Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

Spotlight Mid-term Assessment Report using ROM review

Type of ROM review	**Projects and Programmes**
Project title	*Spotlight Initiative – Alliances for Change – Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practice in Central Asia*
Project reference	
EU Delegation in charge	*Kazakhstan*

Key information			
Domain (instrument)	Region: Central Asia		
DAC Sector	Human and Social Development: « Gender Equality »		
Zone Benefitting from the Action	Central Asia		
Type of Project/Programme	Geographic		
Geographic Implementation	Multi-country		
Contracting Party	SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE		
EU contribution	4,248,584 $ (for Phase 1)		
Project Implementation Dates (Phase 1)	**Start Date**	1 July 2020	**End Date**	January 2023
ROM expert(s) name(s)	Zulfiya Bakhtibekova (regional expert), Alice Behrendt (regional team leader)		
Field phase	**Start Date**	08 April 2022	**End Date**	1st July 2022

Scoring overview: green (good)   orange (problems)   red (serious deficiencies)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Relevance	🟢	🟠	🟠	🟠	🔴	🟢

	7	8	9
Effectiveness	⚪	⚪	🟠

	10	11	12
Efficiency	🟢	🟠	🟠

	13
Sustainability	🟢

Persons interviewed and surveyed	Interviews/FGD	Online Survey	Short online survey	Key documents[1]	Number
EU Delegation	1	0	0	**Essential documents**	9
Partner country government	0	0	2	**Other documents**	13
UN agencies/ RCO (including former staff)	17	10	1		
Spotlight Team	2	1	0		
CSO reference group	3	1	5		
Implementing partners	9	4	5		
Final Beneficiaries	0	n/a	n/a		
Other	2	1	0		

---

[1] Please consult Annex 1 for details on essential documents and other documents.

A. PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Purpose and objectives of the Mid-term Assessment (MTA):

The purpose of the MTA is to assess the programme at the regional level as soon as it reaches the end of phase I, to take stock of where the Spotlight Initiative is vis-à-vis its initial programme and to assess the new ways of working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The specific objectives are to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the programme, based on the agreed MTA questions, and to formulate relevant recommendations to improve subsequent project implementation.

As per the Terms of Reference, the MTA uses the EU Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) methodology as an approach to ensure that the results are comparable (across countries) and easy to interpret. However, the questions to be answered for the MTA are different from standard ROM methodology questions and were agreed in advance by the EU and the Spotlight Secretariat. The 13 MTA questions are grouped by Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability, which form the main headings of the report.

The ROM methodology uses the following criteria for grading the questions:

Table 1. Grading reference table for criteria and monitoring questions

Qualitative	Grading reference table for criteria and monitoring questions
Good/very good	The situation is considered satisfactory, but there may be room for improvement. Recommendations are useful, but not vital to the project or programme.
Problems identified and small improvements needed	There are issues which need to be addressed, otherwise the global performance of the project or programme may be negatively affected. Necessary improvements do not however require a major revision of the intervention logic and implementation arrangements.
Serious problems identified and major adjustments needed	There are deficiencies which are so serious that, if not addressed, they may lead to failure of the project or programme. Major adjustments and revision of the intervention logic and/or implementation arrangements are necessary.

Context of the Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia

The Central Asia programme covers five Central Asian Countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and Afghanistan. Due to the current crisis in Afghanistan and its position as a non-Central Asian country in the programme, it was decided to remove the country from the scope of the MTA. Two of the countries, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, also implemented country programmes under the Spotlight Initiative. These were evaluated through separate MTA processes and the reports are available.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains a significant human rights violation in Central Asia. It is difficult to analyse the scope of the problem due to unharmonized data collection methodologies for assessing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) across countries. While legislations are in place to reduce SGBV, domestic violence remains decriminalized, legal frameworks require alignment with international norms and standards and there is lack of political will to provide adequate resources for ending VAWG. Another commonality of the six countries is the fear of SGBV survivors to seek assistance

due to poor access and quality of services and limited trust in public institutions. Many girls and women are not aware of their rights under the law and do not report SGBV cases to avoid stigmatisation and discrimination.

Unlike other regional programmes under the Spotlight Initiative, there are no regional intergovernmental or non-state structures, institutions or mechanisms that the Central Asia Regional Programme can draw on. A women's movement is emerging but is still relatively weak compared to other regions. This is a particular contextual challenge of the programme.

Methodological approach used for the MTA

The MTA involved a combination of three methodological approaches: qualitative data collection (Key Informant Interviews [KII] and Focus Group Discussion [FGD]), an online survey and a document review. KIIs and FGDs were conducted with seven Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, one research institute (Romania), one university (Australia), three UN organisations with key informants from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the Resident Coordinator's Offices (RCO) in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme Coordination Team, three members of the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG) and the EU delegation (EUD) in Kazakhstan. A total of 34 respondents participated in the KIIs and FGDs, consisting of 30 women and 4 men. To ensure confidentiality of the key informant groups with few stakeholders, it was decided to use the same label ('UN key informant') for key informants quotes from RUNOs, the RCO, the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme team and the UN hired consultant (current and former staff).

The online survey was sent out in two versions. First, the standardized MTA online survey which was shared with all key stakeholders except grassroot organisations. This version was available in Russian and English. Second, a simplified and shorter online survey for grassroot partners which was made available in Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Russian. A total of 17 stakeholders (11 women and 6 men) participated in the standardized online survey. The number of participants who completed the short version of the online survey was 13. The participants from the UN had the strongest representation in the surveys with 12 participants (5 from the RCO, 1 from the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme Coordination Team and 6 from RUNOs).

Limitations and measures taken:

- This MTA did not cover Afghanistan for the reasons mentioned above. Questions related to the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of including Afghanistan in the Central Asia Regional Programme need to be assessed at a later stage.

- The mobilisation of key informants for the interviews was time consuming and challenging. Some of them had to be sent multiple reminders before responding while others did not reply at all despite supportive emails from the Regional Programme Management Unit (RPMU) and the global Secretariat. As a result, key informants from UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in Uzbekistan, the government of Kazakhstan and the former RC of Kazakhstan could not be interviewed.

- Many of the proposed key informants, in particular IPs as well as UN agency staff from UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan had limited information about the programme which is likely to be associated to the large scope of the programme. All but one of the interviewed IPs were only informed about the actions agreed as part of their contractual agreement with the RUNOs but had no view on the programme as a whole. None of the key informants initially selected for interviews was involved in the design phase so the list of key informants had to be extended. The MTA reached out to and interviewed three UN staff who

were deployed to the Central Asian Region during the time of the design. One of the consultants hired to support the design phase was also interviewed.

- The online survey questions had been designed for two country programmes of the Spotlight Initiative. A small number of items and sub-items were not adequate or relevant for the regional programme   (e.g., questions related the engagement of government entities which are (a) not explicitly targeted by the Central Asia Regional Programme and (b) are very heterogenous across the five countries). To mitigate this limitation, the MTA included only data from relevant items which are applicable to regional programmes.

- In addition, the response rates to the two online surveys were too low for a meaningful quantitative and mixed-data analysis. A relatively high number of partial responses indicated limited interest or difficulties in filling out the surveys which might also be linked to the inadequacy of some of the survey items. All of the survey participants from grassroot organisation used either the Russian or the English translation. The translated versions to Kazakh, Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz were not used and the reasons for that were not fed back to the MTA team. Due to the substantial challenges in mobilizing knowledgeable key informants for interviews and focus group discussions and budget-related limitations, no alternative way to collect mixed data was rolled out.

- The Central Asia Regional Programme measures only three output indicators. One of them had already been achieved at the baseline assessment. For another one, neither baseline nor milestone values had been entered due to the low quality and fragmentation of the available data. A meaningful analysis towards output targets was, thus, not possible. The evaluation question 7 - which focusses on the progress towards output milestones - had to be rated as "unable to assess".

- Expenditure data are reported by the RUNO headquarters through the MPTF portal according to the UNDG budget lines as agreed in the contract with the EU. Expenditure in the regional programme is not collected per outcome as this is not required under the current reporting system. This meant that a financial analysis of the respective outcomes was not feasible and is formulated as a recommendation for future monitoring of the programme.

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

B. RELEVANCE

1.Does the action align to the principles of the Spotlight Initiative as listed in the Spotlight Initiative Fund TORs?

☒ Very Good – Good

☐ Problems

☐ Serious deficiencies

The design process

According to UN key informants, the time allocated for the design was four months. This was considered as too short and too ambitious. The design process was kicked off in 2019 with a workshop organized by the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat to which representatives from UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP were invited and during which a group of people was designated to work on the design process. To support the situational analysis and the write up of the concept note, an international and a national consultant from Kazakhstan were hired. The consultants were given five weeks to produce the programme document.

In addition to the tight timelines, further challenges were highlighted. The decision of the EU to add Afghanistan to the regional programme was considered problematic by UN key informants for several reasons. The five Central Asian countries share historical commonalities and a lingua franca as former States of the Soviet Union. This does not apply to Afghanistan. While the EU includes Afghanistan within their Central Asia Region, the UN Regional Offices for Central Asia do not cover Afghanistan and have no jurisdiction over programmes. Some UN key informants perceived it as a strain and impertinent to integrate Afghanistan in the programme during the design process.

> *"And then the fact that Afghanistan was tacked on… and we have no jurisdiction over Afghanistan […]. I mean, Afghanistan is a whole different region. It's a whole under a whole different director. So it did make planning the project extremely hard." [UN key informant]*

Due to the tight timeframe, consultations with key stakeholders could hardly take place and the design process was steered by UN personnel in Kazakhstan. This involvement of key stakeholders in the design process is explored in more detail under evaluation question 3. Another challenge was to find an agreement among the four UN agencies on how to manage the regional programme in Central Asia. UNICEF decided to withdraw its participation in the negotiation process during the design phase. According to the interviewed key informants, UNICEF considered the management of a regional programme through the RCO and UN country offices in Kazakhstan as not feasible. This was perceived differently by the other three RUNOs, also due to different country office management arrangement in the Central Asian region. For UNFPA, for instance, the Kazakhstan Office also has a sub-regional mandate and oversees the work in two other countries. Key informants reported that it was discussed to give a stronger role to the UN Regional Offices during the design phase. But due to the strong commitment of the Kazakh government on ending VAWG, and the country being a geopolitical centre point for the Central Asian region, a 'political decision' was taken to manage the programme through the RCO in Kazakhstan. According to key informants, this decision was taken under time pressure. They were not knowledgeable how and by whom the decision was taken but highlighted that the associated risks had not sufficiently been analysed. Several key informants highlighted that placing the management accountability with the RCO in Kazakhstan was not a good strategic decision. The RCO in Kazakhstan does not receive funding to support the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative and had to invest substantial staff time in the set up and to support the delivery. Some key informants also perceived that the programme could be managed more effectively from the regional offices despite their location being remote from the Central

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

Asian Region. The regional offices have line management authority over their country offices and their convening power is perceived to be much stronger. In addition, regional office staff were perceived to have stronger regional expertise and more experience in implementing programmes of regional scope.

> *"I have to ask, why is this not run out of the region? So why is this not run by an entity that has a programmatic mandate from a regional level, like UN Women or UNFPA to run this regional programme. Why not ask their regional office? They can pull their country offices in a whole different way. They can link this to the IBC [issue-based coalitions] in a way that is easier for them to do than for [the RCO]." [UN key informant]*

> *"Country office teams are very much overwhelmed with their day-to-day work. And they know the situation in their country very well, but they don't have the bigger picture. They're not experts on what happens, for example, in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, they cannot know that. And the regional office is the only structure that can actually ensure, you know, cooperation and coordination effectively between different UN teams in all these countries. We as a country, we cannot do that." [UN key informant]*

Overall, the process management of the design phase was viewed very critically by the interviewed UN key informants from the Central Asian Region. It was perceived as 'rushed' and 'hectic'. The design team also received instructions to exclude the Pillar 6 from the budget as activities would be funded through the UN Women Trust Fund to end VAWG in New York. This decision was reversed later in the process which was reported to have led to a cumbersome revision of the entire budget. After the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project start was postponed to July 2020, but the budget was only available in November which resulted in low budget expenditure in 2020.

> *"And I remember we were told, you know, everything has to be done by November because we want to approve in December. They gave us very, very ambitious and very unrealistic timelines. And then, there was silence for a long time. And then, they told us your concept will be approved later, which was really, really disappointing. Honestly, I have a lot of reservations about the whole process. As I said, the fact that they included Afghanistan - they pushed us to do that and then, they rushed us through [the process]. And then there was silence." [UN key informant]*

Alignment with the 16 principles of the Spotlight Initiative

The results of the online surveys, the KIIs and FGDs indicate that the Central Asia Regional programme is generally aligned with the Spotlight Initiative principles. The majority of the online survey respondents and key informants estimated that the principles were incorporated in the programme design. The Regional Programme Document (RPD) mainstreams the principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB). Particularly marginalized groups such as women living with disabilities; women living with HIV, LGBTIQ+ people, migrants and displaced women as well as elderly women have been identified and taken into consideration in the design of the interventions. Under Pillar 6, for example, interventions aim at reaching marginalized groups through partnerships and networks with grassroot organisations which advocate on their behalf. The M&E section and the Pillar 5 narrative of the RPD emphasize the need for data disaggregation to improve SGBV data availability for different types of vulnerable groups such as women living with disabilities and those living with HIV, LGBTIQ+ people, migrants, substance users, sex workers. The interventions under Pillar 5 also includes region-wide research on addressing data gaps on intersectionality and SGBV. The programme is overall gender responsive in its design and key informants estimated that the signature interventions have gender transformative potential if implemented as planned.

The design of the programme also attributes a key role to civil society organisations (CSOs) in the implementation of the programme and ensures their participation in the Regional Steering Committee. Strengthening the women's movement is at the centre of the interventions of Pillar 6, but it is also mainstreamed in the actions under the other pillars. The programme design has also incorporated a multi-stakeholder approach for targeting government stakeholders in the countries, the civil society in all its diversity (e.g. youth networks) and academia. The set up and management approach as outlined in the RPD also strives to implement the United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform. This includes a management structure with the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) in Kazakhstan being accountable for the programme, a Programme Coordination Unit under the RC as well as Technical Coherence Specialist from UN Women with a matrix reporting line to the UN Women representative and the RC in Kazakhstan. A more detailed analysis on the modelling of the UNDS reform in the Central Asia regional programme of the Spotlight Initiative are provided under evaluation question 2 and 12. The programme design also built on existing programmes and initiatives. UNFPA, for example, has implemented a regional programme on ending GBV in the five countries (including a regional component) and it was ensured that the Spotlight Initiative harnesses UNFPA's experience and is complementary to the existing programme.

