

## **Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board, Annual Session 2025 UN-Women’s Operational Response in Europe and Central Asia**

### **Regional Context Analysis**

The Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region is large and diverse with respect to economic development, political systems, rights protection, culture, religion, and vulnerability to natural hazards. Three countries—Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan—are currently classified as lower-middle-income economies, while the remaining programme countries and territories have upper-middle-income status. Many of these experiences the complex legacies of political and economic transition. In parts of the region, development processes are further challenged by cross-border and inter-ethnic tensions, ongoing and protracted conflicts, war, displacement, and the accelerating effects of climate change. In some contexts, rising inequality, labour market informality, and corruption have added pressure on public institutions and social cohesion, with implications for inclusive development and the realization of gender equality commitments. At the same time, several countries in the region have achieved notable progress on gender equality indicators, including some of the highest rates of women’s representation in parliament globally and the adoption of progressive legal frameworks on gender-based violence and equality in public life.

Although the geopolitical context remains fluid, and global uncertainty has in some cases shifted national priorities away from rights-based development, countries across the region have continued to advance commitments to gender equality. This includes strengthening of national legal and policy frameworks, and expansion of national gender equality mechanisms’ capacity. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan have recently introduced legislative reforms to address gender-based violence.<sup>1</sup> In Ukraine, despite the ongoing war, many important laws were passed including one on the status of victims of sexual violence related and urgent interim reparations and one which integrates gender-responsive budgeting into the Draft Law on Amendments to the Budget Code.

Across the region, gains have also been recorded in women's participation in political and public life. For example, the Western Balkans have some of the highest shares of women in parliament in the region—exceeding 35% in several countries — largely due to the application of gender quotas.<sup>2</sup> In Central Asia, new temporary special measures in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have strengthened women's representation in national or local bodies. The participation of women in public administration and the judiciary has also expanded in some countries, demonstrating growing momentum for leadership at multiple levels of governance.<sup>3</sup>

However, progress has not been uniform. Despite relatively high educational attainment among women in many ECA countries, persistent gender gaps remain in economic participation, with women facing barriers to employment, decent work, and leadership in the private sector. Structural challenges such as occupational segregation, unequal pay, limited access to childcare, and disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities continue to constrain women’s economic empowerment.<sup>4</sup> In six countries, female labor force participation rates remain

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<sup>1</sup> UNECE (2024). Beijing+30 Regional Review Report. ECE/AC.28/2024/2

<sup>2</sup> UNECE (2024). Beijing+30 Regional Review Report. ECE/AC.28/2024/2

<sup>3</sup> UNECE (2024). Beijing+30 Regional Review Meeting. *Women Rising: Leadership and Decision-Making in the Economic Commission for Europe Region*. ECE/AC.28/2024/7

<sup>4</sup> UNECE (2024). Beijing+30 Regional Review Report. ECE/AC.28/2024/2

significantly lower than global averages, and the post-pandemic recovery has, in many cases, reinforced rather than reduced these disparities<sup>5</sup>.

Violence against women and girls remains widespread and underreported. While nearly all countries in the region have adopted laws addressing domestic violence, the implementation and enforcement of these laws remains uneven. In some contexts, reporting mechanisms, protective services, and accountability systems are insufficiently resourced or inaccessible, particularly for marginalized groups such as women with disabilities, Roma women, rural women, and internally displaced persons.<sup>6</sup> While the region has a high number of countries that have ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). In recent years, some countries have withdrawn from the treaty, reflecting ongoing political contestation over gender equality standards.

The persistence and escalation of armed conflict in parts of the ECA region, most notably Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine and the mounting tensions in the Caucasus, continue to have profound impacts on human rights, gender equality, and regional stability. These crises have disproportionately affected women and girls, exposing them to heightened risks of displacement, violence, economic insecurity, and exclusion from decision-making processes. At the same time, women have played vital roles in community resilience, humanitarian response, and conflict resolution, underscoring the importance of fully implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Several countries in the region, including Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan, started to develop their next national action plans (NAP) on WPS. 46 member states (out of 56) of UNECE have NAPs. However, challenges remain in ensuring adequate financing, institutional capacity, and meaningful participation of women in peace and reconstruction efforts. Rising geopolitical tensions have led to a reorientation of overseas development assistance, with increased allocations toward security, reducing the political willingness to fund gender equality initiatives.

