



# Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Distr.: General  
9 August 2019

Original: English

---

**Second regular session 2019**  
9 and 10 September 2019  
Item 6 of the provisional agenda  
**Evaluation**

## **Evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to humanitarian action**

### *Summary*

This report summarizes the evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to humanitarian action for the 2014–2018 period.

The evaluation assessed the:

- a) Relevance and appropriateness of UN-Women's humanitarian action across its tripartite mandate (normative, coordination, operational) in addressing local needs and priorities and increasing ownership and accountability for integrating gender considerations into humanitarian action.
- b) Effectiveness and efficiency of UN-Women's contributions in prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and resilience-building.
- c) Extent to which UN-Women's interventions are connected to longer-term development efforts and support sustainable approaches to recovery and disaster risk reduction.
- d) Extent to which a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated in humanitarian action areas of work.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are the UN-Women Executive Board and UN-Women senior management and staff at headquarters and the regional and country levels.

## **I. UN-Women's work in humanitarian action**

1. It is widely recognized that humanitarian action delivers better results when it accounts for the needs of women and girls, and when gender equality and women's empowerment are central to all aspects of the humanitarian programme cycle. UN-Women is one of the most important actors in ensuring that this is achieved consistently and well.
2. Since 2011, UN-Women has played an active role in focusing attention on gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action. UN-Women's work in humanitarian action covers its three mandated areas: normative support functions, United Nations system coordination and operational activities in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner. UN-Women is a very young actor in humanitarian action; however, the evolution and trajectory of its work in this area has been positive.
3. UN-Women's humanitarian work is guided by the vision that women and girls: a) contribute to, and have greater influence in, building peace and resilience; and b) benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action as articulated under outcome 5 of UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2018–2021. UN-Women's approach to humanitarian action goes beyond direct response and towards the transformative benefits of gender equality and the empowerment of women. By 2018, UN-Women's contributions to humanitarian action included: crises prevention; preparedness; responses to reduce vulnerabilities, address risks and promote resilience; and leveraging of women's leadership across the humanitarian–development nexus. UN-Women supported normative work to assist Member States and the United Nations in developing and implementing humanitarian action policies. The entity also assumed the role of coordinator for the United Nations system and the humanitarian community at various programming levels during humanitarian responses.
4. Through its normative work and at the global level, UN-Women ensured that recommendations to address disaster risk and gender responsiveness were included in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015). UN-Women was one of the main drivers in ensuring that gender equality and the empowerment of women were overarching themes in the seven core commitments agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit.
5. UN-Women's coordination work involved providing expertise for gender-inclusive responses to humanitarian coordination mechanisms and disaster risk reduction bodies. At the global level, UN-Women co-chairs and serves as the Secretariat of the Reference Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the main global humanitarian coordination mechanism. The entity also participates in the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group and convenes the informal Friends of Gender Group for the Grand Bargain. At the field level, UN-Women works with regional coordination mechanisms where they exist, as well as United Nations Humanitarian Country Teams, clusters and inter-cluster coordination groups to ensure that humanitarian coordination mechanisms and humanitarian action policies, programmes and operational procedures and standards respond to women and girls' specific needs.
6. Two Flagship Programme Initiatives (FPIs) guided much of UN-Women's work on humanitarian action at the operational level. The Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) in Crisis Response FPI provided a crisis response framework to ensure that humanitarian response planning, frameworks and programming are gender inclusive and responsive, and that protection and economic opportunities are available for women. The Addressing

the Gender Inequality of Risk and Promoting Community Resilient to Natural Hazards in a Changing Climate FPI focused primarily on prevention and making gender equality and women's empowerment central to coordinated, effective humanitarian action and crisis response.

7. UN-Women also established the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, a flexible and rapid global pooled funding mechanism, which aims to significantly increase financing for women's participation, leadership and empowerment in both humanitarian action and peace and security settings. It provides direct support to increase the capacity of local women to respond to crises and emergencies.

8. Over the course of 2011–2017, UN-Women's contributions to humanitarian action have grown. From working in four countries with a portfolio of \$3.4 million in 2011, UN-Women's annual humanitarian action budget has increased by 700 per cent to \$27.2 million in 2017. UN-Women's humanitarian action budgets are, however, almost completely dependent on non-core funds – an average of 95 per cent of funding under the scope of this evaluation was non-core.

