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Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Economic and Social Council Commission on the Status of Women Sixty-fifth session

15 to 26 March 2021

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters

Report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the activities of the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith, to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Human Rights Council, the report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on the activities of the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, which was prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution [50/166](#).

* [E/CN.6/2021/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. The United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women is a global, multilateral grant-giving mechanism that supports efforts to prevent and end violence against women and girls. The trust fund, which was established in 1996 by the General Assembly in its resolution [50/166](#), is administered by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on behalf of the United Nations system. With the strong institutional support of UN-Women and its regional, multi-country and country offices and working closely with the rest of the United Nations system through its inter-agency Programme Advisory Committee,¹ the trust fund plays a vital role in driving forward collective efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls.

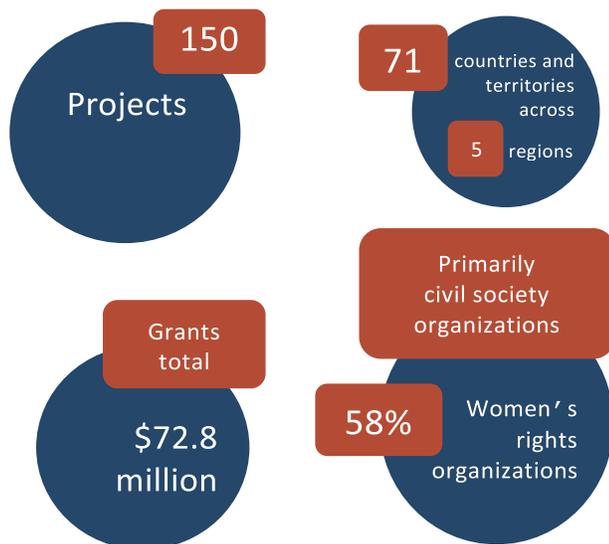
2. The present report describes the impact and achievements of the trust fund and its grantees in 2020.

3. The trust fund raises and distributes funds to support multi-year projects to address, prevent and ultimately end violence against women and girls. It does so through its three strategic directions: supporting results-oriented approaches to prevent and end violence against women and girls; catalysing learning from global evidence collected from grantees; and leveraging its unique mandate and convening capacity to advocate for and foster sustainable financing for national and local work on preventing and ending violence against women and girls.

4. As of December 2020, the Governments of Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America had contributed to the trust fund during the year, as had the Spotlight Initiative, the joint effort of the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate violence against women and girls. Support was also received from the UN-Women national committees of Australia, Austria, Germany, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as from private sector partners, including the Mary Kay Foundation, Mary Kay Inc. and the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

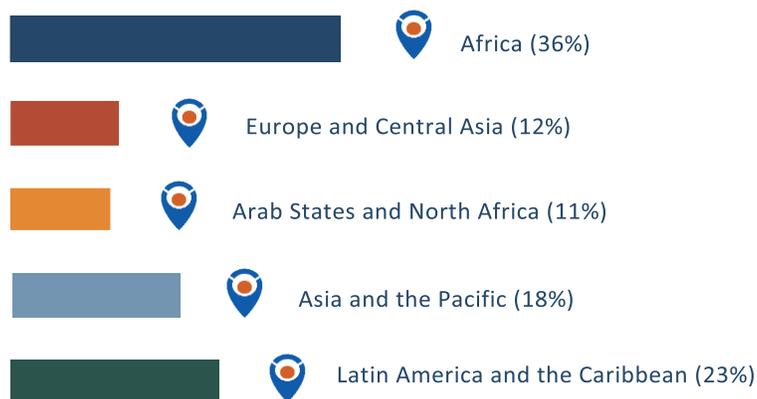
¹ In 2020, members of the Programme Advisory Committee at the global level included: the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Population Fund; the United Nations Children's Fund; the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); and the World Health Organization. It also included intergovernmental organizations and other experts at the global and field levels, including representatives from the Centre for Women's Global Leadership, Equality Now, and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative.

Figure I
2020 trust fund grants portfolio



5. In 2020 (see figures I and II), the trust fund managed a grants portfolio of 150 projects aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women and girls in 71 countries and territories, across five regions, with grants totalling \$72.8 million. Grant recipients are primarily civil society organizations; the majority (58 per cent) are women's rights organizations.

