

Private Sector Engagement **Strategy 2023-2025**



About this strategy: This Private Sector Engagement Strategy (PSES) 2023-2025 provides strategic direction on UN Women's engagement with the private sector to achieve internal and external purposes aligned with UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025. The PSES describes the case for engaging with the private sector (the why), the intended results and objectives for engagement (the what) as well as strategic principles, approaches, activities and enablers (the how). The PSES is accompanied by a Results Framework to monitor and measure progress.

UN Women defines the private sector broadly as the part of the economy that is run by businesses and individuals and is not generally State controlled, noting that in some contexts, State-owned enterprises are operated for profit and therefore are included within this definition. UN Women's definition of the private sector also includes philanthropies, individual supporters and givers, and high-net-worth individuals. In recognition of the need for different methods and approaches for engaging the latter this strategy will be supplemented by a separate document to be developed in 2024 focused on individual supporters and givers and HNWI's.

The PSES focuses specifically on private sector engagement while recognizing the full spectrum and value of multistakeholder partnerships for gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). It will be implemented in parallel with UN Women's complementary Public Partnership and Resource Mobilization Strategy and UN Women's planned Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy.

Methodology: The PSES 2023-2025 was developed over a six-month period in a process that included a series of consultations with internal and external stakeholders. It drew on lessons learned from UN Women's experience in engaging with the private sector to date. In total, more than 10 consultations took place, involving over 200 people across five regions. They comprised representatives of UN Women, National Committees, Member States, other United Nations entities, and the private sector and civil society. The strategy reflects key commitments on working with the private sector adopted by United Nations Member States, including in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Key definitions

The private sector is the part of the economy that is run by the business sector and individuals and is not state controlled.¹ Sporadic, non-commercial income-generating activities by individuals are not considered part of the private sector.

The term "private sector entity" encompasses the entire span of business and includes, inter alia, companies, intermediary institutions, investors and mutual organizations. UN Women considers private sector entities to be specialized organs of society that perform specialized functions; they are required to comply with all applicable laws and to respect human rights.

Engagements with state-owned enterprises – wholly or partially owned by a government – are subject to the same processes as engagements with private sector entities.

Engagement: Any interaction between UN Women and a private sector entity, which may vary across several dimensions such as engagement objective, modality, mechanism, roles of the private sector entity and UN Women, frequency, duration, scale and scope, and level of public exposure. In general, UN Women seeks to engage private sector entities that either demonstrate alignment with and commitment to GEWE and/or are open to improving their practices in these areas.

Partnership: A subset of engagement, partnership is a formalized engagement in which UN Women works with a private sector entity to create positive impacts for women and girls and gender equality, often leveraging close reputational association with the partner to advance the engagement objective(s). Partnerships are formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding or Private Sector Collaboration Agreement or equivalent, since partnerships are often characterized by funding and/or partner visibility linked to visual identifiers (like flags or logos) that showcase the existence of a relationship between a partner and UN Women.

See the [Annex](#) for further elaboration of different types of private sector entities.

“Without creating the conditions for the massive engagement of the private sector, it will be impossible to move from the billions to trillions that are needed to achieve the SDGs. To lead the way to expand economic opportunity for women...[and a]cross the spectrum of global challenges, we need private sector resourcefulness and cooperation to be able to advance in our common objectives of peace, sustainable development, and human rights.”

*António Guterres, UN Secretary-General
World Economic Forum 2023*

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Executive summary

UN Women's Private Sector Engagement Strategy (PSES) 2023-2025 outlines a framework for engaging with the private sector to advance the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). The strategy contributes to UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 by guiding interaction with the private sector to drive transformational changes.

UN Women's approach to private sector engagement begins with acknowledging and supporting States with their primary responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil international, regional and national human rights standards. Their obligations encompass the duty to protect women and girls from violations committed by third parties, including in the private sphere, and to take positive steps to realize human rights. Human rights obligations extend to non-State actors, including the private sector. Hence this strategy focuses on supporting national ownership of international, regional and national commitments and obligations *and* engaging with the private sector to advance GEWE.

The long-term vision of the PSES comprises:

1. States will develop and implement effective legislation, policies and regulations that uphold private sector responsibilities and accountability to protect, respect and enforce women's rights, while working in partnership with the private sector, United Nations system and civil society
2. A responsible, diverse and inclusive private sector will support the full achievement of GEWE by enabling and ensuring women's equal access, participation, voice, agency and safety across all policies and practices, workplace, marketplace and community.

UN Women will focus private sector engagement on *five strategic outcome areas aligned with the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs):*² 1) the private sector fulfilling its duties and responsibilities to protect and respect women's rights, 2) providing financing, resources and long-term investment in GEWE, 3) enabling women's leadership, decision making role and promoting positive social norms, 4) contributing to women's economic empowerment and autonomy, and 5) preventing and protecting women from violence and discrimination in and through the world of work.

UN Women will leverage its global normative, coordination and programmatic mandate to deliver this strategy. It will collaborate with the United Nations system to support United Nations Member States in fulfilling international and national obligations and pursue strategic initiatives to meaningfully engage the private sector in achieving GEWE.

This strategy will advance achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment and SDG 17 on global partnerships for development, whilst contributing directly and indirectly to all the SDGs. In engaging with the private sector, UN Women will seek to leverage the sector's resources, expertise, value chains, markets and influence. Strategic collaboration with Member States and the private sector will reduce barriers to women's economic participation, such as discrimination, gender biases, unequal pay, sexual harassment and limited access to finance, while boosting access to training, markets and decent work.

UN Women will influence and support private sector entities to sign the WEPs as a crucial first step towards advancing gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community. It will seek to ensure all private sector entities UN Women engages with commit to *and deliver* positive impacts at scale to advance GEWE.

Women's Empowerment Principles

The WEPEs are a set of seven principles developed by UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact to advance GEWE in the workplace, marketplace and community.

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women.
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

By adopting the WEPEs, companies publicly commit to taking concrete actions to advance GEWE in their operations and in society. Managed by UN Women, the WEPEs Secretariat offer practical tools for companies to assess and improve their gender equality practices, and to drive positive changes for women. Firms are invited to participate in UN Women-led workshops, training session, programmes and country-level activities, and to explore the hundreds of resources in the WEPEs Toolkit.

Source: <https://www.wepe.org/about>

Private Sector Engagement Strategy 2023-2025 Results Chain

Global Impact

SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality & empower all women and girls.

SDG 17 – Global partnership for sustainable development.

This Strategy contributes directly and indirectly to all 17 SDGs.

Vision

States will develop and implement effective legislation, policies and regulations that uphold private sector responsibilities and accountability to protect, respect and enforce women's rights, while working in partnership with the private sector, United Nations system and civil society.

&

A responsible, diverse and inclusive private sector will support the full achievement of GEWE by enabling and ensuring women's equal access, participation, voice, agency and safety across all policies and practices in the workplace, marketplace and community.

Strategic

RESPECT

Private sector fulfils duties and responsibilities to protect and respect women's rights.

INVEST

Private sector provides sustainable financing and resources that invest in GEWE in the long-term.

ENABLE

Private sector enables women's leadership and decision-making role at all levels and promotes positive social norms.

EMPOWER

Private sector contributes to women's economic empowerment, income security and autonomy.

PROTECT

Private sector prevents and protects women from violence and discrimination in and through the world of work.