## II. Evaluation background and context

### A. Purpose, objectives and scope

9. The UN-Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) undertook a corporate evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to humanitarian action as part of its Corporate Evaluation Plan. This evaluation focused on UN-Women's contribution to humanitarian action at the global, regional and country levels. The evaluation's scope was from 2014 to present, with a brief review of work conducted from 2011 to 2013.

10. The evaluation assessed the:

- a) Relevance and appropriateness of UN-Women's humanitarian action in addressing local needs and priorities, and in increasing ownership and accountability for integrating gender considerations into humanitarian action.
- b) Effectiveness and efficiency of UN-Women's contributions in prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and resilience-building.
- c) Extent to which UN-Women's interventions are connected to longer-term development efforts and support sustainable approaches to recovery and disaster risk reduction.
- d) Extent to which and how a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated in humanitarian action.

The evaluation also aimed to identify lessons learned and good practices in this area of work.

11. The purpose of the evaluation was twofold:

- i) To present evidence to inform UN-Women's strategic decisions on its approach to humanitarian action and to feed into the entity's efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women within the context of the New Way of Working, United Nations reform, the Agenda

for Humanity, the United Nations Common Guidance on Resilience and the commitment to leave no one behind.

- ii) To provide actionable recommendations to inform future decision-making on UN-Women's support for humanitarian action and to solidify its work in this area. The primary intended users of the evaluation findings and recommendations are the UN-Women Executive Board and UN-Women senior management and staff at headquarters and the regional and country levels.

## **B. Evaluation methodology**

12. The evaluation was conducted from September 2018 to June 2019. Given the comparatively short history of UN-Women's engagement in humanitarian action, this evaluation was formative and had a strong utilization-focused approach. The evaluation drew from a range of qualitative and quantitative sources: a desk review of more than 550 documents of UN-Women and other entities; five country visits (Bangladesh, Cameroon, Colombia, Jordan and South Sudan), as well as meetings in New York and Geneva; a portfolio review of UN-Women's work in 39 countries with humanitarian interventions; a global survey; and a self-assessment exercise completed by all six UN-Women regional humanitarian advisers. In total, 461 semi-structured interviews and group discussions took place.

13. The evaluation was conducted in line with the principles of the UN-Women Evaluation Policy, United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation, UNEG Handbook on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation: Towards UNEG Guidance, and the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct.

## **III. Key conclusions**

The evaluation contains 14 findings (see annex A) on which the following nine conclusions and four recommendations are based.

### **Conclusion 1**

**UN-Women helps to ensure that gender equality and the empowerment of women remains central to humanitarian action.**

14. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are largely recognized as important factors to achieve effective humanitarian action. Most stakeholders consulted in the context of this evaluation noted UN-Women's normative, coordination and programming work as relevant to humanitarian action. They also recognized how gender equality and the empowerment of women contribute to more sustained humanitarian outcomes and longer-term transformative change. However, the relationships between UN-Women's normative, coordination and programming work and the wider role that the entity plays in humanitarian action was not always clear. Therefore, some stakeholders see smaller-scale, country-level programming as the entirety of UN-Women's contributions in a specific response, thus missing how UN-Women also informs important coordination and normative work.

### **Conclusion 2**

**Stronger links are needed between UN-Women’s global normative work and humanitarian coordination mechanisms where needs and priorities are determined.**

15. Over the last five years, UN-Women has been involved in, and has often been instrumental to, all major international and regional forums concerning humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction. This engagement provided a foundation for making links to response-specific coordination mechanisms that define the needs of women and girls and other vulnerable groups. Such coordination mechanisms include the Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan processes, United Nations Humanitarian Country Teams, humanitarian clusters and sectors, and inter-cluster working groups. However, a consistent, early and strategic presence in country-level coordination mechanisms is needed to establish the vital links between UN-Women’s global normative work and effective humanitarian action to ensure that the needs of women and girls are appropriately addressed in humanitarian contexts.

**Conclusion 3**

**UN-Women should continue to build on its development work while increasing its focus on the humanitarian side of the nexus.**

16. UN-Women’s global normative work has provided a foundation for activities that are closer to the development side of the humanitarian–development nexus. This could lead humanitarian stakeholders to view UN-Women solely as a development actor, thus decreasing the entity’s opportunities to influence humanitarian and other actors in their work to support women and girls in emergencies, and as they integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women into their programmes. UN-Women could have a greater impact by ensuring that: a system-wide response is gender sensitive from the beginning; the entity addresses underlying power dynamics; programming considers possible risks and backlash to women’s participation; and barriers to access are addressed. These actions are all closer to the humanitarian side of the nexus and also facilitate links to UN-Women’s global normative work.

