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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High
Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Economic and Social Council
Commission on the Status of Women
Seventieth session**

New York, 9–19 March 2026

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*

**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 in compliance with General Assembly resolution [50/166](#).

* [E/CN.6/2026/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. At the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Member States renewed their political commitments¹ to accelerate the elimination of violence against women and girls and to expand flexible, long-term, sustainable funding for civil society and women's rights organizations in recognition of their critical role. The United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women is a General Assembly-mandated, system-wide accountability and financing mechanism to translate those commitments into real results for women and girls in all their diversity, in order to realize their rights to live a life free from violence.

2. The present report, prepared for the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the sixty-second session of the Human Rights Council, has been drafted at a pivotal juncture. With four years left to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, accelerating progress on target 5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls, is essential to saving lives and securing peace, equality and sustainable development.

3. The present report captures the contributions and activities of the trust fund, an embodiment of Member State commitments made at the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Established by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/166 and 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 is the only global, inter-agency, pooled grant-making mechanism dedicated exclusively to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. It brings together Member States, United Nations entities and feminist movements to resource transformative efforts on the ground, providing core, flexible and long-term funding to civil society and women's rights organizations.

4. In the three decades since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the global commitment to ending violence against women and girls has deepened through the sustained efforts of women's movements, Member States and the multilateral system. Nevertheless, violence against women and girls remains a global emergency, and represents a widespread pattern of human rights violations and crimes that devastate lives and flourish with impunity. Globally, one in three women – between 736 and 852 million women – have experienced violence in their lifetime, though underreporting masks the true scale, and rates have remained largely unchanged for a decade.²

5. Women and girls continue to be killed, injured, displaced and left with lifelong trauma and disabilities from these violations. Around 140 women and girls die every day at the hands of their partner or a close relative³ – a woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes. Between 2023 and 2025, the number of cases of conflict-related sexual violence documented by the United Nations increased by 87 per cent.⁴ Cases of female genital mutilation have increased by 15 per cent, compared with global

¹ Political declaration on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-ninth session (E/2025/27, chap. I.C., resolution 69/1).

² World Health Organization (WHO), *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, Regional and National Prevalence Estimates for Intimate Partner Violence against Women and Global and Regional Prevalence Estimates for Non-Partner Sexual Violence against Women. Executive summary* (Geneva, 2021).

³ UN-Women and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Femicides in 2023: Global Estimates of Intimate Partner/Family Member Femicides* (2024).

⁴ Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2025/556).

estimates from eight years ago.⁵ Technology-facilitated gender-based violence is accelerating, yet fewer than 40 per cent of countries have laws to address it.⁶

6. While States are ultimately accountable for upholding and implementing policy and legal frameworks, civil society and women's rights organizations often shoulder this mandate in practice, particularly for historically marginalized women and girls. In many contexts, such organizations fill gaps left by austerity measures, rollbacks in public services and restrictions on civic participation that can prevent access to justice for survivors. These organizations coordinate multisectoral responses, innovate survivor-centred models, hold institutions accountable and address root causes of violence. Beyond delivering services, civil society and women's rights organizations are a driving force behind legal and policy reform. Evidence shows that, where civil society organizations, especially women's rights organizations, and feminist movements are strong, there is greater progress in enacting and enforcing laws that advance gender equality and protect survivors of violence.⁷ Despite this, civil society and women's rights organizations remain critically underfunded and their contributions to access to justice remain underdocumented.

7. Access to justice, the priority theme of the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, is an essential service for survivors, alongside health, police and social services.⁸ It constitutes a minimum guarantee of rights, safety and well-being. Amid intersecting crises, however, the right to justice and protection is under relentless assault. Economic shocks, displacement and political instability have deepened inequality, leaving survivors with fewer protections and fewer places to turn. Even in countries with strong legislative frameworks, enforcement remains inconsistent and prevention services are chronically underresourced; where fiscal data are available, they show that spending on addressing violence is typically far below 1 per cent of national budgets.⁹ Justice also remains inaccessible to many at-risk women and girls and survivors owing to factors such as geographical isolation, linguistic barriers, low legal literacy, care burdens, time poverty and high costs, while police and judicial actors are often faced with limited funding. Such systemic gaps reinforce the critical role of civil society and women's rights organizations, which frequently deliver the very services that States are mandated to provide, thus ensuring that survivors can navigate justice pathways, gain access to coordinated support and exercise their rights.

8. The present report demonstrates how trust fund partner organizations, meaning civil society and women's rights organizations, are indispensable actors when it comes to access to justice. In 2025, 65 per cent of initiatives by active partner organizations included at least one strategy related to access to justice, representing collectively a multi-year investment of nearly \$50 million across 103 grantee partners. The present report captures their realities and resilience as they endeavour to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, despite escalating risks,

⁵ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Female Genital Mutilation: A Global Concern – 2024 Update* (New York, 2024).