Figure II
Regional distribution of grants



6. The work of the trust fund and its grantees in 2020 was marked by the impact of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the adverse consequences generated by measures undertaken to curb its spread. COVID-19 exposed the lack of preparedness of societies to respond to and deal with the existing, ongoing and persistent pandemic of violence against women and girls and prevalence rates that were already alarmingly high before COVID-19. Nearly one in five women (18 per cent) report experiencing intimate partner violence in the 12 months prior to COVID-19, and an estimated 28 per cent of adolescent girls and 29 per cent of young women report experiencing physical or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime.² COVID-19

² UN-Women, *Gender Equality: Women's Rights in Review 25 years after Beijing* (2020), available at www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/womens-rights-in-review.

exacerbated those violations. Across the world, civil society organizations reported a surge in violence against women and girls³ that was reflected in the increased calls for support to helplines, in some cases up by 770 per cent.⁴ The increase in violence has taken many forms; for example, it is projected that the total effect of COVID-19 will result in 13 million additional child marriages globally by 2030.⁵

7. An early impact assessment of COVID-19 among trust fund grantees in April revealed soaring rates of violence against women and girls globally, which were confirmed by a second analysis published in September. At the same time, COVID-19 and the measures adopted to address it made it harder, if not impossible, for many organizations, and especially small, women-led organizations, to continue their essential work. The Secretary-General urged all Governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women and girls a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19, and 146 Member States responded to his call to action. The United Nations system came together to accelerate policy responses to gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19.⁶ Six critical areas for action were identified, among which was increased funding from national and international aid budgets for women's rights organizations that are first responders during this and every crisis, including through such mechanisms as the trust fund, which is committed to supporting civil society and women's rights organizations through the crisis.⁷

8. As an immediate response to the crisis, in April 2020, the trust fund announced a five-point action plan to provide relief support to grantees, including: (a) acknowledging and approving delays in grantee reporting, including final and evaluation reports; (b) exercising flexibility to enable grantees to modify or delay project activities; (c) sharing resources and guidance to help grantees navigate the public health crisis; (d) accepting budget reallocation requests to meet core costs to ensure business continuity and minimize the negative impacts of COVID-19; and (e) approving no-cost extension requests for projects.

9. Furthermore, in response to challenges that were jeopardizing current projects and, in some cases, threatening institutional survival, in partnership with the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations, an additional \$9 million was allocated for immediate and ongoing support to 44 trust fund grantees in sub-Saharan Africa.

10. During its twenty-fourth funding cycle, which opened with a call for proposals in September 2020, the trust fund sought applications from civil society organizations working on the front lines of the COVID-19 response and recovery to address and respond to the rise in violence against women and girls. In all, 1,498 applications were received, requesting a total of \$758,786,215.

11. Applications from women's rights, women-led and small women's organizations were prioritized, in recognition of the fact that they are at the forefront of reaching at-risk women and girls and survivors and leaving no one behind. In the light of the existential threat posed by the pandemic to some grantee organizations, the trust fund

³ United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, "Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls through the lens of civil society and women's rights organizations", available at www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20untf/publications/2020/external%20brief/external%20brief%20for%20publication%206%2019/impact%20of%20covid-19_v08_single%20page-compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=5117.

⁴ United Nations, *United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better* (2020), available at www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un-comprehensive-response-to-covid-19.pdf.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ UN-Women, "Inter-agency statement on violence against women and girls in the context of COVID-19", available at www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/statement-inter-agency-statement-on-violence-against-women-and-girls--in-the-context-of-covid-19.

⁷ Ibid.

established a COVID-19-specific contingency budget line of up to 4 per cent of grants and a budgetary line of up to 3 per cent to supplement general operating and other direct costs for small organizations. It also committed to maintaining core funding of 7 per cent and \$2,000 for self-care activities for small organizations. Overall, that means that, for organizations receiving small grants, flexible funding can be up to 21 per cent of the project budget requested and can be used to meet organizational and beneficiaries' needs in a rapidly evolving COVID-19 context.

