

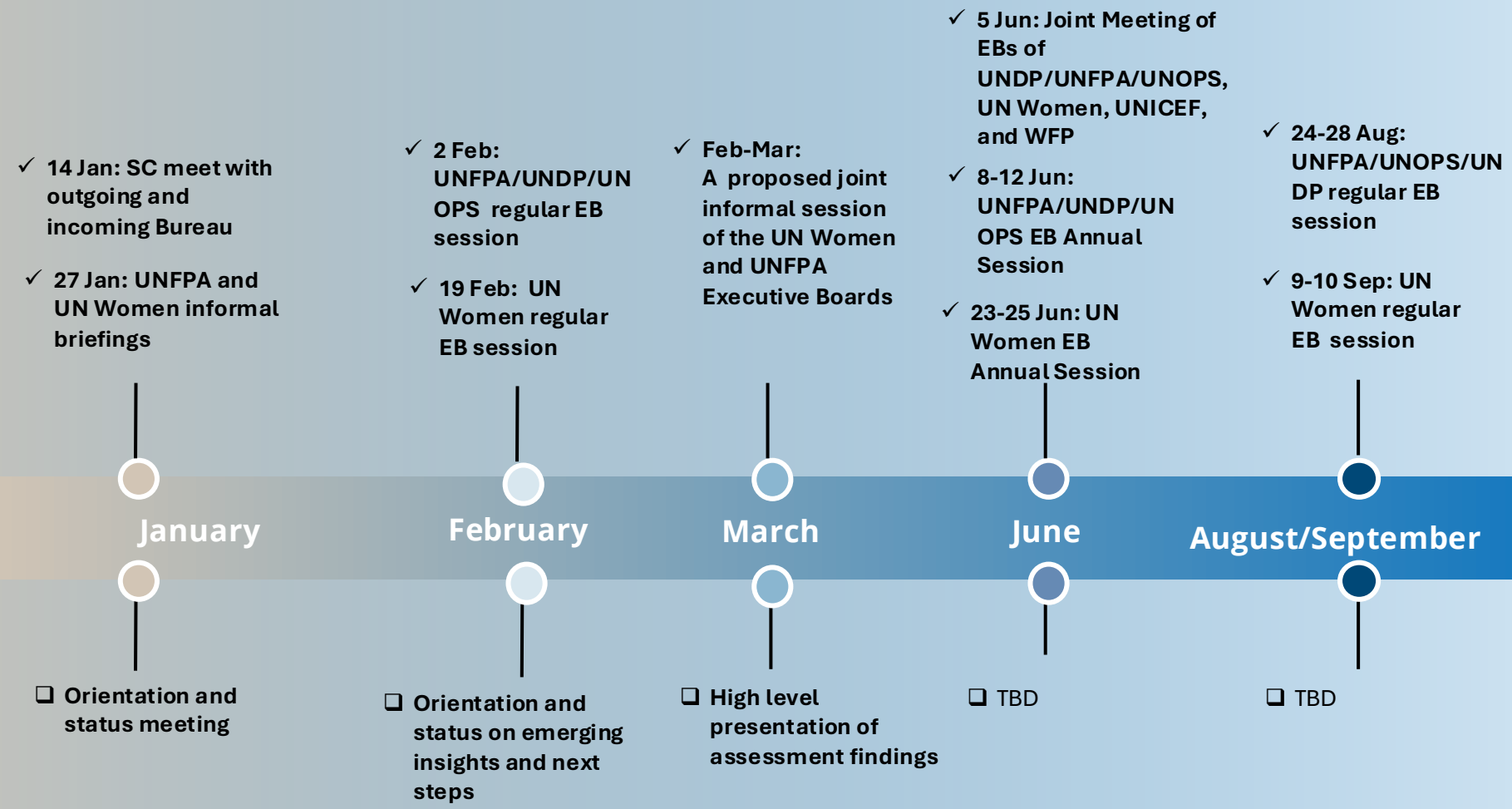
A photograph of a large field of United Nations member state flags in front of the UN Secretariat Building. The UN Women logo is overlaid on the right side of the image. The text is white and bold, with a yellow underline under the first part of the title.

