



**Spotlight  
Initiative**  
*To eliminate violence  
against women and girls*

EU/UN Spotlight initiative, Afghanistan

# Annual Narrative Programme Report

01 January 2021 - 31 December 2021

**Programme Title & Programme Number**

**Programme Title:** EU/UN SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE, AFGHANISTAN

**MPTF Office Project Reference Number:<sup>1</sup>**  
00119460

**Recipient Organization(s)**

UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women

**Programme Cost (US\$)**

**Total Phase I budget, and (where OSC approved) Phase II budget as per the Spotlight CPD/RPD:** 16,921,384 USD

**Phase I and (where OSC approved) Phase II Spotlight funding:<sup>3</sup>** 16,500,000 USD

**Agency Contribution:** 421,385 USD

**Spotlight Funding and Agency Contribution by Agency:**

Name of RUNO	Spotlight Phase I (+ II, where OSC approved) (USD)	UN Agency Contributions (USD)
UNICEF	3,084,040	127,992
UNFPA	4,804,967	293,393
UN Women	7,342,196	0
UNDP	1,268,797	0
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>16,500,000</b>	<b>421,385</b>

**Priority regions/areas/localities for the programme**

Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Paktia

**Key Partners**

Government of Afghanistan:<sup>2</sup>  
 Ministry of Public Health (MoPH)  
 Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs (DMoYA)  
 Ministry of Interior (MoI)  
 Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA)  
 Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs (MoHRA)  
 Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)  
 Ministry of Justice (MoJ)  
 National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA)  
 Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)

Civil Society Organizations:  
 In 2021, the Spotlight Initiative in Afghanistan established partnership with eight CSOs. Due to sensitivity, the names, and details of these CSOs have been removed from the report.

**Programme Start and End Dates**

**Start Date:** 09.11.2020

**End Date:** 31.12.2023

Dr Ramiz Alakbarov, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General

<sup>1</sup>The Multi-Partner Trust Fund (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](#).

<sup>2</sup>These are governmental partners before 15 August 2021, and there has not been any engagement with the de facto Authorities (DFA) since they seized the power on 15 August 2021.

<sup>3</sup>The Spotlight Contribution refers to the amount transferred to the Recipient UN Organizations, which is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

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## Acronym List

AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ANPDF	Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework
AWEC	Afghan Women's Educational Centre
AWP	Annual Work Plan
C4D	Communication for Development
CoC	Code of Conduct
CPAN	Child Protection Action Network
CSNRG	Civil Society National Reference Group
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSSF	Comprehensive School Safety Framework
DFA	de facto Authorities
DMoYA	Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs
DoWA	Department of Women's Affairs
ECM	Early Child Marriage
EVAWG	Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls
EU	European Union
FGC	Family Guidance Center
FLE	Family Life Education
FPC	Family Protection Centre
GBV	Gender- Based Violence
GoIRA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HPs	Harmful Practises
HRDA	Human Resource Development Agency
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KAPB	Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Behaviours
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAG	Multi-Purpose Adolescent Group
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoHRA	Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs

MoIA	Ministry of Interior Affairs
MoIC	Ministry of Information and Culture
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MoWA	Ministry of Women’s Affairs
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSC	National Steering Committee
PCA	Program Cooperation Agreement
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator’s Office
RUNO	Recipient UN Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SI-A	Spotlight Initiative in Afghanistan
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
ToRs	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WASSA	Women Activities and Social Services Association
WPC	Women Protection Center
WPCTF	Women Protection Center Trust Fund
WPHF	Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund
YHC	Youth Health Corners

## Executive Summary

With generous financial support from the European Union (EU), the Spotlight Initiative in Afghanistan (SI-A) programme started in November 2020. Covering Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Paktia provinces, the SI-A has in the first half of 2021 brought together the Government, civil society, the European Union and the United Nations with an opportunity to consolidate and accelerate efforts aimed at reducing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices (SGBV/HPs). The SI-A works comprehensively across the six Pillars of the Theory of Change, though given the context, it prioritizes the prevention of SGBV/HP (Pillar 3), the provision of comprehensive services (Pillar 4) and support to women's civil society organisations (CSO) (Pillar 6). Furthermore, the programme applied a COVID-19 lens to its programming, a critical result in and of itself to ensure that its work is relevant and tailored to operational and contextual constraints.

Due to the highly volatile political situation on the ground, the Programme took steps to reduce adverse effects and prepared an activity-based Risk Mitigation Plan covering UN staff, CSO partners and all program participants, including survivors of SGBV, with effort to not transfer the risk to implementing partners.

The first half of 2021 offered a valuable opportunity for the SI-A team to build strong foundations with key programme partners, particularly the government, civil society and the European Union. During this period, the SI-A had successfully secured the meaningful engagement of eight key ministries<sup>4</sup> of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) in the programme as well as its overall commitment to the elimination of violence against women and girls (EVAWG) in Afghanistan. Partnering with this wide range of ministries was a critical step in ensuring an all-of-government approach to EVAWG, national ownership as well as sustainable programming and results going forward. Through the organisation of two high-level inter-ministerial meetings on 1 February and 3 March 2021, GoIRA committed to support the implementation of the initiative, acknowledging its value and the need for an inter-sectoral approach. The role of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) was particularly important for the Initiative, as the Ministry was mandated to lead and coordinate activities related to gender equality and EVAWG, and the SI-A was supporting MoWA to play its coordination role with other government stakeholders. However, a series of competing priorities, and the absence of key participants due to the ongoing peace negotiations, meant that the Programme launch scheduled in July 2021 was initially delayed.

In the first half of 2021, the Spotlight team has supported the establishment of the SI-A governance structures, including the National Steering Committee (NSC) with representation from the Government, UN and the EU, and preparatory work for the establishment of the Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG) with the finalisation of the selection of the CS-NRG members.

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<sup>4</sup>Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs (MoHRA), Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA), Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC), Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA)

In relation to the partnership between the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) and the Spotlight Initiative, it was agreed with WPHF, the Recipient UN Organizations (RUNOs)<sup>5</sup> and the EU to merge the NSCs for the Afghanistan Country Programme and the WPHF into one body, to ensure effective coordination and build on the synergies.

In the first half of 2021, RUNOs strategically planned for the implementation of the SI-A and proceeded with procurement, recruitment and partnering processes, including the development of the joint annual work plan (AWP) for 2021, which was developed in a collaborative manner through a series of meetings between RUNOs, consultations with CSOs and with the engagement of the EU locally. Under the overall leadership of the Resident Coordinator, the team has continued to identify opportunities to deliver in the spirit of UN Reform, developing mechanisms and practices to incorporate interagency coordination throughout programming in order to achieve more streamlined implementation and more comprehensive results. Taken together, these essential foundational processes – e.g., establishing partnerships and participatory governance structures – laid the groundwork to contribute to the accelerated delivery of results to EVAWG. The RUNOs developed a series of capacity building materials (e.g. adolescent girls' toolkit, GBV Code of Conduct for schools, training materials for Family Life Education/Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Women and Girls Safe Spaces Guidelines, GBV Mobile Health Team Guidelines), prepared GBV prevention campaign, conducted GBV case management training for frontline service providers and undertook preparatory work for conducting of the Baseline and Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice and Behaviours (KAPB), and access to SGBV services studies.

However, plans to officially launch SI-A and deliver against the Joint AWP 2021, were thwarted with the Taliban takeover in August 2021, when an all-male 'caretaker' government was established, gender institutional mechanisms effectively dismantled and fundamental rights and freedoms of women and girls were severely curtailed. The abrupt change in government and ensuing drastic changes in the operational context and deteriorating security situation, coupled with the rapidly growing humanitarian crisis, led to a temporary suspension in the programmatic delivery of majority of the already initiated activities and repivoting of the SI-A plans. The SI-A initially sought to reprogramme activities to align with the humanitarian context and needs. In further coordination with the EU and SI Secretariat, SI-A undertook a series of activities to re-adjust its development programming to the new realities on the ground to ensure viability and safety of protection services for survivors of GBV, including through enhanced support to CSO partners and the redesign of those services. Consultations took place with CSOs to understand their operational challenges and additional partnerships with local/grassroots CSO groups were formed to ensure that services were delivered through community-based approaches. These efforts were captured in the draft Work plan developed for delivery of programme results in 2022. In the transitional period some interventions continued, most notably, the establishment of the 15 Girls Friendly Safe spaces, 18 community-based Men and Boys networks and continued support

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<sup>5</sup>UN Women, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA



to the operationalization of the national Youth Health Line. The Establishment of the Women Protection Centres and Family Guidance Centres in Paktia and Kandahar have been negotiated and approved by de-facto authorities.