⁶ UN-Women, "Digital violence is intensifying, yet nearly half of the world's women and girls lack legal protection from digital abuse", 18 November 2025.

⁷ Daniela Monika Behr and others, "Empowering change: assessing the role of democracy, civil society, and women's rights groups in advancing legal gender equality", Policy Research Working Paper, No. 10788 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2024).

⁸ UN-Women, WHO, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNODC, *Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence* (New York, 2015).

⁹ UN-Women, UNDP, International Development Law Organization, World Bank and Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, *Financing Women's Justice Needs: Global Perspectives on Violence against Women, and a Case Study on Uganda* (New York, 2025).

a backlash against gender equality efforts and funding shortfalls, offering further evidence of the urgent need to meet the commitments made at the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to fully, sustainably and flexibly fund such organizations.

9. Demand for trust fund grants amounted to \$1.5 billion in the most recent call for proposals – a scale of need that far exceeds available resources. As the United Nations marks its eightieth anniversary, renewed commitment to coordinated, pooled funding will be essential to close this gap and deliver impact at scale. Working closely with the United Nations system through its inter-agency Programme Advisory Committee,¹⁰ the trust fund channels demand-driven financing and sustained accompaniment to front-line organizations through a wraparound support model.

10. Over the past three decades, the trust fund has invested more than \$252 million in 725 organizations across 140 countries and territories, generating an unparalleled body of evidence regarding what works and how to end violence and secure justice for women and girls. Over a 10-year period, trust fund-supported initiatives have collectively reached more than 91 million women and girls worldwide, advancing their access to essential services, prevention and justice.¹¹

11. As at December 2025, contributors to the trust fund included the Governments of Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; UN-Women national committees in Austria, Finland, Germany and Netherlands (Kingdom of the); the European Union; private sector and philanthropic partners, including Conscious Step, Soko, Inc. and the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund; and generous individuals worldwide.

12. As the trust fund marks its thirtieth anniversary, the present report serves not only as a record of achievements and lessons learned and an accountability tool, but also as a call to action. The trust fund calls upon Member States to fulfil the commitments they made at the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women – to fund efforts to end violence against women and girls, by contributing to its 2025 call for proposals, entitled “Resourcing resilience”, and by addressing the unmet financial needs of civil society and women’s rights organizations by providing long-term, flexible and core funding. Those funds will reach community-based, local organizations that are often receiving support from the United Nations system for the first time.¹² In the present report, Member States are called upon to stand in solidarity with civil society and women’s rights organizations, which are operating amid shrinking civic space, a backlash and limited resources.

¹⁰ The Committee included representatives of leading civil society organizations and other experts on ending violence against women and girls, including representatives of Equality Now, the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and the South African Medical Research Council. The Committee also included staff members from 16 United Nations organs and bodies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; the International Labour Organization; the International Organization for Migration; the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; 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 (OHCHR); the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; UNICEF; UNDP; UN-Women; the United Nations Office for Project Services; UNFPA; and WHO. The Spotlight Initiative is included as an observer.

¹¹ Total number of people benefiting from, involved as partners in or reached overall by grantee projects, as self-reported by grantee partners from 2015 to 2024.

¹² In 2024, 31 per cent of the grantee partners surveyed reported that the trust fund grant was their first grant from a United Nations entity.

13. As a system-wide accountability and learning mechanism, the trust fund is, through the present report, amplifying the voices of survivors and their organizations before the Commission on the Status of Women and the Human Rights Council. The trust fund is more than a funding mechanism; it also serves as the institutional memory of the global movement to end violence, by documenting three decades of civil society-led action, systemic change and emerging risks that shape intergovernmental policy and response.

II. Context in 2025: structural barriers to justice

14. In 2025, the trust fund managed a \$74.5 million funding portfolio across 159 organizations in 71 countries and territories. All partner organizations were civil society organizations, and 71 per cent of them were women's rights organizations. The portfolio reflected a truly global reach: 25 per cent of initiatives were in Africa, 24 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 20 per cent in Europe and Central Asia, 16 per cent in Asia and the Pacific and 14 per cent in the Arab States and North Africa, while over 1 per cent were interregional.

15. For partners in all regions, rising authoritarianism, militarism and digital repression are shrinking civic space and silencing voices for peace and rights. With armed conflict on the rise, the risk of overlapping, protracted crises increases. The serious violations committed against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, the Sudan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory exemplify the grave risks facing women and girls in crisis-affected settings.¹³

16. Developing countries face an annual \$420 billion shortfall in the funding needed to achieve gender equality under the Sustainable Development Goals,¹⁴ while official development assistance is projected to contract.¹⁵ Recent aid cuts on top of chronic underfunding are having a profound impact. The 2025 global survey conducted by UN-Women of 411 women's rights organizations in 44 crisis settings found that 90 per cent had been financially affected by aid reductions, and nearly half expected to close within six months if conditions persisted.¹⁶

17. The findings of the rapid assessment conducted by the trust fund in February 2025 in response to funding cuts by major donors reveal an alarming reality, in which 60 per cent of partners are being directly affected. Impacts range from a reduction in the provision of essential services to survivors (78 per cent), and suspended or closed shelters, crisis centres, legal aid services and healthcare support (73 per cent). Many partners are also struggling to meet rising demand for services with reduced staff capacity and burnout. Nearly all grantee partners expressed deep concern about increased risks of violence for women and girls in their communities if support is not restored.¹⁷

¹³ Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2025/556).