Another growing concern is the backlash against gender equality and the erosion of civic space. Many countries across the region have seen the emergence or consolidation of movements opposing gender equality and challenging the legitimacy of international human rights standards. These trends have manifested in restrictions on civil society organizations, particularly those working on gender and LGBTIQ+ rights, and increasing threats to women human rights defenders and independent media. In several contexts, gender equality advocates have faced stigmatization, administrative barriers, or intimidation, complicating the work of UN-Women and other actors working to bring equality, rights and empowerment to all women and girls.<sup>7</sup>

These developments underscore the importance of continued regional cooperation, sustained investment in gender equality mechanisms and financing for women's empowerment and gender equality policies, and the protection of civic space. Addressing the root causes of gender inequality, including discriminatory social norms, legal gaps, and structural power imbalances, remains essential to ensuring that all women and girls in the region can exercise their rights fully and equally.

## **UN-Women's Operational Focus and Key Results in ECA**

UN-Women works across Europe and Central Asia through its normative work across UNECE Member States, deploying its operational and programmatic support to countries, and coordinating with the UN system to deliver impactful, rights-based, and context-specific results for women and girls. This triple mandate is implemented from UN-Women Regional Office located in Istanbul, Türkiye, and its 16 offices across Western Balkans, Central Asia, South Caucasus and Türkiye, in line with the UN system Programme presence across the region. The following

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<sup>5</sup> The Female LFPR is lower than the global averages in six countries out of 17 with available data: Tajikistan 32%, Türkiye 36%, Uzbekistan 39%, BIH 39%, North Macedonia 42%, Montenegro 41%  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

<sup>6</sup> UNECE (2024). Beijing+30 Regional Review Report. ECE/AC.28/2024/2

<sup>7</sup> UNECE (2024). Beijing+30 Regional Review Report. ECE/AC.28/2024/2

section outlines key operational work and results achieved across the focus areas of the current regional Strategic Note (2022-2025), demonstrating how regional trends were translated into actionable and measurable progress for women and girls.

## 1. Intergovernmental Normative Support

### 1.1 UN-Women's Normative Engagement in Europe and Central Asia

UN-Women plays a central role in shaping, facilitating, and supporting intergovernmental processes to advance gender equality and women's empowerment across the region. Through robust multi-stakeholder partnerships, regional and subregional consultations, and country-level legislative support, UN-Women supports member states to translate, own and implement global commitments.

### 1.2 Advancing Global Gender Norms Through Regional Stakeholder Engagement

UN-Women, in collaboration with UNECE, led the **Beijing+30 Regional Review**, a key milestone in reaffirming Member States' commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. With participation from **48 governments (70% at ministerial level)**, **78 civil society organizations (CSOs)**, and **UN partners**, the review catalyzed political will.

Member States identified **five urgent action areas: women's economic empowerment, eliminating violence against women and girls, political participation, and gender-responsive financing**. The Istanbul Convention was highlighted as a critical framework to address violence, while concerns such as technology-facilitated violence were brought to the fore. The Regional Review Meeting recommended expanding institutional capacity, strengthening data systems, and ensuring sustainable support for women's organizations and emphasized the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

In the ramp up to the Regional Review, UN-Women convened **80 delegates from its programme countries, which resulted in 13 powerful, timebound national [commitments](#)** to strengthening institutional mechanisms.

UN-Women also lead a series of regional and subregional multi-stakeholder consultations ahead of the annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In the lead-up to the **68th session of the CSW (CSW68)**, over **600 participants** from ministries, national gender mechanisms, civil society, academia, and the private sector were convened. **Key regional recommendations focused on strengthening women's property rights, increasing access to decent work and essential services, redistributing unpaid care, and advancing gender-responsive social protection systems.**

Across all normative work, UN-Women champions the linkages between global and regional processes—**Beijing+30, CSW, WPS, and the SDGs**—ensuring that national actions are informed by international norms and vice versa. This guides our strategic engagements in global platforms such as the **High-Level Political Forum and COP**, and in regional fora such as **the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**.

### 1.3 Influencing Global Norms and Standards

UN-Women significantly contributed to the development of **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40** through regional expert consultations. Inputs from UN agencies, civil society, and experts strengthened the recommendation's framing and influenced global discussions on women's political participation.