"UNFPA has implemented a UK Government funded project for the five Central Asian countries. And the beauty of this, it is all about preventing and responding to gender-based violence and it works with faith-based organisations, but also trying to strengthen the multisectoral response to gender-based violence, which is also part of Spotlight." [UN key informant]

Key findings:

- While the RPD describes a consultative design process for the Central Asian Regional Programme, key informants perceived that few stakeholders were engaged in a meaningful way. The time allocated for the design process was reported as too short which resulted in rushed decision-making processes and insufficient time to build buy-in and ownership across the three RUNOs in Kazakhstan and their colleagues in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The decisions to include Afghanistan in the programme and to manage the programme through the RCO in Kazakhstan were highlighted as problematic for the effectiveness of the programme delivery.
- The programme design is aligned to the Spotlight Initiative principles as listed in the Spotlight Initiative Fund ToRs.

Recommendations:
(The stakeholder group responsible for implementing the recommendation is indicated in brackets at the end of each recommendation.)

- It is recommended to gather representatives from RUNOs, the RCO, UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as regional offices to discuss a stronger strategic support role of the regional offices during the second phase of programme to use their convening power for the engagement of UNDP, UNFPA, and UN Women in the other Central Asian countries. The discussion should draw on existing meeting structures such as the Regional Directors (RD)/ Resident Coordinator (RC) meeting which was organized in May 2021 (RUNOs, RCO).

2A. Are the Initiative's deliverables aligned with the UN agencies' mandate, priorities and expertise? Are the right UN agencies involved? **2B. Are programmes implemented in line with the UN System reform?**	☐ Very Good – Good ☒ Problems ☐ Serious deficiencies

Are the Initiative's deliverables aligned with the UN agencies' mandate and priorities? Are the right UN agencies involved?

Three Recipient UN Organisations (RUNOs) are signatory to the Spotlight Initiative of the Central Asia Regional Programme: the offices of UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP in Kazakhstan. An overview of the agencies' expertise, experience and strategic priorities is presented in Table 1. The analysis also includes the capacity of UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP in the Central Asian Region in alignment with the RPD which states that the regional programme "will draw on the full capacities of their presence in Central Asia" and which outlines the capacity of the three UN agencies in all five Central Asian countries (and Afghanistan). The results indicated that the regional experiences, priorities and expertise of the three UN agencies are both critical and complementary for implementing the five pillars. UNDP brings strong expertise for Pillar 1, 2, 3, UNFPA's expertise is critical for Pillar 1, 2, 3 and 5 while UN Women's mandate and expertise are relevant to all pillars, in particular to Pillar 6.

A few key informants pointed out that UNICEF's expertise and experience in the education sector, in engaging boys and girls, in research and knowledge management as well as in advocacy would have been of added value to the regional programme. The absence of the education sector was highlighted as a critical gap in the programme for changing attitudes and behaviours.

"I still regret that UNICEF is out of the picture in our case. […] And I think the fact that the education sector itself is missing in our regional programme document is something that I regret. Indeed, because you cannot change the mindset through legal reforms. You cannot change the norms through training." [UN key informant]

Table 1.   Priorities, expertise and experience of the three UN agencies in the region

RUNO	Priorities, expertise and experiences in the region
UNDP	UNDP has offices in all five countries. Its programmes in the region aim at strengthening human rights mechanisms at the national level. In the Central Asian Region, UNDP has built substantial expertise and experience in ● designing legislation and secondary policies to reduce SGBV, including addressing impunity of perpetrators and reforming discriminatory laws to be aligned with international standards and human rights conventions, ● training of judges, prosecutors, police, local women-led councils, and legal aid providers to enable them to improve the design of policies and services on access to justice including for cases of SGBV, ● the creation of SGBV prevention and response mechanisms in rural areas in collaboration with civil society, ● multi-stakeholder engagement on SGBV including the media and young people, working with journalists and media outlets. This includes the production an award-winning film on bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan (in collaboration with UNICEF), ● capacity strengthening of CSOs for collecting and reporting on SDGs, including innovation in data collection.

	The experience and expertise of the agency are valuable to all Pillars, but particularly to Pillar 1, 2, 3 (and 4).
UNFPA	UNFPA has country offices in all five Central Asia countries. It also has a sub-regional office in Almaty in addition to its regional office in Istanbul. Its strategic focus is on (1) Ending Preventable Maternal Deaths, (2) Ending Gender Based Violence and Other Harmful Practices, and (3) Ending Unmet Need for Family Planning. The agency co-chairs the UN Regional Issue-based Coalition on Gender together with UN Women at the regional level. In the Central Asian Region, UNFPA has built substantial experience and expertise in ● multi-sectoral response to GBV Model via policy dialogue, development of tools, and capacity building, ● mobilising non-traditional partners in support of ending SGBV through the Y-Peer Networks and 'engaging men', ● supporting census, domestic violence surveys and GBVIMS (GBV information management system), ● providing technical support to the first (2015-2017) and second (2021-2022 - ongoing) violence against women national prevalence study in Kazakhstan (jointly with UN Women), ● implementing regional programmes on the prevention and response to GBV, including collaboration with faith-based organisations and strengthening the multi-sectoral response to GBV, ● supporting the regional model SOPs on ending VAWG based on the corporate policy documents developed globally. The experience and expertise of the agency are valuable to all Pillars, but particularly to Pillar 2 ,3, 4 and 5.
UN Women	UN Women has country offices in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. It does not have offices in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The agency had a sub-regional presence in Central Asia until 2018 through a multi-country office. In the Central Asian Region, UN Women has built substantial experience and expertise in ● supporting governments in adopting and enacting legal reforms and in integrating anti-violence measures into their national development plans as well as ensuring that adequate resources are in place, ● mobilising key champions for change through its HeForShe Campaign and its launching of the #Don'tBeSilent movement, ● providing technical support to the first (2015-2017) and second (2021-2022 - ongoing) violence against women national prevalence study in Kazakhstan (jointly with UNFPA), ● implementing social norm change intervention for EVAWG at community level in combination with an economic empowerment approach. UN Women has extensive experience in sub-regional programme implementation in the region, has a longstanding partnership and cooperation with the women's movement in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and is well connected with CSOs committed to EVAWG in the region which positions the agency as a key partner for all pillars, but particularly Pillar 6.

There are overlaps in the agencies' experiences, in particular under Pillar 2 and 3. According to key informants, this resulted in extensive discussions and negotiations between the three RUNOs to find an agreement which agency would lead on which component. The agreed division of labour among RUNOs for the delivery of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme is described in Table 2. Unlike for other Spotlight Initiative programmes, there has been no agency assigned to lead the work on specific pillars. This was, however, not reported to have any repercussions as the activities were clearly assigned. The distribution of responsibilities is aligned to the strategic priorities and previous work of the three RUNOs (as described in the table 1). The budget distribution among RUNOs under each pillar also appears to be

in line with their experience and areas of expertise. Considering UNFPA's strong expertise on SGBV data it is questionable, however, why its budget allocation under Pillar 5 is considerably smaller (20 per cent) than for UNDP (29 per cent) and for UN Women (51 per cent). The rationale for not harnessing the agency's experience more strongly was not evident. According to a UN key informant, the allocation of funds was based on the planned and costed activities.

Table 2.   Priorities, expertise and experience of the three UN agencies in the region

Outcome / Pillar	Signature interventions (as listed in the RPD)	Participating Agencies	Percentage of budget
1. Laws and Policies	Review the national bodies of legislation pertaining to SGBV, including harmful practices. Support regional dialogue among the national stakeholders involved in the Legislative Review	UNDP, UN Women	7%[2]
2. Institutions	Building a mechanism for planning, funding, and delivering on SGBV work across the region Innovation and learning to promote systems strengthening and core capacities in responding and preventing SGBV and harmful practices – multi-sectoral Coordination, Costing and Financing Strategies Development of a Central Asia Alliance to end all forms of SGBV and harmful practices	UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA	21%
3. Prevention	Empowering Youth to Challenge Gender Norms and Stereotypes through partnership with youth peer networks (y-peer) Support to the #Don't Be Silent movement in Kazakhstan to build momentum for SGBV survivors to speak out and decrease stigma including the establishment of a private sector partnerships with the key Mobile Phone providers in the region to develop a Mobile Phone application to support the movement Mobilising men, boys and religious leaders as Champions to end SGBV through 'engaging men' and HeForShe	UN Women, UNFPA	18%
5. Data	Development of a central Asia-level quantitative and qualitative analysis of SGBV to fill common data gaps in research on men's perception and perpetration of SGBV; A region-wide analysis of men's perceptions of SGBV Establish a new way of working through Accelerator Labs[3] to find new avenues of work for the collection, analysis and use of SGBV data	UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA	11%
6. Women's Movement	Establishment of a regional network and knowledge hub for women and feminist CSOs, women's rights defenders and activist, closely linked to the new Central Asia Alliance Establishment of a regional grant-making entity, with capacity to act as a leader on regional women's building. Provision of small grants, with integrated capacity development support, to strengthen the capacities of	UN Women	43%

---

[2] According to one UN key informant, the budget proportion under this pillar is small because the country programmes in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also cover work related to laws/policies improvement.

[3] Information on the Accelerator Labs is available here.

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

	underrepresented Women and Feminist CSOs at the grassroot level		

Are programmes implemented in line with the UN System reform?

The accountability for the Central Asian Regional Spotlight Initiative lies with the UN RC in Kazakhstan. The role of the RC is to (co-)chair the steering committee meetings, to ensure high level engagement of key stakeholders (in particular the EUD) and to ensure that all RUNOs coordinate their work and demonstrate commitment to the implementation of the programme. This strategic set-up is aligned with the UNDS reform as all UN agencies in Kazakhstan are under the supervision of the RC in the country. This same does not apply, however, to the offices of UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in the other four countries which are accountable to their own RC and have no jurisdiction over the Kazakhstan UNCT. In the design of the programme, the RCs of the other four countries are meant to take up an advisory role in close collaboration with the RC in Kazakhstan. The RUNOs in Kazakhstan are designated to liaise with their respective UN agency counterparts in the other four countries. In addition, a Regional Programme Management Unit (RPMU) has been set up. This includes the Programme Coordinator, a Communications Officer, a Monitoring and Reporting Officer, a Technical Coherence Specialist, five Project Officers (three at UN Women, one at UNFPA, and one at UNDP) as well as four Programme Assistants. Two of the Programme Assistants provide support to the Project Officers working on Pillar 6 and the two other Programme Assistants focus on Pillar 1, 2, 3 and 5. The RPMU's role is to ensure day-to-day management of the Regional Programme including streamlined communication and coordination of all RUNOs. The Programme Coordinator reports to the RC Kazakhstan. She co-locates at the RCO with the Monitoring and Reporting Officer, the Communication Officer (the position is currently vacant) and an Administrative and Finance Assistant who all report to her. The remaining RPMU members (except for the technical coherence function) are based in the UN common premises in Almaty. They have a dual reporting line to the Programme Coordinator (as First Reporting Officer) and the respective RUNO representative (as Second Reporting Officer).

The responsible entity for technical coherence of the programme is with UN Women. A technical coherence specialist has been hired and reports to the UN Women representative. The placement of the technical coherence role with UN Women was perceived as problematic by some key informants and online survey respondents from the other RUNOs. In their perception, UN Women has insufficient presence and experience in the region compared to the other agencies. The lack of neutrality of the position was also criticised.

"The concept of the technical lead does not make sense as the RUNOs themselves, at least in the case that I know well, have the technical capacity and would be better served by coordination support at the working level instead of technical support that comes from inside one RUNO." [UN online survey respondent]

This view was not corroborated by key informants from UN Women and the RCO. One UN key informant emphasized, for instance, that the agency has substantial experience in overseeing regional and multi-country initiatives. Further information on the technical coherence function is provided under evaluation question 12.

There were mixed perceptions on the strength and quality of collaboration between the RCO and the RUNOs and among the UN agencies. While there was agreement among UN key informants from Kazakhstan that their RC had demonstrated commitment and determination to steer the programme and to enhance collaboration across RUNOs, there was little knowledge about the RC's role and the work of

the RCO in Kazakhstan among interviewees from UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in the other countries. Some key informants also voiced concerns that the programme coordination at the RCO focused too strongly on supporting UN Women in their technical coherence function instead of ensuring the coordination across all RUNOs. Other key informants acknowledged the efforts invested by the RCO but perceived that its role was 'too complex' or 'impossible' due to insufficient support and buy-in from the UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in the other four countries. The collaboration among RUNOs in Kazakhstan was seen positively by a few UN online survey respondents in Kazakhstan. Most key informants and online survey respondents, however, had observed discords between UN agencies which contributed, for instance, to delays in the recruitment process of the Spotlight Initiative coordinator and impeded effective information sharing and collaboration. Despite the existence of the RPMU which meets on a regular basis, insufficient communication and collaboration on interventions were identified as key problems. A different implementation pace and inconsistent support from the coordination unit at the RCO and the technical coherence function were also mentioned as challenges.

"There seems to be a lack of communication between UN agencies. Each UN agency promotes its project activities separately, there is no mutual assistance and support. There is more of a struggle for resources, somewhere overlapping areas and functions in the implementation of the initiative." [online survey respondent]

"Not much coordination and support between the agencies at the level of programme management. The technical coherence specialist, M&E specialist, and coordinator should provide effective support to all RUNOs." [online survey respondent]

One identified root cause for the challenges and difficulties of RUNOs to work together effectively were the limited understanding of most key informants of the management structure of the programme. It was described as 'too complex', 'difficult to understand' or 'very complicated'. More information on the management structure is available under evaluation question 11. One UN key informant highlighted that it was also linked to the lack of experience of UN agencies in Central Asia to implement joint programmes.

Key findings:

- The initiative's deliverables and budget distribution are overall aligned with the RUNO's expertise, experiences and priorities. An exception is the relatively low funding allocation to UNFPA for Pillar 5 which seems to be misaligned to the agency's expertise and experience on SGBV data.
- The Central Asia Regional Programme has operationalised the UNDS reform by putting in place management and coordination structures through the RC in Kazakhstan as accountable entity, the RPMU for the management and the assignment of the technical coherence entity to UN Women. Despite dedication and leadership at the RCO in Kazakhstan, the management structure of the regional programme has not been conducive for facilitating a constructive collaboration between the RCO and RUNOs and among RUNOs and the UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP offices in the four other Central Asia Countries. Most key informants observed tensions, insufficient communication and lack of synergies which have been obstacles to the implementation of the UNDS reform.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that representatives from RUNOs, the RCO and the EUD join for a 'lessons learnt' session to discuss the management structure of the programme through the RCO in Kazakhstan for Phase 2 with the aim to decide whether to maintain or amend it for Phase 2. This should include a discussion on how UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women in the other four countries can be more effectively involved (RUNOs, RCO, EUD).