¹⁴ UN-Women, "USD 420 billion annual shortfall blocking gender equality in developing countries", 30 June 2025.

¹⁵ European Network on Debt and Development, "Aid crisis – new data sounds fresh alarm bells for the future", 17 April 2025.

¹⁶ UN-Women, *At a Breaking Point: The Impact of Foreign Aid Cuts on Women's Organizations in Humanitarian Crises Worldwide* (Geneva, 2025).

¹⁷ United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, "The cost of silence – and the power of action: confronting the global rollback on funding to end violence against women and girls", 15 May 2025; and UN-Women, *At Risk and Underfunded: How Funding Cuts Are Threatening Efforts to End Violence against Women and Girls* (New York, 2025).

18. A backlash against women's rights has been reported in nearly one quarter of countries.¹⁸ Based on the on-the-ground experience of 120 partner organizations that responded to the trust fund's annual grantee survey, three interconnected trends define the current dynamics of the backlash: (a) a systemic backlash that prevents legal and policy reform and defunds specialist organizations; (b) "deny, distort and distract" tactics that downplay violence, spread misinformation and disinformation and covertly undermine progress; and (c) repression and violence that target feminist actors through surveillance, intimidation and even physical threats, and are designed to dismantle organized action.¹⁹

19. The current moment is distinguished from past challenges by the scale, the level of coordination and the institutionalization of the backlash against gender equality efforts. As documented in a 2025 report by the trust fund,²⁰ Governments are increasingly using legal, bureaucratic and digital tools to restrict funding and undermine accountability. Around the world, laws on foreign aid and civil society organizations – newly enacted or amended, often without consultation – have introduced conditions on registration, required intrusive disclosure and, in some cases, forced civil society organizations to close. The authorization and approval of trust fund-supported initiatives that once took weeks now take months, delaying life-saving services. Cash flows are interrupted through bank account freezes, prolonged audits or arbitrary surveillance, thereby disrupting access to aid and eroding trust between authorities and civil society. Together, such mechanisms represent a new form of systemic denial of justice: silencing those who work to deliver it.

20. To secure approvals, many civil society and women's rights organizations have needed to reframe their work on ending violence against women and girls as healthcare, economic empowerment or humanitarian aid, yet violence against women and girls is a criminal act and a deliberate violation of women's bodily autonomy, health and dignity. Human rights and feminist organizations have been disproportionately affected, heightening their risk of closure and creating an environment that deters advocacy.

21. In all regions, progress towards ending violence against women and girls remains fragile and uneven. In several countries in Europe and Central Asia, conflict, anti-rights populism and legislation restricting civil society organizations have closed critical civic space. According to trust fund partners in Georgia, the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence requires non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media receiving over 20 per cent of their funding from abroad to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power",²¹ and non-compliance can trigger heavy fines. The law has been a central element of shrinking civic space in Georgia and has raised human rights concerns among civil society organizations.²² The war in Ukraine is intensifying the risk of conflict-related sexual violence, economic deprivation, psychological distress, trafficking and service overload, and partners continue to report constrained investments in multisectoral services. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 2025 Domestic Violence and Violence against Women Law advances the country's

¹⁸ Report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2025/3/Rev.1).

¹⁹ United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, *Beyond Backlash: Advancing Movements to End Violence Against Women* (UN-Women, New York, 2025).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ OHCHR, "Georgia: UN experts condemn adoption of Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence", 14 May 2024.

²² Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, "Memorandum on the human rights situation in Georgia", 10 March 2025.

alignment with European Union standards and those of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, yet trust fund partners report that entity-level inconsistencies and weak enforcement continue to leave survivors unprotected. In addition, partners report that the removal of “gender identity” from the Criminal Code of the Republika Srpska and the drafting of laws that restrict and reduce funding to civil society organizations weaken the ability to provide legal aid, shelters and psychosocial support. In Serbia, the Gender Equality Law is now effectively suspended after the Constitutional Court halted its enforcement in 2024, leaving the country without an operative legal framework and freezing progress on addressing violence against women for an indefinite period.²³

