



**Spotlight  
Initiative**

*To eliminate violence  
against women and girls*

CENTRAL ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN

# Final Narrative Programme Report

24 July 2020 – 31 December 2023

An initiative of the United Nations funded by the European Union



<p><b>Programme Title &amp; programme Number</b></p> <p>Programme Title: Alliances for Change – Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practice in Central Asia MPTF Office Project Reference Number:<sup>1</sup> 00119463</p>	<p><b>Priority regions/areas/localities for the programme</b></p> <p>Central Asia and Afghanistan Regional programme</p>															
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<p><b>Programme Cost (US\$)</b></p> <p>Total Phase I budget, and (where OSC approved) Phase II budget as per the Spotlight CPD/RPD: US\$ 5,392,708</p> <p>Phase I and (where OSC approved) Phase II Spotlight funding: US\$ 5,309,29</p> <p><b>Total Spotlight funding:<sup>2</sup> USD\$5,593,195</b></p> <p><b>Agency Contribution:</b> US\$ 283,898</p> <p><b>Spotlight Funding and Agency Contribution by Agency:</b></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="108 1167 783 1570"> <thead> <tr> <th>Name of RUNO</th> <th>Spotlight Phase I+II (US\$)</th> <th>UN Agency Contributions (US\$)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>UN Women</td> <td>2,907,378</td> <td>96,049</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNFPA</td> <td>1,001,569</td> <td>86,459</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNDP</td> <td>1,400,351</td> <td>101,390</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>TOTAL</b></td> <td><b>5,309,298</b></td> <td><b>283,898</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><b>TOTAL:\$5,593,195</b></p>	Name of RUNO	Spotlight Phase I+II (US\$)	UN Agency Contributions (US\$)	UN Women	2,907,378	96,049	UNFPA	1,001,569	86,459	UNDP	1,400,351	101,390	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,309,298</b>	<b>283,898</b>	<p><b>Programme Start and End Dates</b></p> <p><b>Start Date:</b> 24.07.2020*</p> <p><b>End Date [as approved by the OSC or your N/RSC]:</b> 31.12.2023</p> <p>*Pre-funding approved as of 1 October 2019. Approval of the programme by OSC on 24 July 2020. Actual delivery started on 01 December 2020 upon receipt of funds.</p>
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	<p><b>Report Submitted By:</b></p> <p>Natia Gabelia, Spotlight Regional programme Coordinator</p>															

<sup>1</sup> The Spotlight Contribution refers to the amount transferred to the Recipient UN Organizations, which is available on the MPTF Office [GATEWAY](#).

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## Acronym List

AUCA	American University of Central Asia
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COVID-19	(Coronavirus) pandemic
CS-NRG	Civil Society National Reference Group
CS-RRG	Civil Society Regional Reference Group
CSO	Civil society organisation
DV	Domestic violence
EU	European Union
EVAWG	Elimination of violence against women and girls
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEF	Gender Equality Forum
GEWE	Gender equality and women's empowerment
GGGI	Global Gender Gap Index
GRB	Gender-responsive budgeting
GTG	Gender Theme Group
HP	Harmful practices
LNOB	Leave no one behind
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MSR	Multisectoral response
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
PID	People who inject drugs
RUNOs	Recipient United Nations Organizations
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SI	Spotlight Initiative
SI RP	Spotlight Initiative Regional programme
SOPs	Standard operating procedures
SW	Sex worker

UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development programme
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UoM	University of Melbourne (Australia)
VAWG	Violence against women and girls



**Spotlight Initiative**



**PILLAR 1**

**LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

SI presents an integrated approach, a roadmap and analytical tool to monitor convergence of national SGBV legislation with international standards and strengthening the response to SGBV in CA countries

**1 unified methodology, 5 analytical country reviews 1 regional report on gap analysis between national SGBV legislation and law-enforcement practices in CA and international norms and standards;**  
**1 comprehensive assessment** Analytical tool developed to visualize the findings and monitor improvements in SGBV legislation and SGBV response system.  
 Recommendations on priority actions from both studies communicated to state and non-state actors through 10 country dialogues and 2 consolidated regional summaries.

**PILLAR 3**

**TACKLING SOCIAL NORMS, ATTITUDES & BEHAVIOURS**

More than 15 million people raised awareness on importance of attitudes and social norms change to foster ending violence against women and girls

**Engaging young people**  
**Informal Youth Alliance 'Nur'** on prevention of GBV was established.  
**17 Media Initiatives** on GBV topics from 5 CA countries supported by Media Academy, 245 girls trained.  
**First regional debates** were organized for 5 CA countries gathering 47 youth representatives in Turkistan, Kazakhstan  
**15 Tik Toks** by 5 influencers from CA on changing gender stereotypes and GBV reached appr. 200,000 users.  
**Engaging men and boys**  
**Advocacy knowledge products** were developed on engaging men in CA: (i) desk review of the existing practices, strategy and communication plan on engaging men, practical guide on engaging men, (ii) book 'Being a Man in Central Asia'.

**HeForShe Central Asia solidarity movement for gender equality** 12 million people in CA raised their awareness on gender equality and flexible masculinity  
 A series of 4 short thematic videos 'Our family - our traditions. We can create them ourselves' has over 3,5 million views in web to date  
 The audio & video podcasts on flexible masculinity are available for young men  
**Do Not Be Silent**  
 1 million people reached by 80 human stories on access to crisis centers during COVID-19  
 9 episodes of DocuDrama produced on different types of violence supported by the Government of Kazakhstan  
 ❖ 1 documentary film on raising awareness on prevalence of the sexual violence against women in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

**PILLAR 6**

**STRENGTHENING CSO CAPACITIES AND REGIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

SI united over 500 civil society actors to form the regional CSOs network, strengthened institutional capacity including first regional grant-making mechanism

**31 CSOs** strengthened capacity within the small grants programme – USD 544 228,43: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan supported CSOs working on EVAWG

The regional CSOs network supporting and fostering regional online dialogue platforms for CSOs and expert community collaboration within the Central Asian Alliance discussing recommendations on required legal reforms, institutional strengthening and required data to better address needs of women traditionally left behind.

Over 500 civil society actors has been established and capacitated Regional grant-making mechanism and capacitated 4,000 representatives of CSOs trained by a pool of 21 regional trainers

The toolkit and outreach strategy to grassroot CSOs is developed and shared on the regional virtual knowledge platform

**PILLAR 2**

**STRENGTHENING OF INSTITUTIONS**

SI champions Central Asia Alliance against GBV and strengthens capacity of key sectors to improve the provision of specialized services to survivors of SGBV in CA countries



The Central Asian Alliance, a first of its kind in the region, was established to serve as a multi-stakeholder mechanism based on political and voluntary commitment, providing safe space for deliberations among civil society, state agencies and other relevant stakeholders.

**Regional assessment** of the progress of gender responsive budgeting in CA countries over the past 10 years with recommendations on monitoring systems and further promotion of gender responsive budgeting led to knowledge product on financing of specialized social services to survivors of violence.

**Monitoring and Evaluation Tool** Regional virtual knowledge and a Roadmap for implementation platform developed to gather and of the regional SOP model for 3 promote knowledge with best sectors developed. practices exchange in Central Asia

Empowering representatives of 3 key sectors from 5 CA countries through training of trainers on coordinated service provision and regional SOP utilization for improved multi-sectoral response to violence against women and girls

Police and justice officials interact with expert community and NGOs through an informal Community of Practice to discuss the gaps in prosecution of domestic violence, the use of protection orders, correctional programmes for perpetrators, police training and the role of women in the police force in protecting women from violence (25 regular participants, 10 facilitated regional convenings).

**PILLAR 5**

**CLOSING THE DATA GAP**

SI forged a transformative path by launching cutting-edge learning programs, pioneered mapping GBV data sources, published and distributed a comprehensive report on GBV prevalence, and conducted primary qualitative research addressing data gaps, focusing on women traditionally left behind

Spotlight Digital Challenge "IT vs Violence":

- 832 applications
- 200 participants of educational bootcamp
- 73 number of teams admitted to SDC
- 14 winning teams in 3 nominations

kNOwVAWdata course on measuring violence against women was launched with 13 specialists certified out of 66 trained

Mapping of data on GBV in CA countries by sources was developed

Publication on prevalence of GBV in CA countries was published and widely distributed

The primary research on Addressing data gaps on intersectionality and SGBV in CA conducted exploring experience of women traditionally left behind including women living with disabilities, HIV, elderly (65+), sex workers, migrants

Adopted research methodology package on Men's life experiences and perceptions of violence against women

I AM #WithHer ARE YOU?

## Executive Summary

The Spotlight Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan (hereinafter SI-RP or SI RP) has played a pivotal role closing critical gaps in addressing the violence against women and girls (VAWG). This initiative, driven by the collective efforts of the United Nations (UN) and steadfast support from the European Union (EU), exemplifies our global commitment to advancing gender equality and empowering women (GEWE). It is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular emphasis on SDG 5, and other international agreements.

Structured around five distinct pillars, the Regional Programme has effectively addressed significant shortcomings within the system by (i) supporting legal and policy reforms, (ii) fortifying institutions, (iii) challenging prevailing social norms, (iv) bridging data gaps, and (v) promoting civil society and women's movements. These transformative impacts extend beyond immediate outcomes and have successfully paved the way for a new paradigm in the fight against all forms of VAWG in the region.

**The program's first pillar**, which focuses on **Legislation and Policy Framework**, has achieved remarkable unity by adopting a standardised approach to review legal frameworks. This effort has resulted in five analytical assessments of national legislation and law enforcement practices, culminating in a comprehensive regional report. This report provides a thorough gap analysis and clear recommendations for aligning gender-based violence (GBV) legislation with international norms and standards. The commitment to this cause is evident in the empowerment of experts in gender-focused research and national engagement.

The regional review of the response system to GBV in Central Asian countries revealed significant challenges. These include a shortage of police officers trained to handle GBV cases, a general lack of crisis centres offering safe accommodation for victims/survivors of violence and their children, and a severe deficit of staff with the required qualifications in these centres. Expert discussions also highlighted the capacity gap in existing shelters across all Central Asian countries to support women with disabilities and the denial of services and safe accommodation to women living with HIV who are victims of violence.

**The second pillar - Strengthening of Institutions**, - is a testament to the transformative power

*Only Spotlight was able to unite civil society organisations working on gender equality and eliminating GBV*  
- Orzu Ganieva, CS RRG member

of collaboration and strategic capacity-building. The program's achievements shine particularly brightly with the establishment of the Central Asia Alliance to end GBV, a groundbreaking initiative that summarises the results of the Spotlight Initiative Regional programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan and unifies the efforts of five countries in combating GBV. A pivotal moment arrived on the

27th of June when the first conference convened. This milestone event brought together

government representatives, experts, journalists, youth and over 50 CSOs from Central Asia, setting the stage for a collective mission to counter VAWG.

In the realm of institutional capacity building, a [Virtual Knowledge Platform](#) named End GBV in Central Asian was launched facilitating regional knowledge exchange and promoting evidence-based decision-making. This platform's development was guided by partners' inputs from all Central Asian countries, rendering it a valuable resource for policymakers and practitioners alike. This dynamic platform offers information in multiple languages and plays a pivotal role in supporting capacity-building initiatives. Crucially, its continued existence will be ensured through the Central Asia Alliance, guaranteeing its long-term usefulness and impact.

Furthermore, the regional review of the SGBV response system in Central Asian countries shed light on issues related to adolescent pregnancies and religious marriages. In response, an awareness-raising initiative targeted young people to educate them about these concerns and their consequences. This effort involves the creation of a documentary on adolescent pregnancy and a collection of illustrated personal stories related to religious marriages. These materials will be enriched with insights from GBV experts, legal counsellors, and social workers. The primary goal of this endeavour is to elevate awareness and foster positive change within the SGBV response systems in the region.

Through rigorous regional studies, the engagement of healthcare, social, and law enforcement sectors in addressing SGBV has been systematically evaluated. As a direct outcome, standardised protocols and customised training modules have been developed to equip professionals within these pivotal sectors. It's noteworthy that Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have taken the proactive step of updating and adapting their national protocols according to the regional SOPs, signalling their commitment to enhancing coordination and efficacy in responding to SGBV.

This initiative encouraged the sharing of best practices and contributed to joint advocacy efforts, resulting in strengthening preventive measures as well as sanctions against perpetrators of domestic violence (DV).

A Roadmap and Monitoring and Evaluation Tool have been developed to ensure the effective implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) at the country level. These tools will enhance care and support for SGBV survivors and improve sectoral practices.

Furthermore, comprehensive gender-responsive budgeting assessments were carried out across Central Asian countries, shedding light on significant deficiencies in the budgeting process in terms of fulfilment of gender equality commitments. The assessments, which include a case study on the financing of crisis centres in Kazakhstan, serve as concrete illustrations of these discoveries. In conjunction with the accomplishments mentioned earlier, these assessments present an opportunity to deploy GRB for directing resources toward areas with the highest potential for addressing and reducing GBV.

In pursuit of **Pillar 3: Tackling Social Norms, Attitudes, and Behaviours**, SI has made dedicated efforts to raise awareness and involve men and youth in various impactful initiatives:



**Engaging Men and Boys:** A situational analysis, regional strategy and communication plan for engaging men and boys in ending VAWG in Central Asia were presented to the participants from five countries during a regional workshop. As a result, national action plans on engaging men were developed for each Central Asian country.

A practical guide on engaging men was developed and presented during the second regional workshop on engaging men in Central Asia.

**Promoting Healthy Masculinity:** A book featuring stories and documentary photos of engaged fathers and husbands in Central Asia was created, promoting healthy masculinity, and will be disseminated both offline and online.

**15 million People Reached:** Over 15 million individuals reached by the HeForShe Central Asia campaign and raised awareness about flexible masculinity and the critical role of men and boys in eradicating VAWG.



**Diverse HeForShe Central Asia Advocates:** More than 50 representatives from various sectors, including media, cinematography, public relations, and business, joined HeForShe Central Asia solidarity movement for gender equality as advocates, promoting HeForShe values and sharing their own journey of engaged partnership, fatherhood.

**4 million Online Views:** Four thematic films titled 'Our Family – Our Traditions. We Can Create Them Ourselves' garnered over 4 million online views, effectively promoting HeForShe messages on gender equality and healthy masculinity.

**Radio Awareness:** Collaborations with radio platforms raised awareness among 117,000 people in Kazakhstan, featuring HeForShe Kazakhstan advocates and gender experts promoting gender-equitable norms and criminalization of domestic violence.

**Private Sector Engagement:** The Regional Programme leveraged approximately USD 1,300,000 of in-kind contribution from tech companies, co-working hubs, TV channels, and radio stations for HeForShe Central Asia solidarity movement on gender equality.

**Resources for Young People:** HeForShe Central Asia educational eight-episode-podcast (both in audio and video formats) on flexible masculinity produced and ready to be aired in early 2024 targeting young men and boys.

**Empowering Young People:** 25 youth organisations of Central Asia constituted the Youth Alliance NUR on countering GBV and gender stereotypes. Capacities of the young people of the regional youth network were strengthened through the ToT on GBV and reproductive health issues, 3 regional forums, as well as through a number of online meetings, youth talks and training. First regional debates gathered 46 young men and

women from 5 Central Asian countries, enhancing their communication skills on gender-based violence.

In addition, 1 million people reached via 80 human stories on access to crisis centres during COVID-19 in 2020. Nine episodes of DocuDrama 'Zhalgyz Emessin' (translated from Kazakh as 'You are not alone') produced on different types of violence supported by the Government of Kazakhstan. One documentary film on raising awareness on prevalence of the sexual violence against women in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan directed by Rinat Balgabayev, HeForShe Kazakhstan advocate, is produced and will be aired in early 2024.

**Pillar 5. Closing the Data Gap** achieved significant milestones. A comprehensive kNOwVAWdata course engaged participants from 5 Central Asian countries, providing them with a strong foundation in measuring VAW. As a testament to the program's effectiveness, 66 graduates from the kNOwVAWdata course received certificates, and 13 of them have been added to the regional pool of experts, recognizing officially their expertise level. Enrolments in the course are steadily increasing, equipping participants with the knowledge and skills required to make substantial contributions to the ongoing battle against VAW.

In April 2022, the regional Spotlight Digital Challenge gathered students, graduates, and EVAWG experts to explore tech solutions for violence prevention. An Educational Bootcamp introduced 200+ participants to gender-based discrimination and violence, while also connecting them with innovators from Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The challenge concluded with the 'IT vs Violence' Challenge, promoting problem-solving and collaboration among Central Asian youth. Seven of the nine winners are still actively pursuing their projects in teams:

- The "Made to Top" team from Uzbekistan is working with the Association of Journalists.
- The "God is a Woman" team from Kazakhstan participated in the Solution Expo during the Digital Knowledge Week 2022 in Astana.
- "Kyzdar+1", the all-female team from Kyrgyzstan, created a documentary about men supporting their daughters.

Aligned with the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SI-RP initiative is spearheading groundbreaking research in Central Asia. The study, titled 'Leaving No One Behind: Data gaps and needs on intersectionality and gender-based violence in Central Asia', exploring the circumstances resulting from the intersection of gender inequality with other social inequalities and their relationship to the experience of GBV among them, identifying what data should be collected to inform GBV policies and programmes to ensure they are inclusive of all women in the Central Asian region. This includes women with disabilities, individuals living with HIV, LGBTIQ+ people, migrants, sex workers, drug users, those with criminal records, and elderly women (65+).

**Pillar 6. Strengthening CSO Capacities and Regional Women's Movement** represents the enduring spirit of the SI RP. This initiative has effectively spurred substantial progress in fostering regional collaboration, bringing together over 500 representatives from civil society organizations, human rights advocates, feminist groups, and activists throughout Central Asia. This effort culminated in the establishment of a Regional Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Network symbolically titled 'Spotlight'.

*This programme allowed us to understand who we are, where we go and show others that Civil Society Organizations can play crucial roles in preventing social problems in families.*

**Munisa Husseinzoda, CSO Mumtoz in Rudaki, Tajikistan**

Through 25 national consultations, 3 regional CSO Forums, 9 online discussion platforms, and various collaborative endeavours, this network has placed a strong emphasis on amplifying the voices of often under-resourced CSOs. This includes rural grassroots organizations, emerging entities, youth initiatives, and initiative groups. The Regional CSO network plays a pivotal role within the newly established Central Asian Alliance dedicated to eradicating GBV.