3. Does the action presently respond to the needs of the target groups / end beneficiaries? Are the necessary consultations taking place with key stakeholders?	☐ Very Good – Good ☒ Problems ☐ Serious deficiencies

Involvement of key stakeholder groups in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the action

As described under evaluation question 1, the timeframe of the design phase was limited to four months. One UN key informant described that this short time window merely allowed to keep partners 'informed' rather than engaging in consultations with them. There were different perceptions about the extent of involvement of different UN stakeholders in the design process. The RUNOs in Kazakhstan were effectively engaged during the design, implementation and monitoring (see also question 4). Key informants from the three RUNOs stated that they had reached out to their UN colleagues in the other four countries, but experienced low response rates and interest from their counterparts. Key informants from UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, on the other hand, reported that they were hardly engaged in the design phase and that they were merely contacted to provide information for the programme, but without being consulted on the design. They also reported that their involvement has only increased slightly since the start of implementation, and that their contributions are limited to input for reports and participation in meetings. They perceived as not being associated with the monitoring of the action. According to the RPMU, the RUNOs in Kazakhstan and the RPMU regularly involve their UN counterparts from the other four countries in the implementation of the action. Their participation in monitoring, however, has been limited to the use of SMART platform, the global online monitoring system of the Spotlight Initiative. The application of participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) is planned for Phase II.

UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in Uzbekistan were reported to be occasionally engaged, but this information could not be validated as none of the key informants from Uzbekistan responded to the interview request from the MTA team.

According to the Regional Programme Document (RPD), an interim CSO reference groups with 16 members including CSOs from all five Central Asian Countries (and Afghanistan) had been set up and was consulted during the design phase. Their input in form of suggestions and recommendations are listed in the RPD.

The design phase also included consultations with the government of Kazakhstan to discuss its interest and commitments in becoming a hub for supporting efforts of ending VAWG in the Central Asian Region. The governments of the other countries were not involved in the design process. Key informants explained that they received instructions that the programme was only to implement activities of regional scope and none at country level. Government approvals were, thus, not required. The provision of small grants to grassroot organisations under Pillar 6 are an exception to this. The lack of government engagement was perceived as a major issue by UNDP; its representatives voiced their concerns about this matter and requested stronger governmental engagement in meetings during the design process. Due to the short timeframe, however, these requests were not accommodated.

According to key informants, the EUD in Kazakhstan was involved during the design phase and has contributed to the implementation and monitoring of the action through its participation in the steering committee as well as in high-level events.

Does the action correspond to the needs of the target groups?

Most of the interviewed IPs had limited knowledge about the programme and could only provide information related to the contract they implemented. It was, thus, difficult for them to analyse the extent to which the programme meets the needs of the different target groups. Some of them were also wrongly informed about the regional programme, for example, on its duration which was believed to last only as long as their contract with the respective RUNO (one year). There was, however, consensus among key informants and online survey respondents from the UN and CSOs that the rationale and need for scaling up efforts for ending VAWG were both strong and justified in the Central Asian region.

Some UN key informants and online survey respondents voiced concerns related to the format and ambition of the programme. They questioned the pertinence of the regional approach in the context of Central Asia and raised the question whether resources should have been rather invested in country programmes in which support to civil society and the women's movement as well as advocacy activities were estimated to be more impactful. Unlike other regions, Central Asia cannot draw on regional governance or coordination mechanisms (such as the African Union in Africa). Some key informants also perceived that its regional women's movements are weaker than in other regions despite the existence of regional initiatives (e.g., the Central Asia Women Leader Caucus) and civil society movements such as the newly formed #NeMolchiAsia and FemAgora.

> *"What are we trying to achieve through a regional programme that can't be achieved through a country programme? I think there was a huge assumption that there was a gap in opportunity - inspiring, transformative change for ending violence against women through regional coalitions, regional networks, sharing of resources, sharing of knowledge […]. I think this mid-term assessment is so much needed because I'm not sure that it will work in every region. The resources could be better spent and invested in countries. […] So I would question the logic of having this programme in the first place." [UN key informant]*

Key informants from the UN were also concerned about the scope and targets of the programme which were perceived as unrealistic or very ambitious. This concern was particularly highlighted when discussing the planned launch of the Central Asia Alliance to end all forms of SGBV, but also in relation to other interventions.

> *"Another challenge in the implementation process is the inconsistency between time constraints to three years and an ambitious regional programme with huge, enormous deliverables and commitments in the absence of conducive partners, a conducive environment and [with] a very limited timeframe." [UN key informant]*

The creation of the Central Asia Alliance for ending SGBV is one of the most prominent signature interventions of the programme. With support from UN Women, an international consultant is hired for elaborating what steps need to be taken to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of the Alliance. RPMU, with support of the Secretariat, is making efforts to ensure a meaningful and sustainable operation of the regional Alliance in 2023 and beyond.

According to interviewed representatives from the RPMU, it has been prepared for the past two years. This included regional CSO consultations from February to June 2022. Arrangements are currently being made to launch it in November (2022). Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as Generation Equality Forum (GEF)

Commitment Makers are considered as potential hosts of the Alliance on a rotational basis. The Government of Kazakhstan has already planned to make a financial contribution to the Alliance as part of its GEF commitments. While key informants from the RPMU expressed determination to establish the Alliance, they also highlighted challenges related the tight deadlines and the diversity of stakeholder viewpoints to take into consideration. There was a strong focus on delivering the intervention despite incertitude on how it would function after being set-up.

> *"At first we found the Alliance as ambitious and difficult to implement. Now that we have figured it out and that we are responsible for its implementation, we can and we should make it work. The time given for the implementation is not sufficient and it is difficult taking the differences in the views, interests of the countries engaged... but we can certainly establish the Alliance within the given time." (key informant, RPMU)*

Apart from the RPMU representatives, key informants were either not informed about the Alliance or they had concerns regarding its implementation. The interviewed IPs had not heard about the Alliance. Among the three interviewed CS-RRG representatives, two were not aware about it and the third had substantial concerns about its approach and feasibility. Support to the intervention from RUNO staff (other than the RPMU) and the UN agencies in the other four countries also seemed scarce. UN key informants and online survey respondents voiced strong reservations about its feasibility, relevance and sustainability. Some respondents estimated that the time has been insufficient to build ownership of the Alliance at the level of national governments and CSOs so they can steer and sustain the initiative. There was no evidence of commitment or interest of the governments in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan for being part of the Alliance. There was also the perception that the intervention had insufficient support from within the three RUNOs to be successfully implemented.

> *"I actually hugely see a value in knowledge sharing, knowledge exchange, study tools, bringing policymakers together across regions. It's actually hugely valuable, but trying to force them into an alliance? The ambition was too great. They needed to take a step back and let the countries themselves say what could actually be achieved. And there was no time for that, there was no time to actually do the consultations with the governments and civil society themselves. So the ambition was much too great. You can't be top down these things. So perhaps if they'd lowered the ambition, if they'd run it from the regional office, maybe there's still time." [UN key informant]*

Feedback mechanism

The programme structure includes two formal feedback mechanisms. A Regional Steering Committee (RSC) and a Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG) (both described under evaluation question 11) with the mandate to provide guidance and advice as representatives of the civil society. The interviewed CS-RRG members had no information on whether the programme had set up feedback mechanisms that they could use. Interestingly, the Regional Steering Committee (RSC) which has been organized twice since the start of the programme was not perceived as a feedback platform by the interviewed CS-RRG members. Their limited awareness on feedback mechanisms might be linked to a certain lack of understanding of their role (see also evaluation question 4).

The interviewed IPs were also not informed about feedback mechanism within the Spotlight Initiative. Some reported that information had been collected from them by a RUNO occasionally, but they had no information for what purpose it was collected and how it was used. Their impression was that it was to monitor the progress of their implementation. One CSO reported to be in regular exchange with the RUNO and to have participated in a survey in which it was invited to share its viewpoints.

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

Key findings:

- Despite a very short time frame for the design period, consultations were organised with representatives of the interim CS-RRG, the RUNOs, the government of Kazakhstan and the EUD. Efforts were also invested in engaging UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the design and implementation of the action, but the interviewed UN key informants from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan perceived that they have not been involved in a meaningful way.
- According to the interviewed IPs, the programme is relevant to their needs, but their knowledge about the Spotlight Initiative was limited. Some UN key informants expressed concerns about the overly ambitious targets of the programme.
- The scope and targets of the programme were described as too ambitious for the timeframe of the programme.
- The perceptions of the planned set up of the Alliance for ending VAWG in Central Asia were heterogenous. The interviewed RPMU representatives conveyed determination to ensure its establishment despite challenging timelines while other UN key informants questioned its pertinence, feasibility and sustainability. Only one of the interviewed civil society stakeholders was informed about the Alliance and shared concerns about the adequacy of its approach. The lack of knowledge about the Alliance among the interviewed civil society representatives as well as the divided opinions among UN stakeholders are concerning.
- Formal feedback mechanisms have been established through the RSC and the CS-RRG, but they were not known among key informants from the civil society and, hence, insufficiently used by the latter.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that RUNOs brief their IPs on (a) the content of the programme, (b) the outputs that the IPs are contributing to and (c) on the formal and informal feedback mechanisms that can be used by CSOs within the Central Asia Regional Programme (RUNOs).
- To gauge the feasibility and sustainability of the planned Alliance, we recommend hiring an independent expert to conduct rapid, confidential internal and external consultations with key stakeholders (governments, civil society representatives and UN) to explore their level of knowledge about the intervention as well as their concerns and willingness to contribute to the activities under the Alliance. These consultations should provide recommendations on whether or not the intervention should be pursued and - if it is to be pursued – what steps need to be taken to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability (RPMU with support of the Secretariat).
- For Phase 2, it is recommended to downscale the ambition of the programme and to prioritize the most promising signature interventions, including, for instance, the strengthening of the women's movements at the grassroot, national and regional level under Pillar 6 (RUNOs, RPMU).

4. Do all key stakeholders still demonstrate effective commitment (ownership) and deliver accordingly?	☐ Very Good – Good
	☒ Problems
	☐ Serious deficiencies

Civil Society

IPs

According to the 2021 annual report, RUNOs have started formal collaborations with 29 CSO as IPs since the start of the programme. They participate in the implementation of intervention under all Pillars except for Pillar 5. The youth component, for instance, is delivered by a youth-led organisation from Central Asia. There was consensus among key informants (RUNOs, IPs) that the CSOs are highly committed to making their contribution to the programme. It was perceived that they have been empowered by the Spotlight Initiative. The programme gave them opportunities to strengthen their human and technical capacity and to build up experience in bidding and implementing a programme at the regional level. Furthermore, it enabled them to increase their networking with other CSOs and to build up their profile with public officials.

> *"The implementation of projects under the Spotlight Regional Initiative Programme has opened up many opportunities to strengthen the organisation's capacity both technically and organisationally, as well as methodologically, and has enabled new staff and experts to be recruited. Most importantly, it united NGOs and raised their profile among government structures. For example, some leaders of NGOs have been awarded medals for their contribution to the development of the rule of law. Karaganda Oblast NGOs received letters of appreciation from the Police Department for their work in combating violence." [online survey respondent]*

Key informants from both RUNOs and CSO also emphasized, however, that the remit of their engagement was limited to their contracts, that their interventions were not interlinked and that they have not yet been able to participate in activities related to design, planning, monitoring and learning of the Spotlight Initiative.

> *"Civil society organisations are actively involved in managing the implementation of the Programme but only with regard to their own activities." [online survey respondent]*

> *"It would be good if CSOs could participate in the planning and in the development phase, not just act as implementers." [online survey respondent]*

> *"As CSOs are not involved in the strategic planning stage of the Programme, some indicators and deadlines are unrealistic during implementation. IPs' activities and programmes are not interlinked, although forces and resources could be pooled." [online survey respondent]*

The CS-RRG

The CS-RRG has the aim to provide advisory, technical, and monitoring support to the Central Asia regional programme (see evaluation question 11 for more detailed information on its set-up and group composition). Out of the 12 members of the CS-RRG, only three were described as active. Two of the three interviewed CS-RRG members were not certain about their role. At the time of the MTA, the group did not yet have a work plan. The RPMU, however, has undertaken efforts since the start of 2022 to revive the group and to engage them more actively. They organized an online survey and an online workshop with its members in April 2022 to learn more about their expectations and their technical capacity. In a next step, it is planned to develop a work plan with them and to engage all members directly in supporting the interventions under the different pillars in alignment with their specific expertise. According to one UN key informant, further support to assist the CS-RRG in becoming fully operational in their role has been in the activities of Phase II. The role and contributions of the CS-RRG to the programme were not clear to

most key informants. Key informants from UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP in Turkmenistan, for instance, had limited understanding about their purpose.

UN Agencies

According to UN key informants, the three RUNOs in Kazakhstan have demonstrated strong commitment to the programme. In the interview, they demonstrated ownership and were well informed about the current progress of interventions. UN Women's work on engaging the governments in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the Spotlight Initiative, the GEF and their dynamic networking with CSOs were highlighted by some key informants.

> *"The leading role of UN Women has been instrumental not only in terms of delivering the four pillars out of six, but also in terms of establishing networking, effective networking in the region. And moreover, UN Women's leading role in the engagement of the government of Kazakhstan and in the government of Uzbekistan's participation in the Generation Equality Forum. And their acting there as the generation equality forum commitment makers is absolutely essential. Without UN Women, this would have never been possible." [UN key informant]*

While the commitment to the regional programme of the three RUNOs in Kazakhstan has been strong, this does not apply to their UN counterparts in the other four Central Asian countries. UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP personnel in Uzbekistan were described as sporadically engaged in technical discussions, but with rather low responsiveness. The UN agencies in the other three countries reported to be uncertain about their role in the programme and had mixed perceptions about their engagement. A few of the interviewed key informants reported to have communicated on the Spotlight Initiative with their RUNO counterparts in Kazakhstan. They considered themselves to be 'somewhat involved'. The majority, however, had limited understanding of the programme, its progress or about how is it coordinated and managed. Generally, the UN agencies in the four other countries perceived that the RUNOs in Kazakhstan have 'more ownership than they should have'. The RUNOs in Kazakhstan, on the other hand, reported that they tried to establish working a relationship and a robust communication platform with their counterparts in the other Central Asian countries, but experienced low responsiveness and interest. The document review indicated two potential root causes for this issue. First, the role and function of UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP in the other four countries are not mentioned in the coordination structure so their expected contributions and their accountability to the programme have not been defined. Second, the staff time allocated to the Spotlight Initiative cannot be cost recovered so there are no incentives to engage with the programme.