22. In countries in Asia and the Pacific, funding cuts and the downsizing of civil society organizations threaten work on ending violence against women and girls at a time when a flexible, survivor-centred and feminist response is needed to combat legal uncertainty. In India, conflict in Manipur and a shifting immigration enforcement environment have heightened fear among refugees and survivors from Myanmar in the state. In Samoa, trust fund partners report that *nofotane* women and their children are systematically marginalized by village governance and are highly vulnerable to intimate partner violence. In Cambodia, technology-facilitated gender-based violence remains widespread, with young women, members of the LGBTQI+ community and women human rights defenders at heightened risk due to weak enforcement of legal protections and increasing reliance on local survivor organizations.²⁴

23. In Africa, civic space is contracting amid political volatility in several countries. In Somalia, partners report that political instability has stalled key legislation such as the Sexual Offences Bill, threatening legal protections for survivors of sexual violence. Crackdowns on civil society organizations are halting life-saving services for survivors in the Sudan amid a worsening humanitarian crisis, while in South Sudan escalating conflict and climate shocks exacerbate displacement and disrupt essential services. In Ethiopia, new restrictions on civil society organization registration and funding are being imposed amid increasing conflict-related sexual violence and growing demand for multisectoral services. In Zimbabwe, according to partners, a new law, the Private Voluntary Organizations Amendment Act, which was passed in 2025, restricts the registration and operations of civil society organizations and actively undermines the implementation of progressive laws and essential services, leaving survivors without critical protection.²⁵ Lastly, in Uganda, partners continue to warn that patriarchal norms and anti-rights movements are heightening the risks for activists working on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health rights.

24. Across countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized crime, political instability and economic crises compound violence against women and girls. In Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Ecuador, trust fund partners report that rates of violence, including femicide, continue to rise amid internal armed conflict, organized crime, economic crisis and climate shocks. Partners from Peru report that the approval of amendments to the law concerning the Peruvian Agency for International

²³ Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, *First thematic evaluation report: building trust by delivering support, protection and justice. Serbia* (Strasbourg, 2025).

²⁴ Asia Centre and International Center for Not-For-Profit Law, *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Cambodia: Impact on the Civic Freedoms of Women Journalists and Human Rights Defenders* (Bangkok, 2025).

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Zimbabwe: President signs law to curb civic space – nongovernmental organizations face threat of deregistration, criminal prosecution”, 17 April 2025.

Cooperation in 2025 has resulted in restrictions on foreign donors and required civil society organizations to obtain government authorization to receive foreign funds.²⁶ Banking restrictions and the freezing of accounts have stalled trust fund-supported initiatives on ending violence against women and girls of partners in Mexico and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), blocking the provision of multisectoral services and demonstrating the financial strain on civil society and women's rights organizations.

25. In the Arab States, protracted conflict and displacement exacerbate women's vulnerability. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the ongoing humanitarian crisis, hostilities and movement restrictions have destroyed shelters run by trust fund partners and crippled service delivery, leaving women at heightened risk, in fear of harm and without recourse to justice. Similar dynamics are reported in Yemen, where partners attest to escalating hostilities that have driven a surge in cases of gender-based violence, while mobility barriers and stigma constrain reporting. In the Syrian Arab Republic, partners report that the post-conflict transitions risk excluding women from reconstruction and judicial reform, and services and reporting are fragmented.

26. Despite these headwinds, civil society and women's rights organizations continue to hold the line with effective solutions. They document violations, maintain shelters and helplines and accompany survivors in court processes, often while under threat themselves.

III. Putting the “access” in access to justice: role of civil society and women's rights organizations

27. Trust fund-supported civil society and women's rights organizations work holistically on prevention, protection and accountability, and across this spectrum, they are expanding what access to justice means in practice – anchoring it not only in the courts and laws, but also in the everyday spaces where survivors live, seek help and rebuild trust. Drawing on reports and data from over 100 grantee partners for 2025 alone, the present report addresses a critical evidence gap by examining concrete ways in which civil society and women's rights organizations enable access to justice for women and girls by: (a) anchoring justice in communities; (b) building survivor-centred institutions of care and accountability; and (c) driving structural reforms that embed equality within law and policy.

A. Anchoring justice in communities

28. Justice often begins far from the courtroom. It begins in homes, villages, shelters, refugee camps and informal spaces where survivors first seek support. Civil society organizations, especially women's rights organizations, are mapping and strengthening entry points to justice, transforming them into real community-centred pathways to protection and redress.

29. In Ecuador, where customary and State systems coexist under the Constitution, Asociación de Mujeres por la Equidad de Género y la Autonomía has worked to strengthen coordination between them and ensure that legal pluralism upholds rather than undermines women's rights.

30. In Iraq, the Baghdad Women Association worked to provide women with access to vocational training, legal assistance and psychosocial support. By project end,

²⁶ OHCHR, “The approval of amendments to the “APCI” Law seriously affects freedom of association in Peru”, 17 April 2025.

women self-reported enhanced confidence in navigating legal systems, greater awareness of their rights and an improved ability to resolve complex family and social disputes.