## Contextual Shifts and Implementation Status

With regards to shifts in the broader social, legal and justice system, political, economic or cultural context, as the government collapsed, so did many joint gender transformative initiatives and partnerships at the national, provincial and district levels. The Taliban takeover of Kabul on 15 August 2021 has had an impact of seismic proportions on Afghanistan in general, and on rollback on women's and girls' rights in particular. Soon after the de facto authorities (DFA) took over Afghanistan, majority of interventions related to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), were initially stopped by the de facto authorities, pending the approach of the Taliban leadership with regards to women's rights. This abrupt decision to halt GEWE related interventions also had an impact on SI-A interventions.

With the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021, the unknown fate of the justice-legal system and the direction of the political and security environment further deteriorated women's and girls' access to justice. In addition, women's protection and policy institutions and mechanisms have been dismantled. The MoWA, a key partner to SI-A, was dissolved and the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice was reinstated in September 2021. According to UN Country Team Afghanistan Gender-Responsive Conflict Analysis – 2021 “... *most incidents of violence and harmful practices against women and girls will go unreported but resolved through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, mechanisms that are known to be discriminatory against Afghan women and girls*”.

The top religious leader of the Taliban issued “a Decree on women's rights” in early December 2021. The Decree instructs several de facto institutions such as the ministries of Hajj and Religious Affairs; Culture and Information and Education, the de facto Supreme Court and local actors, to conduct awareness raising on women's rights and support the effective implementation of the Decree. The focus of the Decree in line with Islamic Law, is to protect women in a vulnerable position, including widows and poor women. However, since the issuance of the Decree, no practical steps have been taken/reported regarding addressing women and girls' issues including access to justice. An additional Decree provided that women travelling other than short distances should be accompanied by a male relative.

Systematic and widespread restrictions on women and girls' participation in civic and public life, and their freedom of movement, impacts women's access to basic services including access to education, healthcare, and economic participation. The current legal and judicial vacuum further exacerbates systemic and institutionalized gender-discriminatory practices, disproportionately impact women and girls with prevailing social norms severely impeding their access to health care, education, access to justice, increasing economic inequality and worsening already high rates of gender-based violence and harmful practices.

Despite repeated assurances by the Taliban that women’s rights would be protected under Islam, recent UN Women Assessment<sup>6</sup> shows that women led CSOs have mostly stopped their operations or gone underground soon after DFA took power, due to safety threats and fear of being targeted as well as restrictions on women’s work and freedom of movement. The ban on girls’ access to secondary school has been instated, women’s rights to work has been severely curtailed, gender machinery abolished, women have been removed from public duties. In addition, a lack of directives on women’s participation in the workforce, led to self-imposed family restrictions on women and girls’ freedom of movement. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains one of the most serious, life-threatening, and widespread violations of human rights and the risk, or actual experience of violence, permeates all aspects of women’s lives. Prior to the Taliban takeover, rates of VAWG were already extremely high, further exacerbated by COVID-19. While the need for essential protection services increased, their availability has severely reduced following the fall of Kabul in August. Further disruption to provision of services was in direct consequence of disbanding of the MoWA/DoWA, police and justice system – and therefore the multisector referral system. Furthermore, internal displacement, rapidly deteriorating economic situation and its consequences on the loss of livelihoods, the increase in poverty, food insecurity, inflation and daily price increases of basic necessities are all compounding factors which increase women and girls’ vulnerability to VAWG.

### Implementation progress by outcome area:

Spotlight Initiative – Outcome areas	Implementation progress as of 31 Dec 2021 <sup>7</sup>
<b>Outcome 1:</b> Legal and Policy Framework	0%
<b>Outcome 2:</b> Institutions	0%
<b>Outcome 3:</b> Prevention and Norm Change	5.4%
<b>Outcome 4:</b> Quality Services	13.3%
<b>Outcome 5:</b> Data	0%
<b>Outcome 6:</b> Women’s Movement	3.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6.8%</b>

<sup>6</sup>UN Women (2021). Gender alert I: Women’s rights in Afghanistan: Where are we now? Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/12/gender-alert-womens-rights-in-afghanistan>

<sup>7</sup>Though no expenditures were recorded under outcomes 1, 2 and 5, a lot of foundational work has been done under these outcomes that is presented under the result section.

## Programme Implementation Status

Despite the security and political challenges, the SI-A has made some progress toward planning the safe implementation of the programme, securing the engagement of key stakeholders (i.e., governmental institutions and civil society organisations) at the national and provincial levels, initiating recruitments and contracting relevant partners. Preparations for the official launch of the SI-A in August 2021 were abandoned following the abrupt fall of the government. The RUNOs provided the initial orientation for their respective implementing partners, to ensure they have full understanding not only of the individual activities but also the longer-term impact that is expected to be promoted by the programme.

Considering the complex and fast-evolving operating environment and above-mentioned challenges, the following technical, operational and programmatic adapted responses and modifications were made:

- To engage with the new authorities in this adaptation process, RUNOs jointly with local CSOs, conducted provincial advocacy with de facto authorities on the implications of this decision and the importance of allowing CSOs to operate. This also included changing implementation modalities and language that seemed sensitive in the eyes of the de facto authorities, at the time of negotiations.
- Certain Spotlight interventions were suspended, some due to the link with the government and some other stopped due to fear to implement women's rights activities by the de facto authorities, whereas others were at risk of adopting directions that were not consistent with UN's values and objectives. Therefore, after August 15, 2021, alternative pathways became necessary to protect and empower vulnerable women, girls and adolescents as public services became disrupted, worsened socio-economic vulnerability related to the crisis has further increased vulnerability to SGBV and access was further limited. Repivoting interventions meant that more services were channelled through a decentralised, community-based approach.
- Human resource attrition gravely affected partner CSOs and RUNOs, as they suffered a dramatic "brain drain" through the loss of experienced board executive members, management professionals, and skilled frontline workers who relocated abroad.

### **Thus, the shifts in SI-A were made focusing on:**

- Forming new partnerships with additional CSOs – particularly with local/grassroots groups - allowed the scaling up of grassroots level programmes and activities. The expansion of safe spaces convened by women for women and girls, provided access to vital information and life-saving services.
- The rollout of community level dialogue and information sessions for the local stakeholders, as well as fast-tracked capacity building training for the project management, new staff and volunteers.

- Awareness raising among and advocacy with the de facto authorities at local levels and ensuring that community and religious leaders come on board as supporters, in order to guarantee the continuity of project activities.

Overall, in view of all above mentioned challenges, modest implementation rates have been achieved to allow for re-assessments and viabilities of the planned interventions. After initial delays in implementation related to the engagement of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) and increased in security challenges until the fall of Kabul on 15 August 2021, from September to December 2021, SI-A has been through a review process to be finalised in the first quarter of 2022 with the approval of the European Union (EU) of the joint AWP 2022.

## COVID-19 Effects and Response

COVID-19 came at a time when the ongoing armed conflict, lack of access to services, poor economic opportunities, limited infrastructure, increased unemployment, and high gender inequality were already negatively impacting Afghanistan's economic and social stability. Women and girls in Afghanistan have faced violence regardless of the contextual changes, but COVID-19 exacerbated the violence, highlighting the disproportionate impact of the pandemic, particularly during lockdowns as well as due to decreased access to services. Evidence showed that SGBV/HP dramatically increased in homes and in communities due to the COVID-19 crisis. A 2020 Oxfam survey found that 97% of women respondents in Afghanistan saw gender-based violence increase since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>8</sup> It was also reported that the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis has led to an increase in child marriage, as a negative coping mechanism to respond to the socio-economic crisis, as poverty is a known driver of child marriage.<sup>9</sup> Since 2020, during the programme design phase, the primary challenge other than security has been the impact of COVID-19, in terms of access and ensuring duty of care to staff, partners and participants.

As outlined in the programme document, COVID-19 and its impact on women and girls have been mainstreamed through all the activities and approaches of the SI-A. During the implementation of the preparatory activities, all COVID-19-related protocols were adhered to, such as physical distancing, consideration of movement restrictions in place to curb the pandemic. A consulting company (Magenta) was hired to develop communication for development (C4D) materials for prevention and response to GBV for use by RUNO implementing partners within the various service delivery points to contribute to prevention and awareness of available GBV services. In addition, alternate locations, revised implementation timelines and other measures are being considered to ensure duty of care to all staff, partners and participants.