UN80 - Work Package #4: Assessment of benefits of potential merger of UNFPA-UN Women

+ January 2026

Milestones

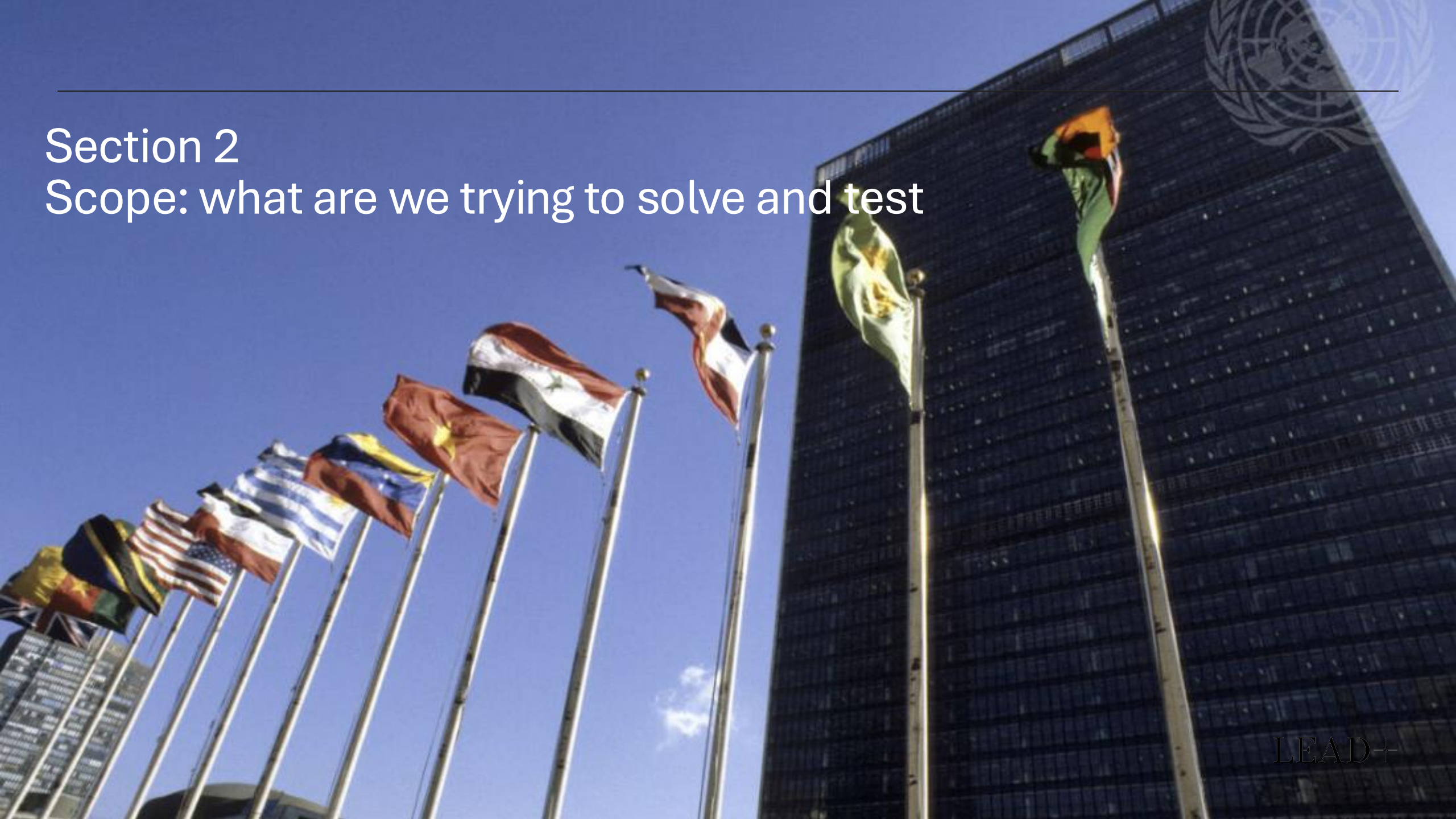
Purpose



ONGOING ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATIONS WITH ALL MEMBER STATES, UN ORGANIZATIONS, CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS, OTHER PARTNERS

Section 2

Scope: what are we trying to solve and test



Context



1 Purpose of assessment

- To inform strategic decision-making by clarifying:
 - the current As-Is baseline
 - the strategic, operational, and financial feasibility of a possible merger
 - the potential benefits and principal risks, including those arising from inaction
 - a limited set of credible merger pathways or approaches, and the conditions under which each is most likely to succeed

2 Scope

- Examines the strategic, operational, and financial implications of a possible merger between UNFPA and UN Women, across headquarters, regional, and country levels, and across development, humanitarian, and fragile contexts.
- Covers mandates and governance, organizational and operational models, financial and staffing profiles, programme portfolios, partnerships, organizational culture, and high-level risk considerations.
- Does not include detailed future-state design, legal drafting, or implementation planning. Findings are strategic guidance, not an implementation blueprint.