UN Women Mission & Strategic

UN Women will leverage its triple mandate in leading normative support, coordination, and programmatic efforts on GEWE to support States and collaborate with the private sector by:

Supporting Member States in holding private sector to account based on national and international legal frameworks and obligations, and providing policy, advocacy and other advice to States and the private sector to adhere to standards and obligations.

Coordinating with UN entities and leading system-wide efforts to ensure more coherent and enhanced performance on GEWE and the private sector through UN Women's convening, capacity development, policy advice and expertise and other strategic actions.

Implementing impactful strategic programmes and initiatives with the private sector on GEWE, at national, regional and global levels to leverage and expand partnerships that achieve sustainable results and increase support and financing for the GEWE agenda & UN Women.

Key strategic approach & Engagement objectives

UN Women will influence and support private sector entities to sign up to the WEPs as a starting point of the "GEWE/WEPs journey" and implement them as a catalyser for transformative change in the following inter-linked strategic areas:

Change the private sector internally through proactive shifts in institutional social norms, behaviours, policies and practices aimed at realizing GEWE.

Change the way the private sector works externally to have positive impacts on communities, markets and society that enable GEWE.

Change the world together with the private sector through collaboration to create services, products and solutions, and to provide resources to address global challenges and meet the needs of women and girls.

Section I: Context

“While States remain central to our collective ability to meet global challenges, solutions increasingly depend on the private sector and other non-state actors. They must be part of our deliberations, and they must be accountable for their commitments. This requires involving a diverse range of voices from the private sector – including micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and women-led businesses.”

*Amina J. Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General
High-level Dialogue on Delivering the SDGs in Partnership with the Private Sector, March 2023*

The global challenge and opportunity

According to recent research, it could take almost 300 years to achieve full gender equality.

Globally, 380 million women and girls live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than USD 1.90 a day. Stronger international cooperation, especially to finance gender equality, is imperative to combat multiple, interlinked global crises that put women’s and girls’ lives and well-being at risk.³

Allocating resources that advance GEWE remains erratic and insufficient given the scale of the challenges women and girls face. According to the United Nations Secretary-General’s report for the sixty-seventh Commission on the Status of Women, private sector investment has lagged in supporting women’s participation and leadership, and providing services addressing the needs of women and girls. In 2020, for example, only 2 per cent of global venture capital funding was invested in start-ups solely founded by women.⁴

As a major employer of women, the private sector plays a huge role in achieving GEWE. According to the International Labor Organization, **private enterprises create a significant proportion of jobs – for example over 90 percent in developing countries.**⁵ However while exact figures on women’s private sector employment worldwide are unknown, as of 2020, women’s labour force participation rate in the public and private sectors globally was estimated at around 50 per cent compared to 80 per cent for men. Women are less likely to work in formal employment and continue to earn less than men. Such gender gaps worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

The United Nations recognizes the private sector as a crucial partner in achieving the SDGs, with potential to contribute to sustainable development, create jobs, spur innovation, and provide essential goods and services. The largest economic entities in the world are transnational and multinational corporations, accruing revenues far greater than those of most governments.⁷ Private sector financing and economic activities have helped lift millions out of poverty and contributed to the realization of human rights.⁸ The private sector also stands to benefit from realizing the SDGs, with significant market opportunities estimated at USD 12 trillion.⁹

While advancing GEWE is good for bottom line, it is noteworthy that businesses are increasingly embracing goals beyond profit, including through social enterprises; impact investing; environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles; and corporate social responsibility initiatives. More employees, investors and customers are demanding diversity, inclusion, and equality, based on moral reasons as well as private sector research affirming the value of investing in GEWE. Shareholders have taken the lead in pushing for corporate sustainability, engaging with companies about their impacts on the environment and society.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there are valid concerns around human rights abuses associated with some private sector entities. The United Nations Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises has documented negative impacts on people and the planet resulting from: some privatization of public services leading to environmental rights abuses; the lack of access to remedies for victims of business-related human rights abuses; weakened regulations and

enforcement of frameworks protecting the environment and workers' rights; and the overall weakening of democratic institutions and processes. The Working Group has also reported examples linked to the climate crisis and negative implications for, among others, the rights to life, adequate food and housing, health and water.¹¹

Women and girls experience the adverse impacts of business activities differently, often disproportionately and in gender-specific ways.¹² Further, many women face intersecting forms of discrimination due to multiple factors, including gender as well as age, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status. Women from diverse backgrounds with different identities and abilities experience systemic biases, stereotypes or discriminatory practices when entering the workforce and advancing their careers. These barriers often result in unequal workforce participation rates, pay gaps, unequal representation in leadership roles, workplace harassment, and discrimination and microaggressions, among other damaging consequences.¹³

Recognizing and eliminating all forms of harm, including gender inequality, in private sector operations and impacts is a legal and moral imperative.

Global obligations: State and private sector responsibilities

Under international human rights law, States have the primary responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. This includes preventing and punishing human rights abuses by private sector entities within their territory or jurisdiction. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 was declared as a *"common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms"*.¹⁴ Business enterprises have been recognized as specialized organs of society performing specialized functions, required to comply with all applicable laws and to respect human rights.¹⁵

Legally binding treaties, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹⁶ and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,¹⁷ clearly elaborate the obligations of States and the rights of individuals. International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions set important international standards for promoting gender equality in workplaces and protecting the rights of women workers. **The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women** requires States to eliminate discrimination against women by individuals, *organizations and enterprises*.¹⁸ States must take effective measures, including by implementing policies, laws and regulations, to prevent, investigate, punish and provide redress for human rights abuses by private sector entities. Domestic laws and contractual requirements between companies and their clients and suppliers must also incorporate the responsibility to respect human rights.

The United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights, endorsed by the Human Rights Council in 2011, assist States and companies in fulfilling their human rights obligations.¹⁹ Developed by the then Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) John Ruggie, these Guiding Principles provided the first global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity, and continue to provide the internationally accepted framework for enhancing standards and practice regarding business and human rights. These principles emphasize the State's responsibility to protect against human rights violations by businesses, including in relation to women's rights, gender equality and non-discrimination.

The United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights are grounded in the recognition of:

(a) States' existing obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms;

- (b) The role of business enterprises as specialized organs of society performing specialized functions, required to comply with all applicable laws and to respect human rights;
- (c) The need for rights and obligations to be matched to appropriate and effective remedies when breached.

These Guiding Principles apply to all States and to all business enterprises, both transnational and others, regardless of their size, sector, location, ownership and structure.

Source: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf

United Nations objectives for engaging with the private sector are further set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,²⁰ the SDGs (specifically, SDG 17 on global partnerships, including with the private sector),²¹ the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development²², the WEPs²³ and the UN Global Compact.²⁴ All of the foregoing recognize and call for a strengthened relationship with the private sector for positive global impacts on the SDGs. The UN Global Compact has effectively collaborated with businesses and philanthropic organizations to advance the SDGs, mobilizing thousands of companies worldwide to align their operations with principles related to human rights, labour rights, the environment and anti-corruption, and encouraging reporting on progress in implementing these principles.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, its 25-year review and the outcomes of other relevant intergovernmental bodies, such as United Nations General Assembly resolutions and the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women, also refer to the vital role of the private sector in GEWE, either directly or indirectly.