II. Response of grantees to the coronavirus disease pandemic

12. In March 2020, the trust fund received information from 122 grantees in 69 countries and territories on the rapid rise in violence against women and girls and the challenges faced by struggling, often civil society-led, support and protection systems. Grantees also reported a lack of or restricted access to justice, essential health care and social protection for survivors. Front-line women's rights and civil society organizations, which formed an early warning system on escalating violence against women, risked being overwhelmed by demand for support. However, the information from grantees also revealed how quickly and nimbly they were adapting to maintain key aspects of their projects while protecting the safety of beneficiaries and staff.⁸ For example, in Serbia, the Association of Citizens to Combat Human Trafficking and all Forms of Gender-based Violence managed to keep its safe houses open and used its reserve fund to help meet needs, including providing food contributions to State-operated shelters to best serve women survivors.

13. The trust fund's ongoing monitoring of the impact of COVID-19 showed that, six months into the global pandemic, there was a continued and significant increase in rates of violence against women and girls and an ongoing impact on the ability of civil society organizations to prevent and respond to the crisis. The overall impact was localized and complex, but grantees identified and shared key challenges and drivers of violence from March 2020 onwards. They included a stark rise in sexual violence, online harassment and harmful traditional practices; a severe impact on marginalized communities and those most often left behind; and a lack of sustainable, structural and societal support for work on ending violence against women and girls, a gap which civil society organizations were striving to fill. Grantees reported a rise in the number of requests for help and in cases concerning immediate threats to life. For instance, the Women's Rights Centre in Armenia noted both significantly higher numbers of cases and increasingly severe violence. In Colombia, reports logged as emergencies increased by 553 per cent, according to Corporación Con-Vivamos.

14. While, in March, grantees reported that the most common form of violence against women and girls was intimate partner violence, by August, they were reporting that other forms of violence, such as online harassment and harmful practices, were also on the rise. For example, in Cameroon, three civil society organizations reported an increase in violence against girls, including child marriage. All 20 grantees working on violence against women and girls with disabilities reported that that group continued to be disproportionately affected in the context of COVID-19, although the scope of the impact was difficult to gauge given that the group was among the hardest to reach during lockdowns. Nevertheless, when the Rwandan Organization of Women with Disabilities conducted a rapid assessment of beneficiaries, 44 per cent of respondents confirmed that COVID-19 stay-at-home orders had exacerbated violence against women and girls with disabilities.

⁸ UN-Women, "UN Trust Fund responds swiftly to COVID-19 crisis", available at <https://untf.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/04/un-trust-fund-responds-swiftly-to-covid-19-crisis>.

15. Some grantees refocused their efforts on the immediate survival of beneficiaries and their organizations. Some worked to provide food (for example, Friends of Women Organization, Selangor in Malaysia and Hagar International in Viet Nam); others provided dignity and hygiene kits, in particular to marginalized women and girls (for example, Al-Shehab Institution for Comprehensive Development in Egypt, and the African Indigenous Women Organization Central African Network and Rural Women Centre for Education and Development in Cameroon). Still others implemented cash-based interventions (for example, the National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda, the Centre for Women Studies and Intervention in Nigeria and the Forum for Women in Development and Democracy and Justice and the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness in Kenya). In most cases, those efforts were provided as stand-alone support, but some grantees used them as entry points for awareness-raising on violence against women and COVID-19.