EU Delegation

The EUD in Kazakhstan was described as supportive during the design and implementation by UN key informants. Its representatives attended the Regional Steering Committee meetings and participated in higher level meetings and events. The EUDs in the other countries are not part of the coordination structure of the programme, but it was indicated that they were kept informed about its progress.

Governments

Due to its regional scope, the programme did not foresee an official role for the national governments of the five countries. They are, however, targeted by activities from IPs and engaged for regional interventions such as the Alliance. Both, the government of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan attended the GEF in Paris in 2021 and became commitment makers for which UN Women had advocated. Through continuous engagement of the government of Kazakhstan, it decided to allocate 70,000 US$ to the Central Asia Regional Programme for supporting CSOs on ending VAWG.

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

"But given the fact that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan because they attended the Generation Equality Forum in Paris, both countries are now presenting themselves as generation equality forum commitment makers. And Kazakhstan is in fact playing perfectly well the role of the reginal leader. Kazakhstan is the first country in Central Asia, which committed its support - financial support - for the Spotlight Initiative programme." [UN key informant]

The programme has, thus, not defined specific national commitments with the governments, but has built on state initiatives for sustained engagement on ending VAWG. More information on the work with the government of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan is available under evaluation question 13. There was no evidence for the engagement of the governments of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in interventions such as the Alliance.

Key findings:

- The IPs demonstrate commitment to the action and have been able to build their capacity and to extend the remit of their activities because of their participation in the Spotlight Initiative. Their activities are, however, implemented in isolation, not consistently interlinked and most do not have information about the programme beyond their own activities.
- Only few members of the CS-RRG are active and the potential of the group was not fully harnessed at the time of the MTA. In the past four months, however, the RPMU has initiated concrete steps to revive the CS-RRG and to support them in fulfilling their role.
- The RUNOs in Kazakhstan demonstrate ownership and commitment to the Spotlight Initiative. Their UN counterparts in the four other countries, however, expressed concerns about not having a full understanding of the content, structure and of their role in the regional programme. This has been a barrier to effective CSO and government engagement in interventions such as the Alliance in the countries outside Kazakhstan.
- The EUD in Kazakhstan has demonstrated commitment to the programme.
- The governments of the five countries are not foreseen to play an official role in the programme. The Spotlight Initiative has successfully engaged the governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to become commitment makers at the GEF. To support civil society initiatives for ending VAWG, the Kazakh government has allocated 70,000 US $ to the Central Asia Regional Programme (see also question 13). Commitments from the governments of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were not reported.

Recommendations:

- In the design process for Phase 2, conduct a planning workshop with IPs to (a) increase their understanding of the regional programme and their contribution to it and (b) establish interlinkages between their actions and (c) to provide an opportunity for cross-fertilization and learning (RUNOs, RPMU)

- To improve the engagement of UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP in the other four Central Asian countries, it is necessary to clarify their role and their expected contributions to the interventions under the different Pillars. The design phase for Phase 2 should be harnessed to define these and to update the coordination structure accordingly. We also recommend a stronger implication of their regional offices for holding their agencies to account for supporting the delivery of the programme (RPMU with support from ROs).

5. Is the programme Theory of Change well developed? Are the indicators to measure results well defined and relevant to measure the achievement of the objectives in line with the ToC?	☐ Very Good – Good
	☐ Problems
	☒ Serious deficiencies

Is the programme Theory of change well developed?

The Central Asian Regional Programme covers five out of six pillars of the global Theory of Change (ToC). An overarching ToC for the five Pillars to visualize the intervention logic of the regional programme has not been developed. The RPD includes high-level ToCs for each Pillar – except for Pillar 1 and 2 which use the same ToC. The pillar-specific ToCs are visualized through a result chain format which does not adequately reflect how the different results contribute to achieving the higher level outcomes. The ToC narratives in the RPD do also not provide information on how results connect to the selected outputs and interventions. These gaps and lack of detail have also been observed by key informants from RUNOs and the RCO. While a few key informants found the ToC to be a useful framework for addressing the violence against women and girls in an integrated way, most described it as too generic and believed that it could be "better formulated". It was also perceived that it fails to integrate assumptions related to the RUNOs' capacity and their willingness to deliver through an integrated approach.

"But the whole ToC that is envisaged in the Prodoc is not detailed enough. For us, the ToC component is not an insightful example of how we are moving from point A to B; it is very high level. So, this is one of the challenges that we encounter. In our project proposal for Phase 2, we are putting emphasis on applying the ToC." [UN key informant]

"The second problem is that the ToC only focusses on external factors, but it does not take into account internal factors such as [UN] agencies' resistance, for example. Even if there is a political will, even if there was support from the national stakeholders, we would need to have, you know, an unanimous approach and agreement within the team which is not there." [UN key informant]

It was also observed by some key informants and online survey respondents that the ToC and in particular its component on setting up a Regional Alliance for ending SGBV was based on the assumption that there is sufficient political will and interest of national governments. According to them, this assumption does not fully hold. While political will and interest to contribute to ending VAWG is visible in Kazakhstan and to some extent in Uzbekistan, this was not reported for the other three countries.

"There are a lot of assumptions in terms of having interest from the national stakeholders, of having basically political support, political will. But the regional programme hasn't been signed like country programmes. It hasn't been endorsed by the governments. And why would they support our products? Why would they support this Alliance which they never signed up for? So, we have, on the one hand, the programme which is not endorsed by the governments officially, and on the other hand, we have ambitious goals of setting up a regional body, which involves these decision - makers and their political support." [UN key informant]

Some of the UN key informants were not able to comment on the relevance of the ToC due to their lack of implication in the programme. One key informant stated, for example,

"How can I comment on anything related to the programme, including the ToC if all I have done is sharing information when requested. Our team is not part of the implementation or steering of

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

the regional programme. The only reason I have some information about the ToC is because we
have a country programme as well […].” [UN key Informant]

The situation was similar for the interviewed IPs and CS-RRG members. They had no knowledge about the ToC of the Spotlight Initiative.

Are the result indicators well developed to measure the achievements of the objectives?

The indicators were selected from the global Spotlight Initiative Results Framework in order to allow for global aggregation and reporting. The CSOs and RUNOs reported that the indicators are neither adapted to a regional programme nor to the Central Asian context. They were also perceived as 'imposed', difficult to measure with data not being available for most of the indicators. Key informants also assessed them as insufficient for measuring the achievement of results and as inapt for the monitoring of qualitative results.

> *"The M&E framework is developed for the country programmes and is not aligned with the regional*
> *programme. The regional programme needs a separate set of indicators and a separate guidance,*
> *a webinar specifically on M&E." [UN key informant]*

The members of the RPMU made several attempts to share these concerns with the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat but reported that they did not receive support for revising their performance indicators. While country and regional programmes have the flexibility to identify programme specific indicators to report on at national level, this option had not yet been explored by the RPMU at the time of the MTA. To improve the situation, the RUNOs suggested conducting a separate, regional programme-based webinar to revise the M&E framework. This suggestion had not yet been planned or implemented at the time of the MTA. Difficulties and challenges in working with the global SMART platform were also emphasized by key informants from the RPMU.

An analysis of the selected indicators corroborated that the programme will not be able to draw on meaningful performance data. The programme currently uses only three output and nine outcome indicators. In addition, the targets for one output and three outcome indicators had already been met at the time of the baseline assessment or were all set to zero (indicator 1.3, 2.1, 6.3 and 2.1.2). They are, hence, meaningless for tracking the progress of the Spotlight Initiative. For the only output indicator under Pillar 5, no baseline and target values have been set. This implies that

- under Pillar 1 and 3, the programme does not measure any output indicator;
- under Pillar 2, the output indicator was already achieved at the baseline.
- under Pillar 5, there is one indicator for which no data is available (and for which no baseline, milestone and target values have been set).
- under 6, one output indicator is available and is being measured.

Apart from the output indicator under Pillar 6, the programme has neither measured progress towards outputs nor their contributions to the selected outcome indicators.

An analysis of the outcome indicator data showed that comprehensive data (including baseline, milestone, 2021 result and targets) are only available for two of the nine indicators (5.1 and 6.1). For the remaining indicators, it was either unclear how they were being applied at the regional level (e.g., indicator 1.1), the baseline and target values were the same (indicator 1.3, 2.1, 6.3), there were no data available at all (indicator 2.2) or the results data by end 2021 were not available (indicator 2.3)

As the global indicator menu hardly includes indicators that are relevant and measurable for the Central Asia Regional Programme, it would have been necessary to develop additional regional indicators to

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

enable effective monitoring. This was highlighted unanimously by key informants (see the previous paragraph) and confirmed by the document review.

Are data for the chosen indicators accessible and have data been collected for all indicators?

Unlike in the programme documents of other Spotlight Initiative programmes, the Central Asia RPD does not include a presentation of the indicators selected for the programme. It is also not specified which RUNO will be responsible for providing data on which indicator. The programme does not have a monitoring plan or framework. The only data sources available for analysing the accessibility of data for indicators are the SMART database (annex A) and information provided by the Monitoring and Reporting Officer of the RCO. The SMART database yields little information regarding the accessibility of data. For 2021, data are provided for five indicators. For the remaining indicators, the targets and 2021 milestones were equal to the baseline values, so no changes were expected or data were missing. Issues related to data accessibility were noted for one of the indicators in the SMART database. The Monitoring and Reporting Officer pointed out, however, that data were inaccessible for several indicators and that research studies had been planned to fill these gaps.

Key findings:

- Key informants perceived that the ToC is not sufficiently detailed, that it contains gaps in terms of coherence and logic and that it is based on assumptions that do not fully hold.

- The programme has failed to put in place a results-oriented accountability regime. It complied with the Spotlight Initiative's requirement to use indicators from the global indicator menu which resulted in the selection of an insufficient number of output indicators and a set of outcome indicators that are inadequate for the programme's scope and context. No specific indicators for the regional programme were added. At the time of the MTA, the programme did not have a functional monitoring system in place. The availability of baseline, milestone and target values was patchy. Except for one output indicator under Pillar 6, there were no meaningful output data available to measure the programme's progress. At the outcome level, data were only available for two of the nine outcome indicators. Without meaningful performance data available, the programme has not been able to analyse and use its results for programme management, learning and accountability purposes. This is a major shortcoming that requires immediate attention.

Recommendations:

- To improve the coherence and relevance of the ToC, the RPMU in collaboration with RUNOs in other countries should undertake a participatory revision of the components of the ToC and to include critical assumptions for each result level (RPMU).

- To enable the programme to be fully accountable to the involved stakeholders, the RPMU should develop a comprehensive M&E framework including tailored, measurable and adequate indicators, data sources, means of verification, data collection frequency and the responsible entity for the data collection of each indicator. Indicators for which targets had already been achieved at the baseline assessment should be removed or revised. Regular progress on the indicators should be reported back to key stakeholders in the Central Asia region. (RPMU with support from the Global Secretariat).

6A. BEFORE COVID-19: Have all relevant circumstances and risks been taken into account to update the intervention logic? If there are delays, how important are they and what are the consequences? What are the reasons for these delays and to what extent have appropriate corrective measures been implemented? To what extent has the planning been revised accordingly? 6B. AFTER COVID-19: What are the consequences of COVID 19? To what extent have appropriate corrective measures been implemented? To what extent has the planning been revised accordingly?	☒ Very Good – Good ☐ Problems ☐ Serious deficiencies

Delays and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The programme was designed in the second half of 2019, but it was only approved in July 2020 and signed by the Executive Office of the Secretary General (EOSG) in September. The first funding tranche was received by RUNOs in November 2020 and only a few activities could be implemented before the end of the year. The programme fully kicked off in March 2021, hence, eight months after the approval of the document. The Monitoring and Reporting Officer started working in May 2021. The recruitment of the Programme Coordinator was only finalized in December 2021. While the position of the Programme Coordinator was vacant, the technical coherence specialist from UN Women took over the coordination functions with support from the RCO in Kazakhstan. She was recruited in October 2020.

The programme was less impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic than other programmes due to its delayed start date. The ongoing COVID pandemic and associated restrictions, however, still required a revision of the programme budget and work plan. In response to the pandemic, the travel budget was reduced and re-allocated to studies for gaining a better understanding of the situation with focus on the sectoral response to SGBV. Meetings and events took place virtually or in hybrid format in periods where on-site meetings could not be organized.

As other regions in the world, Central Asia also observed an increase in domestic violence due to the imposed contact and movement restrictions. CSOs, crisis centres and shelters did not have sufficient capacity to adequately respond to the increased number of referred SGBV survivors. The Spotlight Initiative harnessed its small grants component to provide financial and technical support to grassroot organisations for strengthening their capacities to provide quality services, to SGBV survivors (including legal, social, and psychological counselling) and for awareness raising on SGBV.

Risk management

The risk management register of the regional programme uses four types of risk categories: contextual, programmatic, institutional and fiduciary risks. The risk register was revised and updated in the annual reports. Since the development of the RPD, the risk matrix has been fully overhauled, risks have been reformulated and new risks have been added. At least one mitigatory measure has been identified for each risk. The risks and challenges raised by key informants and in the annual report were overall aligned with the risk matrix. Key informants also agreed that relevant risks had been assessed and that effective mitigation measures have been formulated. There was one risk, however, which was frequently mentioned by respondents which was not covered in the current risk management report. It is about the lack of interest and commitment of governments for ending VAWG. This risk had been listed in the RPD but has been removed in the current risk management report. Key informants and online survey respondents emphasized, however, its importance. In their view, government commitments to the subject continue to be fragile in the region and require continued risk mitigation measures.

Key findings:

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the work plan and budget of the programme were revised, and relevant adjustment measures were initiated. Interventions to assist SGBV survivors were scaled up through support to grassroot organisations and crisis centres to respond to the increase in domestic violence since the start of the pandemic.

- The Central Asia Regional Programme identified relevant contextual, programmatic, and institutional risks and mitigation measures. The risk matrix has been updated and monitored on an annual basis. The risk of insufficient government interest in ending VAWG has been removed from the risk register during these updates, but key informants estimated that it continues to be high.

Recommendations:

- As part of the next annual report, the risk related to insufficient government buy-in and support for ending VAWG should be reintegrated in the risk management matrix along with adequate risk mitigation measures to be implemented by RUNOs and their counterparts in the other four countries (Programme Coordinator with support from RPMU).