The rationale and value of engagement with the private sector is clear, given its responsibility to comply with international, regional and national legal frameworks and obligations. Through its ecosystems of employees, partners, customers and consumers, the private sector offers an enormous sphere of reach and influence. Engagement can help generate real-time knowledge, provide market intelligence, enable the sharing of best practices and facilitate effective information dissemination at multiple levels. It can also provide access to much needed resources (funding, goods, products and services), technical expertise, technology, and innovative solutions to tackle the challenges facing women and girls.

Private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation. We acknowledge the diversity of the private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals. We call upon all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges. We will foster a dynamic and well-functioning business sector, while protecting labour rights and environmental and health standards in accordance with relevant international standards and agreements and other ongoing initiatives in this regard, such as the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the labour standards of the International Labour Organization, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and key multilateral environmental agreements, for parties to those agreements.

Source: United Nations. 2015. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 67.

www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf.

UN Women's engagement with the private sector

“This is a tipping point for women’s rights and gender equality as we approach the half-way mark to 2030. It is critical that we rally now to invest in women and girls to reclaim and accelerate progress. The data show undeniable regressions in their lives made worse by the global crises – in incomes, safety, education and health. The longer we take to reverse this trend, the more it will cost us all.”

UN Women’s engagement with the private sector to advance GEWE is crucial to achieving SDG 5 and ensuring that no woman or girl is left behind. Such engagement is anchored in UN Women’s global mandate for gender equality and the imperative for the United Nations system to implement all obligations under international human rights law and the standards mentioned above.

UN Women brings unique benefits in terms of technical expertise, a multistakeholder network, and coordinating and convening capabilities. As the United Nations entity mandated to lead the United Nations system on GEWE, UN Women provides partners with unique access to and implementation of verified standards and tools. These help private sector entities to fulfil their specific private sector obligations to protect women’s rights and promote GEWE in accordance with international and national human rights laws. UN Women also offers access to audiences, networks and constituencies to share knowledge, lessons learned and best practices.

The private sector can play an important role in making globalization fairer for and more inclusive of women. Since 1995, it has been making a growing contribution to development, gender equality and human rights principles through voluntary codes and agreements, with a focus on providing women with decent working conditions, meeting environmental and labour standards, and paying a fair share of taxes. As the private sector’s influence in sustainable development grows, its actions relating to and accountability for women’s and girls’ human rights should be brought fully into line with the Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda.

Source: United Nations. 2020. *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: Report of the Secretary-General.* E/CN.6/2020/3, para. 25. Prepared for the sixty-fourth session of the Commission for the Status of Women, 9-20 March. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3850087?ln=en>.

Recognizing that the private sector has a significant impact on GEWE, both positively and negatively, UN Women will collaborate with States and the private sector to hold the latter accountable for its commitments and obligations as well as to assist businesses to create and sustain an environment that protects, promotes and respects all women’s rights.

UN Women has engaged with the private sector for over a decade, launching the WEPs in 2010 in collaboration with the UN Global Compact. Over 8,000 chief executives have signed the WEPs to date, representing a vast network of companies from start-ups to large multinationals.²⁵ The WE EMPOWER-G7, WeEmpower Asia and Win-Win programmes – funded by the European Union (EU) from 2018 to 2022 – focused on driving change in the private sector in Asian, EU, G7 and Latin American and Caribbean countries, leveraging the WEPs framework. During implementation, 5,814 companies committed to the WEPs and embarked on the WEPs Journey with UN Women. A 2021 UN Women review found that WEPs signatories generally perform better than non-WEPs signatories on at least 10 key performance and outcome indicators of gender equality.²⁶

The PSES 2023-2025 applies lessons learned to date, including from an *independent* midterm review of UN Women’s Strategic Plan 2018-2021. The review found that partnerships with the private sector had some success, especially in contributing to women’s income security, decent work and economic autonomy.²⁷ Partnerships promoted gender-responsive procurement, expanded opportunities for women entrepreneurs and led to digital innovations. Further, UN Women collaborated effectively with governments, non-governmental organizations and women workers to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls in specific private sector industries. The midterm review concluded that initiatives such as the WEPs, the Unstereotype Alliance and HeForShe were “good models” for encouraging business transformation through the adoption of gender-responsive practices.

The PSES builds on Generation Equality, an initiative convened by UN Women and launched in 2021 to accelerate action and investment in gender equality. Generation Equality brings together organizations from every part of society, including the private sector, to advocate for change and catalyse progress over five years.²⁸ Six Generation Equality Action Coalitions, which are multistakeholder partnerships convened by UN Women, have engaged private sector partners in making significant policy and financial pledges to accelerate progress for women and girls around the world.²⁹

Example: The HeForShe Initiative is a solidarity movement managed by UN Women for the advancement of gender equality that seeks to involve men and boys (including those in the private sector). Since its launch in 2014, HeForShe has been working with hundreds of thousands of men around the world, including Heads of State, CEOs and global luminaries from all walks of life, spearheading transformative change across countries, companies, campuses and communities and inspiring many others to follow suit. As a result, more than 30 solutions on gender equality have been developed with the leadership of Heads of State and CEOs.³⁰

HeForShe: <https://www.heforshe.org/en>

Unstereotype Alliance is a thought and action platform convened by UN Women that seeks to eradicate harmful stereotypes in all media and advertising content. It brings together partners and seeks to collectively use the advertising industry as a force for good to drive positive norms all over the world. In 2021 the Alliance used the Unstereotype Metric to assess more than 14,000 ads across 70 countries, 3,300 brands and 251 product categories. Compared to 2020, findings showed that advertising made by Unstereotype Alliance members was consistently more progressive in its portrayals of female and male characters than non-Unstereotype Alliance members (by more than 4 percentage points), against all market norms.³¹

Unstereotype Alliance: <https://www.unstereotypealliance.org>

Section II: Strategic results

Strategic setting

UN Women recognizes that the only way to achieve transformational results for gender equality and women’s empowerment is with and through partners, including in the private sector.

Engagement with the private sector will contribute to a range of development results across the impact, outcome and output areas of UN Women’s Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

Private sector engagement will contribute to UN Women’s organizational efficiency and effectiveness by supporting the Strategic Plan’s aim to “**effectively leverage and expand partnerships**, communications and advocacy capabilities to increase support for and financing of the gender equality agenda, while securing sustainable resourcing for the delivery of its own mandate”.³² Engagement further responds to the United Nations 2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, which calls on all United Nations organizations to “support and work with programme countries in...implementing, with urgency, sustainable solutions...including with financial institutions and the private sector for achieving the SDGs”.³³

STRATEGIC PLAN VISION

Achieve gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and the fulfillment of their human rights.



Strategic vision

The PSES 2023-2025 will contribute to SDG 5 and SDG 17 and the overall vision of UN Women “to achieve gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and the fulfilment of their human rights” through engagement with the private sector that is aligned with the four established thematic impact areas of UN Women’s Strategic Plan. Through pursuit of this vision, the PSES contributes to achievement of all seventeen SDGs. Considering the primary role of UN Women, which is to support States in achieving GEWE, the PSES has a two-part, interrelated vision in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

1. States will develop and implement effective legislation, policies and regulations that uphold private sector responsibilities and accountability to protect, respect and enforce women's rights, while working in partnership with the private sector, United Nations system and civil society.
2. A responsible, diverse and inclusive private sector will support the full achievement of GEWE by enabling and ensuring women's equal access, participation, voice, agency and safety across all policies and practices in the workplace, marketplace and community.