Furthermore, 31 CSOs spanning Central Asian countries have fortified their institutional capacity by enhancing organizational systems, tools, and processes. These CSOs have made significant strides through the small grants program, receiving a total of USD 544,228.43 distributed as follows: 9 in Kazakhstan, 7 in Kyrgyzstan, 8 in Tajikistan, and 7 in Uzbekistan. This strategic initiative not only resulted in the strengthening of CSOs but also complemented the broader efforts to engage grassroots civil society organizations. The strategy was developed following comprehensive research conducted in the five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The study engaged 82 CSO representatives through focus groups and interviews, as well as 140 grassroots CSOs and initiative groups through a survey.

The culmination of these achievements marks not an endpoint but a commencement of sustained results. As we venture into the future, the program continues to unfold with promising outcomes. The unwavering commitment to lasting progress and the perpetuation of positive change bear witness to the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme's enduring legacy. These achievements serve as not just a conclusion but as a foundational stepping stone for sustained and far-reaching impact.

## **Significant Contextual Shifts and Overall Implementation Status**

### Socio-economic Developments

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare significant economic and social disparities while exacerbating existing vulnerabilities to VAW in the region. The crisis amplified the fundamental root causes of violence, including economic marginalisation, unemployment, and disparities in access to education and services, all of which negatively affected the favourable conditions necessary for the successful implementation of the programme. As outlined in a report by the

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,<sup>3</sup> the pandemic unveiled deep-seated socioeconomic fragility in the region, with a disproportionately negative impact on women and girls. This impact is evidenced by the surge in unpaid labour, declines in remittance inflows, and severe disruptions in heavily affected sectors that primarily employ women, often within informal settings. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, approximately 11 million girls faced the alarming prospect of not resuming their education, substantially heightening the threat of child marriages.<sup>4</sup>

To effectively navigate the myriad of challenges, the SI-RP realigned priorities, intensified regional dialogue through the UN Secretary-General's political engagement strategy on GBV, and provided technical assistance for a gender-sensitive socio-economic response. A noteworthy platform was the EU–Central Asia Civil Society Forum held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in October 2021, bringing together over 300 CSO representatives, government experts and international organisations with a particular focus on the post-COVID recovery phase. Furthermore, to ensure swift and prioritised gender-responsive socio-economic policy reactions within the broader COVID-19 response and recovery framework, the SI-RP played a pivotal role. It facilitated the integration of violence against women and girls (VAWG) concerns into COVID-19 response plans through comprehensive regional analyses and platforms for purposeful dialogue. These efforts were mutually reinforced by state COVID-19 actions to cater to the pressing needs of women and girls who found themselves in marginalised and vulnerable positions. Each country also adjusted their national budgets to provide state-funded fiscal assistance packages, incorporating COVID-19 anti-crisis funds. These packages ranged from 2 % of GDP in Uzbekistan to 9 % in Kazakhstan. Among them, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan explicitly mentioned vulnerable households and groups in their emergency support policies. This integrated approach fostered active engagement of a wide set of stakeholders, including women's rights organisations, and supported initiatives to address the immediate requirements and enduring susceptibilities of girls and women facing multiple risks of violence guided by the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle.

Moreover, the substantial disruptions to trade, constraints on movement, and isolation measures not only spotlighted profound economic and societal inequalities but also contributed to a rise in DV cases. This led to an increased number of women and girls seeking assistance from NGOs, crisis centres, and shelters, aiming to access safety and professional support. To address the limitations in both human and financial resources, the SI-RP, particularly through its Small Grants (SG) component, prioritised enhancing the capabilities of grassroots organisations. The focus was on delivering comprehensive services encompassing legal aid, social support, and psychological counselling for women and girls facing various forms of violence, with special attention on DV and sexual abuse. In parallel, SI-RP grantees conducted a series of seminars, significantly raising the level of awareness of SGBV issues and ways to effectively address them. This holistic approach enabled the SI-RP to navigate complex

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<sup>3</sup> COVID-19 innovation in low and middle-income countries, Lessons for development co-operation, OECD, 2021

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/covid-19/education-response/keeping-girls-picture>

challenges, significantly contributing to reducing widening gaps in access to critical services and professional support.

Furthermore, the persistent presence of harmful social norms related to violence continues to pose a significant challenge in the region. This challenge is exacerbated by socio-economic exclusion, which has the potential to amplify gender-biased social norms. The Gender Social Norms Index (GNSI)<sup>5</sup> serves as a robust measure of these biases, encompassing attitudes toward women's roles in political, educational, economic, and physical integrity domains. According to the GNSI data spanning from 2017 to 2022, over 90 % of individuals in the region exhibited at least one bias against women. With the caveat that Turkmenistan and Afghanistan were not covered in the index, and Uzbekistan only provided figures for the period 2010-2014.

Moreover, among the measured dimensions, the most pronounced biases were found within the physical integrity dimension, - a proxy for intimate partner violence and reproductive rights. However, there were notable variations within the region, with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan recording bias levels of 97.50 % and 90.18 %, respectively, in contrast to 72.56 % and 84.18 % in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, respectively. It is also worth noting that while certain gender-biased social norms might not be explicitly connected to violence, they can still contribute to violence against women and girls. For example, norms that increase men's social and economic control over women can heighten the risk of intimate partner violence. This was evident in the extension of biases into the economic and political dimensions, where gender-biased social norms lead to unequal access for women, negatively affecting women's agency. Once again, disparities were evident across the region, with the most significant challenges arising in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, followed by Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Nonetheless, positive trends were observed in narrowing gender-based gaps in resource and opportunity access, as indicated by the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI).<sup>6</sup> Throughout the implementation period, women in the region made advancements in fundamental rights related to education, health, economic participation, and political empowerment. However, it is important to note that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were not encompassed in the GGGI. In 2022, Kazakhstan reduced its gender gap by 0.9 percentage points, achieving a rate of 71.9 % after two years of stagnation. Kyrgyzstan exhibited an improvement by closing 7 % of its gender gap, marking an increase of 1.9 % points following three years of decline. Tajikistan narrowed 66.3 % of its gender gap in 2022, surpassing the global average of 68.1 % and experiencing a growth of 3.7 percentage points from its 2020 score.

These developments underscore that, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis, the SI-RP intensified support to help governments diminish existing gender gaps and biased social gender norms that were mutually supportive of the encouraging results in the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index, where all three countries surpassed the global average. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan saw an increase in the representation of women in

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<sup>5</sup> UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). . 2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GNSI): Breaking down gender biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality. New York.2023

<sup>6</sup> Global Gender Gap Report 2023, World Economic Forum, 2023, Geneva, Switzerland

senior roles, while Tajikistan exhibited a reduction in the gender gap concerning labour force participation in 2022, achieving nearly equal gender representation in the Educational Attainment sub-index.<sup>7</sup>

### Political developments

Throughout the programme's duration, enhancing social cohesion and women's political participation remains a pivotal political challenge. In 2021, tragic Kyrgyz-Tajik border clashes claimed dozens of in both countries. The distribution of regional water has repeatedly led to disputes between the states that are upstream (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and those downstream (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) of the main rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan offered their mediation to resolve the conflict. The 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan provided clear evidence of strained vertical trust and served as a catalyst for substantial reforms, notably the removal of the List of Prohibited Occupations for Women. The country saw the continuation of the ruling Amanat (previously Nur-Otan) party following the 10 January 2022 elections. Meanwhile, the political landscape of Kyrgyzstan saw the emergence of Mr. Sadyr Japarov as President, following a snap election spurred by an uprising in October 2020. This shift was accompanied by the endorsement of a new constitution in May, resulting in a transition to a presidential system. Subsequently, parliamentary and municipal elections were held on November 28, 2021. In Uzbekistan, the continuity of leadership was affirmed as Mr Shavkat Mirziyoyev secured a second term as President on October 24, 2021. Furthermore, substantive representation in political deliberation is key to creating an environment conducive to policies that uphold the rights and well-being of women. While certain nations, like Kazakhstan, implemented affirmative action measures, including a joint 30 % quota for youth and women in political roles, others experienced setbacks. For instance, Kyrgyzstan saw a reduction in the gender quota for women in Parliament from 30 % to 25 % following parliamentary endorsement in July 2021.

Moreover, the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 2021, led to the dissolution of the existing government structure. An all-male "caretaker cabinet" was established, with appointments spanning security and government positions at various levels. Despite assurances from the *de-facto* authorities regarding women's rights within the context of *Sharia*, the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls suffered severe limitations. The Taliban leader's December 3, 2021 decrees pertaining to women's rights, raised criticism for its failure to address the spectrum of women's rights, such as labour rights and girls' access to education beyond grade six, in alignment with Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international agreements. Concurrently, the influx of refugees surged, particularly to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, indicating a heightened need for humanitarian assistance in 2022 compared to the previous year.

Due to political changes in Afghanistan, the regional programme was capable of only some limited engagement of Afghani beneficiaries in the programme implementation. In an attempt to

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2023>

overcome these obstacles, the team engaged in special consultations with the RCO Afghanistan Team Leader and regional offices of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women. The multi-stakeholder dialogues led to a refined programme stance that benefited from extensive advocacy campaigns in support of Afghan women's rights activists and civil society organisations. Subsequently, regional collaboration and dialogue were intensified with the UN Country Offices to mitigate potential security and political risks and continued its efforts to consolidate more cooperative and integrated regional actions for meaningful and sustainable gender transformation in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

War in Ukraine, although having no direct impact on Spotlight operation, still impacted the economic situation in all Central Asian countries, contributing often to the higher inflation, and short- and medium-term devaluation of currencies against the US dollar and euro - therefore bringing effects to the economic situation of households throughout the region.

### Policy/legislative landscape

Despite considerable efforts in Central Asia to address DV, a prevailing reluctance and complexities in legal definitions have hindered the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in the region. This is despite explicit commitments by the Kazakh and Uzbek governments to promote the GEWE agenda through the Generation Equality Forum, including through the proposed Regional Virtual Community of Practice. The legal landscape varies, with some forms of DV criminalised while others are inadequately addressed, creating protection gaps.

In 2023, Kazakhstan enforced changes to the Criminal Code and Administrative (Civil) Code to allow law enforcement officers to intervene without survivor's statements. Moreover, amended legislation limits the number of times that arguing parties can reconcile to one. In summary, amendments to the legislation on DV stipulate the transition from a passive to a proactive approach in registering and proceeding with DV applying the principle of inevitability of punishment for such offences.<sup>8</sup> However, DV as a distinct form of SGBV is still not recognized by the Criminal Code.

Similarly, Kyrgyzstan revised its Law on Domestic Violence (2017) alongside a new Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code in 2021, but certain key definitions still fall short of international standards. A group of MPs of the Kyrgyz Parliament initiated a bill aimed at strengthening the prevention of repeated attacks on victims of sexual offences by tightening liability and creating protection mechanisms. In this regard, a draft Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On amendments to certain legislative acts of the Kyrgyz Republic in the field of security and protection from family, sexual and gender-based violence" has been developed.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the Tajik Criminal Code only addresses certain forms of violence against women and children, such as kidnapping, early and forced marriage, rape, and sexual abuse, but not all, providing a limited scope of legal protection. Turkmenistan's Civil and Criminal Codes

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<sup>8</sup> <https://mediazona.ca/news/2023/05/15/abuse>

<sup>9</sup> As per the Spotlight Initiative Country Programme for Kyrgyzstan

encompass various forms of violence but lack a clear definition for DV, echoing Uzbekistan's Law on Violence (2019), which also lacks a distinct definition for DV. As for HP, no systematic solutions exist with the exception of Kyrgyzstan adopting a law and Action plan for eradication of early marriages but there is no effective system of tracing the religious marriages with minors and other types of misconduct in relation to illegal practices (e.g. forced marriages etc.) In 2023, the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan adopted a package of amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Codes of the country, which provide for criminal liability for DV and provide women and children with additional protection mechanisms.

Gender Equality Plans and sectoral protocols are in place across Central Asia but often lack comprehensive integration of DV within the broader context of SGBV. Kazakhstan's Concept of Family and Gender Policy until 2030 and sectoral protocols aim to improve DV handling. Kyrgyzstan's Gender Equality Plan (1998) acknowledges DV prevention, but the explicit connection between DV and sexual violence remains absent. Despite sectoral protocols in Kyrgyzstan for DV, their effectiveness is limited. Moreover, Tajikistan's State Programme for DV Prevention (2014-2023) and action plan assigns roles but faces implementation challenges of sectoral protocols.

The gender equality agenda in Turkmenistan is being implemented through the National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2021-2025). Sectoral GBV standards and sectoral SOPs are pending approval. Likewise, Uzbekistan's Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality until 2030 lays the groundwork for sectoral SOPs and referral pathways awaiting approval. The presence of sectoral protocols, however, does not always guarantee seamless coordination across different sectors. Additionally, across the region, legislative documents and protocols consistently overlook provisions for victims/survivors with disabilities and other vulnerabilities, revealing a pressing need for a more inclusive approach.

Furthermore, the challenges extend to the realm of workplace harassment prevention, where legal support remains inadequate. While progress has been made in certain countries, particularly Tajikistan, which passed the Law on Equality and Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, a commendable stride for human rights protection, the law's scope and effectiveness are subjects of concern. Notably, the Committee highlighted the potential limitations in addressing discrimination based on circumstances not explicitly covered.

Central Asia also grapples with punitive laws, policies, and practices that disproportionately affect sex workers (SW) and people who inject drugs (PID), leading to heightened HIV vulnerability and hindering access to crucial services. Discrimination pervades different sectors for women, including sex workers, those living with HIV, and incarcerated individuals. Women with HIV encounter limited access to DV shelters, while women using drugs report instances of police brutality. Moreover, HIV-positive status compounds discrimination in healthcare settings, influencing critical decisions, such as those pertaining to reproduction.

Furthermore, practical application of GRB tools is only possible if the procedure to apply these tools is enshrined in the normative legal acts governing the budgeting process. Unfortunately, the relevant legislation in the region does not yet contain provisions requiring the use of GRB



tools in the planning of national or local budgets, nor are there any provisions in the mandatory assessment of the impact of expenditures on gender equality. A key challenge that persisted throughout is that the use of GRB tools is situational, meaning that gender analysis of individual budgets is conducted only in some pilot projects and in some sectors, but there are no examples of the integration of a gender perspective in the budgeting process on a systematic basis. The SI RP continuously advocated for strengthening interaction between the state and civil society on issues of gender equality through the development of participatory budgeting.

The SI-RP has extended support through technical assistance and high-level dialogues to address these challenges. Notably, the visit of Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, to Central Asia in June 2022, underscored the urgency of advancing gender equality and ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG). The 'silent pandemic' of violence against women and girls was a focal point, emphasising its global magnitude and the need for concerted efforts. This visit, including engagements with government officials, civil society organisations, and women's rights activists, aimed to facilitate improvements in laws, policies, and services to enhance the protection and rights of women and girls and the sustainability of the impacts of the programme.

#### Environmental/climate:

Regional water access remains a key source of dispute and tension in the region that impacts inter-state relations in Central Asia. Distribution of water repeatedly caused friction and contention between upstream disputes (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and downstream (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) on the main rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya. However, encouraging signs of willingness to engage in mediation from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan may be supportive of the aim to avoid conflict. This conflict is thought to have had some degree of impact on the relations between the states and on the programme. In addition, a new Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation will be established in Kazakhstan to address the water shortages.

#### **Programme Governance and Coordination**

A coherent and multidisciplinary cross-agency strategy to address violence against women and girls is imperative in safeguarding victims and survivors from further harm. Entering Phase II of the project, the SI-RP embarked on a mission to enhance participatory implementation. This included inclusive consultations with regional stakeholders, notably the UN Gender-Thematic Groups of all Central Asian countries, EU delegations, CSO networks, the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG), RUNOs' technical leads, and Spotlight Initiative country programmes in the region - the Afghanistan SI Country programme team, the Kyrgyzstan SI Country programme team, and the Tajikistan SI Country programme team.

Enhanced coordination was achieved under the guidance of the UN Resident Coordinator in Kazakhstan, supported by the RUNOs - UNDP, UNFPA, UNW Regional Offices and the SI-RP Programme Team. Deepened engagement of a wide set of stakeholders significantly improved alignment with the One-UN reform, focusing on heightened coherence, improved monitoring and evaluation practices and reinforced national ownership. As a result, the SI-RP effectively

expanded regional collaboration against complex realities emerging with special emphasis on deepening civil society engagement and repositioning for joint actions for addressing EVAWG and SGBV in the region.

#### A. Regional Steering Committee (RSC)

The Regional Steering Committee (RSC), under the leadership of the Head of the EU Delegation and the UN Resident Coordinator, constitutes the foundational pillar for coordinating, overseeing, decision-making, and ensuring accountability within the framework of the SI-RP, in alignment with the core principles of the One-UN reform. Established in 2020, the RSC serves as the driving force propelling the implementation of the regional programme, fostering effective communication and seamless coordination across the regional landscape. Furthermore, the RSC holds the authority to endorse the workplan and budget, empowering it to guide the programme's direction and resource allocation.

The committee's composition encompasses the European Union Delegations (EUDs), UN RC, UN Women Representative for Kazakhstan, UNFPA Representative for Kazakhstan, UNDP Representative for Kazakhstan, as well as two representatives from civil society drawn from the CSO Reference Board. As the programme evolved, the RSC's role and scope also developed to deepen coordination. Chairs of the RSC took a decision to add representatives of the MFA RK, Ambassadors of four Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) to Kazakhstan, as well as all Central Asia UN RC as observers. In addition, regional Co-Chairs of the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender - regional directors of UNFPA and UN Women - were invited as observers to the RSC.