**Conclusion 4**

**Working in partnership can ensure that UN-Women makes sufficient contributions and increases funding opportunities.**

17. United Nations organizations are generally enthusiastic about engaging with UN-Women, which has emerged from the partnerships that UN-Women has forged to date. However, in the future, partnerships could be more central to how UN-Women works in terms of specific responses. Partnerships with OCHA, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, among others, could enable UN-Women to contribute to developing effective gender equality and women’s empowerment approaches, while creating a channel for these to be implemented at scale. This is important as UN-Women’s programming currently tends to be at a smaller scale, meaning its efficacy and relevance is difficult to appraise. Working in partnership and at scale would be an effective way to demonstrate results, inform global policy and increase the inclination and capacity of donors to fund similar approaches and partnerships in other humanitarian responses.

**Conclusion 5**

**There is significant evidence that UN-Women has been highly effective in its global normative work.**

18. There are several examples of how UN-Women has worked to integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment into frameworks and policies that

guide humanitarian action. The evaluation could not identify any relevant international forum or event in which UN-Women was absent in the last five years. The examples provided throughout the evaluation indicated that UN-Women was not merely present, but also ensured that issues of gender equality and women's empowerment were incorporated into key normative frameworks and guidance.

#### **Conclusion 6**

**Lessons from UN-Women's country-level work should serve to improve programming approaches globally and act as a catalyst for longer-term transformative change.**

19. UN-Women lacks systematic methods to effectively extract and document learning from specific humanitarian responses. While this is typical of many international organizations, it is of particular importance for UN-Women as it supports programming that addresses immediate needs, pathways to recovery and longer-term transformative change. A systematic and consistent approach to appraise and extract lessons on how different actors incorporate a gender lens into humanitarian activities – either independently or because of direct UN-Women support – would not only continue to build the case for investment in gender equality and women's empowerment, but would also provide a compendium of best and emerging practices that could be replicated and brought to scale in other responses.

#### **Conclusion 7**

**UN-Women's reliance on non-core resources tends to make it more reactive and less strategic, and therefore less efficient overall.**

20. With non-core resources comprising around 95 per cent of UN-Women's humanitarian funding, the entity is mostly "supply driven". This means that UN-Women is largely reliant on project-level funding and opportunities, which affects its ability to be more coherent and strategic at the global level.

#### **Conclusion 8**

**UN-Women's capacity and expertise in humanitarian action vary across offices, risking the entity's ability to deliver consistently.**

21. As seen from other organizations' experiences, becoming established as a reliable humanitarian actor requires commitment in terms of sufficient humanitarian capacity across the organization. Current corporate systems do not facilitate UN-Women's understanding of what type of humanitarian-related expertise it has available and where it can be found. A team of dedicated staff that could be deployed in the earliest stages of a response would help to ensure the implementation of a strategic and consistent humanitarian approach. Ideally, this team could include three to seven staff members with experience from multiple humanitarian responses who have a deep understanding of humanitarian coordination and appeal mechanisms.

#### **Conclusion 9**

**UN-Women's work exemplifies gender equality and human rights approaches.**

22. Overall, UN-Women's approach to humanitarian action demonstrates an understanding of how dynamics in a crisis can affect women and girls by increasing their vulnerability and impacting their resilience, which ultimately undermines their ability to benefit from humanitarian action.

## IV. Key recommendations

### Recommendation 1

**UN-Women should develop a response-level strategy to complement its global humanitarian strategy.**

23. A response-level strategy should provide specific approaches and standard operating procedures for engaging with and influencing: coordination mechanisms (Humanitarian Country Teams, the Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan); resource mobilization strategies within and beyond coordinated appeals; key partnerships and joint programming opportunities; and approaches that ensure knowledge management and learning.

24. UN-Women should establish criteria to define its field-level engagement, considering the level of need, capacity and inter-agency agreement. UN-Women's most important contribution to humanitarian action could be in helping operationalize guidance and bridging policy and practice. UN-Women could also better track financing and results in programmes that specifically target women and girls to strengthen accountability.

25. To be a credible actor, UN-Women needs to be predictable to better serve women and girls in humanitarian settings. This requires UN-Women to commit to what it will do in crises (what, when and how). The decision on what to prioritize should be informed by humanitarian needs, UN-Women's comparative advantages and gaps in the system-wide response.