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

C. EFFECTIVENESS

7. To what extent has progress towards output targets been achieved? Is the quality of the outputs satisfactory?	☒ Unable To Asses

Achievement of results against the approved workplan

According to the global performance monitoring data provided to the MTA by the Spotlight Secretariat, the Central Asia Regional Programme monitors and reports against three output indicators and nine outcome indicators (see also evaluation question 5). The MTA analysed the output monitoring data for 2020 and 2021. An analysis of the three output indicators showed that

- One indicator (Internal and external accountability mechanisms within relevant government institutions in place to monitor GEWE and VAW/HP) was already rated as achieved at the baseline assessment. The indicator is, thus, not suitable for tracking progress as it was already met before the Spotlight Initiative started.
- For the second indicator (5.1.2), neither baseline nor milestone values had been entered due to the low quality and fragmentation of the available data.
- For the third indicator, the milestone target was achieved. It is the indicator 6.1.4 (Number of women's rights groups, networks and relevant CSOs with strengthened capacities to network, partner and jointly advocate for progress on ending VAWG at local, national, regional and global levels, within the last year). The target had been set to 50 and the programme had achieved 73.

In sum, the programme had only set a meaningful output target for one indicator in the reporting period for which good progress had been made.

Is the quality of the output satisfactory?

Key informants from RUNOs and CSOs highlighted consistently the progress and quality of actions delivered under Pillar 6 which includes the achieved output described in the previous paragraph. CSO key informants emphasized the timely support provided by the RUNOs in Kazakhstan. They also commented on the good communication with the RUNOs. The programme has engaged with 73 grassroot organisations and 18 had been contracted as grantees to strengthen their work in ending VAWG (including three crisis centres in Kazakhstan). According to the annual report, the grassroot organisations were supported in establishing financial, human resources and safety policies and procedures. They were able to extend their network, mobilize other activities and women's rights defenders, and to increase access to comprehensive services, including legal, social and psychological counselling for survivors of SGBV.

Key findings:

- The limited number of output indicators and associated targets does not allow a meaningful analysis of the progress made. For the period under evaluation, there were only progress data available for one output indicator. The MTA was, hence, unable to rate this question.

Recommendations:

- As recommended under question 5, the RPMU should develop a comprehensive M&E framework including tailored, measurable and adequate indicators, data sources, means of verification, data collection frequency and the responsible entity for the data collection of each indicator. Indicators for which targets had already been achieved at the baseline assessment should be removed or

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

revised. Regular progress on the indicators should be reported back to key stakeholders in the Central Asia region. (RPMU with support from the Global Secretariat).

8. Are the outputs still likely to lead to the expected outcomes? To what extent has progress towards the outcome targets been achieved?	☒ Unable To Assess

Progress against the approved workplan by outcome area

Due to the inadequacy of the programme's output indicators and the scarcity of available data (described under evaluation questions 5 and 7), the MTA did not analyse the progress towards the outcome targets.

Main achievement of the Central Asia Regional Programme

To summarize the main achievements of the Central Asia Regional Programme, we analysed the 2020 and 2021 annual reports as well as data from KIIs. According to the 2021 annual report, the programme is "on track". The implementation pace was expected to accelerate towards the end of Phase 1 in 2022 as significant preparatory work had been completed in 2021 (procurement arrangements, recruitment of consultancy companies). This information could not be fully corroborated through other data sources. Most of the key informants and online survey respondents from RUNOs, CS-RRG and CSOs had limited knowledge about the progress of the programme's workplan. Those more closely involved (RUNOs in Kazakhstan, RCO and technical coherence) had contradicting perceptions about progress and achievements of the programme. A few perceived that important progress had been made and that promising results were being achieved. They highlighted in particular the process of establishing a partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kazakhstan as an important achievement that resulted in a financial contribution of the latter (50,000 US$ for CSOs dedicated to ending VAWG in 2021 and 20,000 US$ in 2022).

> *"So, the major accomplishments of the Spotlight regional programme in 2021 is the fact that two out of five Central Asian countries supported, number one, gender transformation in the region, and number two, directly in the case of Kazakhstan and indirectly in case of Uzbekistan, any efforts, any collaborative support for gender transformation in the region, including the financial support." [UN key informant]*

The progress in strengthening CSOs in the region under Pillar 6 was also reported as an achievement, in particular the successful collaboration with grassroot organisations that had not partnered previously with the UN and which advocated and provided services for marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities. Other respondents, on the other hand, reported that the programme's progress was poor and that several of the programme's signature interventions (outlined in the RPD) were lagging behind or had been scaled down.

A comparison of the signature interventions in the RPD with the progress described in the 2021 annual report confirmed that indeed several of the key interventions under Pillars 2, 3 and 5 were still in preparation modus by end of 2021. The Programme Coordinator reported that one research study had to be scaled down from a regional to a country study as the available budget did not allow to conduct a study of regional scope. It was not possible to verify if the scope of any other intervention had been downscaled. Due to contradictory information from key informants, the MTA could also not validate to what extent activities had progressed in the first two quarters of 2022.

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

Table 3. Key achievements and obstacles per Pillar (based on annual reports)		
Pillars	**Key achievements in Phase I**	**Issues arising / obstacles to address in Phase II**
Outcome 1	- Unified methodology to conduct the reviews of the national legal frameworks and law enforcement practices on SGBV and harmful practices and their alignment with international norms and standards developed and reviewed. - Reviews of the national legal frameworks and law enforcement practices on SGBV and harmful practices in the five countries in Central Asia were conducted and launched, based on the desk review, and official requests to respective state institutions in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. - Consultations with and CSOs in the region on law enforcement practices were held.	- According to RUNOs, working in several countries at the state level is challenging due to different socio-political situations and priority agendas; - RUNOs from different countries perceived the engagement of the governments as essential in implementing activities under the programme. Buy-in from the government in Turkmenistan has, however, not yet been established. Government engagement to ending VAWG was stronger in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan due to the existence of country programmes, but their commitment did not include regional level activities. - Due to limited expertise on gender equality and women's empowerment in the region, the simultaneous implementation of two country programmes and the Regional Programme has overstretched the available capacity of local research institutions and experts. This challenge applies to all Pillars. - It is recommended to develop an engagement strategy for the government of Turkmenistan to ensure its support for the actions implemented under the regional Spotlight Initiative
Outcome 2	- A series of meetings on the police response to SGBV and an exchange among the representatives of law enforcement agencies from the Central Asian countries; - A draft Concept Note on institutionalization of the Central Asia Alliance on ending all forms of VAWG and harmful practices was developed in close consultations with Spotlight Afghanistan programme, Spotlight Kyrgyzstan programme, Spotlight Tajikistan programme, GTG Uzbekistan UNCT in Turkmenistan, UNFPA and UN Women regional EVAWG focal points; - The draft Central Asian regional model SOPs for health, psychosocial support and police sectors were developed, based on the existing ones in the countries and international best practices;	- Duplications of activities among RUNOs have been reported under Pillar 2. - It is recommended to conduct joint annual and quarterly planning sessions to avoid duplications.

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

Outcome 3	- A regional forum of youth-led and youth-serving organisations was convened in Almaty with 38 representatives of organisations from the Central Asian countries. The regional forum strengthened the capacity of youth-led organisations through sharing of best practices on GBV prevention and on mobilizing youth in the region to change social norms. The event resulted in the establishment of an informal regional alliance of young people to combat VAWG in the Central Asian region. A draft situation analysis report, along with a strategy and communication plan for youth organisations of Central Asia, was also developed. - A partnership with the newly formed regional #NeMolchiAsia (Don'tBeSilentAsia) Coalition on ending SGBV was established; - The programme supported the first edition of the series of the publications "Calling in" as part of a feminist initiative designed by the regional CSO FemAgora. They highlight the self-organized work of crises centres and services in Central Asia in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. 14 experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan shared their approaches to domestic violence response and the experiences of the crisis centres, as well as recommendations on support of the crisis centres work and other services; - A virtual regional workshop was organized to discuss preliminary results of a desk review of existing practices on "MenEngage" in prevention of GBV in Central Asia;	- While social norms and behaviour change was considered an important activity for ending SGBV by UNFPA and UN Women key informants, they were not able to report any substantial progress under Pillar 3. - Some CSOs confirmed being engaged in social mobilization activities. The CSOs, however, have worked independently and have no knowledge of other CSOs working on similar activities within the programme;
Outcome 5	- A mapping of existing in-country data on SGBV by different sources was conducted, highlighting both positive and weak aspects of SGBV data collection systems in the Central Asian countries - An agreement was signed with the University of Melbourne for an adaptation of the kNOwVAWdata	

	course to the Central Asian context and implementation has started. At the time of the MTA, the adapted course was translated into Russian and the first training session was being planned.	
Outcome 6	- Assessment of the institutional/governmental barriers was carried out to identify the best mechanisms for supporting the effective participation of civil society in the regional women's movement building; - Ideathon with local CSOs and a number of representatives from international organisations supporting civil society in the region was organized to identify mechanisms aimed at enhancing the role of CSOs; - An overview of Civil Society Collaboration on Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Central Asia and Afghanistan" was produced; - A mapping of CSO regional networks on SGBV, involving a total of 27 global and regional CSO networks, and two case studies of advanced international networks were carried out; - A four-day virtual regional workshop with 52 representatives of 27 CSOs, UN Agencies and implementing organisations was conducted; - Spotlight Regional Central Asia Programme awarded grants to 15 CSOs and three Crisis Centres in Kazakhstan	- The CSOs and grassroot organisations do not have any knowledge about the structure, feedback mechanism, theory of change and other details of the Spotlight Initiative Programme. According to the IPs they have been contracted to implement activities specified in their proposal and 'that's it'. The CSOs did not see themselves as part of the programme, let alone of the Spotlight Initiative; - The CSOs had limited knowledge about other IPs engaged in the programme; - We recommend strengthening the knowledge and engagement of the IPs in the programme so they contribute efficiently and share knowledge and experience with each other; - It is also recommended to connect the different IPs in the five countries, which can contribute to sustainability of the action.

Key findings:

- An analysis of progress towards outcomes was not conducted due to the limitations of the M&E framework (see also question 5).

- The work plan implementation has made important progress under Pillar 1 and Pillar 6. There was less progress under the other Pillars and some of the signature interventions were still in preparation modus by end of 2021. As the 2022 annual report will only be available in early 2023, the progress to date cannot be estimated by the MTA.

Recommendations:

- To better understand the current progress on delivering the action, it is recommended that the RPMU reviews the performance of the signature interventions to gauge to what extent progress has been made and for which interventions adjustments are needed. If the progress is insufficient, a revision of interventions and planned outcomes is suggested (RPMU).

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

| 9A. Do the government, implementing partners or RUNOs have sufficient capacity (financial, human resources, institutional) to ensure that implementation is going according to plan? 9B. Are there any obstacles/bottlenecks/outstanding issues on the partners' or government side that are limiting the successful implementation and results achievement of the Initiative?	☐ Very Good – Good
	☒ Problems
	☐ Serious deficiencies

Budget execution

The budget analysis is based on the financial data from quarter 1 of the current year (2022). The data were extracted from the MPTF Gateway in Quarter 2 of 2022. As per the quarter 1 data for 2022, the budget delivery (expenditure and commitments) was at 48 per cent for all RUNOs combined (see Figure 1 below). Expenditures/ commitments were higher for UNDP (60 per cent) which was explained by the fact that the agency's budget also includes the RCO staff salary and operations costs. UN Women and UNFPA had lower expenditure/commitment rates at 45 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. According to the meeting minutes of the Regional Steering Committee of June 13th 2022, the budget expenditure had progressed and was at 65 per cent by the end of Quarter 2.

Figure 1. Budget vs expenditure (by end of Q1 2022)

Central Asia Regional budget vs expenditure (up to 31 March 2022)
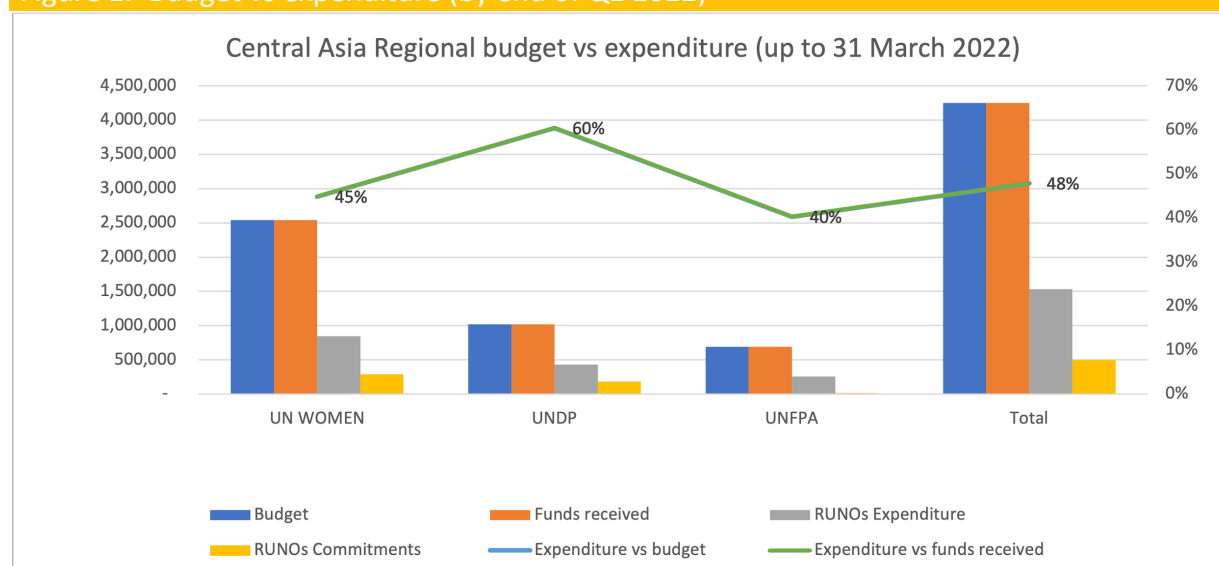
Absorption capacity and other obstacles limiting successful implementation of programme

Civil society and implementing partners

According to RUNO key informants, their IPs display strong motivation, commitment and values to contribute to ending VAWG, but had different levels of absorption capacity across the five countries. The technical and institutional capacity of IPs was described as relatively strong in countries where CSO activities and initiatives are generally supported and are perceived as relevant (Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). In Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, where the space of civil society actors is more restricted, CSOs were perceived to have lower institutional and technical capacity. They require capacity strengthening in proposal development, budget and report writing, project cycle management as well as gender responsive programming. This applies in particular to grassroot organisations.

RUNOs

Key informants among CSOs were satisfied with the support provided to them by the RUNOs in Kazakhstan. They described it mainly as sufficient, helpful and timely. A few IPs reported delays in receiving feedback for certain components of their work which they associated with the high workload of RUNO personnel.