<sup>8</sup>Oxfam (2020). A New Scourge to Afghan Women: COVID-19

<sup>9</sup>Covid-19 and young girls' vulnerability to Child marriage and teenage pregnancies in Afghanistan

## Programme Governance and Coordination

### **a) National Steering Committee (NSC)**

As the programme's highest governance structure, the NSC was envisaged to provide strategic leadership and oversight to the Programme, making decisions in accordance with the achievement of results, strategic focus and scope of the programme. In addition, the NSC was expected to make key programme decisions, guide RUNOs and implementing partners and responsible parties in the execution of the Programme, and ensure effective oversight through review of, and feedback to, strategic programme documents (e.g., Annual Work plans, Evaluation Management Responses, and potential revisions of the Programme Document). The first inter-ministerial meeting, organised on 01 February 2021, was attended by several senior representatives of a range of ministries, including Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Interior (MoI), Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs (MoHRA), and Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The second meeting, held on 3 March 2021, gathered Ministers and Deputy Ministers of the eight key ministries to be engaged in the Spotlight Initiative including the MoWA, Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs (DMoYA), MoLSA, Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC), MoE, MoI, MoJ, and MoHRA. Each ministry presented on how they will concretely engage and support the SI-A, based on the government mapping of activities that has been developed by the RUNOs jointly with respective ministries, for details see Annex G. This commitment from a diverse range of ministries was significant in contributing to a whole of government approach required to EAWG in Afghanistan. In addition, the SI-A geographical scope was also discussed in the NSC meetings and the proposed provinces (Herat, Kandahar, and Paktia) were agreed upon. To better ensure coordination and build on existing synergies, it was decided to merge the SI-A NSC and the WPHF NSC into one governance and decision-making body. This decision was endorsed by the EU, RUNOs and the WPHF. Following the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021, the NSC composition and membership had to be revised to exclude government representatives considering the international sanctions and restrictions related to engaging with the Taliban.

### **b) Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG)**

The establishment of the Spotlight CS-NRG was in the final stage prior to the fall of Kabul on 15 August 2021. The selection of the 15 members of the CS-NRG was finalised on 8 June 2021, pending the participation of a representative from MoWA. The members were selected as experts<sup>10</sup> in the area of EAWG and representatives of the women's movement, including people living with disabilities, rural women, experts on male engagement, etc, coming from provinces across Afghanistan. With the deterioration of the security situation, the notification of selected members of the CS-NRG was put on pause to not increase the risk profile of the selected civil

<sup>10</sup>1. Autonomous Women's Movement (7 seats), Persons with Disabilities (1 seat), Internally Displaced People (1 seat), Engaging Men & Boys (1 seat), Local and grassroots women's organisations (1 seat), Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (1 seat), Youth (1 seat), Religious group and scholar (1 seat), Media (1 seat)

society representatives. The establishment of the CS-NRG and processes will need to be further discussed and approved before moving forward in the changed context, with special consideration for the current risks faced by activists and women's rights defenders.

### **c) Inter-agency coordination, technical committees, and other governance mechanisms**

**Spotlight Initiative Technical Team:** To ensure continued information sharing and coordination, the SI-A technical team, chaired by the Head of the RCO and composed of the RUNOs' technical leads and EU delegation representatives, was established. The technical team was established to meet bi-weekly and constitutes a strong platform for collaboration, consultations and consensus building on key issues in the rolling out of the programme, and it is expected to continue through the life of the programme as a technical level mechanism for addressing and elevating emergent issues swiftly, and for raising to the principals those issues that require a policy decision.

**Spotlight Initiative Country Team (SI-A UNCT):** To facilitate the oversight of the technical team, a joint Spotlight Initiative Afghanistan UN Country Team (SI-A UNCT) was formed, chaired by the RC and composed of the Country Representatives of the four RUNOs. This team meets quarterly to discuss strategic issues and general oversight, while also enhancing communications between the RUNOs at the representative level. It ensures commitment to the programme at the highest level of all the UN agencies and promotes effective coordination and troubleshooting, including for security and political challenges.

**UN Gender Theme group:** The UN Country Team in Afghanistan has a UN Gender Theme Group to promote coordinated and joint gender planning, programming, and advocacy. During the initial SI-A planning meetings, the UN Gender Theme Group was used as a platform for brainstorming on the priorities and complementarities of the Initiative. SI-A Programme Document development remained a key agenda of the UN gender group and the process managed to bring all UN agencies to work together on what needs to be implemented for the women and girls of Afghanistan.

**GBV Sub-Cluster:** In Afghanistan, the GBV Sub-cluster is the coordinating body for Humanitarian GBV Response with membership from the UN and NGOs. To ensure that the SI-A is responsive to the key priority needs of Afghan women and girls, the development and design of the SI-A activities were also guided by the GBV Sub-cluster priorities and approach within the Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2020 and SI-A regularly participates in the forum.

**Gender in Humanitarian Actions Working Group (GiHA):** The Gender in Humanitarian Actions Working Group is a platform that enables coordination, information sharing and advocacy on gender needs, issues, gaps and challenges in the humanitarian inter-sectoral response. The SI-A is a development programme and engages with the GiHA Working Group only to share information on support to women's organisations and SGBV/HP issues.



**The UN Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF)<sup>11</sup> for Afghanistan:** The August 2021 power shift in Afghanistan has created the need for a transitional strategy for the UN to address the deepening political and social-economic instability. The TEF is the overarching strategic planning document for the UN system’s assistance in Afghanistan in 2022. It sets out the UN principles of engagement, collective outcomes, and the UN coordination and implementation arrangements. The TEF comprises three strategic priorities that will guide the UN’s engagement in Afghanistan in 2022, while the UN system adapts to the new realities in Afghanistan and until conditions are conducive for a multi-year development cooperation framework. These priorities are: (i) provide life-saving assistance, (ii) sustain essential services and (iii) preserve social investments and community-level systems essential to meeting basic human needs. The TEF has prioritised women’s participation and capacity of women CSOs as key cross-cutting priorities considering the increased vulnerability and continued shrinking space for women and girls’ participation post August 2021. This clearly resonates well with the principles of the Spotlight Initiatives especially (Pillar 6) which focuses on grassroots women’s organisation’s mobilisation.

#### **d) New way of working under the UN Reform**

**Role of the Resident Coordinator (RC):** The UN Resident Coordinator (RC), supported by the RCO, is the final decision-making authority within the UN and is responsible for the overall strategic direction and oversight of the SI-A Programme, including its planning, implementation, communication, monitoring, reporting and review, as well as facilitation of collaboration amongst all stakeholders. Leveraging a “one UN interface” for partnerships, the RC engages with a broad range of partners including the de facto authorities, EU Delegation, civil society, development and humanitarian partners and other stakeholders.

**The Value Added by UN Reform:** The Spotlight Initiative has strengthened collaboration of RUNOs on gender equality and VAWG, facilitating other current and future collaborations on EVAWG, in the spirit of ONE UN, which is significant in the current context of Afghanistan.

**Delivery Under UN Reform:** In line with the UN Reform principles, all RUNOs have worked closely under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator and the RCO to plan the joint implementation of the SI-A, building on each other’s technical expertise and partnerships. The joint Annual Work Plan (AWP), development of Communication and Visibility Plan, development of TORs for surveys and call for proposals, have provided opportunities for RUNOs to come together and discuss synergies and opportunities to collaborate and support each other across activities for successful coordination and implementation of the SI-A.

<sup>11</sup>[https://afghanistan.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/UN\\_Transitional\\_Engagement\\_Framework\\_Afghanistan\\_2022.pdf](https://afghanistan.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/UN_Transitional_Engagement_Framework_Afghanistan_2022.pdf)

## Programme Partnerships

### **a) Government**

Prior to the Taliban take-over in August, the RUNOs were engaged with the government, and with the eight key ministries, particularly through the interim NSC meetings. Those eight ministries are: MoWA, DMoYA, MoLSA, MoPH, MoE, Mol, MoJ, and MoHRA. The thinking prior to the takeover was that the SI-A would support MoWA to play a leading role in the programme and to exercise its coordination role with other ministries. A mapping of the engagement of the different ministries in the different activities of SI-A was developed and presented to the key ministries on 3 March 2021. The mapping and related discussions also outlined how SI-A will contribute to complementing and meeting GoIRA's objectives, align with its work and priorities and support capacity building opportunities. The mapping is available in Annex G.

However, following the Taliban takeover, a number of changes happened, jeopardising the gains made on women and girls' rights, including the dismantlement of MoWA and the AIHRC, closure of girl's schools, ban women from working etc. Post August 2021, the SI-A limited its engagement to advocacy with the de-facto authorities and the programme is planning to revise the Terms of Reference and composition of the NSC.