Furthermore, the RSC has progressively undertaken a key role in elevating accountability and alignment with the European Union's new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Relations 2020–2025 (GAP III), focusing on accelerating advancements in empowering women and girls, while simultaneously safeguarding the achievements accomplished in the realm of gender equality over 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In 2023, the Joint RSC Meeting convened on its third and fourth meetings respectively on 27 June and 29 November. In 2021-2022, the RSC gathered once a year. The former was organised to provide strategic oversight for the remaining period to the end of the programme and the latter was held to acknowledge the achievements and conclude the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan. Events were chaired by the UN RC in Kazakhstan Ms. Michaela Friberg-Storey. and the EU Ambassador to the Republic of Kazakhstan and the EU Head of Cooperation. The Ambassadors of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and a Consul of Kyrgyzstan participated in the concluding RSC Meeting as observers. Participants of the gatherings emphasised the holistic approach used by the programme in the true spirit of a "One-UN" where it is hardly possible to distinguish between the achievements made by individual UN agencies but rather praise the results achieved by the programme as a whole.

The CS-RRG members took part in both RSC Meetings as committee members and as observers. They praised the programme for a unique comprehensive approach applied to tackle SGBV and all activities that laid a solid foundation for consistent actions and interventions to advance gender equality and eliminate SGBV and provided useful insight into the programme

*The name “Spotlight” will be given to the Regional CSO Network for its unique qualities and capabilities, which will have strength and voice, and giving the hope that together we are able to achieve a better future free of violence.*

- **Ranokhon Kossimova**, CS RRG member

accomplishments in their countries and underscored the profound significance of these accomplishments in the broader context of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG). In summary, on behalf of the CS-RRG, it has been suggested to give the name of “Spotlight” to the Regional CSO Network due to its unique qualities and capabilities that created the network,

which embodies strength and voice, giving hope that together we can achieve a better future free of violence.

## B. The Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG)

The CS-RRG was established as a key institutional mechanism, ensuring the integration of participatory, rights-based, and "Leave No One Behind" principles in both the design and execution of the SI-RP. Beyond this role, the CS-RRG undertakes a dual function: advising the SI-RP team while concurrently advocating for the attainment of the programme's objectives.

An interim CS-RRG came into being in 2019, comprising 15 members representing regional Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Following this, the permanent CS-RRG took shape in December 2020, composed of 12 members selected through a committee that included five representatives from regional CSOs and two members from the UN adhering to the established Code of Conduct. Geographical representation played a pivotal role in ensuring equal representation within the CS-RRG. Furthermore, at least 50 per cent of the CS-RRG members were leaders or members of regional/subregional women's rights organisations/networks, including grassroots organisations. This distribution enabled the CS-RRG to draw on interdisciplinary expertise in human rights, feminist, and protection domains, collectively contributing to a comprehensive and systematic engagement of civil society in the design and implementation of the SI-RP, while fostering national ownership and strategic partnerships.

In 2022, the SI Project Team attempted to reconstitute the CS-RRG. However, among the 12 existing members, few demonstrated a readiness to participate in capacity-building activities and commit as CS-RRG constituents, while others expressed a preference to continue advancing their own networks and organisations. Nevertheless, the SI-RP continued to promote increased engagement with CSO perspectives, notably by organising webinar sessions involving members of the Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Civil Society National Reference Groups (CS-NRG). This initiative aimed at amplifying regional collaboration within the Central Asia Alliance, served as a dynamic platform successfully bringing together multiple stakeholders to SGBV in the region. In addition, other mechanisms were established to strengthen CSO

engagement such as the regional workshop held in June 2021 focusing on harnessing collective expertise, and experiences, addressing challenges, and channelling shared initiatives of advocates for gender equality from the region.

In May-June 2023, during the country visits to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan the programme Coordination Unit/Team (PCU – Programme Coordinator and Monitoring and Reporting Officer) met with the members of the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the upcoming Central Asian Alliance against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and to clarify the roles and participation of both the CS-RRG and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in this Alliance. As a result, five engaged members of the CS-RRG actively participated in the launch of the GBV Alliance having emphasised the crucial link between the Regional CSO Network and the newly established Central Asia Alliance on SGBV.

### C. Inter-agency coordination, Regional Open Coordination Group on Small Grants for CSOs (ROCG) and other governance mechanisms

Strengthening inter-agency coordination and involving multiple stakeholders fundamentally fostered national engagement and ownership, including by civil society, ensuring the sustainability of SI-RP contributions' impacts. This structure also nurtured strategic partnerships, particularly with government and civil society, as well as local and grassroots groups. Notably, this was achieved through the establishment of a Community of Practice (COP) with participation from RCOs in the region, RUNOs, EUDs, CSOs, government representatives, and regional programme staff. This included three representatives from Afghanistan (1 male and 2 female), specialised in eliminating VAWG and harmful practices (HP) and advancing women's rights.

Furthermore, to strengthen multi-stakeholder involvement and local ownership, SI established a Regional Open Coordination Group on Small Grants for CSOs (ROCG) under Pillar 6. The ROCG has been extensively consulted throughout 2021 and 2022, acting as a platform for informal consultations to build CSOs' capacity and the women's movement in the region, ensuring coordinated approaches to country and regional interventions at the strategic level. Moreover, in 2022, as the programme approached the end of Phase I, the SI-RP team embarked on developing Phase II, making the process truly participatory. SI conducted broad consultations with all regional stakeholders, conducting a total of eight rounds, including five Gender Thematic Group meetings in all Central Asian countries with the participation of UN Country Teams and European Union (EU) Delegations, the CSO network, as well as the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG) meeting, RUNOs technical leads meeting, and consultations with the Afghanistan Country SI programme team.

The collaboration with the European Union (EU) was further strengthened during country visits to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in May and June 2023. The Coordination Team met with the focal points of the EU Delegations intending to comprehensively showcase the results achieved by the Regional Programme, and to engage in meaningful dialogues concerning critical matters encompassing a comprehensive spectrum, including milestones attained, the compelling success stories, and complementarity of the Spotlight Regional and Country Programmes.

Furthermore, the agenda included deliberations on the programme closure and the concomitant aspects of follow-up and sustainability, both of which are pivotal for the sustainability of the results and expected impact of the Spotlight Initiative. These interactions were crucial for the comprehension of the program's achievements and for projecting future directions. This meaningful exchange of insights and perspectives contributed significantly to the strategic alignment of efforts and the ongoing commitment to fostering positive change within the region.

During SI visits to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in May and June, the Coordination Team engaged in fruitful discussions with the Spotlight country programmes. These interactions provided an opportunity to delve into a wide range of topics, placing special emphasis on highlighting the significant milestones that have been achieved with compelling success stories that have emerged from these initiatives. A special emphasis was placed on the imminent closure of the Regional and Country programmes and the imperative to sustain and advance the accomplishments while preserving the wealth of data, information and tools collected and produced in the region. The Spotlight teams agreed to make them readily available via the Virtual Knowledge Platform, the database which is to become an integral part of the Alliance. These conversations were not only enriching but also instrumental in fostering a shared vision and collaborative approach to driving positive change in the region.

#### D. Use of UN Reform inter-agency tools

The SI-RP actively pursued a more multisectoral approach to achieve greater efficiencies, enhance synergies across pillars, and engage more cohesively and effectively with the most disadvantaged beneficiaries as part of the commitment to the principle of Leaving No One Behind. The SI-RP was seamlessly integrated into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) joint work plan and strategic planning more broadly.

Furthermore, the SI RP effectively facilitated networking and established partnerships with a diverse array of stakeholders, encompassing state and non-state entities ranging from international and national organisations to local/grassroots and feminist groups. Notably, the programme laid the groundwork for informal platforms for consultations between the police and actors representing social protection and health sectors engaged in the multisectoral response to GBV issues and GBV data collection and processing. Moreover, the SI RP played a convening role in uniting and establishing an informal network among youth organisations in Central Asia, aimed at preventing GBV in the region.

Moreover, through collaboration with a leading regional mass communications entity, the communication agency Tainyi Sovetnik, the SI-RP launched a regional solidarity movement on gender equality, HeForShe Central Asia. The programme contributed to empowering the national and regional women's movement, and the establishment of the Regional CSOs Network and the formal Regional Coalition of NeMolchiCentralAsia (DoNotBeSilent CentralAsia), whilst convening civil society actors and government institutions. In addition, the SI RP worked directly with survivors and facilitated peer-to-peer knowledge transfer.

Finally, in another notable partnership, the SI RP joined forces with the Government of Indonesia and the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN) to acquire capacity-building support for organisations working with Muslim religious leaders. This collaboration resulted in the training of 10 representatives from regional theological institutions, equipping them with the skills to engage Muslim Religious Leaders in discussions about reproductive health, family planning, and the prevention of GBV and child marriage.

## Programme Partnerships

### A. Government

A strong partnership has been forged with the Government of Kazakhstan, which has pledged its commitment to the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions on GBV and on Economic Justice and Rights. Within the GEF Action Coalition on GBV, Kazakhstan has made a commitment to establish a Central Asian Regional Knowledge Platform aimed at amplifying regional knowledge exchange, sharing experiences, innovative solutions on VAWG prevention, response expertise, and women's empowerment.

*The Programme developed into a good cooperation between the EU, participating UN agencies, Governments and civil society reaching those who need it shaping the sense of truly regional partnership that lead to the establishment of the Alliance.*

**Michaela Friberg-Storey**, UN Resident Coordinator to Kazakhstan

In 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) contributed \$50,000 to the Spotlight Regional Programme to enhance the capacity of regional CSOs and support the implementation of activities under Pillar 6, with a particular focus on addressing SGBV, especially in the context of COVID-19 and beyond. In 2022, continued MFA support of \$20,000 enabled the sustainability of three crisis centres for GBV survivors in Kazakhstan.

In 2022 the regional events of the SI Programme on MSR to GBV and Data, engaging men and 'Law Enforcement Agencies to Protect the Rights of Women Subjected to Gender-Based Violence: Experience of the Countries of Central Asia' engaged representatives of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, Prosecutor's Office, Gender Machineries, Statistics committees, and departments of five Central Asian countries.

In alignment with our partnership with the Government, SI is pleased to highlight a significant milestone in our collaborative efforts. In 2023, the Government of Kazakhstan has committed \$400,000 to support the establishment and ongoing maintenance of the Central Asia Alliance, further solidifying our partnership. This substantial funding injection was used to facilitate the creation of a Secretariat, with the newly hired coordinator. Looking ahead, SI anticipates a similar level of investment from the Government of Kazakhstan in 2024. This sustained commitment underscores the strength of our partnership and its pivotal role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the programme's impact.

## B. Civil Society

The UN collaborates with civil society organizations and various stakeholders to drive community-level positive change. These partnerships tap into the local expertise of organizations well-versed in understanding local needs, challenges, and complex political dynamics, including traditional structures and power dynamics. Together with academia, practitioners, and media, this collaborative effort plays a pivotal role in advancing the regional agenda to eliminate harmful practices and promote gender-transformative policies.

One essential partner in the Spotlight Initiative is the East European Institute for Reproductive Health (EEIRH), a trusted and long-standing collaborator with one of RUNOs. EEIRH brings extensive experience in the multisectoral response to gender-based violence (GBV) and excels in data collection and processing related to these critical concerns.

The program conducted needs assessments in 2021, gaining insights into the unique requirements of Central Asian communities and organizations. Local leaders and activists engaged in dialogues to explore challenges and priorities, actively shaping program strategies. The development of the CSO regional network involved consultations and feedback sessions to ensure all voices were heard. The youth led and youth serving CSO were engaged in the prevention of GBV through the established informal youth network.

Through online dialogue platforms, the Regional Program facilitated resource sharing and knowledge exchange among over 410 civil society actors, partner organizations, fostering peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities.

## C. European Union Delegation

The Programme Coordination Unit consistently maintained open lines of communication and collaboration with the European Union Delegation in Kazakhstan, recognizing its pivotal role as a key partner in the success of the initiative. To ensure the overall success of the program, ongoing cooperation and communication with the EU Delegation were deemed essential.

Throughout the final year of the programme, the Programme Coordinator and the Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) Officer undertook visits to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, actively engaging with the respective European Union Delegations in these countries. These interactions were comprehensive in scope, covering a wide range of topics, including the identification of key challenges, the assessment of program milestones, the sharing of success stories, and the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Additionally, discussions encompassed plans for the Central Asia Alliance launch and future support.

In response to these dialogues, the EU representative from Tajikistan demonstrated a strong commitment to regional coordination and partnership. This commitment was exemplified by their participation in the Joint Steering Committee and their involvement in the launch events of the Central Asia Countries Alliance. These interactions not only facilitated the development of follow-up strategies but also addressed critical sustainability aspects, further cementing the foundation for ongoing collaboration.

#### D. Cooperation with other (non-RUNO) UN agencies (if applicable)

In order to bolster the safeguarding of vulnerable groups, the Regional Programme collaborated with both UNDP and the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). This partnership aimed to facilitate interactive training sessions for specialists and activists dedicated to the well-being of women living with HIV. According to a regional study assessing the response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Central Asia, persistent challenges in eliminating violence against women and girls include the absence of an inclusive vision and the enduring presence of HIV-related discrimination and stigma. Among these obstacles are the limited capacity of shelters in Central Asia to cater to women with disabilities and discriminatory provisions that impede women living with HIV from accessing these shelters.

#### E. Other Partners, including for resource mobilisation.

While partnering with community organisations, and institutions and collaborating with governmental authorities, the SI focused its partnership efforts on organisations that share a similar mandate and mission. One outstanding example is OSCE WIN – Women & Men Innovating & Networking for Gender Equality, a strategic project aimed at accelerating the implementation of the OSCE's 2004 action plan for the promotion of gender equality. This plan encompasses Women, Peace and security, violence against women & girls, and women in the economy and the environment.

In November 2022, 130 media professionals, independent journalists and social media influencers from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan participated in an event with training on how to prevent and address GBV. Jointly implemented by the 4 SI programmes in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan (see photo), as well as other actors, like ACTED, Medianet, human rights protection activists and feminists. The event was held simultaneously in Almaty, Bishkek, Tashkent, Ashgabat, Dushanbe, and Kabul. At the end of the event, a contest was held inviting participants to identify the best media product for GBV prevention and challenging participants to create media content that would inspire survivors of violence to speak up and find solutions to their problems. The Government of Kazakhstan's financial contribution to the Regional Programme.<sup>10</sup> The Regional Programme has mobilised around USD 1,300,000 as in-kind contributions from the private sector represented by the woman-led tech company, TV channels and Radio stations to support the solidarity movement for gender equality HeForShe Kazakhstan.

## **Results**

### **A. Capturing Broader Transformations Across Outcomes**

The SI-RP actively deepened the political and strategic positioning of VAW within both regional and national contexts, leading to broader transformations toward advancing the EVAWG agenda. By adopting a multisectoral approach and fostering collaboration among various agencies, the programme significantly enhanced political awareness and urgency to address

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<sup>10</sup> Placeholder for the information



GBV issues in the region. Additionally, the SI-RP laid a solid foundation for regional cooperation by developing mechanisms, conducting analytical works, and performing baseline assessments. Moreover, it strengthened the capacity of local actors, including CSOs, youth organisations, and state agencies. These concerted efforts markedly elevated the profile of the EVAWG agenda across the region, whilst showcasing the transformative change towards EVAWG through interventions across pillars.

A notable achievement was the establishment of the Central Asian Alliance on countering GBV (*Alliance*), a pioneering regional mechanism that played a critical role in policy and legislative reforms, interventions, and joint responses within the framework of EVAWG and countering harmful practices (HR). This comprehensive programme bridged gaps, developed practical recommendations to enhance alignment of the GBV legislation with international human rights standards. The Central Asian Alliance to end GBV success in deepening political engagement was evident in the securing of USD 400,000 in funding from the Government of Kazakhstan in 2023, with similar levels of resources envisioned for 2024. This transformative outcome also reflects harmonisation with national plans and priorities, particularly Kazakhstan's Generation Equality Forum (GEF) commitments with respect to the Action Coalition on GBV. Furthermore, the integration of a regional grant-making mechanism into the Alliance's work under pillar 6 showcased the programme's comprehensive approach to achieving transformative change across sectors, including evidence-based GBV programmes (pillar 2).

The comprehensive approach of the SI-RP, particularly through the Central Asian Alliance, promoted meaningful engagement with marginalised communities and rights holders in line with the Leaving No One Behind principle. By convening various networks and fostering inclusive policy dialogues, the programme ensured that vulnerable voices were not only heard but actively participated in shaping strategies. The establishment of the Central Asian Alliance, for example, provided an inclusive space where diverse stakeholders contribute to the EVAWG agenda's formulation, reinforcing national ownership. This approach not only enhanced sustainability but ensured that interventions were responsive to the specific needs of marginalised segments of society.

Furthermore, the SI-RP demonstrated a commitment to UN reform principles through the development of tools and methodologies in the EVAWG domain. An example was the unified SGBV legislation review methodology, collaboratively created with CS-RRG and civil society activists. This not only facilitated the review of national legislation but also contributed to greater alignment with international standards, demonstrating the interconnectedness of strengthening legislative frameworks (pillar 1) and data collection on VAWG (pillar 5).

Finally, the programme significantly influenced stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Another prominent example was the formal establishment of the Regional Coalition of NeMolchiCentralAsia (#DoNotBeSilentCentralAsia), uniting hundreds of civil society actors, activists, and feminists to strengthen capacities and collaborative engagement to positively influence social gender norms with support from the Alliance. This harmonisation further

illustrated the synergies between pillars, particularly how shifting social gender-based norms (pillar 3) has significantly improved evidence-based programmes for preventing and addressing violence and HPs (pillar 2). In addition, partnerships with communication agencies and religious leaders led to positive shifts in societal norms, reinforcing the interplay between pillars. This comprehensive approach was evident in how capacitating civil society and movements (pillar 6) positively impacted norms and attitudes (pillar 3), subsequently garnering support for legislative and policy enhancements (pillar 1). The comprehensive approach of the SI-RP underscores how it actively secured transformative impact and sustainability beyond specific results in individual pillars.

## Capturing Change at Outcome Level

### **Outcome 1: Legal and Policy Framework**

#### **Increased alignment of SGBV legal framework and law enforcement practices with international norms and standards**

A key challenge in Central Asia is the lack of comprehensive legislation prohibiting all forms of GBV and harmful practices and guaranteeing effective GBV prevention and response to GBV survivors. To bridge this gap, the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme developed the unified methodology for conducting review of national GBV legislation and law-enforcement practices, which allowed it to produce five comprehensive national reviews and one regional review of legislation on sexual and gender-based violence and law enforcement practices.