In marking **25 years of UNSCR 1325**, UN-Women led inclusive subregional dialogues to feed into the Peacebuilding Architecture Review and spearheaded the development of an analytical framework supporting the first-ever **Regional Action Plan on WPS for Central Asia**. New models of women's engagement in peace processes—piloted in fragile settings such as the South Caucasus—are now set for expansion.

#### 1.4 Country-Level Normative Progress

UN-Women's normative engagement is also reflected in key legislative milestones across ECA:

- In **Albania**, the 2024 electoral code amendment mandates 30% gender representation per electoral zone, with women now comprising 33.6% of Parliament and over half of the cabinet.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, recent electoral reforms uphold a 40% gender representation quota on candidate lists.
- In **Kazakhstan**, two landmark laws passed in 2024 reinstated criminal penalties for domestic violence and strengthened child protection measures, including harsher penalties for abuse and harassment.
- **Kyrgyzstan's** new Labour Code, effective January 2025, removed bans on over 400 jobs for women, marking progress toward workplace equality. The country also ratified ILO Convention No. 190, recognizing the right to a workplace free from violence and harassment.

## 2. Programmatic Work

### 2.1. Gender Responsive Governance

UN-Women's work on gender-responsive governance in Europe and Central Asia focuses on **strengthening women's leadership and political participation, working with gender responsive budgeting, and strengthening statistical system to improve the availability and use of gender-sensitive data.** By supporting electoral reforms, leadership training, and inclusive campaigning, UN-Women helps increase women's political representation and influence. In parallel, robust efforts in gender-responsive budgeting have transformed national and local planning frameworks, making resource allocation more equitable and transparent. Complementing these initiatives, investments in gender data systems enable better tracking of progress on SDG 5 and inform evidence-based policymaking, particularly in areas such as violence against women, unpaid care, and femicide.

#### Women's Leadership and Political Participation (WPP)

UN-Women significantly advanced women's participation in political life through policy, technical, and capacity-building support across the region. **In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan the representation of women increased by 2 to 9 percentage points.** Notably, **Uzbekistan enacted a 40% gender quota that helped raise women's parliamentary representation from 32% to 38%, while Kyrgyzstan introduced a 30% quota at the local level, resulting in a 6 percentage point increase.**

Thousands of women leaders, candidates, and activists have improved their knowledge and skills on leadership, campaigning, and advocacy skills, with support of UN-Women's training and curriculum. Inclusive political training was offered in **Serbia, Ukraine, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina**, using the **Companion Guide on Inclusive Campaigning, which particularly supported young, rural, ethnic minority, LGBTIQ+, and disabled women.** UN-Women conceived public awareness campaigns across the region that reached **over 1 million people, challenging stereotypes and advocating for women's leadership.** A baseline study on women's political participation was conducted in **Ukraine**, and in **Georgia, women lawyers and Human Rights Defenders strengthened their capacity to contribute to constitutional reform processes and embed women's rights in governance reforms.**

#### Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and Planning

UN-Women leads GRB efforts across **the ECA region, supporting reforms that transform public finance systems and improve gender equality outcomes.** **National and local governments in sixteen countries in ECA have applied GRB principles,** with **Albania and Serbia** standing out as two of the few countries globally that **publicly track and report budget allocations for gender equality (SDG target 5.c.1).**

GRB has been integrated into key policy and legal frameworks, including public financial management strategies, national laws, and action plans in the ECA region, with the support of UN-Women. **Albania has increased its gender-responsive allocations from 1% in 2015 to 9% in 2025.** GRB is mandatory in **Albania, Serbia, Kosovo and North Macedonia** and **over 270 budget programs in the Western Balkans sub-region are gender mainstreamed, 108 local governments adopted GRB measures, and implemented over 160 gender-focused policy initiatives** which had positive impact on the women's empowerment, livelihood and safety (such as increased subsidies for rural women, increase access to WASH, investments in public safety, sustainable funding for services for domestic violence victims, housing support). In **Türkiye, 11 ministries/public institutions planned specific measures on women's empowerment** in the 2025 Presidential Annual Programme, marking a **triple increase from 2020.** Extensive capacity building has played a critical role, with thousands of public officials

having improved capacity on GRB across the region. Trainings, combined with technical assistance and coaching, has led to the creation of gender-responsive policies, indicators, and budget allocations in several countries. Oversight bodies, including **audit institutions (8 audit reports on GE prepared) and parliaments**, have also been supported to monitor and influence GRB implementation effectively. UN-Women has also promoted participatory approaches by building the advocacy skills of **thousands of women, particularly from vulnerable groups, and supporting civil society organizations to engage in budget processes and voice community needs.**

