



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls



MPTF OFFICE ANNUAL SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE SECRETARIAT NARRATIVE PROGRESS REPORT
REPORTING PERIOD: 1 JANUARY 2023 – 31 DECEMBER 2023

<p>Programme Title & Project Number</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme Title: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat MPTF Office Reference Number:² 00108307 	<p>Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s) / Strategic Results¹</p> <p><i>Country/Region:</i> 34+ programmes in Africa, ASEAN, Caribbean, Central Asia, Latin America, and Pacific</p> <p><i>Priority area/ strategic results:</i> Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls, Sustainable Development, UN Reform</p>
<p>Participating Organisation(s)</p> <p>Organisations that have received direct funding from the MPTF Office under this programme: UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA</p>	<p>Implementing Partners</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Programme/Project Cost (US\$)</p> <p>Total approved budget as per project document³: \$25,118,109</p> <p>MPTF /JP Contribution⁴:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MPTFO (UNDP): \$10,182,492 UN Women: \$14,870,427 UNFPA: \$65,190 <p>Agency Contribution: \$744,264</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MPTFO (UNDP): \$235,714 UN Women: \$351,984 UNFPA: \$156,566 	<p>Programme Duration</p> <p>Overall Duration: September 2017 - December 2024</p> <p>Start Date⁵: 20.09.2017</p>

¹ Strategic Results, as formulated in the Strategic UN Planning Framework (e.g. UNDAF) or project document.

² The MPTF Office Project Reference Number is the same number as the one on the Notification message. It is also referred to as "Project ID" on the project's factsheet page the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

³ The updated Spotlight Initiative Fund Secretariat Project Document, and updated Budget, were approved by the Operational Steering Committee on OSC meeting #25, on 21 Dec. 2022. The figures included here reflect this latest approved version.

⁴ The MPTF or JP Contribution, refers to the amount transferred to the Participating UN Organisations, which is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

⁵ The start date is the date of the first transfer of the funds from the MPTF Office as Administrative Agent. Transfer date is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

Government Contribution	Original End Date ⁶	31.12.2024
Other Contributions (donors)	Current End date ⁷	31.12.2024
TOTAL:		\$25,862,373

Programme Assessment/Review/Mid-Term Eval.
Assessments were further carried out for all programmes as mid-term assessment, various thematic assessments are under way, and a final evaluation is underway.

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⁶ As per approval of the original project document by the relevant decision-making body/Steering Committee.

⁷ If there has been an extension, then the revised, approved end date should be reflected here. If there has been no extension approved, then the current end date is the same as the original end date. The end date is the same as the operational closure date which is when all activities for which a Participating Organisation is responsible under an approved MPTF / JP have been completed. As per the MOU, agencies are to notify the MPTF Office when a programme completes its operational activities.

List of Acronyms

CPD: Country Programme Document
CSRG: Civil Society Reference Group
CSO: Civil society organisation
CSW66: Commission on the Status of Women
DCO: United Nations Development Coordination Office
DG INTPA: Directorate-General for International Partnerships (European Commission)
ECA: European Court of Auditors
EOSG: Executive Office of the Secretary-General
EU: European Union
EVAWG: Eliminating violence against women and girls
EVAW: Eliminating violence against women
FTR: Funds Transfer Request
GAR: Global Annual Report
GBV: Gender-based violence
GRG: Global Reference Group
HQ: Headquarters
KM: Knowledge Management
M&E: Monitoring & Evaluation
MPTF Office: UN Multi Partner Trust Fund Office
OM: Operations Manual
OSC: Operational Steering Committee
RCO: UN Resident Coordinator's Office
RPD: Regional Programme Document
RUNO: Recipient United Nations Organisation
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
SI Secretariat/Secretariat/FS: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat
SMART: Spotlight Monitoring and Reporting Tool
SOP: Standard Operating Procedures
UN: United Nations
UNCT: United Nations Country Team
UNDAF/UNSDCF: United Nations Development Assistance Framework / United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDG: United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UNTF/UN Trust Fund: UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
UN Women: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWG: Violence against women and girls
WPHF: Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund

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Introduction

This report is produced at the request of the Multi Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTFO) as the Administrative Agent and host of the Spotlight Initiative Fund Secretariat (FS). It offers an overview of the progress made by Spotlight Initiative Secretariat in 2023 against the overarching functions and goals set out in the Spotlight Initiative Direct Cost Project Document and the Fund's [Terms of Reference](#), namely:

- Provide strategic advice and quality control over implementation of Spotlight Initiative;
- Exercise accountability for the technical quality and coherence of the Initiative in responding to country and regional programme needs;
- Provide management, operational, and administrative support to the Governing Body and the Operational Steering Committee (OSC), and ensure the submission of country-level/regional programme proposals to the OSC;
- Foster coherence, alignment, quality, scaling up and sharing of knowledge and lessons learned, and ensure that these feed into wider United Nations Reform discussions;
- Facilitate collaboration and communication between the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG), recipient United Nations organisations (RUNOs), and the United Nations Resident Coordinators regarding the operations of the fund;
- Support the monitoring and evaluation of programme technical quality, coherence and potential replicability of actions in other countries/contexts;
- Manage and support communication, public information and visibility, in close collaboration with the UN Department of Public Information, the EOSG and the implementing UN agencies to raise awareness on violence against women and girls (VAWG) and to illustrate impact;
- Coordinate with the implementing UN agencies and the wider UN system, and leverage their collective capacities and gender expertise to deliver on the goal of eliminating violence against women and girls (EVAWG);
- Coordinate action amongst relevant international development actors and promote a streamlined process of information-sharing for EVAWG;
- Facilitate spaces for the meaningful engagement of civil society at all levels of programming;
- Produce high quality data analysis and practical tools for decision makers aimed at ensuring Spotlight Initiative interventions are based on sound research;
- Elaborate and periodically update a comprehensive [Operations Manual](#), to codify policies and rules of procedure in accordance with signed legal agreements, and ensure compliance;
- Manage the monitoring and control of operational risks and ensure activities are implemented as planned, having the intended impact on rights-holders, effectively owned by communities, relevant to the needs of rights-holders, and captured through knowledge management strategies to be converted into policy tools;
- Broaden the evidence base on ending violence against women and girls, and collect and disseminate knowledge and best practices on the issue;
- Coordinate and oversee the annual reporting process, both at fund-level and programme-level, and consolidate narrative annual and final reports;
- Ensure collaboration and streamlined communication with all relevant stakeholders and foster constant engagement with civil society;

- Guide programme teams during the Phase II transition process, including dedicated quality assurance reviews to ensure quality of submissions and adherence to requirements;
- Provide support and coordination for operational and financial closure of Spotlight Initiative 1.0 including final cumulative reporting and data collection, guiding on operational and financial closure procedures and ensuring UN Country Teams develop sustainability strategies and transition plans to safeguard and scale up the results achieved to date.
- Actively engage UNCTs, host governments, civil society partners, and donors to develop and promote the Initiative's next phase of programming (Spotlight Initiative 2.0) including by creating evidence-based programming concepts, strengthening partnerships, and engaging in resource mobilisation to broaden the donor portfolio;

This report has been structured around these main responsibilities.