3 Methodology & approach

- The assessment applied a phased, mixed-methods approach, combining desk review, data analysis, structured interviews, external briefings, and hypothesis testing. Key inputs included:
 - review of mandates, strategic plans, evaluations, and corporate documents
 - analysis of financial, staffing, and operational data
 - interviews with ~70 UNFPA and UN Women leadership and staff, and information gathering from a small number of stakeholders (member states, donors, civil society)
 - a two-day Task Team workshop in January 2026 to test assumptions, surface risks, review evidence against key hypotheses, and explore merger approaches and sequencing

NEED FOR ACCELERATED ACTION

- The window to protect GEWE and SRHR is rapidly closing
- 1,1 B women and girls live in countries where rights are regressing
- Fiscal tightening is accelerating
- Countries are demanding faster, unified support.

*“1945 problem-solving will not solve 2026 problems.”
Secretary-General, 2026*

THE GAP: WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

Results gap (2025 SDG)

- SDG 5: uneven & insufficient progress.
- Only **56%** of women with full SRHR decision-making autonomy
- Reversals in crisis contexts

System gap

- UN system coordination and accountability for women and girls are underpowered and underfunded
- Fragmentation of system efforts
- Incentives push entities to compete, not align

THE BENEFITS OF MERGING

- ✓ **One unified platform** linking norms, policy capacity building and front-line delivery
- ✓ **Stronger political and operational leverage** and **greater reach** at country level
- ✓ **Faster, more accountable impact** at SDG 3/5 intersection

Status quo is no longer fit for purpose. Delivery credibility on gender equality and women’s health requires systemic change.

Vision

The aim is through one UN entity to realize the transformative vision of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and ICPD Programme of Action - a world where gender equality is a lived reality, where every woman and girl counts and thrives; where she is in full command of her rights and lives with equality, dignity, bodily autonomy, economic power, choices, equal voice and unlimited potential - while leaving no one behind.

The entity would advance gender equality, rights and choices, and the empowerment of women and girls by serving girls, youth, and women across the life course, representing more than half of the world's population. It would support countries and communities to meet their national and Sustainable Development Goals ambitions across development, humanitarian, and peace contexts.

The merger vision is built on the best of what already exists, and reimagines how better to deliver for women, girls and youth by combining the strongest normative leadership, accountability, and coordination functions with deeper operational reach and delivery capacity, and by modernizing governance, operational, and funding models. This would enable the UN to scale impact more consistently, protect mandates more effectively, and respond with greater agility and credibility in an increasingly contested and resource-constrained environment.

Working with governments and national and community partners, including civil society, women's rights and youth organizations, and humanitarian actors, the entity would be positioned to drive impact at scale, to advance accountability, mobilize resources, and support the realization of global and national commitments on women's rights, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights and empowerment of women and girls.

Across countries with very young populations and those that are rapidly ageing, the entity would draw on population insights and demographic analysis to support forward-looking public policy, while respecting women's freedom to decide if, when, and how many children they have, and fostering conditions in which individuals and societies can thrive. Population data and demographic analysis and programmes are treated as system-enabling functions that support policy prioritization, investment decisions, and accountability across the full results chain. Consistent with the ICPD Programme of Action, this approach places people-centred, human-rights-based frameworks, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, at the core of population and sustainable development.

In a context of growing and increasingly organized backlash against gender equality and regression on women's rights, including deliberate efforts by state and non-state actors to block, dilute, or reverse agreed norms, standards, and policies, alongside shrinking civic space and constrained financing, the entity would play a strengthened role in protecting and advancing the normative foundations of gender equality. In such an environment, institutional clarity, legal certainty, and delivery credibility become central to sustaining political legitimacy and external trust. Acting in partnership, it would support national implementation of global commitments, counter norm erosion, and bolster the UN System's political will and technical clarity, with lasting results across the nexus of development, humanitarian action, peacebuilding, and resilience.

This shared vision is used in the assessment as a test case to examine whether greater institutional integration could plausibly improve coherence, accountability, and impact, rather than as a normative or predetermined recommendation.