The regional review of GBV legislation and law-enforcement practices identified gaps including but not limited to:

- None of the Central Asian countries have recognized in their legislation that gender-based violence constitutes discrimination against women or a manifestation of gender inequalities.
- None of the Central Asian countries explicitly recognize violence against women as an Intersectional form of discrimination. Also, in legislation on gender equality and violence against women of the Central Asian countries the vulnerability of certain groups of women and girls is not recognized.
- The Central Asian countries have not yet included in their legislation this type of violence as online violence against women and girls. It should be noted that this type of violence is still poorly regulated in many countries around the world.
- The legislation of the Central Asian countries does not comply with international standards in terms of prohibition, prevention and protection from sexual harassment in public places and in the workplace. The concept of “harmful practice” is also absent in the legislation of Central Asian countries.
- The criminalization of femicides in Central Asian countries needs improvement.
- Criminal Codes of Central Asian countries regarding crimes related to sexual freedom and sexual integrity, do not meet modern requirements for the concept of the sexual violence. In particular, rape is understood as vaginal penetration and the main

characteristic is the use of force or the threat of its use, and not like all types of penetration without consent.

- The scope of provision of services to GBV and harmful practices' survivors in the Central Asian countries is at the initial stage of development. The most complete commitment to provide social services for victims of violence has been developed in Kazakhstan. There are not only the obligations provided for by law, but also the standards for providing such services, as well as detailed provisions for the provision of such services to victims, including risk assessment systems and development of an assistance package considering the situation of the victims of violence. Such provisions have not been developed to the same degree of detail in other Central Asian countries.
- In Central Asian countries, the education system is used poorly to combat gender stereotypes, GBV and harmful practices.

The role of the media in preventing GBV and harmful practices is poorly envisaged in legislation of Central Asian countries, there are no requirements for mechanisms of self-regulation, as well as the development and implementation of guidelines on how to write and cover gender issues and gender-based violence by journalists and media. In this regard, the Regional Programme partnered with UNFPA Turkmenistan and organised the media-training on November 3, 2023, resulting in 20 journalists strengthening their knowledge on gender-based violence reporting and journalism ethics.

These analytical data informed the clear-cut regional strategy on alignment of legislation and law-enforcement practices in the Central Asian countries with international norms and standards. These processes were mutually reinforced by ongoing peer review of knowledge products, which not only guaranteed the accuracy and reliability of the tools but also

strengthened the overall methodological rigour.



Photo credit: UNDP, Kazakhstan

strengthened the overall methodological rigour. The main strategy of all the Central Asian countries should be to fully regulate all forms and types of the violence against women and girls, including harmful practices and their criminalization as a basis for further consolidation of the state's efforts to eradicate GBV and harmful practices, including collection of reliable statistics and data on the GBV and harmful practices prevalence and assessments of GBV survivors access to provided measures of protection and support. The subsequent step is the reformation of norms of a procedural law and the focus of such reviews and reform must be, first and

foremost, the reform of the criminal process with taking into account girls and women faced GBV, especially of sexual violence against girls and women.

As evidenced by their practical application in the Astana expert discussion in October 2023, which supported the aim of formulating recommendations for the criminalisation of domestic violence in Kazakhstan. Consequently, the Regional Programme substantially supported increased awareness, compliance, and advanced policy enhancement to end GBV and improve law enforcement practices.

### Enhanced GBV response protection to vulnerable groups

According to the regional study on the architecture of response to SGBV in Central Asia, a lack of an inclusive vision and HIV-related discrimination and stigma remain significant barriers to end violence against women and girls. This includes the lack of capacity of shelters in Central Asia to accommodate women with disabilities and discriminatory provisions that deny women living with HIV access to shelters.

To ensure enhanced protection for vulnerable groups, the Regional Programme partnered the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to conduct interactive training for specialists and activists working with women living with HIV. Activists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan received peer-to-peer support and counselling from reputable HIV consultants and coaches on how to cope with stress and prevent professional burnout, and physical and emotional exhaustion. The training also took stock of ongoing efforts to ensure that the human rights of women living with HIV are respected and their needs in access to health care, social protection and justice are met. The discussion demonstrated commitment at the community leadership level to advocate against ignorance about HIV transmission and stigma and to lead the dialogue with key government agencies and legislators to address existing legal and institutional barriers to access to specialised social services.

Through research and partnerships with the expert community and SGBV service providers, the programme helped raise public awareness of issues and gaps in GBV response, which resulted in enhanced advocacy and knowledge sharing. For example, the regional review of the system of response to SGBV in Central Asia highlighted the problem of adolescent pregnancy. Consequently, in 2023 the programme partnered with one of the leading social media platforms to screen the documentary on adolescent pregnancy in Kazakhstan, followed by a discussion with youth activists and influencers on sexual violence against children, sexuality education and shared responsibility for life-changing decisions, which helped bridge understanding and shift harmful social norms at the community level.

This regional review of the system of response to SGBV in countries of Central Asia raised the problem of polygamous marriages. The follow-up activity aims to raise awareness among young people about the problems and consequences of polygamous marriages for women and their children. A collection of illustrated human stories is being prepared, complemented by commentaries from GBV experts, legal counsellors, and social workers. The materials were disseminated through the social media of the Spotlight Initiative, UNDP, UNFPA and UN

Women in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan during 16 Days of Activism against GBV.

Further these comprehensive analytical data on GBV legislation and law-enforcement practices and the architecture of the response to GBV cases have been visualised into the regional matrix and brief country profiles.

## **Outcome 2: Institutions**

### **Central Asian Alliance to End GBV launched and strengthened its partnership**



*More than 70 representatives from the EU, UN, Central Asian countries, the diplomatic corps, civil society, media and youth associations came together for the launch of the Alliance. Photos: UN Women Kazakhstan*

Participatory consultations on institutionalisation of the Central Asian Alliance to end GBV brought together over 500 actors across feminist and women's rights movements, local and grassroots civil society organisations to dialogue and draft collective vision and strategy of CSOs engagement and participation in the Central Asian Alliance in 2024-2026. On June 27, 2023, in Almaty over 50 representatives of CSOs, gender experts and the development community brought together to celebrate the launch of the Central Asian Alliance.

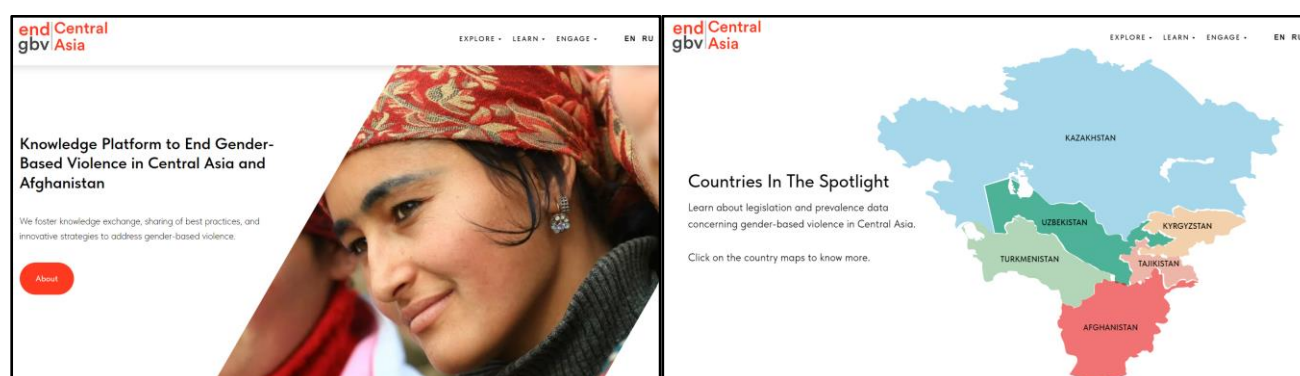
Later in 2023 the Central Asian Alliance supported several initiatives suggested and implemented in partnership with the established regional CSOs network such as the Central Asian CSOs Forum and established dialogue spaces, fostering active engagement among stakeholders across Central Asia. Together, they deliberated on recommendations within Pillars 1, 2, and 5, while also addressing challenges within national and regional institutions. Through nine dialogue and three training sessions, a total of 410 regional CSO leaders actively participated in these collaborative efforts.

The Regional CSO Network serves as an integral component of the established Central Asian Alliance, a collective endeavour at eradicating GBV. CSOs within the Central Asian Alliance play a crucial role by actively fostering regional cooperation and sharing valuable knowledge and experiences.

During the third Regional CSO Forum on November 28, 2023, over 100 representatives from CSOs across the five Central Asian countries came together to share their accomplishments from the past three years. The Forum served as a platform to highlight success stories, deliberate on challenges, share insights derived from lessons learned, and collaboratively formulate a Strategic Plan for the Central Asian Alliance. This event not only reinforced collaboration among CSOs but also nurtured a unified sense of a regional network within civil society dedicated to combating GBV. Moreover, it laid a foundation for the future initiatives of the Central Asian Alliance in the region, emphasising the ongoing commitment to addressing and preventing GBV through collective action.

### *Enhanced institutional capacity through the creation of a Virtual Knowledge Platform*

Evidence-based decision-making and knowledge sharing are fundamental to enhance the capacity of policy-makers and support the implementation of policies, programmes and interventions to end violence against women in the region. With respect to this, the Regional Programme developed the [Virtual Knowledge Platform](#), called 'End GBV in Central Asia' - a dynamic hub that fosters knowledge exchange, document-sharing and exchange of best practices for effectively addressing SGBV against women in Central Asia.



The platform's design and functions were conceptualised through an inclusive consultation procedure. This included semi-structured interviews and administering a structured survey to a targeted group of stakeholders. Specifically, over 70 representatives from CSOs from all five Central Asian countries and 25 personnel from the Spotlight Initiative Regional and Country programme teams, and UN regional and country teams were consulted. Through these engagements, the consultation process effectively captured the articulated needs of stakeholders concerning the platform's development and functionality. This approach allowed stakeholders to express their aspirations, interests, and expectations regarding the platform's role and impact.

By offering a comprehensive repository of information, data, SOPs, and tools in Russian and English at global, regional, national and community levels, the platform significantly improved policy-makers and practitioners evidence-based decision-making, as it enables access to reliable information that guide the development and implementation of policies, programs, and interventions. The platform will further contribute to the Central Asian Alliance's work and capacity-building efforts by providing access to training resources, online and offline learning offerings, and funding opportunities.

*Improved gender-responsive budgeting and integrated policy planning*

*Central Asian CSOs working on eliminating GBV are ready to cooperate and exchange experiences through the Alliance. Photos: UN Women Kazakhstan*

Gender-responsive budgeting and its integration in national legislation, policies and programmes is essential to prevent and respond to SGBV. By conducting a comprehensive regional assessment on gender-responsive budgeting in all five Central Asian countries over the last ten years, the Regional Programme not only raised awareness on the level of commitment and effectiveness of funds but also helped bridge the gap to effectively translating gender aspirations into specific recommendations on implementation and monitoring of gender-responsive budgeting principles in Central Asia.

The regional assessment shows that the Central Asian countries are at the initial stage of implementation of gender responsive budgeting demanding development of detailed step-by-step/roadmaps for integration of gender perspectives in the budget process in the region. Practical application of gender budgeting tools is possible only if the procedure for applying these tools is enshrined in the normative legal acts governing the budgeting process. The relevant legislation of the countries of the region does not yet contain provisions requiring the use of gender-sensitive budgeting tools in the planning of national or local budgets. There are also no provisions on the mandatory assessment of the impact of expenditures on gender equality. A key challenge in the region is that the use of gender responsive budgeting tools is situational, i.e. in some pilot projects, gender analysis of individual budgets is conducted in some sectors, but there are no examples of integration of gender perspective in the budgeting process on a systematic basis. Hence, development of relevant legislation is required.

The Regional Programme advocates to strengthen interaction between the state and civil society on issues of gender equality through the development of participatory budgeting. The existing mechanisms of participatory budgeting can be successfully used to promote women's interests in the formation of local budgets. Civil society actors are essential to monitoring national budgets and to ensuring that efforts to end violence against women and girls are adequately cost and funded. The Regional Programme developed recommendations on building the monitoring systems with indicators and recommendations for further promotion of gender responsive budgeting tools and models in prevention of SGBV targeting survivors of

sexual violence. Through this, the Regional Programme contributed to strengthening the capacities of over 70 civil society actors.

***Case study on the financing of crisis centres for GBV survivors in Kazakhstan:***

*A wide range of civil society actors contributed to the analysis of the budgeting of services provided to sexual and gender-based violence survivors in Kazakhstan. VAW prevalence survey in Kazakhstan was conducted twice (2016 and 2022). However, the results of surveys cannot be applied to assess the needs in crisis centres because crisis centres are financed from city budgets, and survey data is available only at the oblasts (regional) level. In Kazakhstan local budgets allocate an average of KZT 5,400 per one bed in a crisis centre per day. This is approximately USD 11. To ensure that all residents of Kazakhstan have access to special social services in the case of SGBV at least to the same extent as it was provided in 2021, at least KZT 3.13 billion tenge would be required per year (population of Kazakhstan 19,666 thousand people/ KZT 159), which is 3 times less than allocated. To ensure equal access to services of the same quality for all SGBV survivors regardless of place of residence, it is necessary to develop a methodology for calculating the standards of costs for the services of crisis centres.*

The regional assessment on the progress of implementation of gender-responsive budgeting and practical guidelines with a monitoring system is currently undergoing peer review, which will support the vision for the assessment to serve as a benchmark for measuring progress over the long term, particularly in channelling resources toward areas that hold the greatest potential for mitigating instances of SGBV.

**Multi-Sectoral Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (MSR to SGBV)**

Through a series of regional studies focusing on the involvement of the health, social and police sectors in responding to SGBV, the Regional Programme reinforced ongoing efforts to mainstream a multi-sectoral approach in the work of three key sectors - protection, health and social support - to address SGBV challenges in Central Asia and to ensure the availability and accessibility of specialised services for survivors of violence. This included:

- A situation analysis on SGBV and institutional environment for MSR to SGBV implementation in the region, including a review of best practices applicable for CA countries.
- A regional SOP model for SGBV case referral and case management for health, social and police sectors, including people with disabilities.
- Sectoral training packages for professionals in the health, social and police sectors on the provision of coordinated sectoral and one-stop-shop services for SGBV survivors, including disability aspects.

Consequently, Tajikistan is in the process of updating its national SOPs based on the regional model, and Uzbekistan is using them to develop a training module on providing disability-inclusive services to GBV survivors, making progress towards creating a safer and more inclusive environment for all.





Photo credit: UN FPA, Kazakhstan

### ***Situational Analysis on participation of the health, psycho-social and law-enforcement sectors to multi-sectoral response to SGBV in Central Asia.***

*All countries of Central Asia have developed protocols on sectoral service provision (for health, social and police sectors) and/or for multi-sectoral case management coordination, focusing on DW. The protocols do not cover all forms of SGBV or vulnerable groups aspects.*

*All countries in the region are lacking specialised services for SGBV victims/survivors, particularly psycho-social support. Hotline, crisis support centres, shelter and victims support rooms are the most specialised services provided by state institutions or NGOs; however, those are not available country-wide, lacking in rural or remote areas, and omit to reach vulnerable SGBV victims/survivors such as persons with disabilities. All countries have reported a lack of financial support for specialised services to SGBV victims/survivors, these services mainly depend on donor financial support, and their sustainability is often jeopardised. Rehabilitation perpetrators programs were piloted in three countries, but they were not consistent or standardised.*

*While the existing protocols on sectoral service provision include referral aspects, all countries have difficulties in their implementation, especially in rural and remote areas and when assisting vulnerable victims/survivors, including people with disabilities. The case management coordination is poor, the procedures for confidential, respectful and dignity full referral not being at quality, comprehensive or followed by the service providers. The formal mechanism of coordination and government coordination of MSR of SGBV is missing in all countries and the existing tentative mechanisms are weak.*

In 2022 85 representatives from five Central Asian countries received knowledge on SGBV and institutional environment for MSR to SGBV implementation in the region, including the best practices applicable for CA countries on MSR to SGBV, use of regional model SOPs, training package on the provision of services to SGBV survivors by health, psychosocial and police sectors and sources of SGBV data (Pillar 5) at the regional workshop in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The workshop built the knowledge and capacity of participants on the collection, analysis and use of SGBV data in line with international and regional standards to inform laws, policies and programmes.

Moreover, a mapping of the existing data on sexual and gender-based violence by sources in Central Asia was developed and presented during the workshop. The workshop was followed by a training on coordinated provision of services to survivors of violence conducted for 56

representatives of police, health and social sectors, state and non-governmental specialised organisations providing services to survivors of violence. The training emphasised the importance of gender sensitization, a survivor-centred approach, and the needs of persons with disabilities.

In addition, in 2023, a training of trainers (ToT) was conducted in Almaty for 35 representatives from 3 key sectors (health, psycho-social support and police) representing 5 Central Asian countries to deliver evidence-based multi-sectoral programmes that prevent and respond to VAWG and harmful practices. This activity enabled participants to further provide high-quality essential services to prevent and respond to SGBV in Central Asia. The trainees will extend the pool of available trainers in their countries on MSR to SGBV.

Disturbing conclusions of the regional study on the architecture of response to gender-based violence in the countries of Central Asia pointed to an insufficient number of police officers trained to handle GBV cases, a general lack of crisis centres providing safe shelters and other specialised social services for victims/survivors of violence and their children. Budget allocations for shelter services are inadequate and a significant portion of the required funding comes from charitable organisations, even though the provision of services to victims/survivors of violence and their children is an obligation of States. It is important to revise the existing standards of service provision by crisis centres, including the range of services provided and the cost of services. The same issue of an inefficient system of service provision to survivors of GBV was also raised earlier as a result of another activity, the 'Knowledge created by NGOs for NGOs' grant competition, where several participants in this competition, representing crisis centres, emphasised that service provision requires regular revision of processes, standards and funding mechanisms.