### **b) European Union**

The participation of the EU has been regular and essential. The EU participates in the SI-A technical team meetings, various meetings with the government, including the informal NSC meetings. The engagement of the EU in the biweekly technical discussions and meetings has strengthened the partnership between the EU and the UN, where the EU is acknowledged as not only a donor but also an important partner in the implementation of the programme, including at a technical level. For instance, the EU was actively engaged in the development of the Annual Work Plan, drafting the SI Communication and Visibility Action Plan and the selection of the CS-NRG members, as well as developing the launch Concept Note. The European Union in Brussels and the Afghanistan Delegation were actively engaging in the rethinking of the SI-A following the fall of Kabul, and several joint meetings were held with the EU and the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, mainly to update them on the status of the SI-A implementation and seek their feedback. In October 2021, with the request from the EU, the SI-A team provided a detailed update on the status of the programme implementation, where written feedback was received from the EU.

### **c) Civil Society as Implementing Partners**

The RUNOs were able to swiftly identify their implementing partners, based on previous experience and partnerships. Each RUNO provided the initial orientation for their respective partners, to ensure they have full understanding not only of the individual activities but also the longer-term impact that is expected to be promoted by the programme. The SI-A is working with a diverse range of civil society organizations, including women's rights organizations and organizations



representing groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, to ensure that the programme is reaching all women and girls and leaves no one behind.

According to the Gender Alert<sup>12</sup> prepared by UN Women, women's organizations have profoundly been affected by the Taliban takeover. Many women leaders— from all walks of life — fled the country in the lead up to full international troop withdrawal, fearing the consequences of their activism for women's rights and gender equality. While women's civil society organizations continue to exist in Afghanistan, their operations have been significantly curtailed. In the rapid perception survey conducted in October 2021, 65 percent of respondents indicated that women's civil society organizations (CSOs) had stopped working in their area since 15 August 2021. The shrinking of the operational space for women CSOs is attributed to the new restrictions, particularly in relation to women's freedom of movement, lack of financial liquidity and security concerns. Despite the restrictions, women's CSOs are still willing and able to implement initiatives but will need financial and technical support from the UN and other partners to implement them safely.

Furthermore, women CSOs reported that the Taliban's views and restrictions were being applied differently across the various provinces, leading to uncertainty and confusion. Some CSOs have reported being able to operate in a few provinces or in some sectors, while others report a blanket halt to their work. Women staff working on gender-based violence, protection and women's empowerment reported a higher level of risk in operating. Women working in the health or education sector appear to be more accepted by the de facto authorities.

The sector-specific experiences of women-led CSOs indicate that the Taliban considers some areas of work more acceptable than others. Areas of work that directly challenge the Taliban's position on women's rights face the most obstacles in resuming their work safely. Ultimately, ambiguity in Taliban directives and policies does not create an enabling environment for women led CSOs to operate. The lack of clarity creates room for fear and self-censorship, largely due to the vivid memories of the 1996-2001 Taliban era.

The support provided by the SI-A to women's organisations is more than ever critical to support the rebuilding of the women's movement and to allow the sustaining of women's rights organisations in this critical period of time for women's rights. Due to sensitivities of de-facto authorities around women's services, and more particularly women's shelters, the establishment of new Women Protection Center (WPC) and Family Guidance Centers (FGCs) in the provinces of Paktia and Kandahar by SI-A CSO implementing partners was delayed and implementation severely impacted.

Summary of SI-A supported CSOs, as implementing partners, which stayed active throughout 2021 is provided in Appendix A.

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<sup>12</sup><https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/12/gender-alert-womens-rights-in-afghanistan>

#### **d) Other Partners**

The Spotlight Initiative has collaborated with the World Bank to provide technical support to the Ministry of Education (MoE) on the development of a Ministry of Education Teacher Code of Conduct (CoC) and Grievance Reporting Mechanism as mechanisms to enforce schools' safety framework for prevention and response to GBV and harassment at school level. This included a discussion on synergies for impactful results for the prevention and response to SGBV in schools and around the school setting and is expected to contribute to the prevention of and response to VAWG in the education sector, once endorsed, rolling out including capacity building to all concerned SI-A targeted provinces will commence. This activity will be revisited in 2022 once there is more clarity on the possible way forward.

The Spotlight Initiative will build on the partnership between WPHF and Spotlight and ensure linkages between the WPHF-Spotlight grantees and the work undertaken under Spotlight, including through extending support planned under pillar 6 to WPHF-Spotlight grantees, and through knowledge and learning exchanges between Spotlight and WPHF-Spotlight CSO partners to contribute to build the knowledge base in Afghanistan and support capacity development

## **Results**

### **Capturing Broader Transformations Across Outcomes**

The RUNOs have made important progress in securing the meaningful participation and engagement of key government and civil society actors, with the previous government. However, due to a prolonged period of negotiations with the de facto authorities and worsening security situation in the country and ensuring reduced implementation of the SI-A following the Taliban takeover, there have not been significant transformations at the Outcome level at this stage. However, some significant preparations had taken place which laid the groundwork for delivery of further interventions.

As a precursor for policy development, authorities from the previous government were supported in preparation of conducting GBV inquiries. In terms of strengthening institutional capacities for addressing GBV, support was provided through technical support in the implementation of Early Child Marriage (ECM) National Action Plan (NAP), GBV Code of Conduct (for teachers, principals and students)/Family Life Education or Comprehensive Sexual Education materials.

Regarding prevention of GBV, preparations for conducting prevention studies, community mobilization action plans and training materials for primary prevention were all completed. Communities were mobilised through the establishment of Men's and Boys' networks; commitment from religious and influential leaders were made to reducing VAWG and child marriage in their communities by integrating these messages in their Friday prayers; and featuring of several of the trained scholars and key influencers on TV and radio programmes, disseminating messages with regards to Islamic laws and its links to the protection of women.

Overall, SI-A improved GBV service provision of both institutional and CSO actors, through development of various guidelines, capacity building interventions and advocacy and establishment of protection centres. SI-A partners-built capacity on GBV case management for frontline responders, Child Protection Action Network (CPAN) members as well as health workers in the targeted provinces, CPAN members from already existing CPAN structures and community Shuras' members. The 15 Girl's Friendly spaces (GFSs) that were established also maintained essential quality services for women and girls, also under the de facto authority rule. Nationwide Youth Health Line remained operational, providing counselling, information, and referral services. In support of the reopening of women's services, advocacy missions to Kandahar and Herat were organised at the end of October / mid-November 2021 and de facto authorities formally authorised the opening of the Family Guidance Center in Paktia and the Women Protection Center and Family Guidance Center in Kandahar.

Women's movement at the provincial level was continuously supported through women's CSOs roundtables which were organised in Kandahar and in Herat in November highlighting the need for continued advocacy for women's services, particularly for GBV survivors, women's right to education, work and access to services with provincial and national de-facto authorities as well as through the UN. The process of establishment of the Spotlight CS-NRG was completed prior to the fall of Kabul on 15 August 2021 but was put on pause in order to not increase the risk profile of the selected civil society representatives.

## Capturing Change at Outcome Level

### Outcome 1: Legal and Policy Framework

**The SI-A finalised a partnership with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to conduct the nation-wide inquiries on SGBV/HP and/or gender equality and non-discrimination** to strengthen evidence-based legislation and policy frameworks, in line with international standards, ensuring women and girls' rights in Afghanistan. The inquiries were aimed at generating evidence for developing prevention strategies and the enforcement of laws and policies, as punitive and prevention measures in Afghanistan. In addition, as part of the partnership, it was agreed with the AIHRC **to conduct the stakeholder mapping and beneficiary analysis** which includes women and girls who are facing multiple forms of SGBV and discrimination; and in later stage, based on the collected data, localized programmes, strategies and action plans to be developed aimed at prevention and response to SGBV and HPs. In the first half of the year, the SI-A conducted several consultations with the AIHRC to define the scope of work and the areas of support the AIHRC may need in conducting the nation-wide inquiries and other above-mentioned activities. However, following the Taliban takeover, the AIHRC has been dissolved and these interventions had to be paused until SI-A finds alternative ways of implementation.

## Outcome 2: Institutions

A high-level Early Child Marriage (ECM) National Action Plan (NAP) Steering Committee was established to oversee the implementation of the NAP. **The National Action Plan for the Elimination of Early and Child Marriage** was developed in 2017 by DMoYA and MoWA through a consultation process with relevant stakeholders at national, regional and provincial levels. This NAP is the first of its kind (Nation Action Plan) to end the Child Marriage in Afghanistan and it is also the first of its kind which is approved both by UN agencies and Government of Afghanistan (Oversight Committee composed of Second vice President and Ministers from 9 ministries).

The Steering Committee was established to mobilize support for the implementation of the National Action Plan. A consultant was recruited to provide technical support to the Steering Committee and to ensure active participation from the members. From June through 14 August 2021, three Steering Committee meetings were conducted and chaired by DMoYA and co-chaired by MoWA. However, after the events of 15 August, on the ground context has changed the operating capacity and functionality of former ministries.