Background

In 2017, the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) launched Spotlight Initiative, a global partnership to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, accompanied by an initial financial envelope of EUR 500 million. As a complement to the EU's historic seed investment, the Government of Portugal contributed USD 68,474 to the Initiative, and the Government of Albania contributed USD 5,000. The Initiative is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and has supported development actors to drive progress across the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5 on gender equality. The Initiative is also a UN Development System reform model fund, pioneering unprecedented levels of collaboration and coherence across the UN system, under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator at country level, the Development Coordination Office (DCO) Regional Directors at regional level, and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General at the global level.

Spotlight Initiative Secretariat (referred to hereunder as the Secretariat) is a fund support structure that consists of two units that work in close collaboration: the Management Unit and the Technical Unit. The Secretariat supports and services the Governing Body and Operational Steering Committee, as the key governance bodies of the Fund at global level, executes the management and coordination activities of the Fund, and provides both management and technical support to programme teams across the Spotlight Initiative portfolio. Given that Spotlight Initiative is a Demonstration Fund for the United Nations Development System Reform, the Secretariat also facilitates coordination across implementing UN agencies in service of this new way of working. The Management Unit acts as the secretariat of the Governing Body and Operational Steering Committee and is hosted by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office (UNDP), while the Technical Unit is hosted by UN Women and provides technical and programmatic leadership and support. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General provides overall coordination of the Secretariat.

2023 was the sixth (6th) year of the Fund Secretariat's operations.

Results

Overseeing implementation and guiding acceleration

Portfolio Implementation and Management Support

The SI Secretariat is responsible for overseeing **34 Spotlight Initiative programmes**: 32 country and regional programmes and 2 civil society grant-giving programmes in partnership with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) and the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF).

Throughout 2023 - the final year of implementation of the first generation of Spotlight Initiative programmes - the Secretariat continued to ensure programmes were well-equipped to advance implementation, accelerate delivery, address challenges, and drive results. The Secretariat also supported programmes in operational and financial closure preparations and execution, in their efforts to amplify and communicate results, to sustain the gains made, and in resource mobilisation efforts to continue Spotlight Initiative programming. As of September 2023⁸, the Fund was at 84% financial expenditure, with 9% in financial commitments, demonstrating high rates of financial delivery. The full programme portfolio of country and regional programmes under this first iteration of Spotlight Initiative concluded successfully on 31 December 2023.

Effective country and regional programme support

The Secretariat works to ensure that governance decisions, guidance, and resources reach programmes in a timely manner, so that programme teams are equipped to carry out effective and efficient programming in the spirit of UN Reform, and that implementation issues are resolved efficiently.

Engagement with Resident Coordinators and UNCTs: Throughout the year, the Executive Office of the Secretary General (EOSG) and Spotlight Initiative Secretariat convened calls with Resident Coordinators to discuss the status of current Spotlight programmes and strategies to sustain results as the current funding cycle winds down. The Resident Coordinator's leadership of Spotlight programmes continues to be critical: these calls facilitated further dialogue and collaboration among UN Country Teams to take stock of progress made, identify opportunities to accelerate implementation, and prepare for operational and financial closure. Out of 32 country and regional programmes, 18 virtual meetings were held with RCs and their respective teams, and 9 meetings were held in person and/or through bilateral calls.

Spotlight Initiative programme teams and heads of office across UN agencies were invited to join the calls, as well. The calls offered a space for effective troubleshooting at the highest level, and efficient, collaborative work planning to ensure as close to 100% delivery of planned activities as possible.

Spotlight Programme Coordinators' platforms: Throughout 2023 the Secretariat continued to organise "Coordinator Check-In Calls" after a successful launch in 2022. Eight rounds of calls across the five Spotlight Initiative regions were held during February through October between programme coordinators and the SI Secretariat. The check-in calls strengthened collaboration among programme coordinators, and provided a platform to share knowledge, address bottlenecks, and help programmes implement Spotlight Initiative principles, guidelines, and procedures for smoother (and more effective) day-to-day operations.

⁸ As the last available data as of March 2024.

Preparedness for closure of programmes: As programmes completed implementation on a rolling basis throughout 2023, the Secretariat also facilitated dedicated “Closure preparedness webinars” in the first half of 2023 and “Closure process check-in calls” in the second half of 2023 to share the requirements and timelines for programme operational and financial closure and, subsequently, discuss the status of closure processes. These calls helped ensure contractual compliance and offered a space to take stock of progress (including on programme and financial delivery), clarify processes, and support final narrative reporting. These calls also provided a platform to discuss sustainability plans, transitions in partnerships (including with civil society), and knowledge management and lessons learned, among other issues as programmes wound down and looked ahead. Importantly, the calls also discussed mobilising resources for successor Spotlight Initiative programming, building on and amplifying impact. These calls were open to a range of colleagues to ensure sustained support for programme closure. Programme coordination teams, permanent staff/focal point from the RCO, and RUNO focal points (both from Spotlight Initiative programmes and those on other contracts that would continue after programme closure) were invited to join. By the end of 2023, the SI Secretariat completed closure process check-in calls with all 34 programmes.

In addition to virtual meetings, the SI Secretariat supported programme teams on the ground. A total of nine (9) duty travel missions were held throughout 2023 (Honduras, Nigeria, Uganda, Mali, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Fiji (for the Vanuatu and Pacific Regional Programme), Guyana, and Barbados (for the Caribbean Regional Programme). Visits were based on programme end dates, geographical representation, and the status of financial delivery. On-the-ground support helped further resolve implementation issues, accelerate delivery, and better support programmes’ preparation for operational and financial closure in full compliance with the EU contractual framework.

Ad-hoc implementation support: Additional programme management and implementation support was also provided throughout 2023 by the Secretariat, including:

- Two induction sessions for new Spotlight Initiative programme personnel. The inductions provide information on the key features and background on Spotlight Initiative, key programme management principles and guidance, including on UN Reform, programme work plans and budget revisions, implementation through civil society organisations, reporting and operational closure requirements.
- Day-to-day support to coordinators through implementation guidance and troubleshooting, including daily email support and ad hoc calls to provide guidance and address questions on implementation, budget revisions, and other issues in close collaboration with UN agency focal points at the HQ and Brussels level, as well as the EU DG INTPA.
- In April 2023, the Secretariat organised webinars focused on the final reporting cycle, and held targeted refresher sessions in July, September and November 2023. Additional details on guidance and support provided during the annual reporting cycle can be found below.
- Throughout 2023, specific support was provided to ensure continued civil society engagement. The Secretariat produced and shared a guidance note on sustaining the civil society reference group mechanism and sessions were organised in June and October with the Civil Society Reference Groups (CSRG) focal points across regions to discuss their role as this first generation of programmes wound down. The Secretariat shared an updated toolkit to monitor the activities of implementing partners and grantees, along with a package to

engage with the European Union Delegation on investment in Spotlight Initiative 2.0 programmes in their respective countries or regions.

- To support dialogue and knowledge exchange across programmes, the Secretariat organised a series of global-level knowledge exchanges throughout the reporting period, including on the sustainability of programmes' contributions. More on these sessions can be found below in the section on “Advancing knowledge management and capacity development”.