### Recommendation 1.1

**UN-Women should review its humanitarian strategy and develop a complementary and detailed resource mobilization strategy to leverage opportunities at the country level (Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan) and with key donors.**

26. UN-Women may need to revise its Humanitarian Action and Coordination Response Office (HACRO) humanitarian strategy based on a revised theory of change and develop a resource mobilization strategy that is coherent with these priorities and effective humanitarian action.

### Recommendation 1.2

**UN-Women should conduct internal annual reviews of gender in humanitarian action and/or gender equality and the empowerment of women in humanitarian action to analyse how strategies are contributing to demonstrable results.**

27. This may include assessing changes in coordination and the adoption and use of proven approaches and models, as well as strengthening leadership, accountability and technical capacity in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment.

### Recommendation 2

**UN-Women should identify the necessary leadership, minimum levels of staffing and office structures in humanitarian settings for an adequate response-level strategy in humanitarian action to ensure that the entity can maximize its influence at the country level.**

28. UN-Women's humanitarian capacity should be central to relevant parts of the entity's management and administration systems. This would include expanding and strengthening training on humanitarian principles, gender in

humanitarian action, humanitarian coordination, the humanitarian programme cycle, accountability to affected populations, communications with communities, monitoring, evaluation and learning, and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse. Management and humanitarian staff would benefit from guidance on how to engage with humanitarian donors and strategic partners.

### **Recommendation 3**

**UN-Women has developed important partnerships in different contexts and should build on this experience and focus on developing global partnership frameworks with OCHA, UNHCR and UNFPA.**

29. UN-Women should prioritize global partnerships with OCHA and UNHCR which could help to define a core package of services that UN-Women could commit to delivering in (predefined) humanitarian contexts. Given their coordination roles, OCHA and UNHCR could then promote this “package” in other responses.

30. UN-Women may continue to clarify and expand its partnership with UNFPA, recognizing each organization’s contribution and how they build on and support each other in emergency contexts. This should go beyond agreements related to gender-based violence referrals, psychosocial support and prevention of gender-based violence, as currently agreed. A memorandum of understanding should be signed between both organizations and guidance should be developed to clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of both organizations in all contexts. A joint team of focal points could be established to travel to selected countries, clarify issues and work collaboratively.

31. An enhanced partnership with UNICEF could also be considered as there are some understandable overlaps between the two organizations. UN-Women should work towards an agreement that illustrates how UN-Women and UNICEF complement each other in different humanitarian contexts. This should also provide the approach to how each organization takes the lead on issues affecting women and girls.

32. Recommendation 3 requires UN-Women and corresponding partners, such as OCHA, UNHCR and UNFPA, to mutually engage at the highest level in order to secure the necessary commitment and sufficient specificity as to what, how and when they will collaborate to guide implementation on the ground.

### **Recommendation 4**

**UN-Women should increase its effectiveness and impact in humanitarian action by better linking the entity’s work to system-wide responses, while minimizing programming that is not conducted in partnership or does not have broader strategic importance.**

33. Due to its limited size and scale, UN-Women should seek to increase its reach by better linking to system-wide responses, for example, rolling out the IASC Accountability Framework on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Humanitarian Action, integrating gender responsive programming throughout the humanitarian programme cycle, and promoting women and girls’ participation from the initial assessment stage to management, implementation and assessment. From this, UN-Women can promote accountability and learning and further focus on enabling outcome-centred response planning and improved Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan processes.

## **V. Annex A: List of evaluation findings**

### **Finding 1**



Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for effective humanitarian action. Most stakeholders recognize that UN-Women is a key actor for providing clear, practical and evidence-based guidance for gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action and that the entity ensures that these issues are both integrated effectively and consistently in all humanitarian responses. UN-Women's normative work has proven to be particularly relevant to these efforts.

### **Finding 2**

In relation to global forums, UN-Women has made significant contributions to various policies, frameworks and initiatives. As regards specific country responses, UN-Women has not consistently tailored its country-level programming to the needs of women and girls. However, UN-Women's experience in both areas provides examples of how to tailor approaches to women and girls' needs.

### **Finding 3**

UN-Women's work has tended to include activities that are more aligned with the development side of the humanitarian–development nexus, for example, technical assistance and capacity-building with governments and civil society. This trend also exists in disaster risk reduction where UN-Women's contributions tend to be focused on normative work and less on how households and communities become more resilient. UN-Women has not had a sufficient role in the New Way of Working, nor in the IASC Task Team on Strengthening the Humanitarian–Development Nexus, leading to an inadequate focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in these forums.