Strategic outcomes

To achieve this vision and impact, UN Women will prioritize engagement in **five strategic outcome areas** so that the private sector:

1. Fulfils duties and responsibilities to protect and **respect** women’s rights
2. Provides financing, resources and long-term **investment** in GEWE
3. **Enables** women’s leadership and decision-making role at all levels and promotes positive social norms.
4. Contributes to women’s economic **empowerment**, income security and autonomy
5. Prevents and **protects** women against violence and discrimination in and through the world of work.

Engagement will focus on leaving no woman or girl behind through efforts to shift power dynamics and tackle underlying causes of inequality, and align with the WEPs framework for the workplace, marketplace, community, and society at large.

Outcome one: RESPECT (Women in all their diversity)

UN Women will support States and engage with the private sector in the fulfilment of its duties and responsibilities to protect and respect women’s rights. **Intended results include** effective implementation of polices, laws and regulations to uphold private sector responsibilities, including comprehensive legislation that prohibits discrimination based on gender in employment, pay and working conditions; and effective incentives by States, in partnership with the private sector, to promote women’s rights.

Outcome two: INVEST (in Women in all their diversity)

UN Women will engage with the private sector, development banks and international financial institutions to leverage financing, resourcing and investment in GEWE. **Intended results include** increased financial flows to and from the private sector for gender equality, including more funding for UN Women, and the creation of financial products and services responsive to women's needs.

Outcome three: ENABLE (Women in all their diversity)

UN Women will engage with the private sector to facilitate and enable women's leadership and decision-making role and participation at all levels, as well as promoting positive social norms. **Intended results include** more women in strategic leadership positions in businesses and other sectors, and the promotion of positive social norms, including in corporate business culture, through the engagement of men as allies, and progressive roles for women and men in advertising.

Outcome four: EMPOWER (Women in all their diversity)

UN Women will engage with the private sector on its contribution to women's economic empowerment, income security and autonomy. This engagement will be complementary to and supportive of UN Women's planned strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment. **Intended results include** more women accessing equal employment and decent work opportunities in high-paying and emerging sectors; equal pay for work of equal value; increased investment in women entrepreneurs, women-led and owned businesses and gender-responsive businesses; and effective gender-responsive financing and procurement.

Outcome five: PROTECT (Women in all their diversity)

UN Women will engage the private sector to prevent and protect women from violence and discrimination in and through the world of work. **Intended results include** prevention and response to sexual harassment in the workplace leading to reduced incidents; employer actions to stop violence against women and girls in public and private spheres; and improvements in digital technology and safety to prevent online violence.

Strategic mission and outputs

UN Women's added value in engaging with the private sector is firmly grounded in its triple mandate to lead normative, coordination and programmatic GEWE efforts. The PSES 2023-2025 therefore has **three strategic outputs**:

1. **Supporting Member States** in holding the private sector to account based on national and international legal frameworks and obligations, and providing policy, advocacy and other advice to States and the private sector to adhere to standards and obligations.
2. **Coordinating with United Nations entities and leading system-wide efforts** to ensure more coherent and enhanced performance on GEWE and the private sector, through UN Women's convening role, capacity development, policy advice and expertise, and other strategic actions.
3. **Implementing strategic and impactful programmes and initiatives** with the private sector on GEWE at the national, regional and global levels that achieve sustainable results and leverage and expand partnerships that increase support and financing for the GEWE agenda and UN Women.

UN Women will achieve these outputs by engaging *directly with* the private sector (supporting or collaborating with it), by engaging *indirectly on* private sector issues in support of States, and/or by playing a leadership and coordination role with other United Nations entities, civil society and other stakeholders (for example, influencing the private sector through policy and advocacy work).

Strategic Output One: UN Women responds to requests for support from States based on the principle of national ownership. For the PSES, this means engaging with the private sector as an integral part of UN Women's work at a national level at the request of States, as planned in Country Office Strategic Notes aligned with UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (where

relevant). This will include supporting States through policy advice and technical assistance on related national and international legislation and/or responding to national demands from civil society and women's rights organizations to advocate for adherence to standards and obligations relating to the private sector and its impact on GEWE. Whilst UN Women's normative work is well established, working on aspects relating to private sector global norms and standards is a relatively new area of work (with some notable examples to date) which will be further developed under this PSES. This may require work with government ministries, departments and UN agencies that lead on issues intersecting with the issue of private sector obligations on GEWE, such as trade, tax, economy and labour.

Example: In India, UN Women works closely with the Government of India to set national standards for achieving gender equality, including those relating to the private sector. UN Women supports the Government's implementation of India's Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act. For example, with UN Women's support, the state of Madhya Pradesh committed to making the state a safe tourism destination for women workers and tourists in 2021. Together with State Departments, NGOs, hoteliers and travel associations it aims to make tourist sites safe and violence-free for all women and girls. 'Safety of Women in Tourist Places' has been reflected in the state's Gender Budget Statement with an increased budget allocation between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.³⁴

Strategic Output Two: Through its UN system coordination mandate, UN-Women champions and supports more coherent and enhanced performance and accountability for gender equality, women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in the UN system, including through standardized tools that are uniformly applied. This extends to issues relating to the private sector's impact and role in GEWE. UN Women will continue to engage with UN partners to promote integrated support and coordinated action to support States in holding the private sector to account on obligations, enhancing standards and practice regarding business and women's rights and on leveraging private sector investment in GEWE. Critically this includes UN Women's management of the WEPs Secretariat, in coordination with the UN Global Compact, to ensure WEPs is integrated as the primary vehicle for all UN agencies working with the private sector to ensure businesses empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. To ensure the system has the data and evidence needed to plan coordinated action under Output One and Two, UN Women will deliver a Flagship Report on the private sector's role and impact on GEWE, in partnership with other UN agencies. UN Women will also continue to lead and convene significant multi-stakeholder partnerships in coordination with UN agencies and the private sector.

Example: The Women's Entrepreneurship Accelerator (WEA) is a multi-stakeholder partnership convening six UN agencies – the ILO, the International Telecommunication Union, the International Trade Centre, UN Global Compact, the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women – with the private sector to maximize the development impact of women's entrepreneurship in achieving the SDGs by creating an enabling ecosystem for women entrepreneurs around the world. Managed by UN Women, WEA has committed to empower 5 million³⁵ women entrepreneurs by 2030. As of 2022, WEA has indirectly reached 3.5 million women and girls, changed the lives of 1,146 women entrepreneurs who benefited from 60 trainings, knowledge and products specifically aimed at advancing their entrepreneurship development in 70 countries across five regions.

Strategic Output Three: UN Women HQ units, Regional Offices, Country Offices and National Committees have been mobilising resources, designing and implementing impactful programmes and initiatives with the private sector for over a decade with notable success and this will continue.³⁶ Engagements with UN Women can take various forms: shared value and programme innovation, cause-related marketing, customer fundraising, employee giving, pro-bono services, access to networks, knowledge exchange and dialogue spaces, capacity development, mentorship and training, flexible funding, and specific funding for countries or programmes. Under this PSES – the first private sector engagement strategy for UN Women – such endeavours will be enhanced through its strategic direction, focused on three Strategic Engagement Objectives (see next section). UN Women units will develop a partnership pipeline that identifies private sector entities for engagement, that adheres to the PSES engagement objectives and guiding principles, consulting with the sector and other key stakeholders, including civil society accordingly. By embedding engagement objectives within existing strategic frameworks (such as Country Office Strategic Notes) alignment with global, regional, and national priorities can be ensured.