Key informants from RUNOs, on the other hand, described substantial issues related to their absorption capacity. Overall, personnel funded by the Spotlight Initiative perceived their workload as too high. Online survey respondents and key informants identified three causes for this. First, the ceiling of 18 per cent management costs did not allow to budget for sufficient personnel. Consequently, the programme has lacked person power in support functions (administration, finance, procurement etc.). Second, some of the recruited personnel were described as inexperienced in gender and ending VAWG. Third, there has been a lot of personnel turn-over among the administrative and finance assistants supporting the Spotlight Initiative team due to their contract modality as consultants and a relatively low pay scale. According to UN key informants, it is planned to address these issues in the design of Phase 2.

"There is a need for additional human resources to perform operations functions such as administration, recruitment, procurement and finance, etc." *[online survey respondent]*

"The Spotlight Regional Programme pursues ambitious goals in Central Asia, given its complexity per se and multiplicity of actors, and yet sufficiency of the required human resources, particularly at the level of programme assistants, remains a challenge. While designing a proposal for Phase II, we will reconsider the staffing part to ensure that each RUNO provides a respective programme assistant to help Programme Officers effectively deliver the programme commitments." *[online survey respondent]*

Additional obstacles

Key informants described not only the absorption capacity of CSOs as in need of improvement, but also highlighted the lack of regional networks and their difficult operating environment. UN key informants reported that the engagement of CSOs has been 'extremely challenging' due to repressed civic space and the political situation in the countries. This applies in particular to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Due to improvements in civic space in Kyrgyzstan, CSOs were observed to be more advanced and better connected. These observations are corroborated by the document review. According to the CIVICUS monitor, the civic space is closed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, repressed in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and obstructed in Kyrgyzstan[4]. The absence of CSOs with regional scope was emphasized as a particular challenge for the regional programme.

"Another challenge, by the way, in Central Asia is that unlike other regions, you don't really have a very strong network of civil society. I mean, these are former Soviet Union countries where, you know, the civil society is on a nascent. Maybe in Kyrgyzstan, they're a bit more advanced. But in general, they are either non-existent or very nascent or weak or not of regional scope. So, there is an absence also of regional partners. This has really been a constraining factor for this programme. So, the implementation has been challenging. On the one hand, you have this need to work with grassroot organisations which don't really have the capacity, at the same time, there is the non-existence of regional CSOs to partner with." *[UN key informant]*

---

[4] Source: Civicus Monitor: Tracking Civic Space

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

Key findings:

- The Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia had an overall expenditure/commitment rate of 48 per cent by end of March 2022 and has reached 65 per cent in June 2022. As the UNDP budget includes the RCO staff salary and operations costs, it had a higher expenditure rate than the two other RUNOs.
- The absorptive capacity of IPs was reported to be relatively strong in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but in need of improvement in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. This is linked to the difficult operating environment for CSOs in these countries due to the repression of civic space.
- Key informants from the UN reported a high workload and agreed that the budget allocated to RUNO staffing was insufficient in Phase 1. This resulted in insufficient operations support personnel, and unattractive contract modalities for RUNO project officers.

Recommendations:

- As technical expertise for RUNOs can also be budgeted under the programme outcomes in the Phase 2 budget, we suggest implementing a workforce planning exercise in its design process. This will allow to identify critical gaps in RUNO teams and to plan for sufficient RUNO personnel for the next phase of the Spotlight Initiative (RPMU, RC).
- To address capacity gaps of IPs, it is suggested to integrate tailored capacity strengthening interventions in the programme's sustainability plan. The interventions – which could range from training sessions to institutional support (e.g., internal policies and SoP or strategy development) – should be identified in a participatory manner with the CSOs to enable them to reach their objectives (RUNOs).

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

D. EFFICIENCY

10. Are the chosen implementation mechanisms (incl. choice of implementation modalities, entities and contractual arrangements) adequate for achieving the expected results?

☒ Very Good – Good

☐ Problems

☐ Serious deficiencies

Chosen implementation mechanism

The programme budget (not including management costs) is split into four delivery mechanisms: 51 per cent of the budget are transferred to CSOs, 17 per cent are payments to individual consultants, 9 per cent are payments to consultancy companies and 23 per cent are classified as "other". The requirement of the Spotlight Initiative to channel 50 to 70 percent of CSO funding to national and grassroot organisations has, thus, been met. The proportion of other costs and payments for consultancy services is high compared to other programmes.

The RUNOs operate according to their own internal procedures. For working with CSOs, the UN National Implementation Modality (NIM) is applied. New funds are disbursed to implementing partners once activities have been completed and narrative reports have been sent to the RUNOs. These reports feed into the programme reports. The grassroot organisations under Pillar 6 are funded through a small grants scheme.

CSOs partners have been contracted as either vendors, IPs or grantees. At the time of the evaluation, 29 CSOs were contracted; 1 as a vendor, 3 as IPs and 25 as grantees.

All but three of the CSOs were classified in the category "women-led/ women's rights organisation or feminist CSO". The majority of the CSOs (25) were categorised as grassroot organisations, three as National CSOs and one as an international organisation. Of the amount awarded to CSOs, 57 per cent was disbursed to local and grassroot organisations, 19 per cent to the international organisation and the remaining proportion to national CSOs. The high proportion of funding channelled to grassroot organisations is aligned with the vision of the Spotlight Initiative and can be considered a strength of the programme.

Staffing levels for Spotlight and Management Cost

The ceiling for programme management cost is set at 18 per cent of the overall budget for the Spotlight Initiative at the global level. According to the revised budget approved by the global operational steering committee, this ceiling has been complied with in the Central Asia Regional programme. In the revised budget of the 2021 annual report, there are 14 persons who have been hired under contractual services to support the Spotlight Initiative on a full-time basis. This includes the RPMU members at the RCO in Kazakhstan. In addition, seven RUNO staff are partially funded by the Spotlight Initiative. All but one are technical advisors with gender expertise. UNDP and UN Women recover costs for both programmatic and operational support under the programme, which is a good practice. According to the programme budget, UNFPA has only one project officer to support the programme. Key informants from the RPMU reported, however, that 20% of the staff cost of the agency's International Programme Coordinator is funded from UNFPA regular resources to also support the programme's implementation.

As the agency is accountable for spending 19 per cent of the programme budget, this is questionable and might explain the lower expenditure rate of the agency compared to the other two RUNOs.

All RUNO staff is based in Kazakhstan. Due to the programme's requirement to only fund regional activities, none of the UN agency personnel in the other four Central Asian countries is funded by the regional programme which might be a contributing factor to their relatively low level of engagement. As the programme requires regular government and civil society engagement for its interventions such as the Alliance in the other four countries, the lack of staff presence outside Kazakhstan has constrained the delivery of the programme (see also Question 11).

Key findings:

- The regional programme applies adequate implementation mechanisms with its partners (NIM for CSOs).

- Most of the IPs are grassroot organisations that are first time partners of the UN. This is a strength of the programme.

- The management costs for the Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia comply with the threshold of 18 per cent. All personnel who are dedicated on a full-time basis to the Spotlight initiative work under contractual services and are not hired as staff. This might impact negatively on personnel retention under the Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia.

- The RUNO staff and RPMU members are centralized in Kazakhstan. Due to internal requirements, the programme also does not fund staff time of UN country agencies in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This partially explains their limited commitment to the initiative.

Recommendations:

- As recommended under the previous evaluation question, we suggest implementing a workforce planning exercise during the design process of Phase 2. This will allow to identify critical gaps in RUNO teams and to plan for sufficient RUNO personnel for the next phase of the Spotlight Initiative.

- It is recommended to adopt a decentralized set up of the RPMU to ensure that it has representatives in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan to effectively support the programme which can be hosted within their respective UN agency. This should be part of the strategic workforce planning suggested above (RCO, RUNOs).

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

11A. How effectively is the Initiative managed? 11B. How effectively is the Programme managed? Are the governance and management mechanisms for the Initiative at regional level adequate and functioning as planned? Do partner government and other partners (please consider CSO and EU Delegation) in the region effectively participate in these mechanisms?	☐ Very Good – Good
	☒ Problems
	☐ Serious deficiencies

Management of the Initiative - support from the Global Secretariat

The RUNOs in Kazakhstan worked closely with the Global Secretariat during the design and implementation phase. Since its set-up, the RPMU has also received technical support from the Secretariat. The working relationship was described as excellent. The assistance and guidance provided by the Global Secretariat was described as responsive and helpful. The COSI knowledge management platform was particularly appreciated. The support provided during the design phase was described as instrumental, in particular in terms of providing guidance on processes and procedures. The members of the RPMU perceived, however, that the Regional Programme received insufficient support for developing an adequate monitoring framework which has impacted negatively on the accountability of the programme (see also evaluation question 5).

Governance mechanism

Regional Steering Committee (RSC)

The RSC is chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator in Kazakhstan. There is no co-chair. The members of the Committee are a representative of the EU Delegation in Kazakhstan, the UN Women Representative in Kazakhstan, UNFPA Representative in Kazakhstan and Country Director for Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, the UNDP Resident Representative in Kazakhstan and two civil society representatives nominated by and selected from the CS-RRG. The chairs of the Gender Thematic Groups (GTGs), government representatives as well as members from the IBC on Gender can participate as observers. When relevant, the RCs from the other countries are invited. The first meeting took place in July 2021 to discuss the progress of the programme in 2020, to update the current challenges, to review the financial situation and implementation rate and to discuss the annual work plan for the first phase. There were 27 participants (RSC members and observers) from the UN, six from the EUD, two from the CS-RRG and four from the EUD represented in the meeting. The second meeting was held in June 2022 and looked at the accomplishments of the programme in 2021, the approval of the 2021 annual report, and the 2022 annual work plan, the budget and implementation rate and the key interventions for Phase 2. It was attended by over 40 participants which included government representatives (from the embassies) of the five countries, 29 UN staff, five EUD representatives, but only one from the CS-RRG. The minutes of the meeting do not mention any intervention by the latter.

CS-RRG

An interim CS-RRG was established during the design phase in 2019. It was replaced by permanent CS-RRG after the project approval. The CS-RRG is composed of 12 members who were chosen by a selection committee. The group includes representatives from the five Central Asian Countries as well as three representatives from Afghanistan. One of the key considerations in the selection of its members was to ensure representation of all countries covered by the programme.

At the time of the MTA, only three of the CS-RRG members were active. Two of them have been engaged on a contract to support certain interventions of the programme. Out of the three interviewed CS-RRG members, only one had a clear understanding of the role and actions to be implemented by the group.

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

The other two CS-RRG members responded rather from their perspectives as IPs and had very limited information to share on the work of the CS-RRG. As described under evaluation question 4, the CS-RRG does not yet have a work plan and is not yet operational, but the RPMU has initiated actions to make the CS-RRG operational. It is planned to have a funded work plan available before the end of the year 2022. In the meeting minutes of the 2022 RSC meeting, it is also documented, however, that the "regional programme will revise the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG) composition" which implies that new or additional members will be selected. Considering the remaining timeframe of the programme, it is uncertain whether the CS-RRG will have sufficient time to become operational and actively influence and support the programme's work.

Management of the Programme

To explain and clarify the coordination structure, the document 'Coordination Structure and Key Stakeholders in Spotlight Initiative Central Asia Programme' was developed. It was updated in June 2022. It outlines in detail the responsibilities of the RSC, the EU, the RC in Kazakhstan, the RUNOs based in Kazakhstan, the RPMU, the technical coherence function, the RCs in the other four Central Asian countries, the CS-RRG as well as of IPs. The RPMU is responsible for programme management. Its composition is described under evaluation question 2. It is noteworthy that the functions of UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP in the other four Central Asian countries are not included in the document outlining the coordination structure. This seems to be a critical gap.

Key informants based in Kazakhstan provided positive feedback on the work of the RPMU and the RC. The set-up works well at the country level but was reported to have limitations at the regional level. As there are no accountability mechanisms beyond the RUNOs and RCO based in Kazakhstan, the effectiveness of the management structure stops at this point. Neither the RCO in Kazakhstan nor the RPMU have a jurisdiction over their agency's counterpart in the other four countries. To engage peers from UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP, RPMU members reported that they are obliged to use their personal connections to engage their counterparts. This has worked in some instances, but not in others and was described as inefficient and tedious.

According to key informants, issues related to the management structure impacted negatively on the programme in several ways. It is perceived as 'complicated', 'cumbersome' and 'difficult to understand' which had a disengaging effect on some UN staff. UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP staff in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan tend to deprioritize the Spotlight Initiative due to competing demands. They have shown low interest and responsiveness to requests from the RPMU. This has contributed to slowing down the implementation and to inconsistent engagement of CSOs and governments outside Kazakhstan. This has hampered regional interventions which require their ownership and support (such as the Alliance).

"It could be the problem that the resident coordinator in Kazakhstan had no jurisdiction over the other countries. […] This is meant to be a regional programme, but he didn't have the jurisdiction to decide over Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. So, everyone's working on potentially the goodwill of others, but no one would see it as a priority. So, it became very Kazakhstan centric." [UN key informant]

"The programme coordination structure is too cumbersome with unclear accountability structures." [online survey respondent]

To ensure streamlined communication, SOPs for communication have also been developed. They stipulate that all communication has to go through the RCO in Kazakhstan. According to UN key informants, this

procedure is not realistic, lacks agility and has not been consistently implemented, in particular for interventions outside Kazakhstan.

Key findings:

- There is a good working relationship between the RPMU and the Global Secretariat. Its support was described as timely and useful except for the set-up of the monitoring framework.

- The RSC has met twice and has by and large fulfilled its role. The member composition in the two meetings were not aligned with the guidance which foresees that at least 20 per cent of the members should be from civil society. The number of UN participants (over 20 observers in both meetings) was disproportionate compared to other stakeholders.

- The CS-RRG did not yet have a work plan at the time of the MTA and only three members were active. In recent months, there have been efforts by RPMU to revive the group. It has also been planned to revise the composition its members which will again require an induction period for its new members.

- The programme management structure is effective for delivering interventions in Kazakhstan but has shown strong limitations when it comes to the delivery of regional interventions. The function of UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women offices in the other four countries have not been defined. The quality of collaboration between the RPMU and UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP staff in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan depends on personal relationships and the goodwill of the involved UN teams. The lack of an effective regional management structure has negatively impacted on the engagement of governments and civil society for regional interventions outside Kazakhstan.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended to ensure that the participants of the RSC are aligned to the member structure as defined in the Coordination Structure of the Central Asia **Regional Programme**. A disproportioned number of UN observers should be avoided (RC).

- To support the CS-RRG to fulfil its functions, it is recommended (a) to support its members to develop a work plan immediately and to provide a budget for the implementation of the work plan available; (b) to associate one or two representatives of the CS-RRG to technical meetings of the RPMU so they can effectively provide guidance for the planning and interventions of action.