The SI-A explored opportunities to merge the planned ERAW Forum with the newly established Inter-Agency Working Group on GBV, co-chaired by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the World Bank, for the national level ERAW forum, in order to avoid creating another working group on the same issue. After the fall of Kabul, the establishment of the **ERAW Forums** was halted, as they meant to engage with government stakeholders.

## Outcome 3: Prevention and Norms Change

As part of strengthening SGBV prevention and the overall Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF), the SI-A supported the Ministry of Education (MoE) to develop the **Code of Conduct (for teachers, principals, and students)**. The CoC has been developed in partnership with the World Bank. Furthermore, as part of the CoC and CSSF, the MoE has developed the first draft of the Grievance Reporting Mechanisms through which students and Teachers would report any risk of GBV including Sexual Exploitation and abuse at school setting with technical support from partners, to tackle harassment of students/employees and to address their complaints. Complementary guidelines and policy documents already approved by MoE exist - such as the Quality Education Standards and the CSSF - that speak to what MoE wanted to be added to the CoC.

The SI-A supported MoPH in the development of **FLE/CSE (Family Life Education or Comprehensive Sexual Education) materials**. The implementation plan was to integrate FLE into national school curricula and teacher training in the targeted province as a pilot project. It was expected to provide young women and men with the knowledge and skills they need to live healthy and productive lives. A consultant was recruited at MoHP to provide support to the FLE Task Force committee aiming to develop and design FLE materials. The FLE Task Force (steering committee) was composed of representatives from the MoPH, MoE, MoRHA, UN agencies and the President

Office to secure highest governmental ownership. Three FLE Task Force committee meetings were conducted through which a detailed framework was developed for FLE/CSE. Based on recommendation from the task force committee a framework for FLE materials was developed and approved by both ministries in July 2021, but the framework was not implemented and the FLE Task Force was dissolved following the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

Prior to the fall of Kabul, the SI-A finalised terms of reference to contract a consulting firm to conduct the **Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Behaviours (KAPB) Study, together with the Services Perception Study under Outcome 4** to build on the synergies between the studies. The merged studies aimed to inform the development of the prevention work and service provision under Outcome 3 and Outcome 4 respectively, with the identification of root causes of SGBV/HP and barriers to women and girls' access to services. Following the fall of Kabul, most of the prevention activities were put on hold.

A key foundational step, the SI-A finalised the recruitment of an International **Prevention Expert** to lead the development and implementation of the community mobilization action plan that will guide all prevention activities at the community level across the SI-A and provide support to the implementation of the Prevention pillar overall. This was put on hold following the fall of Kabul.

In support of capacity building of key stakeholders on primary prevention – a critical first step to the implementation of the Prevention pillar- the SI-A developed **training materials on primary prevention for key stakeholders** to build stakeholders' understanding and facilitate their buy-in on prevention programming.

As part of strengthening SGBV prevention and the overall **Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF)**, the SI-A had been supporting the MoE (before August 15, 2021) to develop and roll out the Code of Conduct (for teachers, principals, and students). The CoC outlined roles of MoE, school principals and teachers on contributing to a protective environment that is conducive to students learning- free from GBV and harassment within school setting. It also outlined steps and mechanisms to report and manage GBV and harassment including punitive measures to would-be offenders.

SI-A partners invested in the creation of various platforms to engage with communities on social and behavioral change against VAWG and child marriage. Progress has been achieved as follows:

- **Social mobilization through Men's and Boys' community networks.** Through strategic partnerships with local CSOs partners in three provinces (Paktia, Herat and Kandahar), SI-A managed to mobilize communities through dialogue, public information sessions and advocacy campaigns that promoted gender-equitable norms, attitudes and behaviours. These series of dialogues were possible through men's and boys' community networks that were formed and capacitated to champion gender equality and positive masculinity around VAWG and child marriage. In total, through partners, SI-A established 18 community men's and boys' networks in Paktia (2), Herat (4) and Kandahar (12). These men's networks have a total of 192

active male participants. The networks managed to reach a total of 3,121 people (1,078 men, 959 women, 580 girls and 504 boys) through dialogue sessions in the three provinces.

- **Capacity building of key community influencers through social behavioral change on VAWG and child marriage.** In total, 280 religious' leaders (200 in Kandahar and 80 in Herat) were trained on VAWG and early marriage in the community, including on their role to address these issues in their communities. The influential leaders, who attended the sessions, expressed their commitment to reducing VAWG and child marriage in their communities by integrating these messages in their Friday prayers. There has been an attitude and behaviour change, manifested from the fact that women grassroot CSOs are able to space to operate and engage with. Community key influencers especially religious leaders have been in the forefront to support the SI project and partners to have safe spaces for women and girls. These key influencers/ mullahs have been instrumental in identifying locations for safe spaces and since September, women and girls can participate freely in these spaces.
- **Community advocacy initiatives.** SI-A partners conducted several advocacy meetings with religious leaders and scholars in Kandahar province on women's rights and GBV, including enabling a protective environment for women. The initiative reached 200 religious leaders. Both in Kandahar and Herat provinces, SI-A partners featured several of the trained scholars and key influencers on TV and radio programmes. These radio and TV discussions focused on disseminating messages with regards to Islamic laws and their links to the protection of women. Overall, 12 topics were aired and discussed on TV and radio through 30-40 minutes features, two times per week (at 5:30 PM and 10 AM). A total of 21,970 people are part of the listenership groups of these programs (5,120 men; 8,100 women, 4,200 boys and 4,550 girls).

#### **Outcome 4: Quality Services**

To enable standardization of and a culturally sensitive approach to service provision, **the SI-A has developed a Women and Girls Safe Space Guideline** that has been shared with all its CSO implementing partners for use during the setup of safe spaces. The guide facilitates standardisation of the safe space model guided by the global guidance for GBV case management and a platform for promoting women and girls' participation. The guideline has provided guidance for adherence to the survivor-centred, human-rights based, and leaving no-one behind (LNOB) principle, including provision of an intersectional approach that ensures all women and girls are able to access the safe spaces. Under SI-A, 15 Safe spaces are operational and active in Herat and Kandahar. Details of Safe space activities and population reach is discussed in a specific paragraph below within this section.

To help medical mobile teams work on emergency GBV services, **a simplified mobile team guidance has been developed by the SI-A** and shared with MoPH for adaptation in rolling out mobile GBV services, where static services are not available in the targeted districts. The GBV mobile teams are reaching out to the communities which aren't accessible and have no static



services. Tagging on what is already working with the health mobile team, the component of GBV PSS and safe referrals have been added to the mobile team guidance.

As mentioned above, **the Services Perception Study** was planned to be conducted jointly with **the Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Behaviours (KAPB) Study** under Outcome 3 to build on the synergies between the studies. The study aimed to provide data and evidence to inform the implementation of the prevention and service provision work under Pillar 3 and 4. The methodology will be revised to suit the current context in 2022.

The SI-A is supporting the establishment of a multi-donor, multi-stakeholder Women Protection Center Trust Fund (WPC TF) that supports the operation of WPCs and FGCs across the country. The WPCs and FGCs provide life-saving and critical services and referrals for SGBV/HP survivors and women and girls who are at risk of violence in Afghanistan. The Trust Fund aims to promote sustainable, coordinated, strategic and efficient funding as well as to ensure quality service provision, in line with international standards. The WPC TF Advisory Committee, chaired by Deputy Minister for Women Affairs, endorsed the selection of CSO partners on 21 April 2021, in which the EU participated. The WPC TF was effectively operational starting 1 June. The fall of Kabul in August 2021 halted the establishment of new FGCs and new WPCs in Kandahar and Paktia, where there were none. The SI-A supported its civil society partners who are operating WPCs and FGCs to facilitate the safe operation and reopening of those life-saving services for women and girls. In support of the reopening of women's services, missions to Kandahar and Herat were organised at the end of October / mid-November 2021 to engage de facto authorities on the needs for services for women. A meeting with the Herat de facto governor was organised on 10 November 2021, in which the need to allow the safe provision of services for women to respond to the urgent and critical needs of women and girls, including urgent humanitarian needs, which was favourably welcomed by the de-facto governor that acknowledged the importance of such services and initiatives.

Following CSO partners' advocacy with de-facto authorities, the FGC in Paktia and Kandahar, and the WPC in Kandahar have been formally authorized to open by the respective provincial de-facto authorities in November 2021. It is expected that these centers in Paktia and Kandahar will be fully operational in the first quarter of 2022. The FGC and WPC models are being redesigned through a phased and consultative approach, building on international standards, and taking into careful consideration safety and security, operational challenges, and access for all women overall. This will include expanding the range of services provided in these service points to be further responsive to the needs of women and girls, with a focus on SGBV/HP survivors, with the aim to provide improved services in the changed context. It is expected that the revised models for the FGC and WPC be finalised during the first quarter of 2022 and be approved by the WPC TF Advisory Committee, to which the EU is a member.