Phase II development for the Caribbean Regional Programme

After the successful transition of the programme portfolio to Phase II⁹ throughout 2021 and 2022, in 2023 the Secretariat supported the Phase II programme development and approval for the Caribbean Regional Programme. The Caribbean Regional programme was approved by the OSC for their Phase II allocation and programme proposal in March 2023, following the completion of the programme's Mid-term Assessment. The Secretariat provided hands-on support and guidance - including rigorous quality assurance of the programme proposal and budget - to support quality programme development, and help ensure the successful finalisation of the Phase II design process for the OSC approval.

Release of the “Supplementary Guidance on Spotlight Initiative Country and Regional Programme Operational and Financial Closure”

In additional efforts to support full implementation and closure by the end of 2023, the Secretariat issued the guidance on operational and financial closure of programmes. This guidance supplemented the formal requirements of Spotlight Initiative programme closure outlined in the second version of the Operations Manual, reflecting the contractual framework between the MPTFO, as the Administrative Agent of Spotlight Initiative, and the European Union, as well as the contractual framework between the MPTFO and the RUNOs under the Spotlight Initiative. The supplementary guidance offered practical strategies for Spotlight Initiative programme coordination teams, RCOs, and RUNOs at the country/regional and HQ levels¹⁰ to execute operational and financial programme closure of the current generation of Spotlight Initiative programmes effectively and efficiently.

This guidance was complemented by a series of other guidance notes issued by the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat focusing on thematic aspects of programme closure and transition: a guidance note on sustainability, and a guidance note on the sustainability of cooperation with civil society specifically (discussed further below). These notes were disseminated to UNCTs through and discussed in webinars and closure calls to facilitate uptake.

Supporting the agency focal point system at the HQ and Brussels level

As in previous years, the Secretariat held monthly meetings with agency focal points at the HQ and Brussels level throughout 2023. Meetings offered a critical opportunity to discuss progress across the programme portfolio, share operational and technical guidance, address challenges and adapt, exchange knowledge, explore avenues for collaboration around resource mobilisation, and jointly develop the vision for the future of the Initiative.

⁹ The Africa Regional Programme and the Ecuador programme (due to unavailability of funding in the respective regional financial investment plans), the Afghanistan programme (due to slower implementation rate due to contextual factors), Safe and Fair and the UN Trust Fund and WPHF programmes (due to a mono-phase design) did not have a phase II.

¹⁰ Or respective entities for the regional programmes, the Safe and Fair programme and WPHF and UNTF grant-giving programmes.

In 2023, the Fund Secretariat held a total of thirteen (13) agency focal point meetings, with additional ad-hoc meetings focused on jointly discussing the future of the Initiative. These meetings fostered stronger inter-agency coordination and coherence (to better leverage each agency's mandate) and improved communication among Spotlight Initiative programmes, UN country teams, UN agencies at the HQ and Brussels level, and the SI Secretariat for better support to programmes to effectively and efficiently deliver jointly and coalesce around strategic priorities to end VAWG. In May 2023, in the spirit of streamlining communication, fostering alignment, and maximising efficiencies further, operational and technical focal point meetings began to be held jointly. Moreover, HQ and Brussels focal points have played a critical, catalytic role as liaisons with other agency technical or operational counterparts which, in turn, fosters improved collaboration with agencies at all levels for better delivery and higher quality programming.

Facilitating decision-making and cooperation through governance and coordination structures

The Governing Body is the highest level of governance. It sets the strategic direction of the Initiative and strengthens partnerships, collaboration, and coherence across the Initiative. This high-level forum facilitates consultation among key stakeholders, provides strategic oversight, and develops common strategic communication messaging. The Secretariat provides strategic support to the Governing Body by advising on compliance, decision-making and accountability; servicing meetings (including by setting the agenda, drafting talking points and background notes, convening participants, holding pre-negotiation meetings with key stakeholders, planning logistics, and compiling background documents for decisions); and engaging in detailed record-keeping and appropriate follow-up. Due to complicated schedules (including the unavailability of high-level members), no meetings were convened in 2023. The next Governing Body meeting is planned for the first half of 2024, and is expected to cover the impact of the Initiative to date, resource mobilisation at the global level, and the vision for the future of the Initiative.

The second tier of governance is the Operational Steering Committee. The OSC ensures effective management and coordinates all operational and technical aspects of the Initiative, with operational and administrative support from the Secretariat. In 2023, the OSC launched five (5) written procedures. Key decisions are summarised in the text box below.

2023 Operational Steering Committee Key Decisions

Operational Steering Committee #26 - 20 March 2023

- Approval of the Phase II allocation and updated Regional Programme Document (RPD) for the Caribbean Regional Programme, including Phase II.

Operational Steering Committee #27 - 10 May 2023

- Approval of the updated Belize Country Programme Document and Budget for the reallocation of the programme's evaluation funds to UN Women, previously allocated to UNDP.

- Approval of the updated Vanuatu Country Programme Document and Budget for the reallocation of the programme's evaluation funds to UN Women, previously allocated to UNFPA.
- Approval of the revised budget of the Spotlight Initiative's grant-giving programme of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, with no additional allocation to the programme.
- Approval of the revised Spotlight Initiative Global Results Framework to incorporate minor adjustments that address data collection.

Operational Steering Committee #28 - 31 July 2023

- Approval of the Updated Global Visibility and Communications Strategy for 2023, which has been updated to reflect the changes in Spotlight Initiative's communications and visibility operations since 2018.

Operational Steering Committee #29 - 11 September 2023

- Approval of updated Fund Secretariat Direct Cost Project Document allocating USD 171,200 of interest earned to cover costs associated with Spotlight Initiative designation as High Impact Initiative and related campaign activation.
- Approval of Extension of the Implementation Period of the Spotlight Initiative Niger Country Programme until 31 December 2023, within the approved country envelope.

Operational Steering Committee #30 - 22 December 2023

- Approval of the extension until 30 April 2024 for the Spotlight Initiative Global Platform project with updated Project Document and Budget, with no changes to the overall financial allocation.
- Endorsement of the 2022 Spotlight Initiative Global Annual Report.
- Approval of the Spotlight Initiative Afghanistan Country Programme 2023 Annual Work Plan.

In addition to its aforementioned support to the Governing Body and OSC, the Secretariat also regularly coordinates meetings with Heads of UN Agencies (HoAs) of implementing UN Agencies and other stakeholders across the UN system to foster strategic collaboration, communication and cohesion in programming to end violence against women and girls.

In 2023, Heads of Agencies from UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, or their delegates, convened twice, once on 8 May 2023 and again on 8 December 2023 to discuss finalising the implementation of the first generation of Spotlight Initiative programmes. The Initiative's results to date, and the vision for the future of the Initiative were also discussed, deepening agencies' ownership of Spotlight Initiative 2.0. These meetings provided a valuable space for Principals, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, and the Executive Office of the Secretary General to reach a common understanding of the Initiative's strategic direction, its 2.0 architecture, and global resource mobilisation efforts.

At the same time, the EOSG and the Secretariat convened two meetings with Director-level representatives of the 4 aforementioned UN Agencies on 4 May 2023 and 29 September 2023. The

overarching purpose of these meetings was to discuss the Initiative's resource mobilisation strategy, the capitalisation of the Fund, and the Performance Review of the Initiative by the European Court of Auditors (ECA). These meetings reaffirmed the Initiative's important role in amplifying the global commitment to end violence against women and girls (by ensuring the issue remains high on political and development agendas globally), in modelling the UN System reforms, and scaling up existing resources and efforts in a new generation of programming.