- To improve the effectiveness of the management structure at the regional level, it is suggested to define the function and responsibilities of the UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP offices in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and to develop an engagement plan including participatory planning sessions, quarterly meetings and after-action reviews after regional events. As recommended under the previous evaluation question, this issue should also be tackled through the adoption of a decentralized set-up of the RPMU to ensure that it has representatives based in the four other Central Asian countries. This should be part of the strategic workforce planning suggested under evaluation question 10 (RCO, RUNOs, PRMU).

12. Are the chosen implementation and coordination mechanisms (a "new way of working", in line with UN Reform) contributing to efficiency?	☐ Very Good – Good
	☒ Problems
	☐ Serious deficiencies

Set-up and working of UN Team (RCO and RUNOs)

The set-up and working of the UN team (RCO, RPMU etc.) is described under the previous evaluation question. There were mixed perceptions about the effectiveness of the programme coordination by the RCO. Key informants (RUNOs, RCO) agreed that it was a challenging task to coordinate a regional UN programme without the necessary jurisdiction (see also evaluation question 11). The delayed recruitment of the Programme Coordinator was an additional barrier to efficient coordination throughout 2021. The technical coherence specialist filled the coordination gap for almost 14-month (from October 2020 to December 2021). Key informants reported that the cohesion and coordination of the RPMU had improved since her arrival in December 2021.

The new approach of working together was perceived positively by some key informants from the RPMU. An achievement highlighted in the 2021 annual report, for instance, was the development of a joint methodology for conducting reviews of national legislations and law-enforcement practices on SGBV and harmful practices and their alignment with international norms and standards to guide national SGBV legislation under Pillar 1.

The coordination and sharing of responsibilities, however, were described as complicated and work intensive by most, specifically during the design phase and at the beginning of implementation. Disagreements on how the budget and interventions under the five Pillars have prevailed and some key informants expressed hope that the experience from the first phase would be used to re-distribute the responsibilities under the Pillars among the three agencies. According to UN key informants, these disagreements are rooted in competition for funding among the three RUNOs. Some key informants also perceived that most RUNO teams have not yet understood the approach of working together. They were therefore reluctant to accepting it and to applying a joint approach altogether. The lack of incentives and willingness to work together as well as lack of interest in the programme were perceived by some UN key informants as the main causes for the delay in the programme in 2021.

There have also been challenges in understanding and making effective use of the technical coherence function. According to RUNOs, this function has not yet been helpful for ensure coherence across pillars. Key informants from the PRMU and RUNOs voiced several concerns related to the role: (1) it was not perceived as neutral, but to act in favour of UN Women; (2) key informants from UNDP and UNFPA perceived that they had no benefit from the position as the technical coherence function was not responsive to their suggestions and needs. Some went as far as stating that there was no need for the function as sufficient technical capacity was available at the RUNOs; (3) at the same time, it was reported that UNFPA and UNDP have shown limited acceptance for receiving guidance from UN Women; (4) the role was not clearly defined and too ambitious, (5) the technical coherence function is based in a different city than the members of the RPMU which makes the collaboration between the coordination and coherence function more challenging.

"I think the design of this position [the technical coherence role] had really great aspirations and really ambitious goals behind. But the reality is very, very different because why would agencies recognize UN Women in this role, in this overarching role?" [UN key informant]

Did the new delivery mechanisms lead to increased efficiency?

The interviewed IPs and CS-RRG members could not be consulted on potential efficiency increases of RUNOs as they were not knowledgeable about their work and their way of collaboration under the Spotlight Initiative. Key informants from RUNOs perceived the 'new way of working' to be more cumbersome. They also provided examples where discords and lack of communication had led to duplications and delays in delivery. According to key informants, for example, the recruitment of the Programme Coordinator had to be re-advertised several times because the RUNOs could not agree on a candidate. In another instance, partners - including government representatives - received invitations to the same event from two different RUNOs which led to confusion. UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP staff in the four other Central Asian countries did not perceive to be part of a new delivery mechanism. For the RUNOs in Kazakhstan, it was reported that they continued to implement their work in a siloed manner. Some key informants and online survey respondents also perceived that different operating and back-office procedures made it challenging to collaborate efficiently.

> *"Different regulatory guidelines in recipient UN agencies are sometimes an obstacle to cooperative solutions, although institutional and human egoism are often involved."* [online survey respondent]

> *"The rules and procedures of different RUNOs are not allowing them to work as One UN."* [online survey respondent]

While we did not find evidence that the integrated programming approach led to increased efficiency, key informants still emphasized that the Spotlight Initiative has contributed to an increased interagency collaboration of the UN on ending VAWG.

Key findings:

- We did not find evidence that the chosen implementation mechanism of the UN contributed to increased efficiency. The mechanism was not yet well accepted among RUNOs. It was perceived as cumbersome and overly complex which had at times led to delays or duplications in delivery .

- Key informants also agreed that the technical coherence function under UN Women was challenging to implement and stakeholders from UNDP and UNFPA were doubtful about the relevance and neutrality of the way the function was implemented.

Recommendations:

- To harness the potential of the technical coherence role, it is recommended to conduct a participatory planning exercise with the PRMU and the Technical Coherence function to ensure that support from the latter is streamlined equally across the interventions of all RUNOs. The issues related to accepting and supporting UN Women in executing the technical coherence function should also be discussed with reference to the new guidance note for joint UN programmes released in October 2022[5] (Programme Coordinator, technical coherence function).

- To support the roll out of Phase 2, it is proposed to map out processes where RUNOs could closely collaborate, e.g., through joint monitoring, joint call for proposals and developing joint reporting

---

[5] UNSDG (2022). Guidance note on a new generation of joint programmes – annexes. Available at: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Final%20-%20ANNEXES%20to%20UNSDG%20Guidance%20Note%20on%20a%20New%20Generation%20%20Joint%20Programmes.pdf

templates to strengthen the synergy and collaboration across the three RUNOs (Programme Coordinator).

● It is recommended to prepare a short communication for IPs on the ambition and implementation of the UNDS reform under the Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia to make it transparent to them how the different UN agencies work jointly for the delivery of the Spotlight Initiative (RPMU).

E. SUSTAINABILITY

13. Is sufficient capacity being built so that local actors, such as government as well as CSOs, the women's movement and groups representing women and girls that face intersecting forms of discrimination, will be able to manage the process by the end of the Initiative without continued dependence on international expertise?	☒ Very Good – Good ☐ Problems ☐ Serious deficiencies

The Regional Programme does not yet have a sustainability plan or an exit strategy. A sustainability plan will be developed as part of Phase 2. Considering the relatively short implementation timeframe, the programme has achieved some results. The following achievements were highlighted by key informants and in the 2021 annual report which will be critical to further advance to ensure their sustainability during Phase 2:

● The draft Central Asian regional model SOPs for health, psychosocial support and police sectors were developed, based on the existing ones in the countries and international best practices;

● The establishment of an informal regional alliance of young people to combat VAWG in the Central Asian region.

● The drafting of a situation analysis report, along with a strategy and communication plan for youth organisations of Central Asia for ending VAWG.

● The establishment of a partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kazakhstan

● The empowerment of civil society, in particular grassroot organisations, to engage with further activists and women's rights defenders and to carry out actions against SBGV.

Interviewees had mixed perceptions about expertise being built among CSOs for the sustainability of the programme. Some UN key informants believed enough was done to build the capacity of the local partners, especially among CSOs, while others did not yet see significant impact. The CSO respondents (online survey and key informants) perceived that their capacity had been improved by the programme. Their engagement in the programme was valued as an experience that contributed to their capacity and empowerment, particularly for the grassroot organisations. The main barrier to sustainability which was highlighted by CSOs and some of the UN key informants were financial resources. To date, only the government of Kazakhstan has contributed funding to CSO interventions for ending VAWG. In the other four countries, CSOs continue to depend on international donors to pursue their work in this area.

While partnerships with governments were not targeted within the Regional Programme, the advocacy efforts of the Spotlight Initiative to engage governments at the highest level to join the Generation Equality Forum have led to promising results. Both, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan adhered to the Generation Equality Forum and its two Action Coalitions (on GBV and Economic Justice and Rights) as commitment makers. The Government of Uzbekistan pledged USD210 million by 2030 to implement its national priorities on delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. The President of Kazakhstan announced his willingness to support the Spotlight Initiative in a speech. This resulted in a new partnership of the Spotlight Initiative with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Kazakhstan which has made its first contributions to the Spotlight Initiative programme by allocating a total of 70,000 US$ to support CSOs engaged in ending VAWG in the countries.

"One of the elements of sustainability that we have already been able to achieve is the fact that the government of Kazakhstan is ready to contribute to the Spotlight. That's the element of ownership and that's the element of financial sustainability. Temporarily, it is not a long-term financing, of course. You can always confess that. But still, as an entry point of the governments of Kazakhstan to commit itself to Spotlight initiative is already in accomplishments, and that's also the element of our sustainability." [UN key informant]

Key findings:

- Some results have been achieved despite the relatively short implementation period, but it is too early to assess their sustainability. No sustainability plan or exit strategy has been developed at the end of the first phase; it will be developed in Phase 2.

- While the Central Asia Regional Programme has made contributions for strengthening the capacity of CSOs to contribute to ending VAWG, financing mechanisms to sustain civil society actions are scarce. Considering the short implementation period of the programme, however, it would not be realistic to expect this type of result within a bit over a year of implementation.

- The commitments of the governments of Kazakhstan for ending VAWG and of Uzbekistan to pledge funding for achieving the SDGs including SDG 5 are likely to have positive impact beyond the scope of the programme.

Recommendations:

- During the development of the sustainability plan (or exit strategy), it is recommended to ensure meaningful participation of CSOs and government representatives. The actions of the sustainability plan should be integrated in the annual work plan and should be fully funded by the Spotlight Initiative (unless funding from other sources can be secured) (RCO, RUNOs).

- To increase the sustainability of the programme related to strengthening CSOs and the women's movement, we recommend establish stronger communication with the EU Delegations in the other four Central Asian countries to engage them in continued financial support of grassroot and youth-led organisations (RCO with support from RUNOs).

hera
right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

F. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PROGRAMME DESIGN:

Main findings:

1. While the RPD describes a consultative design process for the Central Asian Regional Programme, key informants perceived that few stakeholders were engaged in a meaningful way. The time allocated for the design process was reported as too short which resulted in rushed decision-making processes and insufficient time to build buy-in and ownership across the three RUNOs in Kazakhstan and their colleagues in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The decisions to include Afghanistan in the programme and to manage the programme through the RCO in Kazakhstan were highlighted as problematic for the effectiveness of the programme delivery.

2. The programme design is aligned to the Spotlight Initiative principles as listed in the Spotlight Initiative Fund ToRs.

3. According to the interviewed IPs, the programme is relevant to their needs, but their knowledge about the Spotlight Initiative was limited. The scope and targets of the programme were described as too ambitious for the timeframe of the programme.

4. The perceptions of the planned set up of the Alliance for ending VAWG in Central Asia were heterogenous. The interviewed RPMU representatives conveyed determination to ensure its establishment despite challenging timelines while other UN key informants questioned its pertinence, feasibility and sustainability. Only one of the interviewed civil society stakeholders was informed about the Alliance and shared concerns about the adequacy of its approach. The lack of knowledge about the Alliance among the interviewed civil society representatives as well as the divided opinions among UN stakeholders are concerning.

5. Formal feedback mechanisms have been established through the RSC and the CS-RRG, but they were not known among key informants from the civil society and, hence, insufficiently used by the latter.

6. Key informants perceived that the ToC is not sufficiently detailed, that it contains gaps in terms of coherence and logic and that it is based on assumptions that do not fully hold.

7. The programme has failed to put in place a results-oriented accountability regime. It complied with the Spotlight Initiative's requirement to use indicators from the global indicator menu which resulted in the selection of an insufficient number of output indicators and a set of outcome indicators that are inadequate for the programme's scope and context. No specific indicators for the regional programme were added. At the time of the MTA, the programme did not have a functional monitoring system in place. The availability of baseline, milestone and target values was patchy. Except for one output indicator under Pillar 6, there were no meaningful output data available to measure the programme's progress. At the outcome level, data were only available for two of the nine outcome indicators. Without meaningful performance data available, the programme has not been able to analyse and use its results for programme management, learning and accountability purposes. This is a major shortcoming that requires immediate attention.

hera

right to health & development

Spotlight
Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

8. The Central Asia Regional Programme identified relevant contextual, programmatic, and institutional risks and mitigation measures. The risk matrix has been updated and monitored on an annual basis. The risk of insufficient government interest in ending VAWG has been removed from the risk register during one of these updates, but key informants estimated that it continues to be high.

Recommendations:

(The stakeholder group responsible for implementing the recommendation is indicated in brackets at the end of each recommendation.)

a) It is recommended to consider downscaling the ambition of the programme and to prioritize the most promising signature interventions under the five pillars accordingly (RUNOs, RPMU).

b) It is recommended to gather representatives from RUNOs, the RCO, UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as regional offices to discuss a stronger strategic support role of the regional offices during the second phase of programme to use their convening power for the engagement of UNDP, UNFPA, and UN Women in the other Central Asian countries (RUNOs, RCO). The discussion should draw on existing meeting structures such as the Regional Directors (RD)/ Resident Coordinator (RC) meeting which was organized in May 2021. It is recommended that RUNOs brief their IPs on (a) the content of the programme, (b) the outputs that the IPs are contributing to and (c) on the formal and informal feedback mechanisms that can be used by CSOs within the Central Asia Reginal Programme (RUNOs).

c) To gauge the feasibility and sustainability of the planned Alliance, we recommend hiring an independent expert to conduct rapid, confidential internal and external consultations with key stakeholders (governments, civil society representatives and UN) to explore their level of knowledge about the intervention as well as their concerns and willingness to contribute to the activities under the Alliance. These consultations should provide recommendations on whether or not the intervention should be pursued and - if it is to be pursued – what steps need to be taken to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability (RPMU with support of the Secretariat).

d) To improve the coherence and relevance of the ToC, the RPMU in collaboration with RUNOs in other countries should undertake a participatory revision of the components of the ToC and to include critical assumptions for each result level (RPMU).

e) To enable the programme to be fully accountable to the involved stakeholders, the RPMU should develop a comprehensive M&E framework including tailored, measurable and adequate indicators, data sources, means of verification, data collection frequency and the responsible entity for the data collection of each indicator. Indicators for which targets had already been achieved at the baseline assessment should be removed or revised. Regular progress on the indicators should be reported back to key stakeholders in the Central Asia region. (RPMU with support from the Global Secretariat).

f) As part of the next annual report, the risk related to insufficient government buy-in and support for ending VAWG should be reintegrated in the risk management matrix along with adequate risk mitigation measures to be implemented by RUNOs and their counterparts in the other four countries (Programme Coordinator with support from RPMU).