The Second Meeting of the WPC TF Advisory Committee was organized on 16 December 2021, attended by EU representatives. An update on the status of the WPCs and FGCs since the Taliban

take-over was provided and the next steps for the redesign of the WPC and FGCs models and for the Trust Fund were discussed. Members of the Advisory Committee agreed on expanding the scope of the WPC TF to include the revised model of the Family Guidance Centers.

SI-A has continued to support the existing Youth Health Line (YHL) that was established in 2012. The YHL is a telephone counselling service for young people especially girls to provide information and counselling on ASRH (Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health) and GBV services and inform young callers of the local services available and provide referrals to the existing health services on SGBV. During the reporting period, 168,308 young people were provided counselling, information, and referral services. Out of the total calls, 58% (97,622) of the callers were women/girls and 42% (70,686) were men callers from 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, 73,133 (43%) clients received counselling services, 50,746 (30%) young people were provided information on different adolescent health issues including ASRH, and 44,425 (27%) clients were referred to the different service delivery points in Afghanistan. The counsellors at YHL are medical doctors, specifically trained in Youth Friendly Services (YFS), which are based on an understanding of the lived realities of young people, their needs and how to deliver information in the most accessible means to this younger audience.

To ensure quality service delivery through frontline workers, **SI-A partners provided training on GBV case management to a total of 353 frontline workers (165 women and 188 men)**. These trained social workers included: child protection network members as well as health workers in the targeted provinces of Herat, Kandahar, and Paktia. The training has improved their capacity to deal with GBV survivors, including those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, in the areas of case management, survivor centred approaches, and child survivor friendly approaches.

To improve responses specific to adolescent girls' needs and GBV services, **under the SI-A, the Adolescent Girls' Toolkit was developed**. The toolkit was finalized including the pre-testing of the tool with SI-A RUNOs and selected CSOs partners. The toolkit aligns with the guidelines of SI-A on building the capacity of CSO partners. A comprehensive training programme will be delivered to frontline workers implementing SI-A services, including social workers, Child Protection Action Networks (CPAN) members, health workers and Mobile Health teams.

**During the reporting period, 15 Women and Girls' Friendly spaces (GFSs) were established and are currently still operational**. These WGFSs are proving to be an ideal entry point to reach a wide range of girls and women with key information on GBV prevention and available services. The GFS have also been instrumental in the provision of GBV services to women and girls including timely referrals for specialized care. Post the Taliban takeover in August 2021, SI-A continues to support GFSs to deliver essential quality services, including being a platform for women and girls' participation, which is no longer a given right under the de facto authority rule. To date 1,112 women and girls accessed various services in the GFSs with a total of 104 GBV survivors that received GBV case management including referrals for specialized care.



A total of **123 CPAN members from already existing CPAN structures in Herat and Kandahar were trained** on GBV case management, GBV risk mitigation. This training improved their capacity for safe referrals of GBV cases to other service delivery structures. Since CPANs are attached to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, post the Taliban takeover, the project could not move with the activation of new CPANs at the district level. Therefore, this activity will be re-prioritized and re-programmed in 2022.

In Afghanistan, over 38 per cent of the population<sup>13</sup> continues to rely on community structures for the reporting of GBV. It was therefore imperative that capacity development is invested within local community structures to facilitate safe referrals, rather than the mediation of such cases. **Through partners, 100 community Shuras (Councils), 36 women and 64 men, were trained on GBV prevention** and how to facilitate safe and confidential referrals of cases to specialized service delivery structures. Due to sensitivities around GBV cases and restricted movement post the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the programme was not able to register the total number of cases referred by such community structures.

#### **Outcome 5: Data**

The Terms of Reference for the baseline survey in three targeted provinces to collect baseline data for the Results/Resource Framework of SI-A was advertised in February 2021. A total of 17 bidders submitted their technical and financial proposals and all proposals were reviewed and scored by a technical committee composed of one member from each RUNOs. However, due to existing challenges, specifically the increased insecurities and Taliban take over, the process was not finalised, and the procurement process was put on hold.

The SI-A closely worked with the Ministry of Interior to hire a consultant to complete an assessment of different GBV database systems and based on the assessment develop a harmonized GBV database system (other activities for the development of database were planned to be considered for 2022). However, due to the highly sensitive nature of the database and deteriorated security situation in the country the planned assessment was not conducted.

#### **Outcome 6: Women's Movement**

The establishment of the Spotlight CS-NRG was in the final stage prior to the fall of Kabul on 15 August 2021. **A Call for Nominations<sup>14</sup> was developed and widely disseminated in English and the two local languages, Dari and Pashto, and advertised from 4 March 2021 to 6 April 2021.** A total of 103 applications were received. The Selection Committee meeting was held on 31 May 2021, comprising two UN representatives, two CSO representatives (selected under the call for nominations for CSO representatives for WPHF and the Spotlight Initiative), one representative from the EU, and one representative from the MoWA. The selection of the 15 members of the

<sup>13</sup>DHS2015 & U-Report poll

<sup>14</sup><https://afghanistan.un.org/en/114678-call-nominations-members-spotlight-initiatives-civil-society-afghanistan-reference-group>

CS-NRG was finalised on 8 June 2021. With the deterioration of the security situation, the notification of selected members of the CS-NRG was put on pause to not increase the risk profile of the selected civil society representatives. The establishment of the CS-NRG and processes will need to be further discussed and approved before moving forward in the changed context, with special consideration for the current risks faced by activists and women's rights defenders. The re-advertisement of the Call for Nomination may be required.

To support the rebuilding of the **women's movement at the provincial level, women's CSOs roundtables were organised on 1 November 2021 in Kandahar and 10 November 2021 in Herat.** This was the first time for women's activists to meet after the fall of Kabul. In Kandahar, 25 women activists from civil society organisations, UN, and from the social and legal fields participated and highlighted the need to support women's CSOs to convene and organise to be able to voice their needs and organise themselves to respond to the current situation. It also further highlighted the need to continue to advocate for women's services, particularly for GBV survivors, as GBV and child marriage is increasing, and to advocate for women's right to education, work and access to services with provincial and national de-facto authorities as well as through the UN.

**SI-A has established formal partnerships with 5 local CSOs** for the implementation of community led initiatives to address violence against women and child marriage. These CSOs continued to be a medium to hear the needs and concerns of women and girls; especially post-August 15, when their space for participation significantly shrunk. Also, a community of practice was established as a platform where these NGOs can share lessons, gaps, and demonstrate what is working. This became an instrumental platform to share strategies, engage, and advocate with the de-facto authorities; and it eventually led to allowing women's organizations to resume their operation in early October, since the ban in August 2021.

Support to adolescents and youth for active participation and engagement continued by establishing and scaling up platforms, such as multi-purpose adolescent groups (MAG), adolescent and youth network (AYN) and girls' safe spaces (GSS) at the district level. **In total, 78 MAGs and 23 AYN were established with 1,098 adolescent boys and 706 adolescent girls in Herat, Kandahar, forming the membership. In addition, 145 girls and 415 boys were trained as peer educators** in their communities, and in turn, these peer educators were able to reach their fellow peers with information on child marriage, GBV and life skills education. **Over 4625 girls, 2535 women and 565 boys were reached through peer-to-peer sessions.** Even though awareness against child marriage has been raised with the young people through these interventions, due to severely deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which is manifested through dire poverty across many families, and pushing families to adopt negative coping mechanisms, there have been reports that child marriage is on the rise.

## Rights Holders (“Beneficiaries”)

Indicative numbers	Direct for 2021	Comments / Explanations
Women (18 yrs. and above)	59,610	Those who benefited directly from awareness activities, including access to services through GFS (aggregated figures from Pillar 3, 4 and 6 results)
Girls (5-17)	60,611	Those who benefited directly from awareness activities including access to services through GFS, AYN & MAGS (aggregated figures from Pillar 3, 4 and 6 results of population reached)
Men (18 yrs. and above)	36,373	These were men reached directly with community dialogues/awareness plus men’s groups trained to champion Gender equality and GBV prevention (aggregated figures from Pillar 3, 4 and 6 results of population reached)
Boys (5-17 yrs.)	45,834	These were directly reached with life skills training and awareness raising (aggregated figures from Pillar 3, 4 and 6 results of population reached)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>202,428</b>	

## Challenges and Mitigating Measures

### Pre-Taliban takeover

- As per the approved Programme Document, the Joint AWP (all RUNOs work plan) of Afghanistan Spotlight Initiative had to be reviewed and approved by the National Steering Committee, which was not fully established, pending selection of civil society representatives through the CS-NRG, which was postponed to ensure the safety of the selected members. Modalities to safely establish the CS-NRG will be discussed in 2022.
- In the first half of 2021, consultations were initiated with government stakeholders including MoPH, Mol, MoWA, AIHRC and other relevant partners. Due to challenges with the government partners and delay in signing the SI-A programme documents by the government focal point for Spotlight Initiative, the official launch of SI for Afghanistan was postponed a number of times and ultimately did not have an official launch. However, two joint meetings were conducted with high-level officials of different ministries as an advocacy effort and to ensure government partners' roles in Spotlight were understood and endorsed.