Finally, the Secretariat team held regular briefings for the UN Deputy Secretary-General. In 2023, six (6) briefings were held with a focus on programme implementation and financial delivery, results achieved, the performance review by the ECA, and Spotlight Initiative's ongoing communications and advocacy efforts. The strategic direction of the Initiative, and new partnerships for resource mobilisation were also discussed. The Secretariat ensures robust preparation, servicing, and follow-up of these meetings, as well, including strategic agenda-setting, compiling background documents, drafting briefing notes, talking points, and meeting reports, and by engaging relevant counterparts both ahead of and in follow-up to the meetings.

Supporting the engagement of the Civil Society Global Reference Group

Another key governance and coordination mechanism of Spotlight Initiative is the Civil Society Global Reference Group (GRG). The GRG is an established institutional mechanism of diverse, peer-selected women's rights activists who advise the Initiative, advocate and partner for the realisation of its objectives, and hold the Initiative accountable to its commitments to civil society and rights-holders. A Civil Society Global Reference Group representative serves as a full member of the Operational Steering Committee and a member of the Governing Body. As a Sustainable Development Goal model fund, the representation of a GRG member in the highest governance mechanisms embodies a new way of working with civil society and reflects the Initiative's commitment to meaningfully engage civil society at all levels.

In 2023, the Civil Society Global Reference Group held its second in-person retreat in Abuja, Nigeria, from 8 to 10 February, to take stock of past accomplishments and collectively plan the year ahead. The following items were discussed:

- A process of co-creation with civil society for the structure of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 with the Secretariat and to revisit and redefine the role of the Global Reference Group.
- The GRG's intention to be more strategically involved in resource mobilisation efforts and donor meetings. This point was actioned, for instance, through GRG representatives participating as part of the delegations engaged in a high-level visit to Washington DC, in May 2023, and in a technical meeting in Brussels.

On the first point above, the GRG led a year-long co-design process with diverse civil society organisations with the support of the Secretariat. A series of hybrid and online workshops were held over the course of 2023, involving 700 Civil Society stakeholders from all over the world. Through continuous collaboration, this process generated four key principles, on women's human rights, civil society engagement, funding mechanisms and quality of programming, each accompanied by concrete recommendations.

The high-level principles and recommendations are currently being finalised, and an advocacy plan for the dissemination of these principles will be drafted next year (in 2024), ensuring their integration into the core documents of the Spotlight Initiative going forward, and their consideration in future programming. This advocacy plan includes sessions and high-level meetings with UN representatives and agencies, broader civil society, and donors.

Following a longstanding demand for transparency regarding Spotlight Initiative's financial investment in civil society, the Secretariat created an online [Civil Society Funding Dashboard](#), which is featured on the Spotlight Initiative website as well as the MPTFO Gateway online portal. Endorsed by the Global Civil Society Reference Group, the platform provides a comprehensive database and visualisation of the data on funding civil society organisations in all Spotlight Initiative programmes, including the UN Trust Fund and WPHF, enhancing transparency and accountability. It offers a user-friendly interface with multiple layers of information that can serve as a valuable resource for tracking and advocacy purposes. Additionally, it showcases the diversity and breadth of CSOs that have received funding from Spotlight Initiative, reinforcing the Initiative's commitment to leaving no one behind.

Fund and Programme Replenishment

In late 2022, the Fund received its last large replenishment within the current funding window from the EU. In the first half of 2023, the Secretariat delivered the pending replenishment to several programmes, including the Phase II allocation for the Caribbean Regional Programme which, as noted above, was approved by the OSC in March 2023.

Throughout the funds transfer request (FTR) process, the Secretariat provided extensive quality assurance and liaison support and worked closely with programme teams, EOSG and MPTFO to ensure funds were transferred efficiently and swiftly. In 2023, the Secretariat facilitated fund transfers to Spotlight programmes, the Spotlight Secretariat, and the Global Platform in a total amount of **USD 23,251,248**. Details on fund disbursements processed in 2023 can be found in the table below.

Spotlight Initiative Fund Disbursement in 2023:

Africa	Africa Regional Programme	\$ 5,300,000
Africa Sub Total		\$ 5,300,000
Asia	Afghanistan	\$ 2,300,000
	Asia Regional Programme	\$ 1,060,714
Asia Sub Total		\$ 3,360,714
Caribbean	Belize	\$ 65,107
	Caribbean Regional Programme	\$ 2,218,718
	Grenada	\$ 707,143
	Guyana	\$ 1,585,714
	Haiti	\$ 4,242,857
Caribbean Sub Total		\$ 8,819,539
	Samoa	\$ 1,242,857
	Vanuatu	\$ 60,107
Pacific Sub Total		\$ 1,302,964
Global	Global Platform	\$ 160,500
	Secretariat Direct Cost	\$ 4,307,531
Global Sub Total		\$ 4,468,031
Total		\$ 23,251,248

The Secretariat also prepared a Fund replenishment report to the EU (more on this below) in order to trigger the pre-final replenishment to the Fund to cover global activities. On 6 December 2023, the EU replenished the Spotlight Initiative Fund with USD 2.95 million.

Implementation end dates of programmes: Several programmes in Africa and Latin America received a no-cost extension by their programme-level Steering Committee (as delegated by the OSC through the decision #26 of August 2022) for a later end date (within the maximum end date of 31 December 2023). Given the security situation in Niger in 2023, the SI Secretariat facilitated the extension of the Niger programme, which was approved by the OSC in September 2023. Further details on each programme's implementation end dates can be found in the table below.

Spotlight Initiative Country & Regional Programmes Implementation End dates:

	Mar 2023	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec 2023
Africa					▪ Uganda		▪ Mali ▪ Mozambique ▪ Zimbabwe (extended by NSC from June to September 2023)			▪ Liberia (extended by NSC from June to December 2023) ▪ Malawi (extended by NSC from September to December 2023) ▪ Niger (extension from September to December 2023 approved by OSC in September 2023) ▪ Nigeria ▪ Africa RP ▪ UNTF Africa ▪ WPHF Africa
Latin America	▪ El Salvador			▪ Honduras (extended by NSC from April to June 2023)	▪ Latin America RP		▪ Mexico (extended by NSC from June to September 2023)			▪ Argentina (extended by NSC from April to December 2023) ▪ Ecuador ▪ UNTF Latin America
Asia										▪ All Asia programmes
Caribbean										▪ All Caribbean programmes
Pacific										▪ All Pacific programmes

Bold: programme extended by NSC/OSC.



Reporting on results

As noted above, the Secretariat is responsible for reporting on the Spotlight Initiative's results and for supporting programmes to fulfil requirements to do the same, as detailed in Spotlight Initiative's legal and contractual agreements. To that end, the Secretariat produces global annual reports, in line with contractual requirements, and submits them to the MPTFO in accordance with agreed deadlines. More details on the global annual reporting process are included below. In addition to this, the Secretariat works closely with programme teams as they produce their programme annual reports, submitted for each country/regional programme in adherence to contractual terms and deadlines.