## Gender Data and Statistics

UN-Women enhanced the **production and use of gender data in 15 of 18 countries**, now **reporting at least half of the SDG 5 indicators**. **Three national action plans for gender statistics were launched in Kyrgyzstan, Albania and Uzbekistan.**

Over the past few years, UN-Women supported **National Statistics Offices in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, and Kazakhstan to improve violence against women surveys, labour force data, and time-use statistics**. A regional initiative on femicide research trained **13 civil society researchers from Central Asia** to document **over 600 femicide cases**, building evidence to classify femicide as a distinct crime.

**Online platforms for disseminating data were enhanced in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia**, making gender statistics more accessible for policymaking and public advocacy.

**In 2025, the first joint data project of its kind in our region**, financed by the UN Joint SDG Fund and implemented collaboratively by UN-Women and UNFPA was launched. Its primary objective is to **strengthen national statistical systems**, to enhance the measurement and reporting of SDG 5 indicators—ensuring accurate, timely, and disaggregated gender data to drive policy and decision-making.

## 2.2. Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Humanitarian Action

UN-Women significantly advanced the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Humanitarian Action (HA) agendas across the Europe and Central Asia region by strengthening policy frameworks, coordination mechanisms, and women's leadership in peacebuilding, recovery, and humanitarian response.

**A total of 46 countries/territories in the ECE region have adopted or reviewed National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS**. UN-Women provides direct technical support, including development, monitoring, alignment with EU accession processes, and inter-agency coordination, to UN programme countries in developing their WPS plans and facilitates knowledge sharing with countries within and beyond the region. **In 2024 alone, draft NAPs were developed** with UN-Women's technical support in **Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan**—the latter marking the country's first-ever WPS framework. **Ukraine and Uzbekistan's** NAPs development is currently underway

UN-Women also expanded engagement with EU member states—including **the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Romania, and Denmark**—through joint advocacy and knowledge exchange. Regional advocacy led to the first draft of a **Regional WPS Action Plan for Central Asia**, and **three subregional forums brought together 265 women peacebuilders and CSOs**, notably in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, to align WPS priorities with regional integration and security agendas.

Through the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), **UN-Women mobilized \$6.5 million in direct funding to 54 women's civil society organizations, reaching over 25,000 women and their families with life-saving support and services**. In Ukraine, UN-Women co-launched **the Alliance on Gender-Responsive and**

**Inclusive Recovery with the Governments of Ukraine and Germany** to promote women’s leadership and encourage political and financial investments in gender-equal recovery processes. The **Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group**, chaired by UN-Women, expanded **to over 300 members, including 40 Ukrainian women’s rights organizations (WROs)**, and established itself as the principal coordination platform for gender mainstreaming in humanitarian planning, including contributions to the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP)

In Kosovo, marking 25 years since the end of the 1998–1999 war, the government adopted **its first Transitional Justice Strategy (2024–2034)** with UN-Women’s support. The strategy includes gender-sensitive measures such as a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a war victims memorial, and amendments to the Law on Missing Persons. By mid-2024, **175 individuals had applied for recognition of their status as survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)**. In Georgia, UN-Women supported local peace ambassador networks to implement **30 community-based initiatives and advocate for 115 municipal policy changes** to address the needs of internally displaced and conflict-affected populations. At the regional level, UN-Women deepened collaboration with **UNDP, UNDP, and the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia**, co-convening cross-border dialogue and shaping policy through flagship events: the Regional Open Day on WPS, the Central Asia Women’s Dialogue Forum, and consultations contributing to the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, the New Peace Agenda, and the Pact for the Future.

**The WPS–HA Compact** served as a strategic convening platform, enabling inclusive dialogue, promoting accountability, and addressing persistent implementation gaps in WPS and humanitarian action across the region.