SI RP responded with an initiative to provide Central Asian countries with a knowledge product on the methodology of per capita funding of specialised social services for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. The particular challenge is to effectively allocate available resources and set a budget that ensures the provision of quality services to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. In order to justify the amount of budget needed for a crisis centre to provide services, a methodology for normative funding of crisis centre services was developed using data from crisis centres in Kazakhstan as an example. The methodology provides an approach to determine the cost of 1 bed stay, taking into account regional disparities. This methodology seeks to inform decisions on the scope and duration of services for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. This product is primarily intended for state service providers (state-funded crisis centres), ministries and government agencies overseeing the provision of social services, and non-state crisis centres participating in public procurement programmes.

#### *Enhanced monitoring and roadmap for MSR to GBV*

The countries of Central Asia had no mechanism of monitoring and evaluation of MSR to SGBV. Thus, the M&E Tool has been designed to assess current practice against recommended aspects of service provision in the regional model of SOPs, to ensure comprehensive care and support, and more positive experiences for SGBV survivors who access essential services

provided by health, psycho-social and police sectors. The result and analysis will identify strengths and gaps in current service provision with different sectors, which will assist services to complement and improve their practice and plan and provide appropriate services for SGBV survivors.

The roadmap has been designed to offer guidance for the implementation of the SOPs developed at the country level, based on the regional models of sectoral SOPs and on international guidelines and recommendations for coordinated case management and referral in sexual and gender-based violence in health, psycho-social, and police sectors.

### Increased joint advocacy to end SGBV

Awareness raising and joint advocacy is a key priority in EVAW, as it enables the creation of broad-based alliances among a wide set of stakeholders. To this end, the SI RP enabled the creation of a Central Asian community of practice to end GBV among police services in Central Asia focusing on sharing best practices focusing on effective SGBV response. This included 2 experts from MIA RK in the development of a training programme for Kyrgyz police. During practice-sharing meetings, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were studying the existing practice of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan of specialised units in the police on the protection of women against violence and viewing such units as an effective addition to the system of police response to violence against women.



Photo credit: UNDP Kazakhstan

The community of practice has contributed to the joint advocacy by the Government, UN Agencies, international organisations and NGOs, including a set of proposals to tighten sanctions on perpetrators of domestic violence and administrative measures for strengthening the preventive side of EVAW work. Overall, the informal group consisting of 10-15 law enforcement representatives from all Central Asian countries actively engaged in capacity-building activities. In particular, the sessions focused on training on regional SOPs for three critical sectors, addressing service delivery gaps for survivors of violence, enhancing case management and referrals, and training on the SOP model for coordinated service provision.

Furthermore, champions from the law enforcement and expert communities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan actively participated in a Telegram chat group, which functioned as an advisory service to the regional programme for identifying priority issues on the EVAW agenda.

The expert community remains closely engaged on various issues, not the least on commitments and limitations for criminalising domestic violence, including the identification of actionable insights on the prosecution of domestic violence in the short- and long-term. This coupled with specialised training on applying a gender-sensitive approach, coordinated service provision and access to justice for survivors for more than 20 representatives of the administrative police units for the protection of women against domestic violence, significantly supported the creation of collective knowledge and alliances for transformative change.



Photo credit: UNDP Kazakhstan

### **Outcome 3: Prevention and Norm Change**

#### **Strengthened youth engagement to end GBV - Youth Alliance NUR<sup>11</sup>**

The Youth Alliance is an informal network of 25 youth organisations of Central Asia that has its mission, operational plan, and strategy.

In 2022, a situational analysis was conducted of youth organisations in Central Asia and their involvement in SGBV issues. The analysis



Photo credit: UNFPA, Kazakhstan

demonstrated that there were not many youth organisations dealing with GBV in Central Asia. A strategy and communication plan for the informal regional youth alliance on SGBV prevention were developed to increase the capacity of a regional youth alliance NUR.

11

<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://sites.google.com/view/nuralliance/%25D0%25B3%25D0%25BB%25D0%25B0%25D0%25B2%25D0%25BD%25D0%25B0%25D1%258F-%25D1%2581%25D1%2582%25D1%2580%25D0%25B0%25D0%25BD%25D0%25B8%25D1%2586%25D0%25B0?autouser%3D1&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1703834395826679&usg=AOvVaw25DWIAIA0EM9r7o7iiH4ah>

The institutional capacity of the regional youth network was strengthened at 3 regional youth forums (30 participants each, including guests) conducted in 2021, 2022 and 2023. During the forums representatives of youth organisations from Central Asian countries formulated and validated the mission, and developed the operational plan, strategy and further actions of the alliance on prevention of SGBV. Members of the youth alliance actively participated in 16 days of activism by organising I-Talks/Youth Talks and online trainings on GBV issues in 2022 and in 2023.



The online course of the Media Academy was translated into Russian and placed on IDEA Central Asia's web portal ([Курсив | УЧИТЬСЯ ПО-НОВОМУ \(cursive.id\)](https://cursive.id)) with the aim of training young women and girls to produce engaging and high-quality media products such as articles, blogs, and podcasts that address gender stereotypes and VAWG.

In summary:

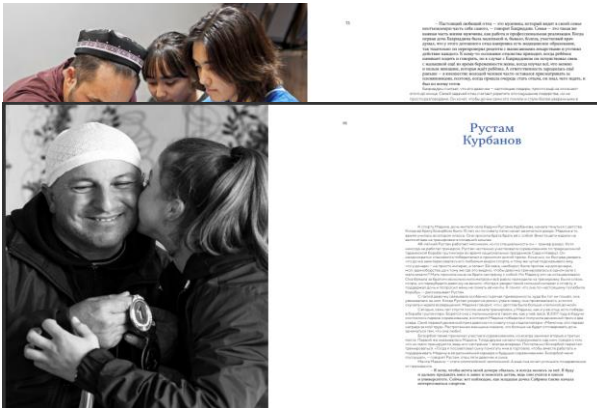
- The 245 girls from Central Asia were trained in the online Media Academy. 17 media initiatives were implemented at the Media Academy. The best media products were posted on social media during the 16 days of activism in 2022.
- The 43 young activists from Central Asia raised their knowledge on gender issues in three online 2-hour meetings (through 3 days) during the Gender Awareness week that was organized for the youth participants from Central Asia devoted to 8 March 2022.
- The 159 participants from 5 Central Asian countries raised their awareness of the current problems and challenges faced by women in Central Asia, as well as opportunities for development and self-realization in the modern world during a 2-day virtual online forum "Like a Girl", organized in 2022.
- The 5 Influencers from 5 Central Asian countries produced 15 TikTok videos on topics such as (1) gender violence, (2) harassment, and (3) gender stereotypes and discrimination. Videos were widely distributed in social media (TikTok, Instagram, etc.) – estimated target audience - at least 200,000 social media users.



First regional debates on SGBV gathered 46 young women and men from 5 Central Asian countries in Turkistan, Kazakhstan to build their capacities in communications. The activity was part of the overall project's efforts to create a critical mass of basic expertise among young people in Central Asia to advocate and effectively communicate on SGBV.

SI RP worked on engaging men, including government representatives, MIA, religious leaders, journalists and other male activists to address SGBV. In 2022 and 2023 two regional workshops on engaging men were conducted to raise the awareness of these groups and discuss the

developed Situational Analysis of Men and Gender Equality in the Central Asian Region, a regional strategy and communication plan for engaging men and boys in ending VAWG in Central Asia. National action plans for each Central Asian country on engaging men were developed during the workshop. The participants of the workshops improved their knowledge and understanding of the role of men in promoting gender equality and preventing gender-based violence, as well as the importance of promoting positive masculinity. The participants from 5 Central Asian countries exchanged knowledge and experience on best practices for involving men and boys.

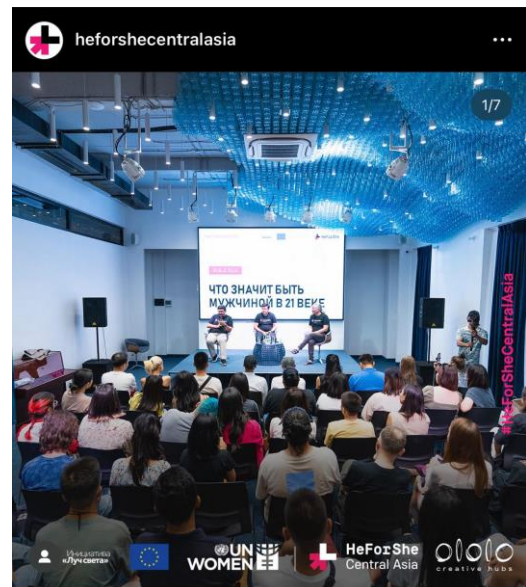


A practical guide on engaging men, developed by a group of Central Asian experts was presented and discussed during the workshop.

A book with human stories and documentary photos about engaged fathers and husbands of Central Asia was developed to demonstrate healthy masculinity and the positive role of men in a family in Central Asia. The book has been presented during the VIII Fathers' Forum in Astana, Kazakhstan in 2023 for more than 300 participants and will be disseminated in Central Asian countries and also will be available online.

### HeForShe Central Asia solidarity movement on gender equality:

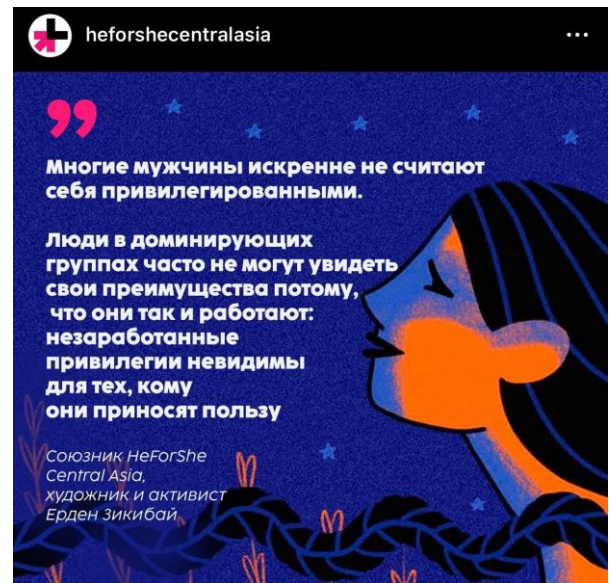
Over 15 million people raised awareness about flexible masculinity and the importance of mobilising men and boys as partners as advocates to end all forms of VAWG as a part of the solidarity movement for gender equality HeForShe Central Asia. Over 50 representatives from different sectors including media, cinematograph, PR, and business have joined HeForShe Central Asia as advocates. A series of 4 short thematic films united by one key message of 'Our family – our traditions. We can create them ourselves' produced and have over 4 million views on the web to date. Effective partnership with the Kazakh TV channel, [KTK](#) aired 2 films on TV channels, reaching different audiences compared to social media.



Ongoing collaboration with radio raised awareness of 117 000 people in Kazakhstan featuring HeForShe Central Asia advocates and gender specialists advocating for gender equitable social norms, legal reforms on criminalization of domestic violence as well as sharing their personal journey in fatherhood in [Kazakh](#) and [Russian](#) languages. Moreover, the Regional Programme has mobilised around USD 1,300,000 of in-kind contributions from the private sector represented by the woman-led tech company in Kazakhstan, the biggest chain of creative co-working hubs in Kyrgyzstan, TV channels and Radio stations in Central Asian countries.

HeForShe Central Asia educational eight-episode-podcast (both in audio and video formats) on flexible masculinity produced and ready to be aired in early 2024 targeting young men and boys.

In 2022 ten representatives of Central Asian theological institutions strengthened capacities on strategic partnership and understanding of the Islamic perspective on improving reproductive health, family planning, SGBV prevention and child marriage through participation in the SSTC (South-South and Triangle Cooperation) International Online Training on Strategic Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders (MRLs) in reproductive health, family planning, and the prevention of SGBV, facilitated by Indonesian experts.



### Safe space and voices of GBV survivors:



“Anel was 18-year-old when experienced sexual violence from her relative. She tried to find support from her family members but faced accusations of her behaviour. Anel was left alone to cope with this trauma. A relative committed another sexual violence and finally was arrested”. This is one of the real-life stories (the name was changed) included in the docudrama series “Zhalgyz Emessin” (You are not alone) produced in 2022 and released in Almaty and Astana on 18–20 April 2023.

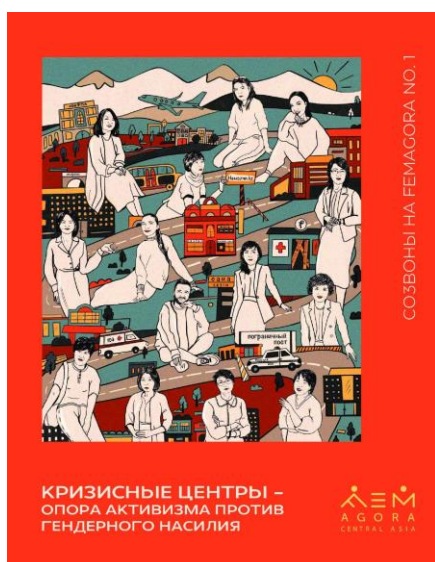
“Zhalgyz Emessin” is a Kazakhstani docudrama series created by the Regional Programme with the support from the Government of Kazakhstan. The nine-episode series features real-life stories of domestic violence survivors who have overcome difficult situations. The docudrama series are being broadcast on the Kazakh republican TV channel, reaching millions of people.

The series aims to increase awareness about types of violence, how to stand up against gender-based violence and challenge gender stereotypes, norms and beliefs. It empowers survivors and calls on everyone to do their part to eliminate gender-based violence in Kazakhstan while sharing key messages of the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence and the Spotlight Initiative.

“Only by joining forces, we can fight against domestic and gender-based violence. Survivors must know that they are not alone, that there is help, and that we cannot remain silent. Filmmaking is one of the best ways to raise awareness and let everyone know that we, as a

world, will do everything we can to end gender-based violence. The European Union is proud to support this project and will continue its work in this direction,” said Kestutis Jankauskas, European Union Ambassador to Kazakhstan.

In 2022, as part of the 16 Days of Activism, over 226,000 people strengthened their understanding of domestic violence issues, its prevalence and the importance of women’s empowerment in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan following programming on [Qazag Radiosy](#), [GovoriTV](#) and [Anhor.uz](#).



In 2020 the Regional Programme supported the [first edition](#) of the series of publications “Calling in ” within a feminist initiative designed by the regional NGO FemAgora. The Brief highlights the self-organised work of crisis centres and services in Central Asia in the context of the 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. As a first contact with survivors, crisis centres document cases and gather valuable evidence and data on violence against women and girls. This issue also includes recommendations to the health sector partners and the civic sector on support provision required for effective work crisis centres.

In 2020 80 human stories on SGBV issues reached about 1 million people in Central Asia highlighting best practices from the region on the work of crisis centres and ensuring access to services provision for survivors of SGBV, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Outcome 5: Data**

The Regional Programme aligns with the foundational principle of Leaving No One Behind from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is conducting a pioneering research study in Central Asia titled 'Leaving No One Behind: Data gaps and needs on intersectionality and gender-based violence in Central Asia.' This research aims to explore the circumstances resulting from the intersection of gender inequality with other social inequalities and their relationship to the experience of GBV among them, identifying what data should be collected to inform GBV policies and programmes to ensure they are inclusive of all women in the Central Asian region including those traditionally left behind.

These marginalised groups of women encompass those with disabilities, living with HIV, LGBTIQ+ individuals, migrants, sex workers, drug users, women with criminal records, and elderly women (aged 65+). The qualitative field study specifically seeks to uncover how various forms of discrimination intersect, affecting women's vulnerability to GBV and their access to appropriate services, support, and justice. Additionally, it aims to pinpoint the data required to



bridge current gaps, enabling decision-makers to understand and address the distinct GBV-related needs, priorities, and concerns of these women.

Throughout the whole research process the Regional Programme partners with active CSOs in the field of GBV across all five Central Asian countries. In April 2023, 12 CSO representatives from Central Asia underwent comprehensive training on data collection in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and strengthened their capacity in various aspects of ethical and safe data collection, engaging in practical exercises using model interview scenarios. These exercises equipped them with skills in interview note-taking, developing interview summaries, probing, and ensuring data quality and reliability.

CSO representatives conducted a total of 110 in-depth interviews with GBV service providers, by and for CSOs, and community women; 83 interviews were selected for the analysis. Findings from the data collected underscore critical gaps in support for women across Central Asia. During the regional study results validation meeting held by the Regional Programme in December 2023, it was further highlighted that despite an awareness of laws, the practical application of prevention and response measures remains elusive. This leaves many marginalised women unaware of available services and their rights, especially in rural areas. It became evident that trust plays a pivotal role; survivors of violence often seek help from familiar community-based organisations or networks, which, however, face common challenges like resource scarcity. While GBV service providers expressed interest in this research to address blind spots and enhance their initiatives, bridging these gaps necessitates a holistic, intersectoral effort, including empowering women with practical knowledge.

The Regional Programme has laid the foundations for an upcoming mixed-methods research study titled “Study of men’s life experiences and perception of violence against women”. One pivotal achievement has been the production of a comprehensive literature review on men's perceptions and behavioural attitudes regarding violence against women. This review not only consolidated existing knowledge but also set the stage for further inquiry into this complex issue. Building upon established frameworks, the Regional Programme has adopted and customised to the national context a robust research methodology rooted in the [“Toolkit for Replicating the UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence”](#). This methodological blueprint encompasses diverse data collection techniques, including quantitative household and individual surveys, as well as qualitative interviews. Notably, ethical protocols have been rigorously incorporated to ensure the utmost respect and confidentiality for all respondents. The continuation of this crucial work will be overseen by the Central Asian Alliance to End GBV.

## kNOwVAWdata course

The kNOwVAWdata course on measuring VAW was launched in September 2022 at the AUCA in the Russian language. The course was developed by the University of Melbourne (UoM) and UNFPA, adapted to the Central Asian context and translated into Russian in collaboration with AUCA and UoM. In 2023 the second cohort of students was trained in the course. Out of 385 applications from the region, 85 participants from Central Asian countries were enrolled in the 4-month online course which was completed by 66 students and 13 received a certificate of technical experts<sup>12</sup>.