Throughout the first quarter of 2023, the Secretariat shared guidance and offered targeted support to programmes to produce high-quality, results-oriented reports. The guidance included annotated templates, timelines, a comprehensive guidance package, and tips for producing strong, results based reports. As with previous (annual) reporting cycles, the Secretariat held a series of webinars to support programmes throughout the 2022 reporting cycle, including sessions in French, Spanish, and two sessions in English across various time zones. The Secretariat also held several sessions focused specifically on the Spotlight Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART), the Initiative's indicator reporting system, to support programmes' to submit quality monitoring and reporting data. The webinars served as a space for the Secretariat to answer any questions on the reporting cycle, and to reiterate key criteria and timelines. Submission of programme 2022 annual reports in the first quarter of 2023 was followed by a round of targeted quality assurance conducted by the Secretariat, as requested by programme teams, prior to their report submission to their respective EU Delegations on March 31 2023. Finally, as every year, the Secretariat distilled the contents of these reports, analysed additional data and information, and wrote the [2022 Global Annual Report \(GAR\)](#) to capture and communicate the Initiative's impact globally. It was submitted to the EU at the end of May 2023 per contractual requirements.

In line with decisions made by the Operational Steering Committee and subsequently programme-level Steering Committees in 2022 and 2023, Spotlight programmes ended at different points in 2023 (as detailed in the section and table above). As such, in parallel to the 2022 reporting cycle, the Secretariat collaborated closely with programme teams throughout 2023 to guide them through the final reporting process.

Toward this end, similar to previous reporting cycles, comprehensive guidance was shared and a series of webinars were held (in April, July and September, and November 2023) on final reporting in English, French and Spanish. Reporting webinars offered the opportunity to re-share results based reporting guidance and tips, clarify questions, and provide targeted results based reporting support to programmes to help ensure high-quality submissions. Final reporting webinars offered a space to introduce new colleagues to the reporting cycle, as well, helping ensure the transfer of institutional (reporting) knowledge as Spotlight programmes wound down and staff moved on to other roles. Draft final programme reports were shared with the Secretariat on a rolling basis throughout 2023. All draft submissions were rigorously quality assured by the Secretariat and relevant feedback was provided to programme teams. This quality assurance process involved a range of internal coordination and preparation across the Secretariat team - including on results-based reporting and quality criteria - to ensure coherent feedback that consistently helped strengthen results-based reporting efforts and adherence to contractual requirements.

Final programme reports have been finalised on a rolling basis, with submission to programmes' respective EU delegations by 30 April 2024 (per contractual obligations). The final programme reports feed into the final global report, which covers the Initiative's contributions from its inception. The Secretariat began preparing for the final global report in the 4th quarter of 2023 to ensure that the report captures the significant achievements and lessons learned along the way, as the Initiative looks ahead to 2.0.

In addition to the global annual report and support to programme-level reporting, the Secretariat is responsible for the production of various other reports. In October 2023, the Secretariat developed and coordinated with the MPTF Office to submit a fund replenishment request package to the European Union to process pending replenishment. To this end, the Secretariat produced a supplemental narrative report covering the period of 1 January to 30 June 2023 detailing the work of the Initiative at global level and across its programme portfolio.

Though financial reporting is managed between RUNOs and the MPTF Office, the Secretariat coordinates with programme teams to produce provisional financial reports (required to request additional funding from the MPTF Office). The Secretariat provides instructions and report templates to teams and coordinates with the MPTF Office to review requests and the relevant supporting documents. The Secretariat is also responsible for requesting the OSC Chair's signature on funds transfer requests.

As in previous years, in 2023, RUNOs submitted quarterly financial reports to the MPTFO to allow for regular monitoring of programme financial implementation status. Each quarter, the Secretariat coordinated with the MPTF Office to analyse the data and course correct as needed, with a focus on programmes that required acceleration measures to expend funding efficiently and on time.

Finally, the Secretariat is responsible for responding to requests to feed the Initiative's contributions and lessons learned into other UN processes and entities' reports, including UN Women's Annual Report, the Annual Report of the MPTF Office, the Annual Report of the Development Cooperation Office, and the Report of the Secretary-General on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), among others. Reporting into these processes supports UN system wide efforts for improved efficiency, effectiveness and accountability, including in efforts to end GBV and advance gender equality.

Monitoring and evaluating the Initiative: Capturing Progress, Ensuring Relevance and Responsiveness, and Promoting Sustainability

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function helps ensure that the right decisions are taken at the right time so that Spotlight Initiative's interventions: (i) are implemented according to plan; (ii) effectively deliver relevant (and sustainable) results; (iii) have the intended impact on rights holders and communities (including structurally marginalised individuals and communities) and (iv) are monitored so as to identify challenges early on, and course correct as needed.

Throughout 2023, the Secretariat continued to support the implementation of the Initiative's M&E Strategy, including by managing various assessments and evaluations, and providing targeted monitoring (and reporting) advice to programmes. Technical support to programmes focused on deepening the use of participatory monitoring, evaluation and reporting approaches, and, as noted above, strengthening results-based reporting, including indicator reporting (both of which are further explained below).

The Secretariat, together with the Initiative's programmes, continued to advance participatory approaches to monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Participatory approaches engage a range of individuals and groups in the M&E and reporting phases of the programming cycle, and place a particular emphasis on capturing the perspectives of rights holders, community members, and structurally marginalised groups. The Secretariat's efforts have helped advance knowledge of participatory approaches within Spotlight Initiative's programmes and across the UN system.

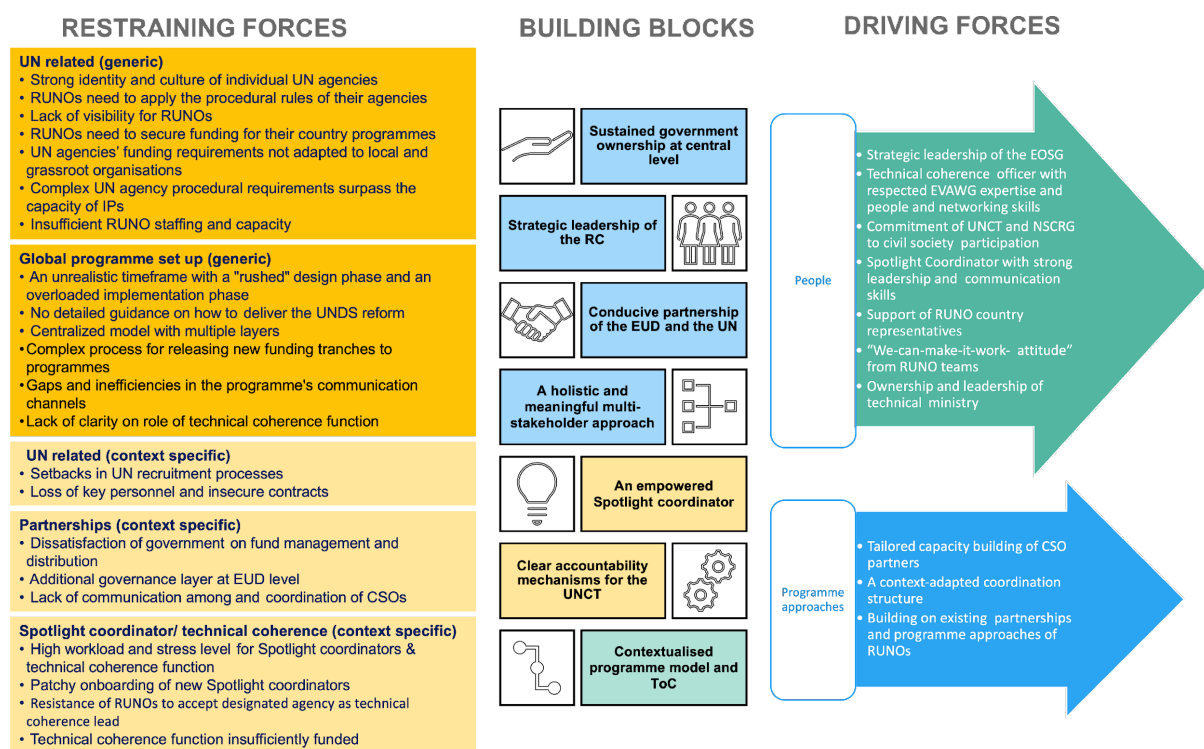
Indeed, building on the work of previous years, the Secretariat contributed to a United Nations System Staff College course entitled [“Improving People’s Lives through UNSDCF Guiding Principles: HRBA, GEWE & LNOB.”](#)¹¹ Launched in the first half of 2023, the course is offered to all UN personnel, and, in so doing, helps ensure that participatory monitoring, evaluation and reporting approaches are further institutionalised and used across the system. Emphasising the importance of engaging with those directly impacted by rights violations (including gender based violence) across the programme cycle, the course is expected to increase the use of participatory monitoring, evaluation and reporting approaches, and improve the relevance and responsiveness of programming over time. Civil society, including women's rights organisations, have reported more meaningful engagement within programmes, as well, as a result of the Initiative's efforts to support participatory approaches to M&E and reporting.