### Post-Taliban takeover

- Ultimately after 15 August 2021, the context in Afghanistan changed entirely, as the previous government collapsed, and the Taliban took over the control of the country. As a result, the implementation of GBV interventions was for the most part suspended.

- In the immediate aftermath of the Taliban takeover, a collective search for the powerful reorientation of the programme workplan was initiated to address the new challenges. A discussion took place with all RUNOs and the EU technical counterparts of possible options to reprogram activities within the existing scope and with possible integration of humanitarian dimensions. As humanitarian interventions could not be approved within SI, the Technical Team started again the planning process of readjusting development interventions in the changed context. This further contributed to delays in the implementation of SI programme.
- The Taliban's position on the preservation of women's rights has been so far ambiguous, as they have indicated that it would follow Islamic principles, but without more practical details of what that would entail. In the recent months, there has been an increase in levels of political intimidation, protection risks and killing of women in the public sphere, particularly women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, women journalists and judges thereby shrinking the human rights spaces for women. Efforts are still more than ever needed to ensure that the gains made on women's rights are not rolled back and are protected and promoted, and the Spotlight Initiative is more than ever key to preserving their rights but will require high level engagement and support to ensure safety of personnel and beneficiaries.
- The de facto leadership slowed down the implementation of the activities at the provincial level for almost two months, due to the fact that all NGOs working on women's rights and GBV related activities had been requested to halt their work. The situation post-August 2021, also saw most of the NGO leadership and key women staff leaving the country, hence creating a vacuum in response provision. Partners had to restart recruiting social workers to replace those that had left the country which stalled progress in implementation and outreach. Time and effort were therefore heavily invested through various negotiations at the provincial level to allow female frontline workers to return to work. The 'go ahead' was not uniform across the three provinces in the absence of a national policy. Similarly, the response by de facto authorities was not uniformed in relation to the running of the protection services for women.

### **Other Challenges**

- Due to the COVID-19 measures and security concerns in Afghanistan RUNOs and partners were prevented from in-person engagement, which limited implementation. However, RUNOs have adopted the necessary modalities to work with the consultants remotely and complete document reviews and consultations, to ensure no further delays in implementation.
- The shifting reality on the ground has brought to surface worse negative coping mechanisms such as organ trafficking/sales, child marriages and sales of children, to mention a few. The programme operates in an environment of sanctions, restrictions, and on-going humanitarian crisis. Therefore, adaptability of the Initiative to this new context to address the needs along the spectrum of peace-development-humanitarian nexus would be highly desirable to show-case how development dimensions addressing basic human needs of women and girls

of Afghanistan can be brought in to alleviate challenges emanating from a predominantly humanitarian context.

## Lessons Learned and New Opportunities

### a) New Opportunities

The improved security situation provides an opportunity to scale up all programming and in particular, to rethink, rebrand, redesign and scale-up services to end violence against women and girls. More than ever, the women's movement needs support. The SI-A provides the platform and opportunities to support the rebuilding of the women's movement, and to support women's activists and women's organisations with the support they need to sustain their operations and continue to advocate for their rights. In 2022 the Spotlight Programme is planning to increase funding to Pillar 6 to support women's CSOs with technical, operational and institutional support.

**MoE's commitment to School safety:** There was an unprecedented drive by MoE and its development partners to improve the country's response to GBV and HP in the schools before the Taliban took over. The involvement of different actors resulted in initiating several strategic level interventions which require consolidation to promote the establishment of one coherent system. The SI-A continued to play a key role in coordinating these activities, ensuring that there is a consolidated system in place to prevent and respond to SGBV and other forms of exploitation and abuse in schools, and building on and leveraging efforts by other partners, such as the World Bank. However, after August 15, these efforts were halted indefinitely.

**Safe spaces for women and girls:** Spotlight has been vital to service delivery in highly vulnerable contexts. For example, the Spotlight Initiative has been critical to our work in creating safe spaces for women and girls in Afghanistan. These safe spaces, initiated as informational platforms during COVID-19, are now unique spaces convening opportunities for girls and women to access psychosocial support, learning, and other services in conditions of insecurity and crisis.

**New Framework of operation:** Both the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2022 and the One UN Transitional Engagement Framework 2022 (TEF) prioritize women's participation and building the capacity of women CSOs as cross-cutting priorities. This resonates well with the principles of the Spotlight Initiatives especially (pillar 6) which focuses on the support and mobilization of grassroots women's organizations. Hence, this would present an opportunity for SI-A to scale up investments in interventions that promote the voice and participation of women in Afghanistan.

**Increased partnership with local women-led and women's rights CSO:** The SI-A has provided an opportunity for RUNOs to expand on local women-led and women's rights CSOs knowledge and partnerships, as a core principle of the SI-A, which is critical for improving local women and girls' agency and their participation.

CSO roundtables were organised in Kandahar and Herat in November 2021, providing women's activists and organisations a safe place to reconvene after the fall of Kabul. It is foreseen that

regular meetings will be organised in UN compounds with women's activists and organisations, with the participation of staff of other UN agencies, in order to provide women with a safe space to share their concerns and to inform UN priorities and programming. This will support the reorganisation and rebuilding of the women's movement as well as gender-responsive programming and humanitarian response.

## **b) Lessons Learned**

**The importance of collaborative planning:** Through an intensive and collaborative planning process, that engaged the European Union, the development of the AWP enabled the RUNOs to collaborate on a range of activities and utilize RUNO's technical expertise and past work to support the implementation of the SI-A, avoid duplication and fill the programming gaps, to avoid a siloed approach, in the spirit of the key principles of SI-A.

Innovative, Promising and Good Practices

### **a) Implementation practices**

**U-Report platform:** The U-Report platform is an innovative mechanism that facilitates two-way communication through short surveys (polls) administered via social media platform SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Viber to get opinions, monitor and course-correct programming. As part of SI-A, a **U-report poll** was launched on 6 May 2021 to understand the level of the population's knowledge about VAWG and to inform and shape the SI-A's program intervention on GBV. The survey received more than 10,000 responses, one of the highest response rates since the U-Report was launched in Afghanistan in 2020. The response rate on the topic of GBV signifies the appetite among the population to know more about GBV, especially on the available reporting mechanisms for redress.

In addition to the poll itself, through a GBV Chatbot (a chatbot is an online Frequently Asked Questions where people can get information about a specific subject 24/7) 6,407 consultations were documented, focusing on the following issues:

- What is GBV? (1,603 consultations)
- What are the different forms of GBV? (701 consultations)
- What are the causes of GBV? (800 consultations)
- What are the consequences of GBV to a survivor? (303 consultations)
- Where to get help in case one suffers GBV (3,000 consultations).

The U-Report poll and the consultations have already provided insights on where to focus mobilization and response services for GBV both for SI-A partners and the GBV Subcluster.

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<sup>15</sup>U-Report Platform



**Community Men's and Boys' network:** Through strategic partnerships with local CSOs partners in three provinces (Paktia, Herat and Kandahar), SI-A managed to establish community men networks for championing Gender equality and protective environment for women and girls. In total, through partners, SI-A established 18 community men's and boys' networks in Paktia (2), Herat (4) and Kandahar (12). These men's networks have a total of 192 active male participants. The networks managed to reach a total of 3,121 people (1,078 men, 959 women, 580 girls and 504 boys) through dialogue sessions in the three provinces. Currently, a community package to guide male network discussion is being finalized-informed by assessment being conducted by using existing men networks, that will inform more content on men's role on addressing GBV and Child marriage. This process will also lead to the development of men care messages that is fit for purpose in Afghanistan context.