Example: African Girls Can Code Initiative is a collaboration between UN Women, the African Union Commission, the International Telecommunication Union and the private sector that aims to train and empower at least 2,000³⁷ girls and women aged between 17 and 25 across Africa to become computer programmers, creators and designers and take up studies and careers in the information, communication and technology, education and coding sectors. The first phase of AGCCI implemented from 2018-2021 successfully built knowledge and skills of over 600 young girls from 32 Member States, empowering them to pursue education and innovation in ICT.

Across all three strategic outputs active participation of, and consultations with, civil society organizations are vital to ensure that UN Women’s work is informed by local civil society’s perception of engaging with specific private sector entities, especially women’s rights organizations representing the needs of women and girls, including the most marginalized.

Strategic engagement objectives

For direct engagement with the private sector, three interrelated strategic objectives underpin the PSES 2023-2025 outputs and guide UN Women in planning, implementing and monitoring engagement in line with the WEPs framework.

Strategically planned engagement will seek to:

1. **Change the private sector internally** through proactive shifts in institutional social norms, behaviours, policies and practices aimed at realizing GEWE;
2. **Change the way the private sector works externally** to have positive impacts on communities, markets and society that enable GEWE; and
3. **Change the world together with the private sector** through collaboration to create services, products and solutions, and to provide resources to address global challenges and meet the needs of women and girls.

UN Women seeks to steer the private sector towards positive impacts *across all three objectives* even if engagement starts with only one of these. For example, a private sector entity may join a global campaign to change the world (objective three) and then be asked to sign the WEPs and address practices *inside* the organization to achieve GEWE (objective one) or *externally* in the community (objective two), or vice versa.

Engagement objective one: Changing the private sector internally through proactive shifts in institutional social norms, behaviours, policies and practices aimed at realizing GEWE. This could include: efforts by the private sector to commit to and implement the WEPs by ensuring gender equality in recruitment practices; appointing more women employees and those from marginalized groups to top leadership and management positions and roles where they are underrepresented; ensuring corporate human resources policies and procedures respond to the disproportionate care burden on women (that is, ensuring equitable maternity and paternity leave and other benefits and measures); ensuring decent work for women and equal pay for work of equal value; putting gender equality at the core of business models; preventing and addressing sexual harassment and discrimination, and ensuring security and safety for all women in the workplace; and ESG reporting.

Example impact on the lives of women and girls: By engaging with the private sector *internally* changes in business practices will lead to decent work, higher earnings and benefits that are fundamental to moving women out of poverty; this includes ensuring more women are employed in under-represented professions such as science, technology and engineering that will assist in breaking negative stereotypes and tackle the root causes of gender inequality.

Engagement objective two: Changing the way the private sector works externally to have positive impacts on markets, society and communities that enable GEWE. This entails changes to private sector behaviours, policies and practices that improve conditions for GEWE, and that prevent intended and unintended harm to individual women, girls and communities. It could include:

stopping private sector practices causing environmental and social harms and undercutting women’s human rights; working with community stakeholders and officials to eliminate discrimination and the exploitation of women and girls, and to open new opportunities for them; working with high-risk industries to make commitments to change; promoting gender equality in advertising and removing harmful stereotypes from marketing campaigns (for example, with the Unstereotype Alliance); and committing to and implementing the WEPs.

Example impact on the lives of women and girls: By engaging with the private sector to change *external* business practices women and girls will be better protected from external drivers of poverty such as food insecurity, climate events and/or access to markets and financial resources (that can be vulnerable to business practices in the community and marketplace) and contribute to ensuring access to affordable, safe water and affordable and clean energy.

Engagement objective three: Changing the world together with the private sector through collaboration to create services, products and solutions, and to provide resources to address global challenges and meet the needs of women and girls. This could include: providing funding, other resources and collaboration to implement policies, practices, tools, solutions and innovative methods to achieve GEWE; private sector leadership in championing gender equality and promoting positive masculinities at all levels of businesses (for example, through the HeForShe initiative and the WEPs); funding UN Women projects, programmes and initiatives, and civil society organizations making a difference for women and girls; investing in women-led businesses and women entrepreneurs (for example, through the Women’s Entrepreneurship Accelerator); and providing technology and tools to close the gender digital and financial divides (for example, by being a commitment maker and implementer in a Generation Equality Action Coalition).

Example impact on the lives of women and girls: By engaging with the private sector *collaboratively to change the world together* more women and girls will benefit from stronger international cooperation and increased financing for gender equality; for example, more women’s rights organizations, women’s human rights defenders and activists will be sustainably funded, including in conflict and humanitarian settings, and social movements for GEWE supported globally.

Section III: Strategic principles

The PSES 2023-2025 is informed by UN Women’s four guiding principles: 1) ensuring national ownership, 2) United Nations system-wide coherence, 3) sustainable financing and 4) leaving no one behind (a human rights-based and intersectional approach).³⁸ The strategy also embeds United Nations principles applying specifically to private sector engagement, including the UN Global Compact principles, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Children’s Rights and Business Principles³⁹ and the WEPs.

UN Women will design, implement and monitor all engagements with the private sector in a principled manner to ensure:

Do no harm: Engagements will seek to avoid exposing people to additional risks through action or inaction. The “do no harm” principle requires UN Women to analyse a private sector intervention or engagement within the broader context, and to mitigate potentially negative effects on women and girls in particular as well as the broader economy and the environment. Women and girls must not be inadvertently put at greater risk either through private sector engagement *or the absence of it*.

Accountability: First and foremost, this refers to accountability to women and girls, which lies at the heart of UN Women’s work. It also refers to the accountability of States and the private sector for achieving human rights obligations and GEWE commitments, and, *specifically, to accountability for the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the WEPs*. Women and girls, and women’s rights organizations must be able to lead, participate in and act as agents of change in private sector engagements. Accountability mechanisms should be built into all programmes, partnerships and initiatives.

Integrity: Engagement with the private sector must maintain the integrity of the United Nations and its independence, impartiality and transparency. It must clearly advance UN Women’s aims, activities and purposes, set clear delineations of roles and responsibilities, avoid any unfair advantages and include all relevant partners. All engagements must aim to achieve GEWE impacts.

Risk-aware: Applying a principle of risk-awareness to ensure the greatest impacts aligns with Strategic Plan 2022-2025 commitments to enhance risk management through strengthened systems and processes.⁴⁰ UN Women may pursue a risk-aware approach to private sector entities in high-risk and sensitive industries⁴¹ to address human rights abuses and violations against women, and to ensure no woman or girl is left behind. The UN Global Compact recommends a higher risk tolerance for “engagements specifically intended to address failures in certain criteria through meaningful changes to business policies and practices”.⁴²

Section IV: Strategic approaches

The Women’s Empowerment Principles Journey

UN Women’s key strategic approach is to influence and support private sector entities to sign up to the WEPs as the starting point for a GEWE or WEPs journey, and as a catalyst for further results. UN Women aims to achieve positive impacts at scale by encouraging all private sector entities to commit to delivering on GEWE through the WEPs. While the first step could be small, as simple as UN Women disseminating information on private sector obligations to influential entities, the WEPs offer a pathway to deeper engagement.