¹¹ The acronyms stand as follows: Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA); Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE); and Leave-No-One-Behind (LNOB).

Throughout 2023, the M&E team also supported programmes to monitor progress and report against indicators in the Spotlight Monitoring and Reporting Tool. SMART facilitates the consolidation of high-quality data across programmes, allowing the Initiative to capture (and communicate) global impact more effectively. The Secretariat provided targeted support to programmes in their indicator reporting exercise, and held multiple webinars to guide programmes in final reporting, as noted above, addressing methodological questions on indicator reporting, as well. These webinars helped strengthen results-based reporting, and ensure programmes were well-equipped to report cumulatively. Finally, the Secretariat provided tailored quality assurance and advice on indicator reported data, further ensuring the quality of reported data. More information on support to reporting efforts can be found above.

Representing a critical aspect of the monitoring and evaluation function, the Secretariat continued to manage several assessments and evaluations over the course of 2023.

Building off the work Hera completed in 2022,¹² the M&E team oversaw the update of the meta-review (of mid-term assessments) to reflect all Spotlight programmes for which mid-term assessments were conducted. The updated meta-review summarised the progress made and results achieved during Phase I, highlighting the building blocks and driving forces of successful programming. It also noted restraining factors (to successful programming), and put forward recommendations for the implementation of the next phase of the Spotlight Initiative. The updated meta-review’s findings are summarised here:



¹² Hera is the evaluation and research company contracted to conduct Spotlight Initiative’s mid-term assessments.

Concurrently, the Secretariat continued to manage a thematic assessment covering three interconnected dimensions of the Initiative's work: the meaningful engagement of civil society organisations, particularly local and grassroots groups; the implementation of the principle of Leaving No One Behind; and support to movement building. Global in scope, the thematic assessment offers the opportunity to surface critical lessons across programmes on the extent to which the Initiative has progressed on these three transformative dimensions of programming. Employing a feminist methodology, the assessment's findings and recommendations will contribute to more effective, evidence-based EAWG programming. Lessons will be used in the next generation of Spotlight Initiative (SI 2.0) programme development, and to advocate within the UN (and with the donor community more broadly) for improved, rights-based processes and funding approaches that facilitate more meaningful engagement with civil society organisations, including particularly local groups, and more effective support to women's and feminist movements (uniquely critical to advancing progressive policies and ending GBV). The final thematic assessment report is expected in Q1 of 2024, and will be shared widely for learning, and improved EAWG programming.

In addition to the thematic assessment, the M&E team supported the management of the final evaluation of the Initiative. Conducted by the UN System-wide Evaluation Office, the final evaluation assesses the Initiative's overall performance, inclusive of its design (notably its commitment to UN Reform and the principle of Leaving No One Behind), its management and operations (the extent to which it is "fit for purpose"), and the results it has achieved. The Secretariat has effectively supported the evaluation team by reviewing the evaluation's terms of reference and supporting data collection efforts, including across all case studies, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.

More specifically, throughout 2023 (from March 2023 into 2024), eight country case studies were conducted (in Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan, Guyana, Argentina, Honduras, and Samoa); five regional case studies (Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Asia and Pacific); as well as five counterfactual country case studies (in Suriname, Tonga, Zambia, Chile, and Uzbekistan). The Secretariat supported the final evaluation team in coordinating visits, gathering key documents for desk review, and supporting UN teams ahead of data collection missions. The Secretariat also responded to requests for documents, and provided additional information and clarifications as needed.

Finally, in 2023, the M&E team continued to draw on the ["Imperative to Invest"](#) study, which found that investing in a comprehensive, rights-based approach — one that privileges partnerships with civil society — has the potential to reduce violence 70% - 90% more effectively than single-pillar or siloed approaches. The Secretariat has used this study (and its recognition as one of 12 High Impact Initiatives, described further below) to advocate for robust resourcing (of the model) and sustaining Spotlight Initiative programming.

As detailed above, the Secretariat's M&E (and reporting) function generates relevant data, evidence, knowledge and recommendations to strengthen the collective ability of all actors to more effectively end violence against women and girls.

Advancing knowledge management and capacity development

Spotlight Initiative is committed to advancing evidence-based programming and has worked to strengthen knowledge management efforts among Spotlight Initiative stakeholders. The Secretariat has curated, analysed and disseminated lessons learned and good practices in service of global policy, programming, and advocacy to end violence against women and girls. Throughout 2023, the Community of the Spotlight Initiative (COSI) and monthly newsletters have continued to enable the Secretariat to share resources with a global network of EAWG practitioners. Supporting coordination among programmes in support of efforts to end GBV, the Knowledge Management (KM) Focal Points Network continued to meet on a quarterly basis, providing critical insights on the needs of programmes at regional, country, and local levels, and illuminating key ideas, challenges and opportunities related to knowledge management. Similarly, the UN HQ Knowledge Management Group on EAWG, which also met on a quarterly basis, continued to be pivotal in identifying opportunities for collaboration and strengthening synergy on knowledge management on EAWG across the UN system.

The Secretariat partnered with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women to collaborate on an online hub for global exchange on ending violence against women and girls, titled the [SHINE](#) online platform. In 2023, a total of 13 online discussions were held on SHINE, 2 of which were undertaken by the Secretariat. Over the reporting period, the Secretariat also convened a series of global-level knowledge exchanges on EAWG. These included three knowledge exchanges on sustainability (discussed further below in the section on sustainability). Each knowledge exchange was organised in collaboration with Spotlight Initiative programmes, and brought together participants from across the UN, civil society and other stakeholders in the EAWG space.