31. In Kenya, Physicians for Human Rights advanced the MediCapt initiative, an application that links local health facilities (often the first point of contact for survivors) and justice systems through digital evidence collection. MediCapt, which is integrated with the Kenya Health Information System, has supported the forensic documentation of almost 2,000 cases of sexual violence. Use of the application has been complemented by other survivor-centred improvements to documentation supported by Physicians for Health, which have reached 17,932 survivors of violence, and 4,578 cases were officially reported to the national health system registers as a result.

32. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, while State services reported no cases of sexual violence, community-anchored research conducted by Centro Yanapasiñani Bolivia para el Desarrollo de la Mujer y la Familia found substantial rates of such violence, underscoring both the magnitude of underreporting and the critical need for survivor-centred, localized data collection methods.

33. In Serbia, in a context of persistent homophobia, limited institutional responsiveness and scarce survivor-centred services, trust fund partner Labris focuses on building safety and visibility for lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer women through direct support, empowerment and advocacy. In addition to conducting intensive work on women's empowerment, providing specialized training to service providers, conducting public awareness campaigns and running an emergency hotline, Labris is conducting in-depth research to strengthen institutional responses to same-sex partner domestic violence.

34. These initiatives reimagine what "access" means – not merely physical entry to legal institutions, but also social, linguistic and cultural accessibility to protection and redress. In contexts of backlash, displacement or fragile governance, such community-anchored approaches keep the promise of justice alive.

B. Building survivor-centred institutions of care and accountability

35. Trust fund partner organizations are building institutions every day that prioritize safety, trust and accountability. These are ecosystems of care that connect survivors to justice through multisectoral collaboration.

36. In India, the Migration and Asylum Project supports refugee women from Myanmar who face acute vulnerabilities, including heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence. By establishing an inclusive legal framework that protects refugees and addresses their long-term needs, the initiative aims to enhance systemic support through awareness, assistance and advocacy, ultimately mitigating vulnerabilities for refugee women and girls from Myanmar in a challenging sociopolitical environment.

37. In Ecuador, where rising levels of insecurity and femicide create significant barriers for survivors, Centro de Planificación y Estudios Sociales and partners are advancing litigation, observatory operations and national advocacy, demonstrating effective adaptation to political risks and repression.

38. In Ethiopia, the Empathy for Life Integrated Development Association developed a referral network connecting the justice, police and social sectors. By training 50 front-line workers on survivor-centred protocols and psychological first

aid, the initiative created functional pathways for survivors and improved response times through clear, local-language guidance.

39. In war-torn Ukraine, where marginalized women, including those with diverse sexual and gender identities, internally displaced women, women with disabilities and single mothers, face heightened risks of gender-based violence, sexual abuse and mental health crises, the organization Insight is delivering critical support and training to enhance the capacity of lawyers and mental health professionals to provide trauma-informed care.

40. In Nigeria, sexual and gender-based violence has reached such a level that advocates are calling for a state of emergency. Against this backdrop, Women United for Economic Empowerment has built a model for survivor-centred accountability by training justice actors, creating a helpline and establishing new community reporting systems. Within one project cycle, evaluation findings show that 91 per cent of respondents (compared with zero at baseline) reported familiarity with the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act²⁷ and nearly 300 new cases were reported (compared with zero at baseline), including at least six cases of sexual assault that resulted in the prosecution of the perpetrators.

41. In Cameroon, the Libra Association for Widows operates in six conflict-affected regions, where it has provided legal aid to more than 850 survivors and ensured active prosecution in at least 78 gender-based violence cases. By embedding paralegals in communities, the initiative has been able to maintain access despite insecurity and displacement.

42. The above-mentioned examples reveal that civil society and women's rights organizations share the goal and the ability to couple justice with care. Survivor-centred institutions not only meet immediate needs but also institutionalize accountability through practice, demonstrating that protection systems can evolve even in fragile or repressive contexts.

C. Shifting power through legal change from the ground up

43. Civil society and women's rights organizations are also embedding equality within constitutions, courts and community norms and shaping the monitoring of laws, policies and frameworks to ensure that survivor-centred perspectives inform national commitments and that laws are fully implemented.

44. In Armenia, where domestic violence legislation lacked clear definitions, the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women worked to institute legal clarity and expand the prohibition of violence in the workplace. In a landmark victory, a stronger legal foundation has been established in the Criminal Code²⁸ and the law on the prevention of domestic violence²⁹ for survivor protection and accountability. The revised law explicitly recognizes partners and child witnesses as victims, removes reconciliation procedures, ensures free access to medical care and shelter for persons with disabilities and criminalizes stalking.

45. In Lebanon, Justice without Frontiers is using a multilevel strategy of raising community awareness, training police and ministries and drafting reforms to

²⁷ Nigeria, Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 (25 May 2015), *Official Gazette* No. 61, vol. 102.

²⁸ Armenia, Criminal Code (adopted 5 May 2021, entered into force 1 July 2022; amended 12 April 2024, entered into force 1 July 2024).