### 2.3. Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW)

National institutions across the Europe and Central Asia region have **advanced the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and broader normative commitments on ending violence against women and girls (EVAW)**, with UN-Women’s integrated programming contributing to more survivor-centred and accountable systems through legal reform, data generation, service model innovation, and multi-stakeholder coordination.

**In Tajikistan, the newly adopted Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence** now ensures free health services, shelters, extended protection orders, and accessible hotlines for survivors. In Ukraine, landmark **legislation introduced reparations for survivors of sexual violence and victims of armed aggression**. **Albania’s Gender Equality Law** was amended to strengthen institutional accountability and improve compliance with international standards. **In Kazakhstan, the Law on Ensuring Women’s Rights and Safety of Children** improved mechanisms for prevention, protection, and response. Moldova established **a National Coordination Council on GBV** and launched the first Regional Integrated Service for Survivors of Sexual Violence in Ungheni, both fulfilling key commitments under the Istanbul Convention. Additional milestones include **Georgia’s first costing model for VAW services, Belarus’ inaugural VAW prevalence survey** (to be reported in 2025), and **Uzbekistan’s integration of VAW indicators** into its national statistical system.

At the regional level, the joint EU4Gender Equality programme—implemented together with UNFPA in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine—strengthened referral pathways, enhanced service provider capacities, and advanced legal reforms. Since 2020, advocacy campaigns on transforming discriminatory social norms and preventing VAW have reached **over 25 million people across the region**.

An emerging area of concern with regards to EVAW is technology-facilitated violence. Building on the Generation Equality Midpoint Regional Event, UN-Women also advanced work on innovation and digital safety, reaching **over 10,000 people in 13 countries through awareness campaigns and dissemination of research on technology-facilitated violence against women**. Additionally, through the new joint programme, supported by EU and implemented in partnership with UNDP in the Western Balkans, UN-Women are working to enhance legislation, improve multi-sectoral services, and raise awareness to ensure the safety and empowerment of women and girls in the digital age in the region.

### 2.3. Women’s Economic Empowerment

Women entrepreneurs across the ECA region have greater access to markets, financing, technology and networks as a result of the Women’s Entrepreneurship EXPO initiative and platform.

Launched in 2021 by UN-Women in partnership with the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and Yıldız Holding**, the **Women’s Entrepreneurship EXPO is a flagship initiative aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs across 20 countries in the ECA region**. The initiative focuses on building and sustaining a diverse network of stakeholders committed to systematically addressing the capacities, opportunities, and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, by providing them with access to an inclusive professional ecosystem that supports skill development, mentorship, and enhanced access to markets, financing, technology, and networks at local, national, and international levels. **Over 5,000 women entrepreneurs have been included in a database assessing and documenting their needs, and more than 2,700 have enhanced their skills through 95+ virtual bootcamps delivered in 10 languages**. EXPO’s events—including satellite expos in different countries in ECA, pitch sessions, and virtual marketplaces—enabled thousands of women to showcase their businesses, network, and receive mentorship, with high satisfaction rates and increased knowledge reported by participants. The EXPO has become **a dynamic regional platform for fostering inclusive entrepreneurship**, supporting **over 10,000 expected direct beneficiaries by 2026**, and accelerating progress toward gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. Online engagement reached an estimated **6.25 million people** in 2024, amplifying visibility for women-led businesses and shifting public narratives on women’s economic participation.

Economic Empowerment Principles (WEP) remain a primary vehicle for corporate delivery on gender equality dimensions of the 2030 agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. UN-Women ECARO continues to work closely with private sector and by early 2024, **the number of WEPs Signatories reached 2580**.

## 3. UN Coordination

UN-Women significantly strengthened system-wide coordination across the region by leveraging its triple mandate and co-leading inter-agency platforms that advanced gender equality across strategic planning, humanitarian action, and intergovernmental engagement.