Example: The UN Women and ILO joint programme “Promoting Productive Employment and Decent Work for Women in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine” aims to address the structural causes of inequalities that hinder women from enjoying equal opportunities for decent work. One of the main vehicles used for this purpose is the partnership with the private sector to support a gender-responsive private sector that attracts, retains, and promotes women. The primary tool UN Women uses to engage with the private sector is the WEPs, which is used as an instrument for the execution of gender equality and women’s empowerment practices in the private sector.⁴³ In 2022, The Jordan Chamber of Commerce joined the WEPs community by signing a statement of commitment to the WEPs Principles.

All private sector entities entering a formal partnership with UN Women will be expected to sign the WEPs. Each entity will be analysed and assessed for risks, including against the do-no-harm principle (see the risk management section for more detail). Ensuring private sector entities sign the WEPs enables UN Women to start formal and active engagement with a mutual understanding of baseline commitment and expected standards, and to advocate for monitoring and implementation.

Taking a life cycle approach to engagement means monitoring, evaluating and learning from the partnership, and ensuring accountability and ongoing risk management. No matter what stage of the GEWE/WEPs journey each partner has reached, UN Women will aim to monitor implementation of GEWE commitments, subject to earmarked resourcing available for this work. Hence the PSES 2023-2025 highlights knowledge management and monitoring, evaluating, accountability and learning as key enablers of progress, for which resources will be mobilised.

Private sector entities that have not signed the WEPs, that are not adequately implementing WEPs principles, or that are too high risk or sensitive for a formal partnership may only be engaged with *indirectly*, such as through policy and advocacy work to influence such entities to address harmful practices (for example through Strategic Output One, normative support). UN Women may choose to withhold any form of engagement with a private sector entity that is deemed too high-risk.

[An integrated and diversified approach](#)

Private sector engagement will be embedded as integral to planning for normative, coordination and programmatic support in which businesses can play roles. For example, UN Women will integrate engagement objectives within existing strategic frameworks and planning processes (such as country office Strategic Notes and unit workplans) aligned with national, regional and global priorities, as relevant. It will develop a pipeline of private sector entities suitable for engagement, adhere to PSES 2023-2025 engagement objectives and guiding principles, and consult with the private sector and other key stakeholders, including civil society.

UN Women recognizes that the private sector should not be engaged in a silo but through transformative, multistakeholder partnerships that support States in creating an enabling environment for progress on SDG 5. UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 emphasizes public-private partnerships that complement national efforts. Initiatives including Generation Equality and its Action Coalitions mobilize much needed attention and resources from multistakeholder partnerships; these comprise the private sector as vital in achieving GEWE, in the spirit of SDG 17.

Because the private sector is not a monolith, spanning small firms and transnational corporations as well as philanthropic bodies, UN Women will diversify its approach to take advantage of wide-ranging opportunities for positive change. It will consider the size and capacities of both the private sector partner and the UN Women unit or National Committee embarking on an engagement, as well as the stage a private sector firm has reached in its GEWE journey. The overarching aim will remain to establish long-term, sustainable partnerships for catalytic and transformative changes that benefit women and girls, at scale.

UN Women will tailor its engagement strategies to the varying needs and capacities of private sector entities, towards effectively promoting GEWE across all enterprises. For example, it may back women-led micro- and small enterprises through programmes that provide microfinance or access to markets, or that leverage technology for business growth; provide medium-sized enterprises with capacity-building on women's leadership and inclusive workplace practices; and engage larger corporations on corporate social responsibility through advocacy and policy dialogues. It could influence multinational and transnational corporations and investors to make gender-responsive investments.

UN Women will vary its approach to private sector engagement depending on national priorities as well as host country and market environments, recognizing that the private sector is more regulated in some countries than others, which creates opportunities and challenges. In regulated markets, UN Women will explore openings to mainstream GEWE and the protection of women's rights, for example, through support to States on labour laws and consumer protection. Some countries are notably mandating private sector employers to develop and implement sexual harassment policies. Lessons from such processes can be transferred to other States through UN Women's convening and knowledge exchange role. States with less regulated markets may require more direct advocacy with the private sector, such as to prioritize investment in women-owned businesses or gender-responsive procurement.

Since customizing engagement and attention will depend on capacities across UN Women units, it will take a holistic approach, providing options for country offices, for example, to direct interested private sector entities to HQ and regionally managed initiatives.

[An intersectional approach](#)

UN Women will apply an intersectional approach⁴⁴ to engagement with the private sector, focusing on engagement that can challenge and address multiple forms of intersectional discrimination and structural barriers, especially those affecting marginalized or underrepresented groups. Working with States to regulate and hold the private sector to account requires operating within the framework of various human rights instruments to address multiple forms of discrimination. This could encompass encouraging changes to business leadership, policy and practice as well as working with States to influence the private sector through laws, regulations and business incentives that address intersecting forms of discrimination.

Engaging with the private sector includes working with firms to confront unequal power dynamics across their sphere of influence, from the workplace and marketplace to communities and societies at large. This process rests on paying attention to how discrimination can impact people differently and identifying measures to tackle unfair treatment and transform harmful norms. Many opportunities exist for companies to address all forms of discrimination and ensure the equal valuing of the perspectives and talents of women in all their diversity. The WEPs include recommendations for companies to address discrimination and foster diversity, equality and inclusion, with a specific focus on intersectionality.⁴⁵

Example: In 2021, popular football players from the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia – and Turkey have spoken out against toxic masculinity and violence against women via video message, under UN Women’s regional programme on ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds,” funded by the European Union. The campaign yielded results, with 21 media reports including special video broadcastings on three national TV stations and – partnering with the country’s largest betting company - the video was broadcast in over 280 betting shops, a predominately masculine space.⁴⁶

Section V: Strategic activities and enablers

Strategic activities

UN Women will engage with the private sector through several types of activities, in accordance with internal policies and procedures, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group’s (UNSDG) common approach to prospect research and partnership engagement assessments.⁴⁷ The following examples provide ideas for planning strategic engagement.

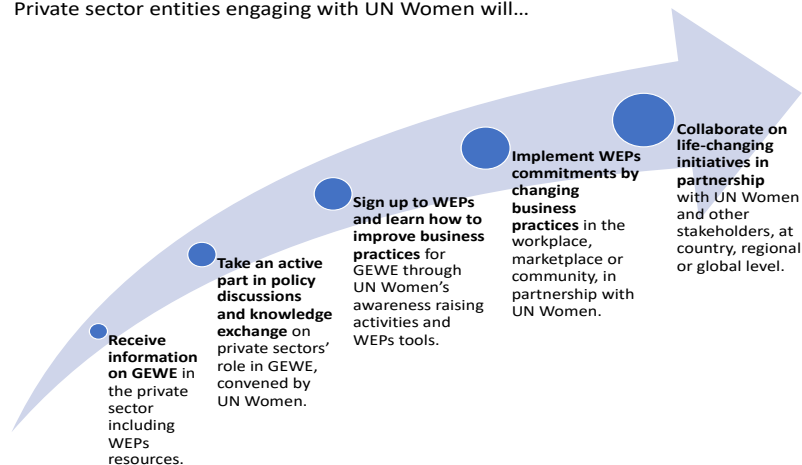
- **Policy dialogues and normative setting:** UN Women will lead, convene and contribute to impactful policy dialogues with the private sector, Government United Nations entities, and other stakeholders, including civil society that lead to specific changes in private sector policies, practices or behaviours, and/or to the adoption of best practices and standards.
- **Advocacy:** UN Women will conduct impactful advocacy campaigns with the private sector leading to changes in behaviours, policies and practices. Activities could include public awareness campaigns, media campaigns, communications for development programmes and public events.
- **Exchange of knowledge and information:** UN Women will collect, produce and exchange influential data, evidence and knowledge with or about the private sector that stakeholders use to influence or inform the GEWE agenda, with a focus on the private sector’s role in achieving and financing the development agenda.
- **Resource mobilization:** UN Women will mobilize resources (funding, goods or services) from/with the private sector for UN Women, civil society or multistakeholder projects, or activities that benefit GEWE, including through sponsorships, donations, marketing and campaigns.