Key hypothesis tested during interviews

Heading	Code	Testable statement
Impact	H1a	Merger increases voice, influence and results for gender equality, the rights and empowerment of women and girls, SRHR, and population dynamics at global, regional, and country levels by improving overall normative results.
Impact	H1b	Merger increases voice, influence and results for women and girls, gender equality, the rights and empowerment of women and girls, SRHR, and population dynamics at global, regional, and country levels by improving overall programmatic/ operational results at the country level.
Impact	H1c	Merger increases voice, influence and results for women and girls, gender equality, the rights and empowerment of women and girls, SRHR, and population dynamics at global, regional, and country levels by improving overall coordination results of the UN System's capacity to deliver for women and girls.
Impact	H1d	Primary risks are mandate dilution; the length of time merger negotiations/integration could take in terms of both organizations' focus and delivery for women and girls, and governance/legal misalignment (including host country arrangements and accreditation).

Key hypothesis tested during interviews

Heading	Code	Testable statement
Streamlined structures	H2a	Merger addresses structural overlaps and duplications (HQ, regional offices, country offices, back-office functions) through consolidation, including aligning better with UN system presence.
Efficiency	H3a	Merger delivers cumulative cost savings in administration, corporate services, supply chain, and field presence, after accounting for transition costs.
Efficiency	H3b	Merger cost savings can be deployed towards more and better results for women and girls
Credibility	H4a	Leveraging the mandates and stakeholder reach of both organizations together will enhance donor confidence, increased resources, and public trust, broadening and deepening partnerships.
Culture	H5a	Cultural strengths can be combined into a more agile, inclusive, impactful organization while mitigating culture-clash risks.
Relevance	H6a	Merged entity more agile and responsive vis-a-vis emerging challenges (conflict, climate, crisis, digital, humanitarian emergencies).

Section 4 AS-IS



As Is

AS IS highlights



Mandates

Distinct but complementary mandates



Presence

Joint across 61+ country office presences



Operating models

Different operating models and similar funding structures



Impact

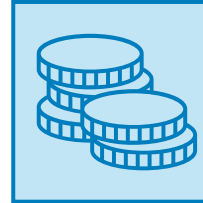
Current impact relies on parallel action and coordination, not shared accountability

As Is

Overview



\$2.1B total expenditure (CEB 2024)



\$1.5B expenditure

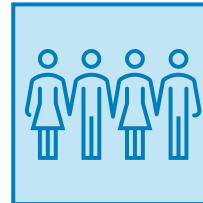


\$0.6B expenditure



The revenue and expenses amounts reflect data as reported by organizations in their respective financial statements, without adjustments for revenue and/or expenses associated with transfers of funding between UN organizations – CEB website

9,400 total personnel (Jan 2026)



5,600 personnel



3,800 personnel



180 country offices (Jan 2026)



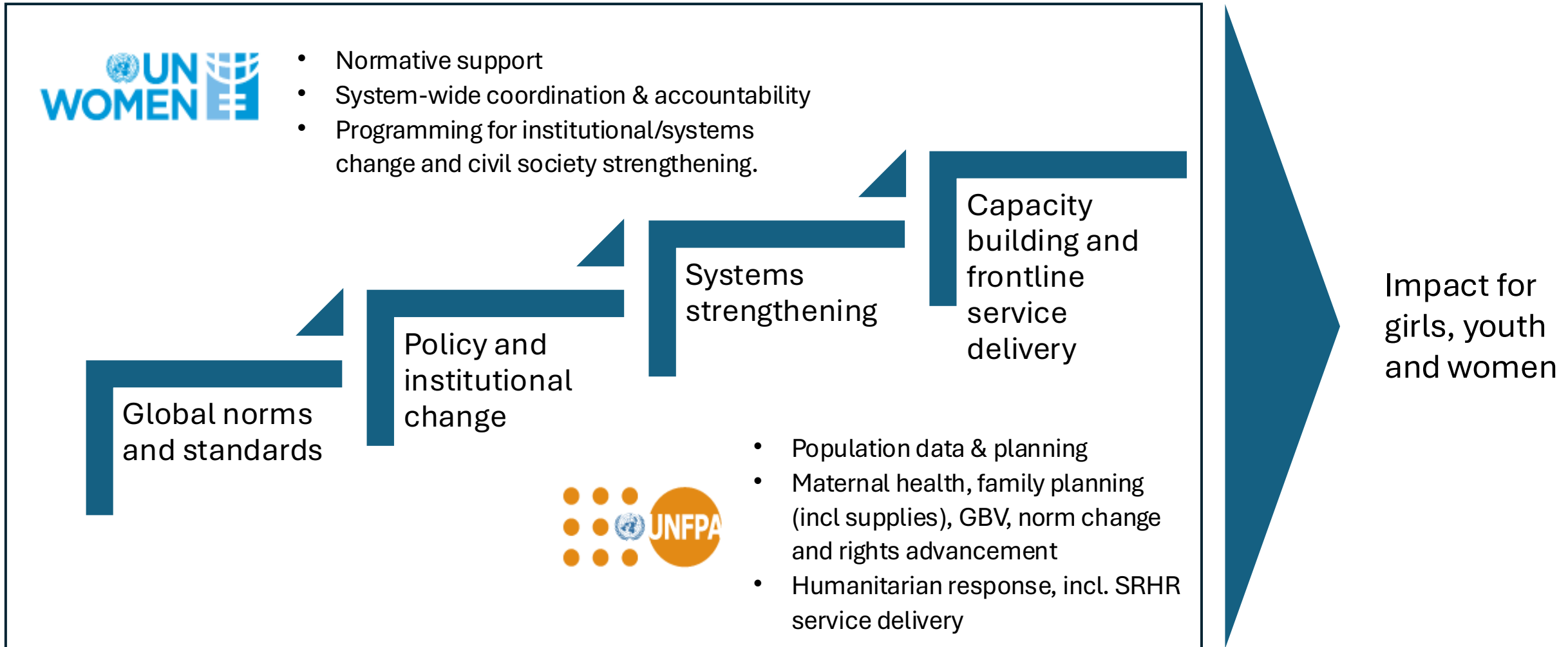
150+ presence (118 offices)