Photo credit: UNFPA, Kazakhstan

Mapping of existing data on SGBV in Central Asia was presented at the workshop for 85 representatives of the statistical offices, health, psycho-social and police sectors from countries of the region aimed at strengthening the knowledge on the collection and dissemination of GBV prevalence data in line with international and regional standards to inform laws, policies. The results of the mapping demonstrate that although all 3 sectors collect administrative data on GBV, there is a significant gap in administrative data compilation, analysis, and publishing, as the data is mostly used for internal purposes. There is little evidence of large-scale GBV prevalence studies as well as systematic assessments of knowledge and attitudes towards GBV. The mapping also revealed that physical and sexual violence, by an intimate partner or a non-partner in the context of domestic abuse, are more commonly registered than psychological and economic abuse. However, data on the types of violence are not always disaggregated, and HPs are substantially less recorded. Data on the age of first marriage is often not collected, and there is scarce data being collected on bride kidnapping. The mapping resulted in the development of a number of recommendations for all

Central Asian countries.

The first-of-its-kind publication on the collection of reliable previous publications and reports on the prevalence of SGBV in Central Asian region over the last 10 years was developed and published in English and Russian and disseminated among relevant stakeholders (governments, civil society, academia, experts) in 5



Photo credit: UNFPA, Kazakhstan

Central Asian countries. The publication presents the visualised data on GBV in a reader-friendly manner and at the same time demonstrates limited availability of representative and comparable data.

<sup>12</sup> Technical expert is a person who has completed the full course, submitted a study protocol and successfully participated in an interview with an expert panel.

To strengthen the administrative data analysis and visualisation a practical tool was developed that could be used for advocacy, policy development, and decision making.

### Digital Challenge “IT against Violence”

In April 2022, the first regional Spotlight Digital Challenge brought together students, recent graduates, and experts on EVAWG in a collective effort to explore the potential of digital technologies in the prevention and response to violence, including data collection. The Spotlight

Digital Challenge welcomed newcomers to the EVAWG community, provided an intensive educational programme for participants to learn about the problem and a space for participants to make headway on problems of VAWG. Educational Bootcamp welcomed over 200 participants who learned about gaps, divides, and inequalities sustained through social norms and practices leading to gender-based discrimination and violence from the leading experts and practitioners representing academia, CSOs and crisis centres for women subjected to violence. Participants also met innovators from Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan who had already taken part in hackathons and were able to join with like-minded people to develop tech-based solutions to help others.

The Spotlight Digital Challenge culminated in the online ‘IT vs Violence’ Challenge. It provided an environment for problem-solving, creative thinking, and collaborative skills among young people from Central Asian countries in their attempts to create concepts of technology-based solutions in support of EVAW in their home countries and in the region. 7 out of 9 winners continue working on their idea. ‘Made to Top’ team from Uzbekistan is now collaborating with the Association of Journalists of Uzbekistan. ‘God is a Woman’ team from Kazakhstan participated in Solutions Expo during the Digital Knowledge Week – 2022 in Astana. ‘Kyzdar+1’, the all-girl winning team from Kyrgyzstan, worked on a documentary on engaged men supporting their daughters.

## **Outcome 6: Women’s Movement**

### Strengthened civil society - Regional CSO Network

Prior the Regional Programme, regional dialogue on gender-based violence (GBV) was constrained<sup>13</sup>. However, by the close of 2023, the implementation of Pillar 6 activities, encompassing 25 national consultations, three regional CSO Forums, nine online discussion platforms, and various other regional endeavours, has significantly enhanced regional networking and collaboration among civil society organisations, human rights advocates, feminist groups, and activists in Central Asia.

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<sup>13</sup> An overview of Civil Society Collaboration On Sexual and Gender-based Violence In Central Asia and Afghanistan, Clara Magariño Manero, MAY 2021| DESK REVIEW



Participants of the second Civil Society Forum organised in Turkistan, Kazakhstan, on 1-2 November 2022.  
Photo: UN Women Kazakhstan.

One notable achievement is the establishment of a Regional CSO Network comprising over 500 active women leaders from CSOs, women's rights groups, and feminist activists in Central Asia. This network focuses on amplifying the voices of less-resourced CSOs, including rural grassroots organizations, newer entities, youth initiatives, and initiative groups.

Albeit at a development stage, this regional CSO Network stands out due to its structured approach and strategic development. Led by a Regional Coordination Group, supported by National Committees in each Central Asian country, and guided by regulations and a defined roadmap, it aims to create a coordinated and robust women's movement focused on collective advocacy, activism, and accountability efforts.

In 2023, the Regional CSO Network engaged in impactful advocacy initiatives. Notably, the Network voiced civil society recommendations on combating intolerant attitudes towards violence against women and children during a session of the Committee on Social and Cultural Development in the Parliament of Kazakhstan. Additionally, the Network issued a collective statement, emphasising a crucial need to criminalise domestic and partner violence in Kazakhstan. These actions were prompted by a significant increase in gender-based violence cases against women and girls in the country, highlighting the pressing urgency and importance of legal measures to address and prevent such incidents.

Also, in 2023, the Regional CSO Network established dialogue spaces, fostering active engagement among stakeholders across Central Asia. Together, they deliberated on recommendations within Pillars 1, 2, and 5, while also addressing challenges within national and regional institutions. Through nine dialogue and three training sessions, a total of 410 regional CSO leaders actively participated in these collaborative efforts. The engaged leaders formulated recommendations spanned theoretical, practical and ethical dimensions, focusing on standardisation of services and the improvement of accessibility and quality of infrastructure for crisis centres. CSOs' leaders demonstrated their commitment to knowledge exchange by establishing a repository containing 157 materials developed by CSOs in the region. Furthermore, a comprehensive database featuring 72 regional experts was created, further enhancing collaboration and resource sharing among CSOs. This multifaceted approach significantly reinforced regional leadership, coordination, knowledge sharing, and the dissemination of best practices. These enhanced capabilities empowered CSOs to strategically

collaborate with governments and other stakeholders within the Alliance, effectively contributing to the elimination of GBV in the region.

Furthermore, the Regional CSO Network actively involved grassroots organisations and initiative groups in the efforts to eliminate gender-based violence. The strategy for engaging grassroots CSOs was formulated after conducting thorough research in the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The study included the participation of 82 CSO representatives through focus groups and interviews, along with 140 grassroots CSOs and initiative groups through a survey.

#### Improved access to financing through CSO grants

Since its inception, the SI RP has boosted small grants for Central Asian CSOs. These grants are tailored to empower grassroots organisations working on SGBV, gender equality, and women's empowerment. They funded capacity development through training, technical assistance, and support for monitoring, quality control, and fund management. This strengthened CSOs' effectiveness in the women's movement by enhancing organizational systems, tools, processes, workforce skills, and acquiring essential equipment.

The SI RP identified eligible NGOs in the region to receive these small grants, resulting in 31 CSOs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan receiving a total of \$544,228.43 since the program's inception. This support enabled civil society to operate efficiently, acquire the capacity to access additional funding sources, sustain their activities, and actively participate in joint advocacy efforts to combat SGBV. The grant allocation was based on analysis, mapping, and regional consultations with CSOs to identify priority areas for grassroots organisation development in Central Asia.

The SI RP has empowered organisations to contribute effectively to the initiative's objectives in the region. For instance, 'Kalb Nuri' Center,' located in the Djizak region, Uzbekistan, created an educational tool called 'Gender and Media.' This tool targets journalism students, practitioners, bloggers, and researchers. It has been incorporated into the curriculum of the Faculty of Media and Communication at the Uzbek State University of World Languages and the University of Journalism and Mass Communication of Uzbekistan, with 300 copies of the manual published.

With 11 journalism faculties in Uzbekistan, interest in this course is growing. One of the authors, Ms. Kosimova, a Doctor of Philology and Associate Professor, has taught this course for four years at the Faculty of Media and Communication in Uzbekistan. Additionally, in collaboration with the Director of the Kalb Nuri Center, they conducted training sessions on gender equality for journalists, bloggers, mahalla activists, and civil society.

The Tajikistan-based NGO, the PO "World of Law", achieved justice for a young rural woman who had suffered rape and severe assault by a young man. The woman faced stigmatization and victim-blaming in her village, affecting her daily life. Despite facing initial refusals by the Regional Prosecutor's and General Prosecutor's Office, the NGO's persistent efforts, backed by

compelling arguments, eventually led to the perpetrator's conviction and an eight-year prison sentence.

### Enhanced national ownership

In 2021, three crisis centres received \$29,198 in support from the MFA RK. This funding increased the institutional and organisational capacities of CSOs to respond effectively to domestic violence, especially within the context of COVID-19.

Thanks to this support, the PF "Institute of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Kazakhstan" made significant strides in its capacity for case management, preventing professional burnout, and enhancing security measures. They developed two practical guidance documents: one focusing on case management in socio-psychological rehabilitation and the other offering insights into improving crisis centre security and addressing aggressors. These valuable resources will be shared with other crisis centres and shelters in both print and electronic formats, strengthening their efforts against violence against women. In total, 74 individuals received training on security, burnout, and case management.

Another grantee, PA "Senim-Ai" in Turkestan, bolstered its capacity to raise awareness about EAW and provide essential services to beneficiaries. A notable achievement was the professional development of specialists directly involved in handling domestic violence cases. Throughout the project, consultations with dedicated lawyers and psychologists were organised, benefiting a total of 1,025 individuals in the Turkestan region. Additionally, 851 beneficiaries attended seminars on domestic violence.

### Strengthened capacity of CSOs

In 2021, the SI RP identified significant barriers to full CSO engagement in addressing GBV in Central Asia and Afghanistan. These hurdles fell into four main categories: institutional and legal barriers, socio-cultural challenges, organisational constraints, and financial limitations<sup>14</sup>.

In 2022, a comprehensive capacity development initiative was launched to empower CSOs in overcoming barriers, enhancing their ability to address GBV through a human rights-based approach, and promoting gender mainstreaming across diverse sectors and cultures. The Regional Programme collaborated with 11 regional civil society organisations to implement a Training of Trainers (ToT) program involving 21 local trainers. These trainers, armed with a comprehensive Facilitator Guide<sup>15</sup> developed for the purpose, subsequently conducted capacity-building activities for 3950 CSO representatives and activists. This initiative equipped them with essential knowledge and skills in areas such as gender and human rights, policy analysis, co-creation, internal and external communication, media relations, and strengthening the social fabric of the region's civic space. The goal was to enable them to be effective partners in addressing GBV in the region.

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<sup>14</sup> Identification and analysis of barriers to CSOs engagement in Central Asia and Afghanistan, Luiza Balbi, 2021

<sup>15</sup> Guide for Training Facilitators, Jyldyz Kuvatova, Emilia Rossi, 2022

In Central Asia, the financial sustainability of the civil society sector, especially in addressing GBV, heavily relies on external donor contributions. To tackle this challenge, the SI RP conducted a study to identify active CSOs in Central Asia engaged in women's rights, gender equality, and combating GBV. This effort aimed not only to identify these organisations but also to spot potential regional grant-making entities.<sup>16</sup>

As a result, the Programme identified and strengthened the capacity of a local organisation, the Civic Participation Fund in Kyrgyzstan, to act as a regional grant-making entity supporting grassroots CSOs. Additionally, a Strategic Group was formed to facilitate effective communication between the Coordination Group of the Regional CSO Network, the Grant-making Mechanism, and the Central Asia Alliance. This innovative approach empowers Regional Network members to collectively select areas for resource mobilisation and identify opportunities. The Strategic Group explores creative partnerships and financing models to diversify funding and ensure the long-term sustainability of CSO-led efforts against GBV.

Moreover, 62 representatives from Central Asian CSOs, including members of the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG), have elevated their capacity to monitor and advocate for alignment between national laws and international standards and conventions. This progress is propelled by the developed Monitoring and Accountability Tool for CSOs, actively utilised by CSOs and prominent women leaders in Central Asia. This tool streamlines data collection, compilation, and analysis of various indicators, facilitating advocacy and influencing actions to prevent and respond to GBV while promoting GEWE.

*Strengthening CSO capacity through Training, Testing, and Evaluation: Progress Report on Monitoring Visits and Introduction of CSOs to Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME)*

In 2023, the Programme Coordination Team visited Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and engaged extensively with the EUDs, the Spotlight Initiative Offices, programme beneficiaries, CSO members. The team's interactions weren't limited to strengthening regional coordination and communication levels; they actively interfaced with grassroots CSOs and beneficiaries of the small grant program (SGP) in both countries.

The Team undertook a series of meetings with grass-root CSOs, and beneficiaries of the small grant programme (SGP) in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to identify monitoring issues and provide short training aimed at Strengthening the CSOs' M&E capacity, including Participatory M&E (PME), as well as to monitor their activities and record the stories of success.

At the meeting with members of the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG), the Team discussed the forthcoming launch of the Central Asian Alliance against GBV, their participation and the roles of CS-RRG and CSOs in this Alliance. During the meeting with the Head of the Civic Participation Fund, the potential of the organisation and conditions for the establishment of an operational regional grant-making mechanism were discussed.

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<sup>16</sup> KAMEDA, CSO Mapping in Central Asia, 2021

The visits showed that the SI Programme significantly contributed to strengthening communication and building the institutional capacity of CSOs. Thus, the SI team helped CSOs develop internal standards and a system for the evaluation of personnel, micro purchasing, and procurement procedures. An immediate result (output) of the Small Grants is the existing system for documentation, monitoring, reporting, HR and procurement processes. For some CSOs, it has led to a successful application for grants to other donor organisations.

The current level of CSOs' knowledge and practical skills in project/programme monitoring and evaluation issues remains wanting. This calls for developing the M&E capacity building a systematic activity with testing of basic and post-test levels to gradually increase the complexity of the topics covered.

The dual-pronged approach aimed to identify areas for refining monitoring practices and to deliver concise training sessions focused on bolstering the CSOs' Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) capabilities. These training sessions covered the core concepts of Participatory M&E (PME) and concurrently facilitated active monitoring of CSO activities. Conducted by the M&R Officer, these training sessions successfully conveyed the principles of (P)M&E.

A short pretest was administered at the beginning of the training to assess the participants' baseline understanding of M&E definitions. The results of the pretest indicated that only 20 to 30% of the respondents had a reasonable level of knowledge regarding the main M&E definitions, while the remaining 70 to 80% were unable to provide accurate answers.

Following the completion of the training program, a post-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the training on the participants' knowledge. The post-test results revealed a significant improvement in the understanding of M&E concepts. Specifically, the proportion of correct answers increased from the initial 20-30% to some 70% after the completion of the training.

This suggests that the M&E training was successful in enhancing the participants' knowledge and comprehension of M&E definitions. The participants demonstrated a notable improvement in their ability to identify and provide correct answers related to M&E concepts, indicating the effectiveness of the training in bridging the knowledge gaps.

The resoundingly positive feedback received was accompanied by a genuine request for a continuous capacity-building programme that would encompass various dimensions of CSO activities and performance management, including (P)M&E and reporting accompanied by the extending the training to government agencies to ensure alignment and effective collaboration. This recognition reinforces the Programme's commitment to nurturing continuing growth and learning within the CSO community.

In addition, the Team tracked the activities of these CSOs and collected success stories that showcase the real impact of the programme (see below).

Of significant note is the Team's engagement with the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG). Discussions revolved around the impending launch of the Central Asian Alliance



against GBV. The roles of CS-RRG and individual CSOs in this alliance were clarified, fostering collaboration, and strategizing their involvement. During discussions, the groundwork for establishing a functional regional grant-making mechanism was laid.

In addition to the Regional Programme's core efforts to strengthen women's movements and build a regional network, several other initiatives were undertaken within the program:

*Sustainable Funding:* The program advocated for sustainable funding for women's rights organisations. This involved diversifying funding sources and implementing long-term financial planning strategies. To ensure equitable access to resources, the program established the Strategic Group, responsible for allocating funds and grants specifically designed for smaller women-led organisations and initiative groups. This process prioritised transparency and accessibility in grant applications.

*Advocacy and Policy Change:* The Regional Programme actively supported the advocacy efforts of the Ne Molchi (Don'tBeSilent) movement, which is dedicated to combating sexual and gender-based violence. This support aimed to drive positive changes in policies and practices related to gender-based violence.

*Awareness Campaigns:* An integral annual initiative involved the 16-day campaign against gender-based violence. The primary objective of this campaign is to educate both the public and policymakers, fostering awareness and promoting actionable measures to address the issue.

In 2023, a live broadcast titled "Women's Economic Freedom: The Legal Dimension" was orchestrated by the Regional CSO Network in conjunction with the International Campaign Agenda "Investing in the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence." During this broadcast, five experts, each representing one of the five Central Asian countries, actively engaged in a live discussion. They provided in-depth insights into the prevailing conditions in their respective nations concerning women's economic freedom and the legal dimensions associated with it.

*Networking and Collaboration:* The program facilitated collaboration among women's rights organisations, civil society groups, and various stakeholders, including OSCE, ACTED, in Central Asia. Networking events and forums were organised to promote knowledge sharing and foster synergistic relationships.

As a tangible outcome, ACTED will extend support to the Regional CSO Network in 2024. This assistance will take the form of organising an offline CSO Forum in Uzbekistan, facilitating opportunities for mutual learning and experience sharing. Additionally, two online meetings will be arranged to further enhance collaboration and knowledge exchange among the network members.

*Community Engagement:* The program actively engaged with local communities to garner support for gender equality initiatives. Efforts were made to ensure that these initiatives were culturally sensitive and relevant to the specific communities they targeted.

*Global Solidarity:* Recognizing the importance of global cooperation, the program connected with international women's rights movements and networks, and Spotlight Global CS-RG. This facilitated the leveraging of global support and the adoption of best practices.

*Collaboration Between Pillar 6 and Pillar 2:* These Pillars collaborated to develop the One Spotlight Virtual Knowledge Platform. Initially, Pillar 6 conducted resource mapping and provided initial recommendations for the platform's architecture, content design, and administration. Subsequently, Pillar 2 further enhanced the participatory approach engaging over 70 CSOs actors on platform architecture and oversaw the development, testing and launch of the virtual knowledge platform.

*Joint Efforts of Pillar 6 and Pillar 2:* In another instance of collaboration, national consultations of CSOs across the five countries to discuss their participation in the regional CSO network were organised within the two pillars. Over 500 civil society organizations actively engaged in the discussion. They collectively formulated recommendations to support the emerging Central Asian Alliance in its mission to eliminate SGBV and harmful practices.