In recognition of Spotlight Initiative's selection as a High Impact Initiative at the UNGA and SDG Summit in September 2023 and an SDG accelerator, the Secretariat also brought together programme teams and representatives from the UN, EU, civil society, and government to celebrate collective achievements and reflect on lessons learned from the Initiative, as part of a Global Convening. Participants' reflections exemplified the many breakthroughs and shifts in efforts to advance gender equality and end violence against women and girls that have been made possible through each programme's interventions, and provided a timely opportunity to reflect on the future of the Initiative.

To support expansion of the global evidence-base on EAWG, [five knowledge briefs](#) highlighting key results, lessons and good practices from Spotlight Initiative on various topics related to EAWG were developed in 2023 and disseminated widely. The Secretariat also worked closely with programme teams to ensure all knowledge products produced by programmes were captured in a [Global Knowledge Product Tracker](#). As part of its focus on knowledge curation, in 2023, the Secretariat also worked on the development of the Initiative's Technical Package. The Technical Package synthesises the Initiative's wealth of knowledge and successes, innovative and promising practices, and lessons learned into a definitive guide on how to design and implement EAWG programmes, and is scheduled to be launched in May 2024.

To capture the depth of knowledge and lessons learned over the past five years of Spotlight Initiative programming, the Secretariat also worked to develop a Compendium of Innovative and Good Practices and Lessons Learned. The principal purpose of the Compendium is to provide reflections on

Spotlight Initiative's comprehensive model to support programmatic learning and strengthen global policy, programming and advocacy on EVAWG. The Secretariat commissioned the company ImpactMapper to lead the development of the Compendium. As a first step, the project team conducted an evidence review of existing Spotlight Initiative materials, including programme annual reports, mid-term assessments and knowledge products. Simultaneously, the team disseminated a survey to all country and regional programmes to capture additional innovative, promising and good practices. Based on their findings, the team identified a series of case studies for inclusion within the Compendium. These were deepened through five (5) visits to Spotlight Initiative country programmes, during which key programme stakeholders were interviewed. In late 2023, with substantive inputs from the Secretariat, the project team initiated drafting of the Compendium report. The full report is scheduled to be published in April 2024.

Overall, activities in 2023 demonstrated the strategic contribution of the KM portfolio in reflecting on the progress made towards ending violence against women and girls through Spotlight Initiative, supporting the sustainability of programmes' impacts, and deepening evidence-based and quality programme implementation.

Raising awareness and visibility

In 2023, the Spotlight Initiative garnered extensive media coverage, raising the visibility of violence against women and girls and the work to address it. In total, more than 4,360 Spotlight Initiative-specific articles and stories were published by 1,300 media outlets across 113 countries, with an estimated reach of more than 3.2 billion readers.¹³ Stories were published in top-tier media outlets including: MSN, Yahoo News, Hindustan Times, Clarin, Infobae, El Pais, Naver, Euronews, POLITICO and El Diario to name a few.

The Initiative hosted a number of events to raise visibility and continued to build on key partnerships. This included a [visit to Argentina](#) for UN Global Advocate for Spotlight Initiative, Cecilia Suárez, in March 2023. Over the course of five days, she met and spoke with survivors, civil society activists and organisations, government officials, UN agencies and the European Union Delegation to hear about what is being done to improve the lives of Argentinian women and girls, sharing her experience with her more than one million Instagram followers. She also did interviews promoting the Initiative's work with high-profile media outlets, including GENTE, TN, Parati and Ohlala!, which reached an audience of 159 million people.

In June 2023, the Initiative partnered for a third year with [RISE](#), a human rights organization founded by Amanda Nguyen, on the exhibit '[What Were You Wearing?](#)'. This time, the exhibition travelled to Brussels and was displayed at the Salle de Glaces, Brussels Parliament. It consisted of more than 100 mannequins dressed in clothing worn by survivors at the time of their assault, representing 1.3 billion survivors worldwide.

Moreover, and as noted above, Spotlight Initiative was selected as one of [12 High-Impact Initiatives of the UN](#) for the SDG Summit in September 2023. It was chosen from more than 120 applications as the only cross-cutting High-Impact Initiative. The Initiative used its moment and platform during the

¹³ Meltwater media keyword search (1 Jan - 31 Dec 2023). Raw data of all media hits available [here](#).

SDG Action Weekend to demonstrate 'proof of concept', not just on ending violence but as an accelerator across the SDGs, and to highlight the successes of the Initiative's first phase of programming and advocate for renewed commitments from Member States to implement national plans to end VAWG.

This included hosting a [high-level event](#) at the UN Headquarters in New York featuring statements and conversations with Heads of State, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, leaders from the European Union and United Nations, actress and UN Global Advocate Cecilia Suárez; actress, filmmaker and philanthropist Natalie Portman; actress and UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador Ashley Judd; music artist and UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Yemi Alade; and actor and UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, as well as leaders from civil society, the private sector and other partners. It featured musical performances by MILCK and Natasha Bedingfield with a panel discussion hosted by Futurist Sinead Bovell.

In November 2023, Spotlight Initiative participated in a series of events exploring the links between climate change and gender-based violence at the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai. The largest event was a talk show-style discussion, '[Climate change and violence against women: Zero degrees of separation](#)'. It included high-level participation from UNODC Executive Director, Ghada Waly, and Deputy Executive Director a.i. for UN Women, Sarah Hendriks, and powerfully underscored the links between the climate crisis and GBV.

Online, the [Spotlight Initiative global website](#) published more than 75 human interest stories, publications and press releases. It recorded 108,000 sessions, while the average session duration rose from 1:56 mins to 2:41 mins. The Initiative leveraged the global digital audiences of implementing UN agencies and entities for increased visibility across the broader UN system through the co-creation of 'A brighter future'. This series of [web stories and videos](#) was published during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence and ran on the global websites and social media accounts of [UN Women](#), [UNICEF](#), [UNDP](#), [UNFPA](#) and [UNHCR](#), as well as DCO and United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG). Two stories were also published by UN News in English, Swahili and Portuguese.

The Spotlight Initiative's social media presence continued growing in 2023. The Initiative now has almost 61,000 fans/followers and achieved 4,200,000 impressions across [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). Thanks to regular posting and tailored content, the Secretariat managed to grow its audience on all platforms (+3% growth on X/Twitter; +2.5% growth on Facebook; +42.9% growth on Instagram). Additionally, the engagement rate also grew on all platforms: +378% on Facebook; +1% on Instagram; and +7.8% X/Twitter.

The Secretariat recorded a huge improvement in the public's engagement with our social media accounts. The click-through rate for links has increased by 15% on Facebook and 11% on Instagram due to an increase in video content. This also allowed us to channel social media traffic to our [website](#). The Spotlight Initiative shared more content on its [YouTube channel](#) to make all global and locally produced videos available to the public. The Spotlight Initiative YouTube channel has more than 141 videos and 1120 subscribers (+13% increase). In a year, the channel recorded 49,000 views (+378% than the previous year) and more than 121,000 impressions (+54% growth).

The global [X/Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) accounts are being administered by the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat. The [X/Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) in Spanish were administered by the country teams and the [X/Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) social media accounts in Russian are being administered by Spotlight Initiative Communications colleagues working in the region.