- **Capacity development:** UN Women will participate in and/or lead impactful capacity development activities, such as training, professional development or capacity transfers, to enhance individual and organizational capacities to improve GEWE behaviours and practices.
- **Technical collaboration and innovation:** UN Women will develop and collaborate to create new products, solutions, technology, programmes and/or initiatives to address GEWE challenges; UN Women may also seek to influence private sector and other stakeholders to promote sustainable financing for gender equality.

Planning engagement activities strategically can help move a private sector entity from commitment to action on the GEWE/WEPs journey. The journey may not be linear, and progress against one engagement objective may happen at the same time as regression in another area. Ongoing partnership, risk management, monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning are critical across the engagement life cycle.

EXAMPLE PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Private sector entities engaging with UN Women will...



Strategic enablers

To deliver the ambition of the PSES 2023-2025, UN Women will focus on five key enablers:

- 1. Knowledge management, data, research and evidence as relevant to GEWE and the private sector:** UN Women is uniquely placed to generate influential evidence and knowledge on private sector impacts on GEWE. It will establish a dedicated knowledge management function and prioritize investment in specialist expertise. UN Women will deliver a biennial Flagship Report on the private sector's role and impact on GEWE, in partnership with other UN agencies. The first report will be launched in January 2025.
- 2. Policy development, advocacy and coordination:** UN Women's policy and coordination functions, including expertise in leading and coordinating GEWE initiatives with other United Nations entities, are essential in advocating for change in the private sector and supporting States in upholding public and private sector responsibilities to respect and protect women's rights.
- 3. Programme and project design and implementation:** Integrating private sector engagement into UN Women's existing programmes and projects and prospecting and planning for new

private sector engagements require growing excellence in project management expertise and robust results-based management. PSES implementation will focus on capacity-building and project management skills for those involved.

4. **Partnership management, resource mobilization, communications and prospecting:** To take full advantage of opportunities for private sector engagement at all levels, UN Women needs to invest in partnership management and prospecting as a core function. Investment in specialist expertise will ensure a life cycle approach to engagements that maximizes partnership opportunities.
5. **Risk management, due diligence, and management of internal policies and procedures** are other essential core functions. They effectively mitigate and manage risks and support robust implementation of private sector engagement policies, procedures and assessments. Continuous monitoring and learning are vital to inform adjustments to policies and procedures as needed.

Section VI: Risk management

This strategy is subject to UN Women’s overall robust governance, risk management and controls, including adherence to all relevant regulations, rules, policies, procedures and guidance to identify, mitigate and manage risks. UN Women also aligns itself with the practices of other United Nations organizations and the *UNSDG Common Approach to Prospect Research and Due Diligence for Business Sector Partnerships*.⁴⁸

Risks identified include those that may emerge in the delivery of this strategy and those associated with engaging with the private sector. Risks will be managed proactively through a robust risk management process. It will integrate risk management into the strategy’s internal implementation plan overall and in the design of specific engagements with the private sector to ensure effective management *before* the engagement is established *and throughout its life cycle*.

The most significant risks associated with *delivering* the PSES 2023-2025 overall relate to internal implementation capacities and resourcing. The PSES will be supported by an internal implementation plan with a fundraising plan and financing options. This step acknowledges the need to mobilize resources for core partnership management functions at the country, regional and headquarters levels as well as new modalities for responding to private sector demand for UN Women’s support, tools and guidance. Linking private sector entities to existing national, regional or global private sector initiatives will be a first consideration to maximize efficiency and impact.

Risks from engaging with the private sector include not being able to hold the partner accountable to the agreed engagement objectives, and the impact this can have on project delivery and ultimately women and girls; incorrect use of engagement by the partner to enhance reputation and credibility (secondary to supporting UN Women’s mandate); and use of UN Women’s logo or bilateral branding without permission or for commercial purposes, and, in the case of formalized partnerships, contrary to agreement terms.

UN Women recognizes that risks are inherent to any engagement with the private sector. It also acknowledges that its own potential inaction or non-engagement may impact its ability to deliver on its mandate. This includes the risk of leaving behind a large group of women and girls. In its private sector engagement, UN Women has therefore adopted a risk-aware approach as opposed to a risk-avoidance stance. The former entails establishing clear criteria for engagement design, informed decision-making and oversight. It requires proactively managing risks to protect UN Women’s values, credibility and reputation while creating space for innovation and engagement to achieve GEWE impacts at scale.

To manage risks, UN Women’s follows its internal private sector engagement policy and procedures, including partner engagement assessments *before* any engagement with the private sector. All approved engagements require a robust, measurable risk management and mitigation plan. Engagements are subject to a life cycle approach of proper oversight arrangements to monitor key risk indicators identified in the assessment process; these are incorporated into the prepared risk management and mitigation plan. If a new opportunity arises with a private sector entity with which UN Women currently or previously engaged, or where the partnership is due for renewal, the entity will be subject to a further partner engagement assessment to ensure its continued suitability as a partner of choice.

Section VII: Implementation and management arrangements

A Results Framework for the PSES 2023-2025 will define measurable results and monitor progress. An internal implementation plan will include delegated roles and responsibilities for specific, time-bound actions to deliver the PSES across UN Women, at the national, regional and headquarters levels, and to involve UN Women’s National Committees.

The PSES is not meant to be prescriptive. It allows flexibility in meeting context-specific needs. It should guide and inspire private sector engagements that demonstrably contribute to development results and organizational effectiveness, and that are integral to UN Women’s strategic planning processes. Planning for private sector engagement will be included in the design and implementation of national, regional and headquarters Strategic Notes and biennial workplans, as appropriate to each context.

To further support implementation, UN Women will enhance its outreach, communications and offer to the private sector, in line with demand from private sector entities. It will promote UN Women’s available materials on existing national, regional and global private sector engagements as well as support, tools and guidance.

This PSES requires appropriate and sufficient funding for project specific results, normative and coordination work and its management. UN Women will continue to mobilize non-core resources from the private sector for programmes, projects and initiatives. It will also use its core resources as appropriate for costs such as those relating to normative, coordination and operational work, as well as for investment purposes to leverage non-core. Specifically, core resources will be used for due diligence assessments, risk management and oversight to ensure independence of private sector partners. In this respect the financing approach to work with the private sector is aligned with the financing vision UN Women’s founding resolution GA46/289.⁴⁹

About UN Women National Committees

UN Women National Committees are independent non-profit, non-governmental organizations established to generate greater political and financial support for UN Women. National Committees are present in 13 countries and work to support UN Women through fundraising initiatives, advocacy with their governments to increase political and financial support to UN Women, and public awareness activities in their respective countries.