*Pillar 6 in Harmony with Pillars 1, 2, and 5:* Under the framework of Pillar 6, dialogue spaces were established to facilitate discussions among CSOs. These online dialogue platforms have played a vital role in promoting the recognition of best practices, facilitating the exchange of expertise, and sharing insights among Central Asian women's civil society organizations. These platforms align with the goals of the Alliance in its mission to combat GBV and are in harmony with the three key thematic pillars of the SI RP (1, 2, and 5).

*Use of Peer-to-Peer Approach:* the 2021 Grant Competition "Knowledge Created by NGOs for NGOs" identified NGOs with unique experience in working with victims of violence and willing to arrange exchange and knowledge transfer to interested peers. It inspired the 2023 Grants Competition, which awarded 6 grants to NGOs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These grants aim to improve law enforcement practices and attitudes while enhancing the effectiveness of laws and law enforcement.

## Rights Holders (Spotlight programme “beneficiaries”)

Indicative numbers	Direct for 2023	Indirect for 2023	Comments/Explanation
Women (18 years and above)	27 833	160174	<p><u>The number of direct beneficiaries is fixed according to the following:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is an internal report of each specialist on beneficiaries. Statistics on the list of beneficiaries are broken down by age; distribution; and residence.</li> <li>2. The lists of beneficiaries are filled in by psychologists and lawyers when they provide group and individual consultations and provide assistance.</li> <li>3. Each expert keeps a log of consultations. Consultations were held on the provision of psychological, legal and social assistance and support.</li> <li>4. Those with access to a hotline, as those with hotline access can obtain advice.</li> <li>5. Seek advice through messengers.</li> <li>6. There were infections in criminal cases (murder, rape, paedophilia, serious bodily harm), as well as in the protection of children's rights.</li> <li>7. Consultations on the provision of shelter, assistance in the restoration of documents, registration, documentation, &amp; participation in training off- &amp;online.</li> <li>8. Support and protection of rights in courts, in government agencies, when attached to clinics, registration of EDS, benefits, queuing for housing, employment, and placement in a kindergarten.</li> <li>9. Logs are kept where women receiving shelter services stay.</li> <li>10. Field consultations were held in the region.</li> <li>11. Lectures were held offline and online for students alongside an open lecture held on the city radio.</li> <li>12. Within the framework of the project, trainings and conferences were organised offline and online.</li> </ol> <p><u>The number of indirect beneficiaries is fixed according to the following:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Everyone who found out through coalitions, social networks and posters</li> <li>2. All structures (Department of Internal Affairs, Public Education System, Mahalla Department and the mahalla committees, Health System, etc.)</li> <li>3. Handouts and programmes on television, articles, posts and social videos on Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram channels</li> </ol>
Girls (5–17 years)	625	4,683	
Men (18 years and above)	353,781	69 214	
Boys (5–17 years)	376	1,585	
<b>Total</b>	<b>382 615</b>	<b>235 656</b>	

## Challenges and Mitigating Measures

While actively engaging with civil society organisations and grassroots groups in the region, social initiatives faced a challenging situation involving one of the NGOs. The issue revolved around perceived limitations in partnership opportunities within SI's regional program and reported misunderstandings during their collaboration with SI Program staff. Although this organisation had contributed valuable services to Spotlight, subsequent events underscored the necessity for further efforts to resolve these concerns.

To address these concerns, SI took several steps, including organising an online meeting that involved representatives from the UN headquarters and creating a platform for open and constructive dialogue. During these discussions, NGO representatives were encouraged to voice their concerns and provide valuable feedback. In a proactive move aimed at revitalising collaboration, SI initiated both formal and informal meetings and discussions to explore solutions to the identified challenges.

Furthermore, NGO representatives were extended invitations to participate in the Central Asian Alliance launch event. Their active involvement and positive feedback during the event underscored their readiness to collaborate further, explore renewed partnership opportunities with SI and actively engage in upcoming activities within the Central Asia Alliance.

Navigating the Transition to Quantum Technology- the transition from one system to another, especially the shift to Quantum, posed significant challenges during Phase II. These challenges encompassed delays, a lack of a well-defined budgetary roadmap, all of which coalesced to create a demanding environment during implementation. Additionally, there was a noticeable absence of technical uniformity among the participating agencies, resulting in a diverse array of implementation approaches, often influenced by the distinct rules and procedures unique to each agency.

Despite these hurdles, the Spotlight Regional Programme exhibited resilience recognizing difficulties and demonstrating a clear understanding of the need to navigate these challenges to propel the initiative forward. The team's dedication and adaptability ensured that, despite the intricacies of the transition, the programme remained on track, albeit with an increased awareness of the importance of technical cohesion and budgetary clarity as it advanced.

In the context of Pillar 6, an organisation known as "Tashabbus" non-state non trade company, located in the Khorezm region of Uzbekistan, was granted funds. However, it is important to note that the grant funds were ultimately returned. The primary challenge faced in this situation was the requirement for organisations to obtain permission from the government, specifically from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to accept the grant. Unfortunately, Tashabbus encountered difficulties in obtaining this required permission.

As a result of the organisation's inability to secure the necessary government approval, internal procedures within the grant-providing body were activated. This led to a formal request for an explanation letter from Tashabbus regarding the circumstances surrounding their inability to obtain the required permission. Subsequently, due to the inability to meet the necessary

regulatory requirements and in adherence to grant protocols, Tashabbus voluntarily returned the grant funds.

This situation underscores the importance of complying with government regulations and obtaining the requisite permissions when receiving grants in Uzbekistan. It also highlights the commitment of the grant-providing entity (SI) to maintain transparency and adherence to established procedures in grant disbursement.

The implementation of a small grants programme to enhance CSO capacity in Turkmenistan faced significant challenges due to disparities between official and unofficial exchange rates.<sup>17</sup> The maximum allowance of 30,000 USD per grantee (following the UN Women's Small Grants Policy) would only amount to approximately 3,280 USD in the local currency. Consequently, no CSOs in the country were willing to accept small grants under Pillar 6. This situation was accurately documented in the Risk Management Report, and despite efforts to identify an alternative solution, it remained unresolved.

In the context of the Central Asian Alliance, SI has successfully convened a diverse group, including CSOs, youth networks, and representatives from five Central Asian countries, laying a robust foundation for sustaining the achieved results. However, SI acknowledges the ongoing challenge of engaging high-level government officials from Central Asian countries, a crucial element for the initiative's future progress. Moving forward, it will be essential to intensify efforts in advocating for increased participation and commitment from the governments of Central Asian countries. This approach is pivotal as it presents a unique opportunity to promote collaboration between the CSOs and governments, enabling them to collectively address the critical issue of GBV and pool resources to combat it effectively.

### **Lessons Learned and New Opportunities**

While SI actively collaborates with governments at various levels, it's crucial to note that formal cooperation agreements have not been finalized. Establishing these agreements is vital for SI's advocacy efforts and aligning commitments with both the United Nations (UN) and the European Union Delegation (EUD). Unlike SI country programmes, the Regional Spotlight initiative lacks the level of commitment that signed agreements provide. To ensure the ongoing success of any SI programme, particularly those related to SGBV, it's strongly recommended to obtain government endorsements before initiating any activities. This step is pivotal for strengthening partnerships, and commitments, and enhancing the impact of regional programs.

Addressing Geographic Gaps: To reach underserved populations in rural or remote areas, it's crucial to expand their respective coverage. Future initiatives should prioritise strategies to bridge these geographic gaps.

Promoting Collaborations: Collaboration between state institutions and NGOs can enhance support systems for survivors of GBV. Encouraging and facilitating such partnerships is essential to address service gaps and improve accessibility. While the Alliance facilitates

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<sup>17</sup> 1 USD = 3.50 TKM (official exchange rate) vs. 1 USD ≈ 32 TKM (black market rate)

collaboration, additional support is needed to strengthen its operational capacity for this purpose.

**Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Regular data collection and analysis are essential for identifying gaps, assessing intervention impact, and informing evidence-based policies. Emphasising the importance of data in programme planning and evaluation is crucial.

**Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly assessing the effectiveness of SGBV services and adjusting interventions based on feedback and findings essential for improving outcomes and optimising resource utilisation.

In all Central Asian countries, there is a notable absence of state financial support for psychosocial services related to SGBV, with these services predominantly reliant on donor funding, thus posing sustainability challenges.<sup>18</sup> To address this issue, diversifying funding sources and exploring opportunities for government financial support is essential to enhance the long-term viability of these critical services.

A significant gap exists in collecting, analysing, and sharing administrative data on GBV. Comprehensive studies that address the prevalence of GBV and assess public knowledge and attitudes are lacking. To bridge this data gap, it is crucial to continue using comprehensive surveys like the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) to gather GBV-related data. Additionally, integrating GBV topics, including prevalence, service utilisation, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours (KAP), into regular national-level surveys is recommended. This approach offers a cost-effective way to collect vital data regularly and systematically.<sup>19</sup>

There are few youth organizations in Central Asia working in the field of SGBV prevention. The informal youth network established within the SI RP will allow young people to be more engaged in VAWG prevention.

There is a lack of national experts on positive masculinity and engaging men. For the development of the situational analysis, strategy and communication plan, an international expert with extensive expertise in this field was hired and this work was supported by the work of the national experts.

## **Innovative, Promising or Good Practices**

### **kNOwVAWdata course**

Under Pillar 5, the SI RP is partnering with UoM, and AUCA, to adapt the kNOwVAWdata online training course to the context of Central Asia and introduce key concepts related to measuring VAW, teaching how to use various tools to generate reliable, comparable data and undertake a

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<sup>18</sup> Situational Analysis of the participation of the health, psycho-social and law-enforcement sectors to multi-sectoral response to sexual and gender-based violence in Central Asia, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Mapping of the existing data on sexual and gender-based violence in Central Asia, 2022.

national prevalence study. Serving as a global product for practitioners worldwide, the course provides opportunities for distance learning and building the capacity of national partners (statisticians, researchers, etc.) in Central Asia.

#### Addressing GBV through education, collaborative thinking and use of digital technologies

Recognizing the importance of increased use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) to prevent the spread of VAW and capitalising on its experience in launching hackathons, which are becoming powerful drivers for change, generating solutions that contribute to more egalitarian societies, the SI RP hosted the first regional Spotlight Digital Challenge within Pillar 5 (Closing the Data Gaps on SGBV) in April 2022. Pillar 5, among other priorities, focuses on overcoming the gaps in VAWG data, which includes a component on innovative ways of collecting and visualising data.

The Spotlight Digital Challenge was designed to increase awareness among young people that digital technologies contain the potential to address SGBV but, at the same time, pose new threats to GBV in cyberspace. The Spotlight Digital Challenge offered an educational component for students and recent graduates from the region – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It also provided a space for problem-solving, creative thinking, and collaborative skills among young people from Central Asian countries in their attempts to create concepts of technology-based solutions and mobile applications in support of EVAWG in their home countries and in the region of Central Asia. The Challenge improved young people's understanding of gender inequality and discrimination, and increased awareness of SGBV in cyberspace (IT-facilitated violence) and safety measures. A community of like-minded young people formed a self-sustained network to share information on different opportunities for the acceleration of their ideas.

#### Good practices

A youth component of the SI RP was implemented by youth-led organizations, which allowed them to better understand their needs, aspirations, and interests to better mobilise youth organisations and activists from all Central Asian countries.

#### MenEngage & HeForShe

Implemented mostly in Kazakhstan (since 2019) and Kyrgyzstan, the innovative MenEngage concept is a novelty for the region and raises interest.

In November 2022, Central Asia joined the Global Solidarity Movement for Gender Equality, HeForShe. Limited analytical information on masculinities and social norms and no research on men's perception and use of VAWG in Central Asia and at the national level, led to the comprehensive analysis of men's perception of GBV and development of the online mobilisation communications strategy. The SI RP conducted 30 in-depth interviews with activists, civil society actors, businessmen and businesswomen, gender experts, journalists, and filmmakers from all five countries; surveyed 1,000 Central Asian men and analysed results; conducted focus

groups with target audiences in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to test developed messaging pillars and key messages for each country; and analysed men's comments on high-profile YouTube SGBV documentaries, social media posts and podcasts. This approach proved to be a good practice resulting in the successful launch of the campaign reaching over 15 million people in Central Asia, effective collaboration with HeForShe advocates, TikTok and continuous interest from influencers and the private sector. The initiative leveraged over USD 1,300,000 in-kind contribution from the private sector.

### Intersectionality of Violence

There are many groups of women facing intersectional inequalities in Central Asia, but there is little information describing their experiences, including access to services. This stems partly from laws and policies around their legal status coupled with a high level of social stigma in these countries. SGBV data among general populations of women in Central Asia is limited, and there is little data on the GBV-related vulnerabilities, experiences and needs of these women.

Engaging by and for CSOs in the design and implementation of the primary research on intersectionality and SGBV in Central Asia proved to be a good practice. This research will explore the unique circumstances resulting from the intersection of gender inequality with other social inequalities and their relationship to the experience of SGBV among them, to identify what data should be collected to inform SGBV policies and programmes to ensure they are inclusive of all women in Central Asia. Thus, the SI RP directs the study in collaboration with CSOs that worked extensively with these priority groups: women living with HIV; women living with disabilities; sex workers; LGBTIQ+ community members; women with the experience of migration; and older persons (65+ years).

In some instances, the offline format proved more effective than online, as it allowed expansion of the network of partners and beneficiaries.

### Promotion of shared knowledge, best practices and experiences within the region

## **Communications and Visibility**

### **a) Overview**

#### News Portals:

Over 55 articles about events organised by the SI RP were published on various news portals in five countries and on global news portals. Most of the publications were made in Russian. Links to all articles during 2020 - 2023 are available [here](#).

#### Virtual Knowledge Platform:

The [Virtual Knowledge Platform](#) to End GBV in Central Asia stands out for its role in fostering regional knowledge exchange and advocating for evidence-based decision-making. Created with inputs from partners across all Central Asia, the platform emerges for its dynamic nature, offering information in two languages and strategically driving capacity-building initiatives.



## **b) Messages**

The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030.

The Initiative is responding to all forms of violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on domestic and family violence, sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, femicide, trafficking in human beings and sexual and economic (labour) exploitation.

The Initiative is addressing legislative and policy gaps, strengthening institutions, promoting gender-equitable attitudes, and providing quality services for survivors.

These messages were further tested in eight focus groups and successfully launched, including:

- **Gender equality:**
  - Gender equality...is when you are equally proud of a son and a daughter...everyone needs @HeForSheCentralAsia
  - Gender Equality...is no stereotyping about men and women...everyone needs @HeForSheCentralAsia
  - Gender equality...is when she is not forced to marry...everyone needs @HeForSheCentralAsia
- **Healthy masculinity:** A man has the right to be vulnerable and express his feelings in a safe way, and care about his health and well-being. He, like any other person, has doubts, and could feel sad, repent or make mistakes. He has the right to enjoy fatherhood, and question the expectations of masculine, controlling and violent behaviour imposed on him by the traditional narrative.
  - Your mentality is you. Norms accepted in society can be changed. Reference to mentality is a way of hiding laziness and a desire to maintain the status quo. Young men are tomorrow's aksakals, to whom young people will listen, so you can stand up for new rules today. - *for Uzbekistan*

The messages targeted mass media and wide audiences. The messages had a clear structure, focusing on: (i) an innovative large project by two high-profile, globally known organisations, (ii) partnerships with the governments and NGOs, and (iii) pressing issues the programme addresses. As referenced above, the messages were widely shared in the media.

## **c) Media and visibility events**

Please see the Pillar 3 results.

In 2023 the programme partnered with one of the leading social media platforms to screen the documentary on adolescent pregnancy in Kazakhstan, followed by a discussion with youth activists and influencers on sexual violence against children, sexuality education and shared responsibility for life-changing decisions.

The docudrama series “Zhalgyz Emessin” (You are not alone) produced in 2022 and released in Almaty and Astana on 18–20 April 2023. “Zhalgyz Emessin” is a Kazakhstani docudrama series created by the Regional Programme with the support from the Government of Kazakhstan. The nine-episode series features real-life stories of domestic violence survivors who have overcome difficult situations. The docudrama series are being broadcast on the Kazakh republican TV channel, reaching millions of people.

### Central Asian Alliance Launch conference (27 June 2023) and Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme Closing Conference (29 November 2023)

The Central Asian Alliance to End Gender-Based Violence was officially launched on 27 June 2023 in Almaty, Kazakhstan as part of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan. More than 70 representatives from the EU, UN, Central Asian countries, diplomatic corps, civil society organisations, media and youth associations came together for the launch event. The Alliance seeks to advocate for gender equality, strengthen civil society, and create a platform for knowledge-sharing and expertise to prevent and address gender-based violence in the region.

The final conference of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan was held on 29 November 2023 in the Kazakh capital Astana. Bringing together around 100 attendees, the Conference was symbolically aligned with the “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” and underpinned long standing commitments as well as new endeavours to seeking transformative regional and national solutions and placing the elimination of all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence at the forefront of the national agendas of Central Asian states.

#### **d) Campaigns**

The solidarity movement for gender equality HeForShe Central Asia resulted in 20 million views of its key messages and reached 15 million people in Central Asia via social and online media as well as TV channels and radio. Please see the Pillar 3 results.



HeForShe Central Asia 5 Facebook and Instagram accounts + 1 common regional YouTube:

- e) [HeForShe Central Asia \(@heforshecentralasia\)](#)
- f) [HeForShe Uzbekistan \(@heforsheuzbekistan\)](#)
- g) [HeForShe Tajikistan \(@heforshe.tajikistan\)](#)
- h) [HeForShe Kyrgyzstan \(@heforshekyrgyzstan\)](#)
- i) [HeForShe Kazakhstan \(@heforshekazakhstan\)](#)
- j) [HeForShe Central Asia - YouTube](#)

Information campaign about the problems and consequences of polygamous marriages for women and their children is underway. A collection of illustrated human stories is being prepared, complemented by commentaries from GBV experts, legal

counsellors, and social workers. The materials will be disseminated through the social media of the Spotlight Initiative, UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. A launch event will be organised for human rights and gender equality activists and media ahead of the 2023 16 Days campaign. Outreach figures to follow.