### **Finding 4**

Partnerships with United Nations organizations in specific country contexts represent the greatest potential for UN-Women to link its global normative and coordination work with programming. Working in partnership, especially with OCHA, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, will ensure that the needs of women and girls are met more effectively and that gender equality and women's empowerment is incorporated in an "effective, consistent and practical manner", both at a scale and scope commensurate with needs.

### **Finding 5**

UN-Women's global normative work is effective in ensuring that policies, guidelines and frameworks sufficiently address gender equality and women's empowerment. UN-Women has many examples of coordinating and facilitating different actors, for example, during the World Humanitarian Summit, to incorporate gender into humanitarian action. The entity's work in coordination at the country level is nascent, with some good examples, yet it has limited consistency or strategic focus overall. In addition, the entity's country-level programming requires improvement, mostly because of the size and scope of projects and the funding available. Despite this, the evaluation found some effective examples in this area. UN-Women can become more effective by being more consistent and strategic overall and by emphasizing the complementarity and interlinkages between its normative, coordination and programming work.

### **Finding 6**

UN-Women's direct programming reaches a small proportion of the women and girls in need and is not always consistent in scope and quality. However, the effectiveness of UN-Women's global, regional and increasingly local work on standards and guidelines rightly contributes to how girls and women are served in various humanitarian responses.

**Finding 7**

Effective coordination requires in-depth knowledge of relevant mechanisms, both globally and in specific responses, and how to leverage these towards carrying out more effective humanitarian action. UN-Women has significant knowledge from its work in forums, such as those associated with the IASC and the World Humanitarian Summit. UN-Women's coordination work in the Humanitarian Country Teams, clusters and working groups included some positive examples, though there does not seem to be sufficient common knowledge of these local coordination mechanisms for UN-Women to be consistently effective.

**Finding 8**

While UN-Women has results management policies and systems, these are not sufficiently tailored to the humanitarian operating environment that requires specific guidelines, operating procedures and strategic principles to enable the entity's offices to respond quickly and consistently to emergencies and complex humanitarian responses. Institutional arrangements, including fast-track mechanisms and standard operating procedures, are currently not fit for purpose to allow UN-Women to function in a fast-moving environment. Overall capacity also needs to be made more consistent for different levels of response and humanitarian principles need to be reinforced across UN-Women's work in humanitarian action.

**Finding 9**

UN-Women's expertise in humanitarian action remains limited and skills vary significantly from office to office, hampering the entity's ability to deliver consistently. Establishing UN-Women as a reliable humanitarian actor will require a systematic investment in humanitarian capacity across the organization to allow staff to provide clear, practical and evidence-based normative standards (guidance) and to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are incorporated in an effective, consistent and practical manner to better serve the needs of women and girls.

**Finding 10**

While efforts have been made to set up an internal surge roster, it is still not fit for purpose. UN-Women is exploring options for surge capacity, including opening the roster up to a wider network of people and to include programme staff not on temporary assignment or short-term contracts. Profile identification, such as heads of office or policy specialists, should include skills specific to the context and/or crisis, for example, disaster in small island states and population flow.

**Finding 11**

There is no systematic method to extract learning from the field level and feed it back into normative work at the regional and global levels. Rather, the focus is more on reporting activities than on learning. However, UN-Women finds ways to drive learning through different types of exercises, such as the annual reporting on results in humanitarian action and crisis response.

**Finding 12**

UN-Women's approach to humanitarian action demonstrates how the underlying dynamics in a crisis affect women and girls by increasing their vulnerability, impacting their resilience and undermining their ability to access and/or benefit from humanitarian assistance. UN-Women's normative work is based on addressing these underlying causes and often draws not only from global research, but also from its experience with civil society and governments. UN-Women can expand on this work, finding ways to bring these actors into every aspect of a response. This is aligned with the New Way of Working and is an essential way

to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment and the needs of women and girls are considered not only in terms of effectiveness, but also from a rights perspective.

**Finding 13**

UN-Women's contributions to humanitarian action, especially at the normative level, are informed by human rights-based approaches. UN-Women's work has promoted greater transparency and accountability for these approaches.

**Finding 14**

While UN-Women has not historically worked specifically with women with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) communities in humanitarian contexts, the evaluation noted examples of how UN-Women could ensure that normative and coordination work considers these rights holders in humanitarian action.