Over the years, National Committees have continued to forge strong relationships with private sector entities through corporate philanthropy, cause-related marketing and sponsorships, raising around USD 3.9 million in 2022, up from USD 1.6 million in 2021. Private sector entities have also been increasingly contributing to Core Resources through the National Committees in Australia, Japan, Sweden and the United Kingdom. National Committees have also been instrumental in promoting and facilitating engagements with private sector entities through other UN Women initiatives such as HeforShe, Unstereotype Alliance and the WEPs.

For example, during the Orange the World campaign (a day to raise awareness and take action to end violence against women and girls), the French National Committee has been collaborating with two major private sector entities in raising awareness of an emergency hotline to report violence against women, which is printed on customers’ receipt when they purchase goods at the supermarket. Customers can also round up their purchase to donate to UN Women France.

For more information: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/national-committees>

Section VIII: Monitoring and reporting

The PSES 2023-2025 will be subject to an *internal* annual review and brief report on progress with an evaluation planned in the final year of implementation (2025) to inform future engagement with the private sector and the next UN Women Strategic Plan (2026-2029). To align with existing reporting processes, external progress updates will be included in UN Women’s Annual Report on its Strategic Plan. Informal updates will be provided to UN Women’s Executive Board upon request.

Monitoring and reporting will be steered by a Results Framework and a limited set of key performance indicators to measure the PSES. Results will also be reported against the UN Women Strategic Plan’s Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF).⁵⁰ The IRRF already includes a set of relevant indicators that can, if they are disaggregated, demonstrate results achieved through engagement with the private sector. An approach to extracting, monitoring and reporting on such results, integrated within

existing UN Women results systems, will be designed and incorporated into the next UN Women Strategic Plan 2026-2029 and IRRF.

Success will also be measured qualitatively through deeper dive analyses into specific areas of work, including individual results reports for key initiatives. Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning approaches will be incorporated into engagements to generate knowledge and test the assumptions of the PSES. At least two key knowledge products will be produced annually, consolidating knowledge from practitioners in private sector engagements, and in collaboration with the private sector and other stakeholders.

Knowledge products and results reporting are intended to provide transparency and accountability to stakeholders on the purpose and intention behind the PSES. Further transparency will come through the publication of details on the cooperation, to the extent possible, while respecting confidentiality obligations in bilateral agreements.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ESG	Environmental, social and governance principles
GEWE	Gender equality and women’s empowerment
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRRF	Integrated Results and Resources Framework
PSES	UN Women’s Private Sector Engagement Strategy 2023-2025
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
WEPs	Women’s Empowerment Principles

Annex: Types of private sector entities

Companies	Intermediary institutions	Investors	Mutual organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Multinational companies with global reach and operations (e.g., from the North and South, and with a wide presence in multiple countries, including in UN Women programme countries) •Large domestic companies •Micro-, small and medium enterprises •Cooperatives •Social enterprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chambers of commerce and industry •Business associations •Innovative alliances •Business round tables •Stock exchanges •New generation of cooperatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Asset owners (e.g., pension funds) •Asset management companies •Commercial banks •Private equity funds •Venture capital funds •Corporate and philanthropic foundations •High-net-worth individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Mutual organizations •Cooperative banks •Mutual saving banks •Credit unions •Mutual insurance/assurance and health care companies

Endnotes:

¹ The PSES recognizes that in some contexts, state-owned enterprises are operated for profit and therefore are included within this definition.

² The Women’s Empowerment Principles. See: www.weps.org/.

³ UN Women and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2022. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022*. www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022.

⁴ Economic and Social Council. 2022. *Report of the United Nations Secretary-General: Innovation and Technological Change, and Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls*. www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/CSW67-Expert-Group-Meeting-report-en.pdf.

⁵ International Labour Organization. 2023. “The ILO, the Private Sector, and Employment Promotion.” www.ilo.org/pardev/public-private-partnerships/jobs-growth/lang-en/index.htm.

⁶ World Bank Gender Data Portal. “Female Labor Force Participation.” <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/data-stories/flfp-data-story/>.

⁷ World Economic Forum. 2016. “How Do the World’s Biggest Companies Compare to the Biggest Economies.” www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/10/corporations-not-countries-dominate-the-list-of-the-world-s-biggest-economic-entities/.

⁸ United Nations. 2015. *Report of the Working Group on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises*. A/HRC/29/28. Human Rights Council, twenty-ninth session. www.right-docs.org/doc/a-hrc-29-28/.

⁹ Business and Sustainable Development Commission. 2017. *Better Business, Better World*. <https://unglobalcompact.org/library/5051>.

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- ¹³ UN Women, Women's Empowerment Principles. 2021. "Understanding Intersectionality: Targeting All Forms of Discrimination in the World of Work." WEPs Guidance Note. www.weps.org/resource/understanding-intersectionality-targeting-all-forms-discrimination-world-work.
- ¹⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. See: www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.
- ¹⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2011. *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/720245?ln=en>.
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- ³⁶ Examples: UN Women, 2022. *Partnering with UN Women: Business and Philanthropies in Asia Pacific*. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/private-sector-0> and UN Women, 2023. *UN Women's Business and philanthropic partners* <https://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/businesses-and-foundations/major-partners>
- ³⁷ African Girls Can Code Initiative builds digital skills and momentum towards a better future, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2023/03/african-girls-can-code-initiative-builds-digital-skills-and->

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³⁸ Details on UN Women's Guiding Principles can be found in the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

³⁹ United Nations Children's Fund, UN Global Compact and Save the Children. "Children's Rights and Business Principles." www.unicef.org/documents/childrens-rights-and-business-principles.

⁴⁰ UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025, para. 104. See: www.unwomen.org/en/un-women-strategic-plan-2022-2025.

⁴¹ This refers to private sector activities and attributes that create significant risks to UN Women via potential association or engagement. This may be due to the close link between business interests and concerns about women's and girls' rights or the potentially negative impact of operations on communities and/or on the environment. The term "sensitive" may also be applied to private sector entities that systematically fail to demonstrate a commitment to, or to meet in practice, the principles of the United Nations (on human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption).

⁴² UN Global Compact. 2015. *Guidelines on a Principle-based Approach to the Cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Sector*. <https://unglobalcompact.org/library/3431>.

⁴³ United Nations Jordan, 2022. *UN Women launches Guidelines for Leadership and Skills Development of Women in the Private Sector*. <https://jordan.un.org/en/205719-un-women-launches-guidelines-leadership-and-skills-development-women-private-sector>

⁴⁴ UN Women and United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2021. *Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind*. www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit-en.pdf.

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⁴⁶ United Nations Serbia, 2020 *Campaign against toxic masculinity yields success in Serbia* <https://serbia.un.org/en/187499-campaign-against-toxic-masculinity-yields-success-serbia>

⁴⁷ United Nations Sustainable Development Group. 2020. *UNSDG Common Approach to Prospect Research and Due Diligence for Business Sector Partnerships*. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/unsdg-common-approach-prospect-research-and-due-diligence-business-sector-partnerships>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ UN General Assembly, 2010. *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 2 July 2020 on System-wise coherence (A/RES/64/289*)* <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/479/17/PDF/N0947917.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵⁰ UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025, Integrated Results and Resources Framework. See: www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/UN-Women-Strategic-Plan-2022-2025-Annex-01-Integrated-results-and-resources-framework-en.pdf.