### 3.1 Gender Mainstreaming in UN Country Teams (UNCTs)

As co-chair of the **Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality (IBC-GE)**, alongside UNFPA, UN-Women provided strategic guidance, capacity building, and technical support to Resident Coordinator Offices and UNCTs, resulting in UNCTs having a better understanding of how to integrate gender equality in their work and apply UN system standards and tools – such as the UNCT SWAP - for stronger planning and results for women and girls. **In 2023, 61% of cooperation frameworks in ECA region had a dedicated gender equality result at the outcome level.**

UN-Women partnered with UN Development Coordination Office for ECA, UN System Staff College and other Issue-Based Coalitions to provide capacity building to UNCTs, for example on application of UN system GEWE standards and tools such as the UNCT SWAP and on embedding gender equality and human rights in systems thinking and innovation in UNSDCF design, helping UNCTs operationalize the principles of Leaving No One Behind, intersectionality, and inclusive governance. As a member of the regional Peer Support Group, UN-Women

ensured in-depth gender review of all documents for the design of new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and provided technical suggestions for strengthening GEWE in line with UN standards.

UN-Women at the country level ensured **stronger reflection of GEWE priorities and alignment with SDG 5 in UNCT analysis, strategic planning and advocacy** through contributing data, analysis, gender-sensitive indicators and technical advice on normative processes and commitments relating to gender equality. In the majority of UNCTs, UN-Women serves as **chair or co-chair of the internal and external Gender Theme Groups. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN-Women leads the development of the Gender Equality Accelerator joint programme that brings together 4 agencies** for a holistic and integrated UN approach to bring about transformative change in key areas of SDG 5 where the country is lagging behind.

In line with the **UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (GEAP)**, UN-Women also helped advance UNCT's use of gender equality markers and accountability tools and supported joint gender assessments, particularly in humanitarian and post-conflict settings.

### **3.2 Humanitarian Coordination and Gender in Emergencies**

UN-Women strategically positioned gender at the center of humanitarian response in the Europe and Central Asia region by launching a **Regional Humanitarian Strategy 2024-2025**, strengthening the capacity of key actors, and fostering inter-agency partnerships.

As co-lead of the **Regional Gender Taskforce under the Ukraine Refugee Coordination Forum**, UN-Women ensured that gender considerations were systematically integrated into the regional response planning process. Through this mechanism, **gender analysis from seven host countries (including Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania) was consolidated into four inter-agency thematic reports on protection, education, health, and livelihoods**. These reports directly informed the **2024 Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP)** as well as **related Country Context Analyses and UNSDCF**s in host countries.

UN-Women also partnered with **OCHA, UNHCR, and Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator offices to integrate Gender in Humanitarian Assistance (GiHA) training** into emergency preparedness planning, ensuring that humanitarian actions are inclusive and responsive to the differentiated needs of women, girls, and marginalized groups. In addition, a regional consultation with humanitarian-development-peace actors was convened to explore the operationalization of the **Humanitarian–Peace–Development Nexus**, which will inform the development of a **Regional Programme Framework on WPS and Humanitarian Action in 2025**.

## **4. Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness**

UN-Women ECARO effectively delivered on its strategic priorities across the region, demonstrating strong results in both programmatic impact and operational efficiency. **During SN period 2022-2025, UN-Women implemented over 190 million USD in ECA region comprising 17% core (regular) resources and 83% non-core (earmarked) funding**. Non-core resources for UN-Women ECARO increased **by approximately 28% from 2022 to 2024**, reflecting strengthened donor confidence and expanded partnerships. Key contributors to this growth included Sweden, the European Union, Norway and Denmark, being the top donors to the region.

Importantly, **nearly 70% of total core resources were allocated directly to Country Offices (COs)**, ensuring flexible, needs-based support for strategic note implementation in line with national gender equality agendas. **The Strategic Note Direct Funding (SNDF)** on the other hand allowed flexible, demand-driven programming across **Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine**.

ECARO enhanced planning and resource efficiency by promoting regional knowledge exchange of good practices and strengthening internal systems for monitoring and evaluation. **ECARO supported 18 regional learning events, including during CSW68 and through Communities of Practice.** To support the effective implementation of the Regional Strategic Note and the Strategic Notes of participating Country Offices, **UN-Women convened two high-level stakeholder engagement events in 2024.** These events created important platforms for joint reflection, strategic alignment, and cross-regional learning.

## Looking Ahead: UN-Women ECARO’s Strategic Approach: Strategic Note Process

The development of the Regional Strategic Note (SN) 2026–2029 takes place in a context of profound geopolitical, social, economic, and environmental shifts. **Rising political polarization, democratic backsliding, escalating conflict and crises, growing backlash against gender equality, the shifting of priorities toward securitization, and funding cuts are reshaping the landscape in which UN-Women operates.** With the final five years of the 2030 Agenda, the demand for acceleration, focus, and bold partnerships is clearer than ever.