2. GOVERNANCE:

Main findings:

1. The IPs demonstrate strong commitment to the action and have been able to build up their capacity and to extend the remit of their activities because of their participation in the Spotlight Initiative. Their activities are, however, not consistently interlinked and most do not have information about the programme beyond their own activities.

2. The RUNOs in Kazakhstan demonstrate ownership and commitment to the Spotlight Initiative. Their counterparts in the four other countries, however, expressed concerns about not having a full understanding of the content, structure and of their role in the regional programme. This has been a barrier to effective CSO and government engagement in interventions such as the Alliance in the countries outside Kazakhstan.

3. The governments of the five countries are not foreseen to play an official role in the programme. The Spotlight Initiative has successfully engaged the governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to become commitment makers at the GEF. To support civil society initiatives for ending VAWG, the Kazakh government has allocated 70,000 US $ to the Central Asia Regional Programme Commitments from the governments of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to the regional programme were not reported.

4. The RSC has met twice and has by and large fulfilled its role. The member composition in the two meetings were not aligned with the guidance which foresees that at least 20 per cent of the members should be from civil society. The number of UN participants (over 20 observers in both meetings) was disproportionate compared to other stakeholders.

5. Only three members of the CS-RRG are active and the potential of the group was not fully harnessed at the time of the MTA. In the past four months, however, the RPMU has initiated concrete steps to revive the CS-RRG and to support them in fulfilling their role. It has also been planned to revise the composition its members which will again require an induction period for its new members.

Recommendations:

(The stakeholder group responsible for implementing the recommendation is indicated in brackets at the end of each recommendation.)

a) In the design process for Phase 2, conduct a planning workshop with IPs to (a) increase their understanding of the regional programme and their contribution to it and (b) establish interlinkages between their actions and (c) to provide an opportunity for cross-fertilization and learning (RUNOs, RPMU)

b) To improve the engagement of UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP in the other four Central Asian countries, it is necessary to clarify their role and their expected contributions to the interventions under the different Pillars. The design phase for Phase 2 should be harnessed to define these and to update the coordination structure accordingly. We also recommend a stronger implication of

their regional offices for holding their agencies to account for supporting the delivery of the programme (RPMU with support from ROs).

c) It is recommended to ensure that the participants of the RSC are aligned to the member structure as defined in the Coordination Structure of the Central Asia Regional Programme. A disproportioned number of UN observers should be avoided (RC).

d) To support the CS-RRG to fulfil its functions, it is recommended (a) to support its members to develop a work plan immediately and to provide a budget for the implementation of the work plan available; (b) to associate one or two representatives of the CS-RRG to technical meetings of the RPMU so they can effectively provide guidance for the planning and interventions of action (RPMU).

3. PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT:

Main findings:

1. There is a good working relationship between the RPMU and the Global Secretariat. Its support was described as timely and useful except for the set-up of the monitoring framework.

2. The regional programme applies adequate implementation mechanisms with its partners (NIM for CSOs).

3. Most of the IPs are grassroot organisations that are first time partners of the UN. This is a strength of the programme.

4. The initiative's deliverables and budget distribution are overall aligned with the RUNO's expertise, experiences and priorities. An exception is the relatively low funding allocation to UNFPA for Pillar 5 which seems to be misaligned to the agency's expertise and experience on SGBV data.

5. The Central Asia Regional Programme has operationalised the UNDS reform by putting in place management and coordination structures through the RC in Kazakhstan as accountable entity, the RPMU for the management and the assignment of the technical coherence entity to UN Women. Despite dedication and leadership at the RCO in Kazakhstan, the management structure of the regional programme has not been conducive for facilitating a constructive collaboration between the RCO and RUNOs and among RUNOs and the UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP offices in the four other Central Asia Countries. Most key informants observed tensions, insufficient communication and lack of synergies which have been obstacles to the implementation of the UNDS reform.

6. The programme management structure is effective for delivering interventions in Kazakhstan but has shown strong limitations when it comes to the delivery of regional interventions. The function of UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women offices in the other four countries have not been defined. The quality of collaboration between the RPMU and UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP staff in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan depends on personal relationships and the goodwill of the involved UN teams. The lack of an effective regional management structure

has negatively impacted on the engagement of governments and civil society for regional interventions outside Kazakhstan.

7. We did not find evidence that the chosen implementation mechanism of the UN contributed to increased efficiency. The mechanism was not yet well accepted among RUNOs. It was perceived as cumbersome and overly complex which had at times led to delays or duplications in delivery.

8. Key informants also agreed that the technical coherence function under UN Women was challenging to implement and stakeholders from UNDP and UNFPA were doubtful about the relevance and neutrality of the way the function was implemented.

9. The management costs for the Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia comply with the threshold of 18 per cent. All personnel who are dedicated on a full-time basis to the Spotlight initiative work under contractual services and are not hired as staff. This might impact negatively on personnel retention under the Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia.

10. The RUNO staff and RPMU members are centralized in Kazakhstan. Due to internal requirements, the programme also does not fund staff time of UN country agencies in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This partially explains their limited commitment to the initiative.

Recommendations:

(The stakeholder group responsible for implementing the recommendation is indicated in brackets at the end of each recommendation.)

a) It is recommended that representatives from RUNOs, the RCO and the EUD join for a 'lessons learnt' session to discuss the management structure of the programme through the RCO in Kazakhstan for Phase 2 with the aim to decide whether to maintain or amend it for Phase 2. This should include a discussion on how UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women in the other four countries can be more effectively involved (RUNOs, RCO, EUD).

b) As technical expertise for RUNOs can also be budgeted under the programme outcomes in the Phase 2 budget, we suggest implementing a workforce planning exercise in its design process. This will allow to identify critical gaps in RUNO teams and to plan for sufficient RUNO personnel for the next phase of the Spotlight Initiative (RPMU, RUNOs, RC).

c) It is recommended to adopt a decentralized set up of the RPMU to ensure that it has representatives in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan to effectively support the programme which can be hosted within their respective UN agency. This should be part of the strategic workforce planning suggested above (RCO, RUNOs).

d) To improve the effectiveness of the management structure at the regional level, it is also suggested to define the function and responsibilities of the UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP offices in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and to develop an engagement plan including participatory planning sessions, quarterly meetings and after-action reviews after regional events.

e) To harness the potential of the technical coherence role, it is recommended to conduct a participatory planning exercise with the PRMU and the Technical Coherence function to ensure that support from the latter is streamlined equally across the interventions of all RUNOs (Programme Coordinator, technical coherence function).

f) To support the roll out of Phase 2, it is proposed to map out processes where RUNOs could closely collaborate (Programme Coordinator).

g) It is recommended to prepare a short communication for IPs on the ambition and implementation of the UNDS reform under the Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia to make it transparent to them how the different UN agencies work jointly for the delivery of the Spotlight Initiative (RPMU).

---

4. PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS:

Main findings:

1. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the work plan and budget of the programme were revised, and relevant adjustment measures were initiated. Interventions to assist SGBV survivors were scaled up through support to grassroot organisations and crisis centres to respond to the increase in domestic violence since the start of the pandemic.

2. The Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia had an overall expenditure/commitment rate of 48 per cent by end of March 2022 and has reached 65 per cent in June 2022. As the UNDP budget includes the RCO staff salary and operations costs, it had a higher expenditure rate than the two other RUNOs.

3. The absorptive capacity of IPs was reported to be relatively strong in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but in need of improvement in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. This is linked to the difficult operating environment for CSOs in these countries due to the repression of civic space.

4. Key informants from the UN reported a high workload and agreed that the budget allocated to RUNO staffing was insufficient in Phase 1. This resulted in insufficient operations support personnel, and unattractive contract modalities for RUNO project officers.

5. The limited number of output indicators and associated targets does not allow a meaningful analysis of the progress made. For the period under evaluation, there were only progress data available for one output indicator. The MTA was, hence, unable to rate evaluation question 7.

6. An analysis of progress towards outcomes was also not conducted due to the limitations of the M&E framework.

7. The work plan implementation has made important progress under Pillar 1 and Pillar 6. There was less progress under the other Pillars and some of the signature interventions were still in preparation modus by end of 2021. As the 2022 annual report will only be available in early 2023, the progress to date cannot be estimated by the MTA.

8. Some results have been achieved despite the relatively short implementation period, but it is too early to assess their sustainability. No sustainability plan or exit strategy has been developed at the end of the first phase; it will be developed in Phase 2.

9. While the Central Asia Regional Programme has made contributions for strengthening the capacity of CSOs to contribute to ending VAWG, financing mechanisms to sustain civil society actions are scarce. Considering the short implementation period of the programme, however, it would not be realistic to expect this type of result within a bit over a year of implementation.

10. The commitments of the governments of Kazakhstan for ending VAWG and of Uzbekistan to pledge funding for achieving the SDGs including SDG 5 are likely to have positive impact beyond the scope of the programme.

Recommendations:

(The stakeholder group responsible for implementing the recommendation is indicated in brackets at the end of each recommendation.)

a) As technical expertise for RUNOs can also be budgeted under the programme outcomes in the Phase 2 budget, we suggest implementing a workforce planning exercise during the design process of Phase 2. This will allow to identify critical gaps in RUNO teams and to plan for sufficient RUNO staffing for the next phase of the Spotlight Initiative (RPMU, RC, RUNOs).

b) The RPMU should develop a comprehensive M&E framework including tailored, measurable and adequate indicators, data sources, means of verification, data collection frequency and the responsible entity for the data collection of each indicator. Indicators for which targets had already been achieved at the baseline assessment should be removed or revised. Regular progress on the indicators should be reported back to key stakeholders in the Central Asia region. (RPMU with support from the Global Secretariat).

c) To better understand the current progress on delivering the action, it is recommended that the RPMU reviews the performance of the signature interventions to gauge to what extent progress has been made and for which interventions adjustments are needed. If the progress is insufficient, a revision of interventions and planned outcomes is suggested (RPMU).

d) During the development of the sustainability plan (or exit strategy), it is recommended to ensure meaningful participation of CSOs and government representatives. The actions of the sustainability plan should be integrated in the annual work plan and should be fully funded by the Spotlight Initiative (unless funding from other sources can be secured) (RCO, RUNOs).

e) To increase the sustainability of the programme related to strengthening CSOs and the women's movement, we recommend establish stronger communication with the EU Delegations in the other four Central Asian countries to engage them in continued financial support of grassroot and youth-led organisations (RCO with support from RUNOs).

ANNEX 1: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Spotlight programme documents (essential documents)	Availability
Regional Programme document as approved by OSC	yes
Regional Budget as approved by the OSC (may also include revised budget)	yes
Spotlight Programme Snapshot	yes
Inception report	No
Annual report/s	yes
Annex A Report (included in the Annual Report)	yes
Ad hoc (2nd Tranche) report (may also include provisional narrative report – 2 pager)	no
Spotlight Initiative financial information on the MPTF Gateway	yes
Knowledge management workplan	no
Regional CSO Reference Group workplan	no
CSO Reference Group Bios	yes
Communication workplan	no
Stories directly from the Calendar	yes
Other documents	
Coordination Structure and Key Stakeholders in Spotlight Initiative in Central Asia Regional Programme	
SOPs for communication with external partners	
Sample Survey on Violence against Women - Kazakhstan	
CS-RRG general Terms of Reference	
Regional Steering Committee agenda and minutes, 2021 and 2022	
Regional Steering Committee agenda and presentation, 2022	
Spotlight Initiative monitoring on the SMART platform (annex A)	
Annex B- F of annual report 2021	

Stakeholder group	Institution / organisation	Name	Position
UN	RCO	Ms. Michaela Friberg-Storey	United Nations Resident Coordinator, Kazakhstan
	Spotlight Coordination team	Ms. Irada Ahmadova	Spotlight Regional Programme Coordinator
	Spotlight Coordination team	Mr. Konstantin Ossipov	Monitoring and Reporting Officer
	UNDP Kazakhstan	Natalia Maqsimchook	Project Officer
	UNFPA Kazakhstan	Azhar Bergeneva	Project Officer
	UNFPA Kazakhstan	Meder Omurzakov	International Programme Coordinator
	UNFPA	Giulia Vallese	Regional Deputy Representative, former Representative of UNFPA in Kazakhstan
	UN Women Kazakhstan	Dina Amirsheva,	Programme Manager
	UN Women Kazakhstan	Assem Satmukhambetova	Project Officer
	UN Women Kazakhstan	Saltanat Mustafina,	Technical Coherence Specialist
	RCO Tajikistan	Marziya Baydulloeva	CP Coordinator
	UN Women Tajikistan	Aziza Hamidova	Country Programme Manager
	UN Women Tajikistan	Diana Ismailova	Senior Programme Coordinator
	RCO Kyrgyzstan	Samara Papieva	Former Programme Coordinator RCS-Technical Team
	UNDP Kyrgyzstan	Bermet Ubaidillaeva	Project Coordinator
	UN Women Kyrgyzstan	Lira Duishebaeva	Coherence Specialist
	UNDP Turkmenistan	Lachin Artykova,	Project Manager, Governance
	RCO Turkmenistan	Durdymammet Ilmammedov	Executive Associate
	UNFPA Turkmenistan	Mehri Karakulova	National Coordinator
	UN Women	Gemma Woods	Monitoring, Evaluation and Knowledge Manager for the UN Trust Fund to EVAW
	RCO	Viktor Damjanovic	Head of RCO in Sudan, former Head of RCO in Kazakhstan
EUD	Delegation of the EU to the Republic of Kazakhstan	Johannes Stenbaek Madsen	Head of Cooperation
Stakeholder group	Name		

Stakeholder group	Institution / organisation	Name
CSO Regional Reference Group		Ms. Selbi Jumayeva
		Ms. Ranokhon Kasimova
		Ms. Nurzhamal Iminova
CSO Implementing Partners	Doktor S.N. Public Foundation, Kazakhstan	Sergey Molchanov, Director
	Kaysar Public Foundation, Kazakhstan	Oxana Tarabukina, Chairman of the Organisation
	Public Movement Against Violence "NeMolchi.kz" Public Foundation, Kazakhstan	Dinara Smailova, President of the Foundation
	Centr razvitiya i socialnoi pomoschi naseleniyu "Moi Dom" Public Association, Kazakhstan	Irina Zhdanova, Head
	Mumtoz Public Organisation, Tajikistan	Rukhshona Shobudinova, Director
	The World of Law Public Organisation, Tajikistan	Gulchehra Kholmatova, Director
	The World of Law Public Organisation, Tajikistan	Larisa Aleksandrova, Consultant
	The University of Melbourne (UOM)	Kristin Diemer
	East European Institute for Reproductive Health (EEIRH)	Mihai Horga
Other	UN Women, Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme Consultant	Christine Arab