### **b) Technical practices**

Building synergies with other programmes to meet the needs of women and girls' survivors of violence: The SI-A is supporting the new Women Protection Centre Trust Fund (WPC TF), a new multi-donor, multi-stakeholder mechanism to promote sustainable, coordinated, strategic and efficient funding as well as to ensure quality service provision in WPCs across Afghanistan. The Trust Fund is a unique mechanism that enables pooling of resources, including smaller and one-off contributions, from diverse donors to ensure comprehensive and quality provision of services to survivors of violence, in a coordinated and sustainable manner. Through its capacity building component, this mechanism will support smaller and less established women's rights organisations to access funding and support the provision of VAWG services. Through SI-A, the EU has supported the first round of the Trust Fund grantees and participated in the first Advisory Committee of the Trust Fund in April 2021. This constitutes a promising practice to build on complementarity and synergies between programmes working on VAWG, that also promotes SI-A coordination with existing and other EVAWG programme. The WPC TF will continue to grow, as fundraising efforts continue and with the ultimate goal to have one WPC in each province of Afghanistan, with quality standard services across the WPCs, in line with international standards. Following the 16 December Advisory Committee meeting, FGCs will also be incorporated in the Trust Fund mechanism, further supporting the provision of comprehensive services for GBV survivors.

## **Communications and Visibility**

### **a) Overview**

The SI-A Communication and Visibility Strategy (CVS) for 2021-2022 was developed in consultation with RUNOs. Below are the global objectives to which the SI-A CVS was aiming to contribute:

1. To raise awareness on issues of SGBV and HP related to child marriage with a focus on cultural norms, attitudes, services, policies, laws and prevalence in Afghanistan
2. To illustrate and promote the impact and results of Spotlight-supported interventions

3. Provide communications for development support to strengthen Spotlight Initiative's programme design and implementation
4. To ensure visibility for the Spotlight Initiative, the donor (EU) and partners.

The RUNOs, under the guidance of the UN Communications Group, have also developed a Speak out Strategy to complement the Communication and Visibility strategy. The overall objective of the Speak out Strategy was to react proactively, amplify various voices and advocate for the rights of VAWG survivors and ending VAWG through various active platforms, including social media. However, with the recent changes of the Taliban takeover, further discussions around Communication and Visibility between the SI-A and EU will be needed to clarify the EU's position in this regard.

During the reporting period, the team promoted the SI-A through social media (tweets), as well as two consultation meetings with the GoIRA in March 2021, during which the Key Speakers' messages were conveyed through tweets.

#### **b) Spotlight Initiative Launch**

Preparations for the launch were finalized by the SI-A Technical Team and Communications Team. Unfortunately, due to a series of competing priorities, the rapidly worsening security situation and fall of the government it was not possible to conduct the launch during the reporting period.

#### **c) Spotlight initiative during 16 days of Activism**

During the 16 days of Activism, RUNOs came together with the UN Communication Group to highlight the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. Key GBV messages highlighting the role of women and girls in the society were promoted through social media platforms due to increased sensitivities around GBV post August 2021. The links below captured some of the social media campaign related to Spotlight Initiative:

##### **Facebook**

<https://www.facebook.com/afghanistanunicef/photos/a.424601994235690/5331559380206569/?type=3>

<https://www.facebook.com/afghanistanunicef/posts/5279602038735637>

<https://www.facebook.com/afghanistanunicef/photos/a.424601994235690/5296940990335075/>

##### **Twitter**

<https://t.co/H58SWET9uv>

<https://t.co/5jYfJlbaB2>



<https://t.co/GRCwwUvXXW>

<https://t.co/GJ1HSawAsK>

### Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CWr3zTbI9L1/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CW5OGxKsFLQ/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CXGnJfDsJRB/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CXSfnKkoXyJ/>

### **d) Stories from the field**

#### **When Your Problem Solution is One Phone Call Away!**

Shagufa, a 16 years old girl from Kandahar, was suffering from severe pain due to her menstruation that lasted for almost one year. This chronic pain dragged her into depression, especially because she felt shy sharing this with anyone. Neither her mother nor her close friends knew about the pain and fear Shagufa went through.

During July 2022, Shagufa went through severe lower abdominal pain, and she shared her story with her friend living in the same neighbourhood. Her friend immediately provided her with the Youth Health Line number (120) supported by UNFPA in Afghanistan.

Shagufa called 120 number on July 14 at 11am, where one of the female counsellors responded to her request. At the beginning Shagufa was hesitant to share her issue. She kept saying I have pain in my abdomen without details. However, the trained counsellor was able to communicate in a youth friendly manner and ensured a safe platform to share more details about the medical condition Shagufa is facing. The YHL counsellor provided detailed information about puberty, menstruation, and available services including referral to the health facilities, followed by MHPSS counselling to help navigate the psychological impact that affected Shagufa's life. After two weeks the HLS center received a call from Shagufa, with messages of gratitude and happiness. She thanks the Counselor and the staff who have been working for the YHL serving Afghanistan adolescents girls and boys nationwide.

#### **“I’VE GOT TALENT”**

“I love drawing, but my parents cannot afford to buy me any paper or paint,” said Samira, 16. “Because I can’t go to school now, I just stay at home. When I heard of this safe space for girls at WASSA (one of the Spotlight Implementing Partners), I was so happy. I can come here and use the brushes, coloured pencils, paints and paper.

I told my parents, and my father gave me permission to go there. He was also happy that I could practice and become a painter one day. My father was ashamed that he was not able to help me with my talent. Now he smiles every time I come home from the Centre in such a good mood. He told other parents to allow their daughters to visit WASSA’s safe space, because we have a nice time and learn”.

**“I come to the Girls’ Safe Space every day”**

These were the words of Faiqah (19), when she first met with WASSA psycho-social counsellor at the Girls Safe Space in Herat. “My father abuses me so much that I feel worthless”, said Faiqah, crying. Her mother died when she was a little girl, Faiqah’s father, a heavy gambler and drug addict, forced her to marry at 13 as a repayment of his gambling debt. A widow at 15, Faiqah had no choice but to return to her abusive father. She said she hated him so much that having to sit at the same table and calling him “father” was driving her to desperate thoughts.

“I really wanted to die until I heard that there was a counsellor at WASSA”, said Faiqah. It took several sessions of spiritual and psycho-social counselling to start healing and repairing the relationship with her father, who also attended counselling to help him deal with his gambling and drug problems.

“I come to the Girls Safe Space every day so that I could have a better mental state and be able to solve my problems. Finally, I was able to overcome my problems and love my father.”

**Next Steps****From the operational perspective, next steps include:**

- Continue consultations with the EU and among the RUNOs at technical and leadership level for smooth implementation of the SI-A.
- Coordinate closely with the UN Program Management Team to enhance alignment with HRP and TEF.
- Recruitment of UNV Gender and Communication Specialist – who has recently left the operation for further studies.

**In terms of programmatic activities, the next steps include:**

- Finalisation of the 2022 Workplan, including partners specific priority activities for 2022.
- Finalisation and roll out of the SBC/C4D campaign to address social behavioural change activities through various channels.
- Roll out of adolescent programming in cooperation with partners through the finalized Adolescent Girls Toolkit.
- Conduct the National GBV Inquiry, SI-A Baseline and the revised KAPB and Services Perception Study to inform the implementation of the SI and ensure evidence-based programming.
- Finalize SoPs and training materials for rolling-out partner capacity for quality response services (Adolescent programming tool kit, Community leaders training package on Safe referrals).

- Capacity building for targeted service providers on quality GBV service provision, in line with international standards.
- Establish and conduct the first meeting of the CS-NRG, including the development of a costed workplan.
- Conduct the stakeholder mapping and beneficiary analysis, which includes women and girls who are facing multiple forms of discrimination.
- Conduct a national inquiry on SGBV/HP and/or gender equality and non- discrimination.
- Continuation of services through Youth Health Line.
- Roll out quality SGBV/HP service provision through different service delivery channels to the targeted populations: Women and Girls Safe spaces, Multipurpose adolescent groups, Child Protection Action Network (CPAN) networks, mobile teams, Women Protection Centers, Family Guidance Centers, Youth Health Corners, and Family Protection Centers). Finalisation of the redesign of the WPC and FGC models and approval by the Trust Fund Advisory Committee.
- Capacity building for targeted service providers on quality GBV service provision, in line with international standards and jointly prepared training plan between RUNOs.
- Community mobilization on GBV prevention and related advocacy at community and national levels.
- Conduct mapping and capacity assessment of CSOs in targeted provinces.
- Establish and conduct the first meeting of the CS-NRG, pending discussion of establishment processes. Revise the National Steering Committee Terms of Reference and reactivate the committee.
- Review of the establishment process of the CS-NRG in consultation with the EU.
- Start implementation of pillar 6 and increased support to women's organisations, in coordination with other proposed UN programs to support Afghan women's CSOs

## **ANNEXES**

Annex B: Risk Matrix

Annex D: Innovative, Promising or Good Practices Reporting Template

Annex E: Annual Work Plan

Annex F: SI-A outputs mapping with the current One UN Framework outputs

Annex G: Stakeholder Mapping



**Spotlight  
Initiative**  
*To eliminate violence  
against women and girls*