In response, **ECARO’s forward-looking strategic prioritization is grounded in the synergy of its triple mandate, sharpening strategic focus through a feminist foresight approach and systems thinking.** The SN prioritizes action across four areas, informed by regional trend analysis, evaluations and functional reviews, and a multi-layered co-creation process involving country offices, civil society, the UN family and development partners.

### 1. Sharpening strategic focus across interconnected priority areas

ECARO’s work will align with the four corporate impact areas, adapted to regional dynamics and institutional capacities, while ensuring strong interlinkages between thematic priorities:

- **Gender-Responsive Governance and Women’s Leadership and Decision-Making:** Advance parity in public leadership and political processes, with a focus on election and post-election contexts. Investments will include feminist leadership development, civic participation, and protection from violence against women in politics. This also entails strengthening legal frameworks, building the capacities of key stakeholders and women politicians, and establishing platforms for inclusive policy dialogue. Gender-responsive budgeting and the generation and use of gender data will be prioritized to inform evidence-based decision-making, improve transparency, and ensure accountability for gender equality commitments across institutions.
- **Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE):** Leverage the care economy as a transformative entry point. Priorities include strengthening national care systems, supporting women’s entrepreneurship through economic empowerment and partnership with the private sector. Gender-responsive climate action will be addressed as an integrated component of our WEE programming, building on momentum from COP29.
- **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG):** Tackle both entrenched and emerging forms of violence, with a focus on prevention, social norm transformation, and addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Regional commitments to adoption, implementation and monitoring of the the Istanbul Convention and supporting women’s organizations will remain key anchors.
- **Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS and HA):** Deepen the humanitarian–development–peace nexus through the implementation of the Regional Humanitarian Strategy and support for gender-responsive crisis response and recovery. ECARO will use the momentum of the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 to strengthen Member State commitments and advance a coherent WPS regional framework, promote localization of the normative agenda, and support greater participation of women-led organizations in peace and security processes.

## 2. Enabling systemic change through institutional strengthening

ECARO will focus on advancing three interlinked systemic outcomes aligned with the upcoming Strategic Plan:

- **Protecting and translating GEWE normative commitments** - Beijing+30, CEDAW, the WPS agenda, and the SDGs, into national laws, policies, and budgets.
- **Strengthening institutions to drive accountability**, with a focus on financing for gender equality, gender data systems, gender-responsive governance, and policy coherence.
- **Supporting women’s agency and access to resources** by promoting gender-responsive public services, intersectional approaches, the empowerment of vulnerable women, and strengthened capacity and increased funding for women-led organizations.

Across these outcomes, ECARO will apply integrated programming approaches using the Gender Equality Accelerators framework, supporting institutional transformation across sectors. **The coordination mandate will be leveraged, and UN system-wide tools will be strategically deployed** to enhance accountability, coherence, and collaboration on GEWE through interagency platforms and government partnerships.

## 3. Transforming the model of work and strengthening regional capacities

In line with **UN-Women’s business transformation agenda**, ECARO will recalibrate its service offer to become more agile, data-driven, and responsive to country offices. Strategic priorities for institutional effectiveness include:

- **Implementing the regional functional review recommendations and mainstreaming the “pivot to countries and regions” model;**
- **Investing in regional knowledge management systems and cultivating a culture of continuous learning** through the ECALearn platform. ECARO will pilot the integration of strategic foresight in planning and knowledge management to strengthen anticipatory governance and organizational agility.
- **Strengthening regional policy advisory services across core focus areas as well as on UN coordination and partnerships**, while addressing emerging priorities such as care systems, climate change and digital technologies.

## 4. Co-creation and ownership as the cornerstone of the RSN

The RSN development process follows a co-creation model guided by the theme “*Re-group. Re-imagine. Re-design.*” It integrates SN evaluation, strategic foresight, and external consultations into a coherent planning journey. It reflects feminist leadership, intersectionality, and a commitment to amplifying the voices of diverse women and girls across the region.

This approach ensures that the SN 2026–2029 is not only technically robust but also politically and institutionally strategic—anchored in country realities and global ambition. **A coherent, evidence-based, and forward-looking SN will also serve as a key tool for resource mobilization and strategic partnership-building.**