²⁹ Armenia, Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence, and Restoration of Peace in the Family (adopted 13 December 2017; amended 12 April 2024, entered into force 1 July 2024).

harmonize personal status laws, which currently vary across 19 sects, to counteract a fragmented legal system that exacerbates inequalities in access to justice in a context where many women are in survival mode.

46. In Guatemala, the Women's Justice Initiative has expanded access to justice for more than 3,000 Maya Kaqchikel women, including 1,747 who participated in legal literacy workshops, 1,549 who received legal services as survivors of violence and 44 who were trained as community advisers.

47. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the Tanzania Women Cross-Party Platform strengthens women's political participation by combating electoral violence and discrimination and advocating legal reforms to protect women and girls with disabilities. These actions, along with capacity development, civic education campaigns, debates and community-led initiatives and advocacy for legal and policy reform, are creating a safe and inclusive political landscape.

48. In Indonesia, the work of Women Solidarity for Humanity and Human Rights is focused on supporting marginalized women (e.g. survivors of violence, self-identified sex workers, women living with HIV and those of diverse genders and sexualities) who face systemic barriers to justice and essential services that are compounded by social stigma and discrimination. The initiative aims to support the full implementation of the law on crimes of sexual violence³⁰ through service integration for improved, survivor-centred and multisectoral services.

49. In Liberia, the Women NGOs Secretariat organized 40 coalitions across six counties to engage with more than 670 local leaders and lawmakers to advocate the Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Bill. This has positioned survivors and practitioners as central actors in the national reform movement.

50. The work of trust fund partners demonstrates that civil society and women's rights organizations are not only extending the reach of justice systems but are also redefining their very purpose – broadening rights, strengthening institutions and ensuring that those most at risk can claim justice – while bringing to the surface gaps and risks that official systems often miss.

IV. From crisis to capacity: contribution of the trust fund in 2025

51. The trust fund links the courage of front-line movements with the resources, learning and solidarity they need to prevail. As the flagship United Nations pooled mechanism dedicated exclusively to eliminating violence against women and girls, for the past three decades the trust fund has provided not only grants but also an ecosystem of support that allows feminist movements to survive and thrive. In 2025, as civic space shrank and needs surged, the trust fund invested in organizations that make justice possible, by strengthening organizational resilience through wraparound support; by co-creating and amplifying practice-based knowledge; and by sustaining advocacy for feminist financing.

³⁰ Indonesia, Sexual Violence Crime Act, Law No. 12/2022 (12 April 2022), *State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia*, No. 75/2022.

A. Strengthening organizational resilience through wraparound support

52. Over a period of 30 years, the trust fund has paired financial support with technical accompaniment to sustain the leadership of women’s rights organizations. In 2025, the trust fund expanded its direct support for operational and organizational resilience, enabling grantee partners to invest in staff well-being, adaptive management and core operational continuity, thus acknowledging that feminist organizing cannot thrive without care-centred, sustainable structures.

53. At the programmatic level, partner organizations received tailored accompaniment and benefited from peer exchange to strengthen survivor-centred design, safeguarding, risk management and crisis adaptation. In 2025, the trust fund convened 19 virtual learning sessions that drew nearly 1,000 participants from grantee teams worldwide. These sessions became spaces to share tools on project planning, programming principles, monitoring and evaluation, audit preparation, financial planning and sustaining solidarity among practitioners working in challenging contexts. In addition, the trust fund organized an in-person capacity development workshop in São Paulo, Brazil, bringing together active staff from partner organizations across five regions. Most participants reported that the workshop had enhanced their capacity to achieve their initiatives’ intended impact (90 per cent), provided opportunities to learn from and network with others (85 per cent) and fostered a strong sense of community among partner organizations (90 per cent) in challenging times.

54. The trust fund continually adapts its grant-making to match the realities of civil society and women’s rights organizations working in increasingly volatile contexts. Its “Resourcing resilience” call for proposals exemplifies this evolution. Consolidating two funding cohorts into a single call, it prioritizes long-term, flexible and core funding for organizations working amid shrinking civic space, backlash and funding gaps. Grants ranging from \$150,000 to \$800,000 will be focused on improving access to services, enhancing prevention efforts and increasing the effectiveness of legislation, paying special attention to women and girls who are structurally marginalized. The call also simplifies the application process and expands flexible funding by, for instance, allowing smaller organizations to allocate up to 18 per cent of their grant, and larger organizations up to 12 per cent, to flexible funding.

55. The trust fund also continued to bring together its grantee partners at the country level in structured dialogue with UN-Women and other United Nations agencies. Country engagements during 2025 spanned 12 countries, covering at least one country in each region, and strengthened the coordination and sustainability of partner organizations. For example, discussion during the country engagement in Albania advanced joint advocacy to embed the prevention of female genital mutilation in national coordination spaces; and dialogues during the country engagement in Liberia created space for knowledge exchange on the grantees’ impact on national legal reforms, including laws on domestic violence and gender equality.