Mobilising partners and stakeholders to eliminate violence against women and girls

In 2023, the Secretariat coordinated action among international development actors to end violence against women and girls, in line with the UN Secretary General’s [call for action](#) and appeal for “peace at home — and in homes — around the world” issued in April 2020. To that end, Spotlight Initiative Secretariat supported the EU and Member States in organising meetings of the Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls, in accordance with the commitments made by the Group at its launch in December 2020. On 14 December 2023, the Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls met to discuss [strategies and best practices for engaging men and boys in the push to eliminate gender-based violence](#). The Group has continued to grow since its inception three years ago, with Bangladesh joining as the 96th member.

Moreover, in July 2023, Spotlight Initiative participated in the Women Deliver 2023 Conference, in Kigali, Rwanda, to foster increased knowledge of Spotlight Initiative and its work to end violence against women and girls, and enhance knowledge on the existing evidence base, on what works to end violence in low and middle-income countries. Women Deliver, one of the largest multi-sectoral convenings to advance gender equality globally, is co-created by grassroots advocates, multilateral governments, private sector actors, philanthropies and youth, and provided a unique platform to showcase the Initiative’s impact, collectively identify viable solutions and mobilise partners in support of ending violence against women and girls.

Nimble adapting to challenges

Throughout 2023, the Secretariat successfully navigated the increased urgency for programme delivery and efficient, compliant closure, as the initial investment into Spotlight Initiative ended in December 2023.

As noted above, the Secretariat provided targeted and relevant support services to programmes to ensure high-quality implementation and strong financial delivery rates. The Secretariat continued to act as liaison between UN Agency teams at HQ and Brussels level and Agency country and regional offices to highlight closure requirements and timelines, streamline communications, flag programme-specific issues and clearly communicate the importance of ensuring continuity of and adherence to the closure process beyond the end of 2023 within UNCTs. UNCTs were also requested to designate a task force dedicated to the programme closure process, integrating RUNO core staff (for continuity following programme closure), and led by an appointed focal point. This proactive engagement helped ensure clarity at all levels and, importantly, institutional knowledge transfer as Spotlight team members moved on to other roles (as programmes wound down).

Finally, throughout 2023, the Secretariat provided targeted guidance and support to Spotlight Initiative programmes facing challenges in implementation due to a range of complex contextual factors including, notably, high turnover of government personnel, challenging security contexts, conflict, and natural disasters. Programmes facing these challenges included Afghanistan, the Africa Regional Programme, Haiti, Niger, and Ecuador. While navigating these challenges, the Secretariat continued to support programme teams to monitor, evaluate and report on their work, meaningfully engage civil society, raise visibility, and capture and disseminate the wealth of knowledge and lessons learned.

Responding to challenges, and adapting accordingly, the Spotlight Secretariat ensured effective support and management of the Fund's programme portfolio throughout 2023, continuing to contribute to global efforts to end GBV in an increasingly difficult climate (marked by ongoing and intersecting economic, political, social, climate, and humanitarian crises and a sustained backlash to women's rights).

Sustainability as the Initiative looks ahead

Fund Capitalisation and Replenishment

Throughout 2023, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat engaged in a broad range of resource mobilisation efforts to broaden its partnerships and donor base at the Fund. This aimed at sustaining and scaling up the results achieved by the Initiative to date, as the first portfolio of programmes funded by the EU investment concluded at the end of 2023. The Spotlight Initiative Secretariat conducted an extensive donor mapping, in consultation with key UN and external stakeholders. As a result, several donors were identified as priorities, with whom the Secretariat held various levels of consultations: the United States, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium as well as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

At the global level, EUR 16.5 million was allocated to launch the Spotlight Initiative's High-Impact Programme for Violence and Elimination by 2030 (HIVE Programme), aimed at enhancing global advocacy and knowledge on the elimination of gender-based violence by reinforcing and disseminating the best practices, data, and research accumulated through the first generation of Spotlight Initiative programming.

During the same period, through country-based resource mobilisation, the Initiative saw the successful transition of two past Spotlight programmes into the next generation of programming (Spotlight Initiative 2.0): in Ecuador and Uganda. In Uganda, the UNCT secured a EUR 20 million funding from the European Union Delegation to further scale up efforts to fight violence against women and girls in the country, building on the strong results achieved by the first Spotlight Initiative Uganda programme. Similarly, in Ecuador, a EUR 1 million contribution from the EU was confirmed, with additional funding expected from USAID in 2024, to continue the successful Spotlight Initiative programming in the country.

Benefited by the momentum generated by the successful mobilisation of additional resources for the next generation of Spotlight Initiative programmes, both at global and country levels, the Secretariat

intends to expand its resource mobilisation strategy to secure broad donor funding as the Initiative looks ahead. Over the reporting period, the Secretariat continued to land its vision to scale up to a USD 1 billion Fund covering 60 countries, anchored in the proven model and impact of Spotlight Initiative interventions.

Sustainability Guidance to Spotlight Initiative Programmes

Throughout 2023, as programmes drew to a close and looked ahead, a significant focus was placed on how to sustain the momentum, partnerships, resourcing, and impact of the Initiative. All Spotlight Initiative programmes worked to produce a Sustainability Strategy (building off the approaches outlined in their programme documents, and responding to a key recommendation of the performance review of the Initiative by the European Court of Auditors). These strategies outline how progress towards programme goals would continue and be locally owned and carried out by local, national or regional stakeholders. The Secretariat provided support to the development of these strategies through a process of review, quality assurance and feedback on strategy drafts.

As noted above in the knowledge management section, the Secretariat convened knowledge exchanges covering the principles of sustainability, as well as approaches to implementing sustainability strategies (including discussions on the division of labour and accountability). Held on 23 February 2023, in collaboration with programmes in El Salvador, Malawi, Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe. The first session was attended by 115 participants from across the UN, civil society and other programme stakeholders. A similar exchange was convened for programme colleagues in the Pacific Region on 15 March 2023, during which the Timor-Leste programme presented their approach to integrating the principle of sustainability throughout programme activities.

On 7 June 2023, in collaboration with Spotlight Initiative programmes in Argentina, Mali, and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as UNODC and the UN Women Essential Services Programme, the Secretariat convened a knowledge exchange dedicated to the issue of sustaining essential services for survivors of violence. Attended by 82 participants, the session facilitated discussion on the delivery of quality essential services and approaches to consolidating community - and government - level ownership of these services. The exchange was preceded by a three-week online SHINE discussion, which similarly interrogated the issue of sustaining essential services for survivors of violence.

Sustaining Meaningful Engagement of Civil Society

Civil society partnerships have been fundamental to Spotlight Initiative's governance, set up and functioning. As programmes planned their transitions, civil society partners, especially the Civil Society Reference Group members, played a critical role in this process. This helped to ensure that plans were responsive to the needs of local communities and rights holders, further fostering sustainability. To support this process, the Secretariat disseminated the dedicated [Sustainability Guidance Note on Civil Society Engagement](#) to UN Country teams. The Guidance Note includes recommendations and considerations for programme teams on the inclusion and participation of civil society partners in the design and implementation of sustainability plans, including specifically on sustaining and leveraging the Reference Group mechanism within and beyond Spotlight Initiative. Some UN country and regional teams have decided to maintain the Civil Society Reference Group

mechanism as an advisory board to the RCO to continue to improve programmes' responsiveness to diverse communities. In other settings, the reference group will continue to function as a collective to advise multilateral and international organisations. The abovementioned CSO 2.0 co-design process (which was conducted throughout 2023) provided recommendations that help sustain and build on gains made thus far, through meaningfully engaging civil society.