The annual 16 Days of Activism campaign is the culmination of an effort to analyse, report and highlight major interventions of women activists and grassroots CSOs in combating SGBV. The following activities were conducted throughout the campaign:

1. Master class on gender journalism (2022)
2. Youth engagements
  - Three I-Talks on the issues of GBV, gender equality, women's empowerment in the universities of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (2022)
  - Regional online forum, 'Media Initiatives of the girls from Central Asia' (2022)
  - National Youth Debate Tournaments, 'Non-Violence Cup' in each Central Asian country (2022)
  - 5 Youth Talks in 5 Central Asian countries (2023)
  - Online trainings on GBV and human rights topics (2023)
3. Social media campaigns
  - k) Manshuq Media (2022)
  - l) Wonder Woman (2022)
  - m) Youth 'Nur' Alliance (2022)
  - n) Tik toks on gender stereotypes and SGBV issues (2022)

***o) Human interest stories:***

All human stories collected during 2020 - 2023 are available [here](#).

***Aslan Temirkhanov, the former focal point of the Y-PEER in Kazakhstan***

"According to Mr. Temirkhanov, the Spotlight initiative has been significant for the members of the Y-PEER Kazakhstan network. By addressing Y-PEER's core subjects, Spotlight enabled Y-PEER Kazakhstan's members to meet several experts from Central Asia. It was also an opportunity for them to share their knowledge and expertise on SRHR, GBV and gender equality, for instance, as facilitators and trainers at the Spotlight camp in Tashkent. By attending events organised during the Spotlight initiative, Y-PEER members were able to deepen their knowledge continually. Last but not least, the Spotlight initiative was interesting as it covered GBV, gender equality and SRHR among young people, and it included them. No one was left behind."



***Empowering Women and Transforming Lives: The Spotlight Initiative in Tajikistan***

*This story is narrated in the words of Venera Djabarova, PO Bonuvoni Fardo, Tajikistan.*

The Spotlight Initiative has brought about significant changes in our approach to our work. In the past, when dealing with women who had experienced violence, our primary aim was to preserve the family at all costs. However, our perspective has evolved, and we now recognize that women are equal members of society. When there is a lack of respect, mutual understanding, and support from the husband, there is no justification for maintaining such families or concealing cases of violence. It is crucial to address this problem openly.

If a man decides to positively change his behaviour and cease harmful actions, we can work towards preserving the family. However, if this transformation does not occur, we must be prepared to take a different course of action. We have encountered numerous cases where women, after participating in our training programs, undergo a profound reevaluation of their values. Previously, these women tolerated situations where they were treated as subordinates and their opinions were disregarded. Today, they refuse to accept such treatment.

I vividly recall a distressing case where a young woman, who was breastfeeding her newborn, was deemed unsuitable for her husband's family. His parents informed her that they would find a "better" wife for their son and expelled her from their home. For four days, she pleaded to be allowed back into the house, crying and desperate. She could hear her baby crying inside but was helpless to intervene. They switched the infant to bottle-feeding, depriving him of his mother's care.

She sought assistance from the local women's council, and her story eventually led her to our Public Organization. Upon assessing the situation, it was evident that there was a complete absence of respect and understanding within this family. In such cases, preserving the family would not have been in anyone's best interest, and this decision was entirely justified.

Today, this woman lives happily with her child in a new environment. We worked diligently to boost her self-esteem and provide psychological support. She has since remarried a man who respects and values her, and their children are growing up in a loving and nurturing environment.

This is a testament to the positive impact of the Spotlight Initiative, as it empowers women to reclaim their dignity and build happier, healthier lives.

### **From Tragedy to Triumph: Empowering Women and Protecting Children in Tajikistan"**

*In the words of Venera Djabarova, PO Bonuvoni Fardo, Tajikistan:*

We have a case in a family with two daughters that began very tragically but found a happy resolution, filling our hearts with joy.

A woman, whom we call Leila, approached us with a heartbreaking story - her elder daughter had taken her own life. This tragedy had unfolded because her husband had created a toxic environment in their home. His family members lived in constant fear, enduring disrespect and aggression, feeling trapped within their own lives. The situation was most dire for Leila's elder daughter, who suffered the brunt of her husband's aggression. Shockingly, this kind of behaviour was deemed normal in their family; they couldn't comprehend how wrong it was until tragedy struck.

Desperate for help, Leila turned to us, and we invited her to our training sessions conducted under the Spotlight Initiative. It was only through these sessions that she realized the extent of the violence within her family and how deeply her children and she were affected. Sadly, her husband's aggression soon extended to their younger daughter, causing Leila to fear that another tragedy was imminent.

We took immediate action and enlisted the support of the Women's Union and legal experts from the local authorities. Our lawyers engaged with the aggressor, not only addressing his psychological issues but also explaining Tajikistan's legal framework. They made him aware of his responsibilities under the law and clarified the consequences of domestic violence.

The transformation within this family was profound. The aggressor acknowledged his mistakes and began to foster an environment of freedom and respect. Previously, he had forbidden his wife and daughters from participating in public events, family gatherings, weddings, and virtually any social activity. Now, everything had changed - the women in the family were empowered to make decisions about their lives and engagements.

Furthermore, Leila found employment, and their younger daughter is on the path to pursuing higher education. The intervention not only saved lives but also breathed hope and freedom into a family once bound by violence and oppression.

### **A Tale of Triumph: Mumtoz Organization's Impact in Rudaki, Tajikistan**

*This story is narrated in the words of Munisa Husseinzoda, representing CSO Mumtoz in Rudaki, Tajikistan.*

This is the inspiring story of Madina, a resilient mother in Tajikistan, who found her way out of economic violence with the support of Mumtoz Crisis Center. Madina's journey is emblematic of the challenges faced by many women in Tajikistan, where husbands often migrate to seek employment abroad.

When Madina first sought help at our Crisis Center, she was struggling to cope. Her husband was working in a different country, leaving her to care for their disabled child alone. But Madina's determination was unwavering, and with the assistance of Mumtoz Crisis Center, she began her path towards empowerment.

We started by enrolling Madina's child in a school for children with disabilities, ensuring that the child could receive an education even from a distance. Meanwhile, Madina eagerly participated in our workshops and seminars under the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme. These



Photo credit: UN RCO, Kazakhstan

sessions not only imparted knowledge about her rights but also equipped her with valuable skills.

Madina embarked on a journey of self-sufficiency by taking dress-making courses at our center. Her talent was undeniable, and soon she was receiving substantial orders, providing her with a source of income. We continued to support her, offering opportunities to engage in larger projects. With our guidance, Madina crafted a successful business project, paving the way for her to establish her own home-based dress-making business. She invested in sewing machines and learned about her rights, discovering that women with home-based businesses in Tajikistan are not obligated to pay taxes.

Today, Madina's business thrives, allowing her to financially support her family. Her determination knows no bounds, as she manages to create two dresses a day, significantly boosting her income. At our center, we also extend a helping hand by assigning her part of the orders when we receive requests for eco-bags and folders from prominent organizations. Madina efficiently works from home, enabling her to balance her responsibilities as a mother to her disabled son, Azizjon.

Madina's success story is a testament to the positive impact of the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme. It has provided us with the opportunity to reach out to vulnerable women like Madina and help them break free from the shackles of economic violence. Thanks to Madina's resilience and our unwavering support, she has emerged victorious over adversity, proving that a brighter future is possible for all.

### **Transforming Families: A Spotlight Initiative Success Story in Tajikistan.**

*This story is narrated in the words of Orzu Ganiyeva, a member of the Spotlight Civil Society Regional Reference Group in Tajikistan.*

Orzu Ganieva, a valued member of the Spotlight Civil Society Regional Reference Group in Tajikistan and the Regional CSOs Network Coordination Group, recently shared a heartwarming story of her impactful involvement in our Regional Programme. Among the many tales she recounted, one stood out as particularly touching.

Orzu organized a training session as part of the Spotlight Regional Programme for members of the Ministry for Emergency Situations in Tajikistan. Some time after the training, she serendipitously crossed paths with one of the participants, whom we will refer to as Azat. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude, revealing how the training had profoundly transformed his perspective on family dynamics.

Azat, a father of two children, aged 2 years and six months, used to adhere to the traditional belief prevalent in their community: that childcare was primarily the mother's responsibility. However, one evening, he returned home late to find his wife fast asleep while nursing their baby. Their elder son was also sound asleep in his crib.

During the night, the elder son awoke and began crying. In a significant departure from his previous behaviour, Azat chose not to wake his wife, as he typically would have. Instead, he

took it upon himself to care for their older child. He played with his son, comforted him, and eventually lulled him back to sleep.

The next morning, when his wife awoke, Azat informed her that their child had been awake and fussy for half the night, but he had taken care of him himself. His wife was deeply moved and expressed her gratitude. Breaking free from ingrained stereotypes can be a challenging endeavour, but in that moment, Azat sensed a positive transformation within himself. He recognized the importance of sharing responsibilities with his wife and cherished the happiness in her eyes. Inspired by this newfound perspective, he happily shared his story with Orzu.

Orzu, in turn, extends her profound gratitude to the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme. It reached the home of this program beneficiary, bringing greater joy to their family life and fostering an understanding within Azat that parenting responsibilities should be shared equally. This success story underscores the significant impact of the Spotlight Initiative in promoting gender equality and transforming traditional attitudes and behaviours for the better.

### **p) Testimonials:**

All testimonials collected during 2020 - 2023 are available [here](#).

#### **1. CS-RRG member, Kazakhstan, Minutes of the RSC Meeting, June 2023**

A uniquely comprehensive approach applied by the Programme laid a solid foundation for consistent actions and interventions to advance gender equality and eliminate SGBV..... the Programme achievements became possible as a result of meaningful participation of civil society where CSOs increased their capacities and the capacities of their partners to develop and implement new innovative projects, to advance the needs and interests of the most 'invisible' women, and those with intersectional forms of discrimination.....

#### **2. CS-RRG member, Tajikistan, Minutes of RSC Meeting, June 2023**

Only Spotlight was able to unite civil society organisations working on gender equality and eliminating GBV. The Central Asian Regional CSO Network could be named after the Spotlight Initiative due to its unique qualities and capabilities that created the network, which will have strength and voice, giving hope that together we are able to achieve a better future free of violence.

#### **3. Zhanna Arayeva, Feminist, Activist, Gender and Media expert, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**

“Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme allowed us to gain freedom of creativity and transfer our knowledge to a huge number of journalists who also have a great influence on how public opinion on women's rights and gender-based violence is formed. The uniqueness of the programme for our region is that it made it possible to unite all specialists within the region. This allowed us to get better acquainted with organizations that work in the same field. For example, in my case in the media field, this allowed me to meet other journalists from other countries and see how things are going in their country with the topic of gender-based violence. The program provided an opportunity to get acquainted with civil society organisations from other countries,

from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and understand that we are not alone in searching for solutions to our common problem. It was very important that there was an exchange of experience between countries and we realised that we can solve the problem together and take steps towards eradicating gender-based violence” (<https://youtu.be/cT1wZMcR6e8?si=6B8kMK0DfGRdETFv>)

#### **4. Karzhaubayeva Sholpan, Center of youth and Family Health, Almaty**

“What was interesting and new for me personally in TOT on MSR for GBV? I am a doctor, I represented health sector. What was interesting is that there was an opportunity to exchange experience with specialists from the Central Asian region. What was also interesting - the one-window methodology, when a victim of violence is provided with comprehensive assistance in one place by specialists from the police, healthcare and psychosocial assistance sectors. And the second is very important - the tools were provided by the Eastern European Institute of Reproductive Health based on evidence.” ([https://www.instagram.com/reel/CtgNr-zl5XI/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CtgNr-zl5XI/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==))

#### **5. Gulnora Beknazarova, Center for Sociological Support "Zerkalo", Dushanbe, Tajikistan**

"As this <study ARCHITECTURE OF RESPONSE TO GBV> covers all countries of Central Asia, it allows us to have panoramic vision on what is done in each country. How all countries are responding to GBV cases, what happens, what is missing" (<https://youtu.be/Ws41m-x6-SU?si=wfXZxKOFXrCd1O1r>)

#### **6. Munisa Husseinzoda, CSO MUMTOZ, Dushanbe, Tajikistan**

STRENGTHENING CSO CAPACITIES AND REGIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

"This programme allowed us to understand who we are, where we go and show others that Civil Society Organization can play crucial roles in preventing social problems in families" (<https://youtu.be/jHfrEYtrEsw?si=IW4VLkKT57Fq0a0S>)

#### **7. Dilbar Turakhanova, legislative reform expert, Dushanbe, Tajikistan about Legal Review**

"The value of a regional programme and a regional review of GBV legislation is that it provides a unique opportunity for the legislative countries of Central Asia to find out what best practices have worked in their countries, what norms that, for example, have already been adopted in Kyrgyzstan, work effectively and which they can include in their laws"

#### **8. Venera Djabarova, PO Bonuvoni Fardo, Tajikistan**

Uniqueness of the Spotlight Initiative in comparison to other programmes is that with its help we enhanced the potential of our workers, of our own organisation. We changed the way of thinking and behaviour of our own employees. It is especially important for the lawyers, who protect the rights of people. Thanks to the training that were held within this programme, where we were explained what is gender and gender equality and which of the Tajik laws are supporting gender



equality. After these training sessions our lawyers started using newly acquired knowledge about gender equality in their practice.

q) **Photos:** [PHOTO SUBMISSION PLATFORM](#).

r) **Videos:** [VIDEO SUBMISSION PLATFORM](#)

1. '[Don't forget the way home](#)' - the film produced by the HeForShe Central Asia
2. '[Dress](#)' - the film produced by the HeForShe Central Asia
3. '[Dinner](#)' - the film produced by the HeForShe Central Asia
4. '[All about my father](#)' - the film produced by the HeForShe Central Asia
5. [Public talk on XXI masculinity](#) supported by HeForShe Central Asia
6. [Radio broadcast about HeForShe Central Asia solidarity movement](#)
7. [Radio broadcast with gender experts within HeForShe Kazakhstan solidarity movement](#)
8. Interview with Sanovbar Raupova, Tajikistan <https://youtu.be/Q68ll-plUBE?si=ePOucFuoB26mls6y>
9. Interview with Zhyldyzai Turdybekova, Kyrgyzstan <https://youtu.be/5fd5lfGDtGI?si=rait1JLHRIZNoj3g>
10. Interview with Orzu Ganiyeva, Tajikistan <https://youtu.be/fp8ScYVHPPs?si=Am2Go7xJXWoS3W0Q>
11. M&E training, Kyrgyzstan [https://youtu.be/Als\\_Tas0nN8?si=Jkgkmppe54jPKhtm](https://youtu.be/Als_Tas0nN8?si=Jkgkmppe54jPKhtm)
12. Interview with Gulnora Beknazarova, Tajikistan [https://youtu.be/Ws41m-x6-SU?si=toi2tEWD2WbK\\_i7J](https://youtu.be/Ws41m-x6-SU?si=toi2tEWD2WbK_i7J)
13. Interview with Munisa Huseinzoda, Theatre Forum, Tajikistan <https://youtu.be/HAdwnhK261E?si=K1tWw1Ms51-jWk-G>
14. Interview with Munisa Huseinzoda, Puppet Theatre, Tajikistan <https://youtu.be/PxTSA9Qhvvvg?si=3fUivLtPu4us6KTV>
15. Interview with Munisa Huseinzoda, Human Story, Tajikistan <https://youtu.be/jHfrEYtrEsw?si=PDE7ovwpvVWq5xLq>
16. Interview with Zhanna Araeva, Kyrgyzstan <https://youtu.be/cT1wZMcR6e8?si=0U8qHWSq5gCSMmtB>
17. Story of Mutobar Ismailova, Tajikistan <https://youtu.be/EygdKPPSDk?si=ymRq8Sws5f4ojSxB>

## Looking forward – ensuring Spotlight's contributions are sustained

In May 2023, SI-RP developed a Sustainability Strategy aimed at ensuring the sustainability of impacts after the finalisation of the SI-RP, which is critical to maintain legitimacy and trust among the communities that we serve to bring positive change. Sustainability in this context is understood as the extent to which benefits of the programme continue after the external development assistance has come to an end. The Strategy can be accessed [here](#).

The Strategy was developed through extensive and in-depth consultations with diverse stakeholders such as governmental institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), community leaders, international experts and others to secure a comprehensive roadmap for the sustainability of outcomes anchored in the country and regional contexts. This inclusive and participatory approach allowed SI to identify critical aspects and anchor the ideas and analysis with a diverse set of stakeholders to secure buy-in of the Strategy.

In the development process, SI meticulously adhered to a rigorous review and feedback mechanism, incorporating input from independent experts in the fields of gender-based violence and sustainable development. By adopting an iterative approach of refinement and revision, SI not only addressed critical questions regarding the sustainability of institutions, tools, capacities, and partnerships beyond the program's duration but also formulated a robust and well-founded vision. This vision is poised to guide future efforts aimed at eradicating violence against women and girls in the region. Furthermore, it provides insights on how to navigate and mitigate risks through enhanced national ownership and engagement of diverse stakeholders. These steps are pivotal in building upon the progress made towards the goal of Ending All Violence Against Women and Girls in Central Asia.

SI has worked under the assumption that significant project gains will endure through sustained RUNO funding, often referred to as signature interventions. These funds will facilitate the systematic integration of these activities into the broader country programme within the framework of agency-mandated work. More specifically, SI anticipates this integration to apply to the endeavours of the Central Asia Alliance to end GBV. Additionally, the resources, knowledge, and networks developed will continue to be utilised by agencies in their routine advocacy efforts, such as the 16 Days campaign and the HeForShe campaign. These initiatives will persist through the UNFPA offices in the region, where an operational plan for the next two years has been devised.

This foundational assumption forms the basis for ensuring the sustained impact and continuity of long-term outcomes, as it aligns with agency-mandated work aimed at advancing the End All Violence Against Women and Girls agenda in the region. However, it is essential to acknowledge that this assumption relies on the clear definition, communication, and adoption of ownership and shared responsibility throughout all phases of the exit strategy and beyond.

## **ANNEXES**

**[Annex A: Results Framework](#)**

**[Annex B: Risk Matrix](#)**

**[Annex C: CSO Engagement Report](#)**

**[Annex D: Innovative, Promising and Good Practices Report](#)**

**[Annex F: List of end-use of equipment by programme](#)**