B. Elevating practice-based knowledge, learning and impact

56. The trust fund continued to co-create practice-based knowledge with its partners to inform global dialogue and advocacy, broaden the knowledge base, including, most crucially in a year of volatility and shrinking civic spaces, as an act of feminist praxis to preserve knowledge regarding strategic resistance, and support grantee solidarity circles.

57. The trust fund co-produced and disseminated knowledge assets on organizational resilience, the backlash and funding cuts, the role of practice-based knowledge, in partnership with Raising Voices and phase II of What Works to Prevent Violence,³¹ and self- and collective care for staff involved in initiatives to end violence against women and girls. The trust fund also launched a series of thematic briefs on the role of civil society and women's rights organizations in providing essential services for survivors and at-risk women and girls, including a dedicated brief on access to justice that aims to inform cross-sectoral policy dialogues and the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2026. The trust fund also published a meta-analysis of 36 partner initiatives from 2021 to 2025, drawing on the trust fund's evaluation library and assessing their impact, sustainability and effectiveness. In the meta-analysis, a renewed vision of the impact of the ecosystem for ending violence against women and girls is called for, a vision that would be co-defined with those on the front lines and that diversifies what counts as success.

58. The trust fund also launched a learning collective called "Shifting Power in Practice", under the European Union-funded ACT (Advocacy, Coalition-Building and Transformative Feminist Action to End Violence against Women) project. The collective brings together ACT partners in a sustained peer-to-peer learning process. It is focused on knowledge co-creation that reflects partners' priorities and feminist leadership practices – enhancing analytical capacities, strengthening solidarity and building evidence on effective coalition-building.

59. Alongside these efforts, SHINE, the trust fund's global online hub for knowledge exchange on ending violence against women and girls, now connects more than 3,000 practitioners across regions. Besides being a digital repository, SHINE is an active community of practice, where civil society and women's rights organizations, policymakers and donors exchange real-time lessons learned from practice, in over 100 languages. In 2025, the trust fund and its partners on SHINE (e.g. the Spotlight Initiative and ACT) have hosted multiple consultations on topics ranging from climate change to technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

60. These efforts demonstrate how, through accountability, learning and knowledge generation, the trust fund works to document and share lessons learned from the micro-level realities of survivors to inform donors, United Nations agencies, the ecosystem for ending violence against women and girls, and macro-level policy and financing decisions.

C. Advancing partnerships, financing and advocacy

61. As the only global, pooled grant-making mechanism dedicated exclusively to ending violence against women and girls, the trust fund plays a catalytic role in shaping financing for gender equality. Despite shrinking spaces and constrained resources, it is leveraging its inter-agency mandate to expand funding pathways, promote equitable partnerships and elevate partners' voices in global policy and advocacy arenas.

62. In 2025, the trust fund deepened its collaboration with the United Nations system, donors and civil society by leading and participating in strategic forums; by creating spaces for collaboration and networking; and through joint advocacy initiatives. Its leadership was visible at consequential moments globally, reporting and lifting the voices and needs of partners at the following events:

³¹ What Works to Prevent Violence is an initiative funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

(a) **Strategic dialogue at the sixty-ninth session of the Commission** (March). Co-hosted by the trust fund, the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, Mama Cash, Equality Fund/Fonds Égalité and the Alliance for Feminist Movements, the session made a resounding call for sustainable, long-term and flexible funding as a precondition for progress;

(b) **Human Rights Council presentation** (June). The launch of “Voices of Resilience from the Frontlines: Advancing Efforts to End Violence against Women and Girls in the Context of Backlash”, produced in collaboration with the UN-Women Geneva Office and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, featured grantee partners Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa, Corporación Humanas and Medica Kosova, which shared insights concerning their experiences of backlash in their respective countries and regions;

(c) **Free Futures** (September). Co-hosted with the Ford Foundation, Pivotal Ventures and The Meteor, this high-profile event positioned innovations on economic empowerment from the trust fund’s grantee partners at the centre of global advocacy.

63. These in-person missions ensure that the role and contributions of the trust fund are recognized and leveraged, enhance visibility through internal and external communications, present opportunities for bilateral and multi-stakeholder engagement and ensure the effective participation of partners.

64. In 2025, the trust fund also continued spearheading the United Nations Inter-agency Initiative to Advance a United Nations-wide Funding Framework for Women’s Organizations and Civil Society Organizations, which responds to demands from civil society and donor partners for the trust fund to leverage its unique position to address institutional barriers limiting the access of women’s organizations and civil society organizations to funding and to catalyse transformational change across the United Nations system. The Initiative is led by a task force co-chaired by the trust fund and the Spotlight Initiative, with active participation from 11 United Nations entities. Informed by these findings and building on consultations with civil society and donors, the task force is developing a United Nations-wide funding framework for women’s organizations and civil society organizations, outlining a set of actionable principles to address institutional barriers and promote a more coherent, equitable and trust-based approach to resourcing civil society across the United Nations system.