120+ presence (62 offices)



As Is



Section 3

What has emerged: top opportunities and risks



Opportunities

Risks



- **Stronger unified voice** on gender equality and SRHR
- Strengthened **end-to-end value creation**: global norms, national systems, service delivery and community impact
- **Enhanced coordination in humanitarian and crisis settings**
- **Mandate dilution** or political backlash
- **Transition complexity** and potential disruption to life-saving services
- **Donor confidence and funding uncertainty**
- **Risks of inaction**: ongoing fragmentation, weaker political resilience, declining coherence



- **A stronger, unified global voice**

A single entity elevates the influence, clarity and political power of the UN's work on gender equality and SRHR - speaking with one unmistakable voice at global, regional and country levels.



- **End-to-end impact for women and girls**

Bringing together normative leadership, coordination, data, systems strengthening and frontline delivery unlocks a seamless value chain - from global standards to tangible change in communities.



- **Greater resilience in a challenging environment**

A combined institution is better equipped to withstand backlash, protect hard-won norms and drive progress even in crisis, conflict and climate-affected contexts.



- **More coherence, less fragmentation**

Integration reduces duplication, aligns strategies and enables shared accountability - making it easier for governments, partners and civil society to engage and collaborate.



- **Improved efficiency and reinvestment in impact**

Streamlined structures, coordinated operations and harmonized systems generate efficiencies that can be reinvested directly into programming for women and girls.



- **A bolder platform for partnership and innovation**

A larger, more coherent entity attracts stronger donor confidence, expands strategic partnerships and opens space for ambitious, future-facing initiatives.



- **Mandate protection**

Ensure ICPD, Beijing and population-data leadership are fully safeguarded so neither normative authority nor SRHR delivery is diluted.



- **Continuity of life-saving services**

Protect humanitarian access, supply chains, procurement authorities and quality-assurance frameworks from any disruption during transition.



- **Political sensitivity and backlash**

Navigate geopolitical divisions, protect hard-won gender equality norms, and avoid the perception that one mandate is subsuming the other.



- **Legal and governance complexity**

Manage General Assembly decision sequencing, governance alignment and host country agreements without delaying or jeopardizing delivery.



- **Workforce and culture integration**

Mitigate risks of staff uncertainty, morale decline, culture clash and uneven transition practices across offices and regions.



- **Donor confidence and financing stability**

Maintain trust during the transition; provide clarity on mandate continuity, risk safeguards, and how efficiencies will strengthen impact.



- **Operational feasibility and transition load**

Sequence high-risk changes (IT/ERP, HR, policies, regulatory frameworks) carefully to avoid overloading the system and compromising field performance.



- **Risks of inaction**

Fragmentation, declining coherence and reduced political resilience remain active risks if the merger is delayed or poorly executed.