65. The trust fund’s activities in 2025 reaffirm that meaningful progress towards ending violence against women and girls depends on adequately resourcing those closest to the work. Through its grant-making, knowledge, partnerships and advocacy on financing, the trust fund strengthens civil society and women’s rights organizations and the global ecosystem that sustains women’s organizations and movements. However, the persistence of the backlash, conflict and shrinking civic space underscores that progress is neither linear nor guaranteed.

V. Looking back, looking forward: calls to action from three decades of grant-making

66. Over the past three decades, the trust fund has shown that access to justice for women and girls is not achieved through short-term projects or isolated reforms; rather, it endures when organizations are funded flexibly, supported consistently and trusted to lead change. Long-term, multi-cycle investments have allowed civil society and women’s rights organizations to move beyond service delivery towards shaping systems by embedding equality in laws, institutions and community norms.

67. Since its inception following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the trust fund has helped to establish legal recognition and institutional entry points for ending violence against women. Early partners, such as Asociación Venezolana para una Educación Sexual Alternativa (the then Republic of Venezuela, 1997), Fundación María Guare (Ecuador, 1997) and the National CEDAW Watch Network Center (Mongolia, 2000), catalysed reforms to criminalize domestic violence and established some of the first national protection frameworks. During its founding decade, even as it built its own institutional architecture, the trust fund supported partners in over 50 countries that were behind landmark laws, policies and national action plans on ending violence against women and girls, laying the foundation for systemic change that continues to shape national responses today.

68. In the trust fund's second decade, its partners focused on making laws work in practice, with survivor-centred procedures adopted in courts, in camera trials institutionalized, protection orders enforced and referral protocols made operational. In Bhutan (2006), national consultations led to gender-responsive judicial procedures and police training; in Serbia (2007), Women in Black trained prosecutors to document conflict-related sexual violence; and in India (2010), the Bell Bajao ("ring the bell") campaign made domestic violence visible nationwide, encouraging reporting and enforcement. Feminist organizations also deepened accountability through evidence, ranging from femicide investigation protocols adopted in 11 states in Mexico, to survivor testimony that informed charges brought by the International Criminal Court in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. Three decades of evaluations show that these efforts moved justice from principle to practice – improving the quality of case documentation, increasing the number of prosecutions initiated and expanding the caseloads supported.

69. The most recent decade has underscored that justice is relational, intersectional and often built in crisis. Supported by longer and more flexible grants, grantees have extended justice to those most at risk and have adapted in volatile settings. The Women's Justice Initiative in Guatemala (2025) has brought lasting impact to the lives of Indigenous women and girls in the Maya Kaqchikel region through free legal aid; and THRIVEGulu (Uganda, 2023) strengthened psychosocial and legal accompaniment, raising survivors' access to services from 77 per cent to 89 per cent. The Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2024) paired legal representation with digital security training to document violations during conflict. Equality (China, 2018) advanced the enforcement of protection orders and the Standup Movement (Sri Lanka, 2021) organized self-identified sex worker collectives and trained police to respect their rights. Each demonstrates that flexible, trust-based funding enables organizations to pivot, by embedding paralegals in displacement zones, coordinating customary and state systems, or converting community demand into prosecutions through helplines and legal awareness.

70. The evidence is clear: where civil society is sustained, justice advances; where it is underfunded, progress stalls. Multi-cycle, long-term funding allows for gains to be consolidated; integrated prevention-response approaches keep justice relevant to local realities; and flexibility enables resilience to crisis and backlash. These lessons are not historical; they are a blueprint for the next three decades of collective action. They point to the following five priorities for the international community to ensure access to justice for all women and girls:

(a) **Act on commitments.** Deliver on the promises made at the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to end all forms of violence against women and girls, ensuring that no context or community is left behind;

(b) **Fund civil society and women's rights organizations on the front lines.** Provide sustained, flexible and long-term funding to enable civil society and women's

rights organizations to deliver, especially in contexts of conflict, crisis and backlash and including through the trust fund's current call for proposals, entitled "Resourcing resilience";

(c) **Protect civic space and those who lead within it.** Safeguard the ability of civil society and women's rights organizations and human rights defenders to organize, advocate and implement freely and safely without fear or restriction;

(d) **Recognize and strengthen civil society's role in justice.** Support the critical role of civil society and women's rights organizations in ensuring survivor-centred justice systems and providing legal aid, accompaniment, documentation and accountability for violence, which States cannot ensure alone;

(e) **Sustain global solidarity and shared accountability.** Uphold normative frameworks (i.e. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda) as foundations for systemic reform and utilize the trust fund as a key mechanism for translating these global commitments into coordinated, well-resourced and evidence-based action.