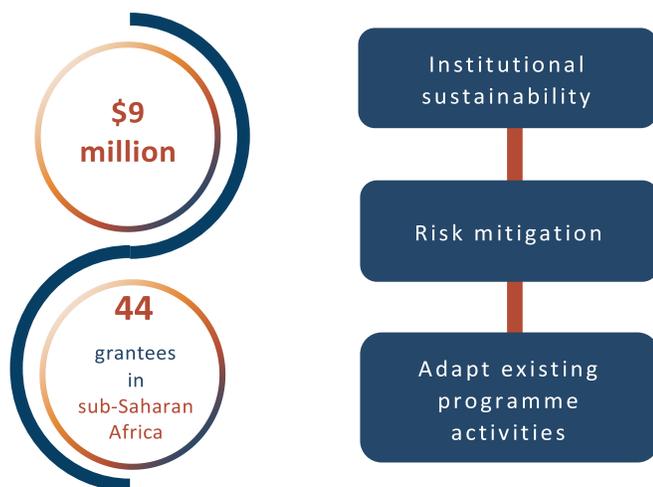
16. By August, all active grantees had adjusted their project plans for programmatic and operational reasons. To manage the surge in demand for services, grantees put in place additional services with COVID-19 preventative measures. For example, in Chad, the Public Interest Law Centre created a temporary shelter, beyond its permanent counselling centres, to provide additional support for women in need. Civil society organizations also reached out to service providers to support government responses for survivors. For example, in Kenya, when the Refugee Consortium of Kenya found that police stations in Nairobi and Garissa were overwhelmed by the increase in cases of violence against women and girls, it provided the police with mattresses, child play items and dignity kits, as well as forms to document cases, which are essential for the legal process. In Solomon Islands, the Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team provided phone credits for courts to issue and review protection orders, enabling them to return calls from survivors and obtain information to issue orders.

17. Grantees quickly recognized that the economic impact of the pandemic could fuel violence against women and girls and that existing economic empowerment programmes needed to be redesigned to help women and girls survive. For example, the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa helped women and girls in South Sudan to recover economically by training them to produce masks and reusable sanitary pads, thereby meeting local demand for both products and generating income.

18. Assessments by civil society organizations of service capacity and qualitative insights provided data that informed local responses and constituted a critical body of practitioner-based knowledge intended to guide global responses. For example, the International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care in India investigated why more cases of violence had not been reported to their helpline at the start of the pandemic. They found that fewer women were calling, as stay-at-home orders prevented them from speaking on the phone in private. Some women at risk assumed that the service was closed. In response, the grantee republicized the hotline number, moved to online methods of communication and urged the Government to publicly reaffirm that services related to violence against women and girls were essential and open. In the State of Palestine, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling systematically recorded violations reported to its services every week following lockdown; the number of cases in which a woman's life was threatened increased significantly in May and the number of long-term (unresolved) cases almost tripled compared to pre-pandemic figures. At a time when national violence protection systems were refocused to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, the roles of civil society organizations, both as first responders to violence against women and girls and in monitoring and gathering data, emerged as an invaluable early warning and immediate support system.

III. Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations

Figure III
Amount announced in partnership with the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations, 2020



19. The Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations that aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. While all of the Spotlight Initiative’s six mutually reinforcing areas of focus align closely with the trust fund’s strategic priority areas, movement-building is the central focus of the collaboration.⁹

20. Trust fund grantees under the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations reported challenges in reaching beneficiaries in the context of COVID-19. Quarantine measures and restrictions on movement, including public transport, severely limited face-to-face, group-based, participatory programming and direct service provision. Grantees responded by implementing a variety of methods, tailored to their context, to reach beneficiaries, taking into account challenges, including those related to shifting to online activities.

21. On 8 May 2020, in partnership with the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations, the trust fund announced \$9 million as an additional and immediate support focused on ensuring institutional sustainability and risk mitigation, as well as adapting existing programmatic activities to respond to the needs of women and girls affected by the pandemic. Funds went to 44 trust fund grantees in sub-Saharan Africa (see figure III) and therefore infused funds that were used for projects to end violence against women and girls living with disabilities as well as projects carried out in humanitarian contexts. Funding went to the lead partners, as well as 29 implementing partners, mainly women’s organizations, contributing to a resilient women’s movement in Africa. In addition, funds were allocated to build an online practitioner-based learning hub to enhance the exchange of best practices.

⁹ United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, “Call for proposals for Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa: the Spotlight Initiative – theory of change for Outcome 6”, available at www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20untf/publications/2019/spotlight%20cfp%20docs/english/untfevaw_spotlight_annex%201_outcome6.pdf?la=en&vs=3542.

22. The trust fund also responded to the needs of grantees of the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations in Latin America by promptly enabling all 11 grantees to access budget reallocation requests to implement targeted response activities. For example, in Mexico, Infancia Común used additional funds reallocated from their original project budget to create a web page to disseminate information on sexual abuse and violence as well as COVID-19 prevention, with material adapted for girls and women. CIARENA, which works with indigenous women in remote rural areas of Mexico, incorporated a communal vegetable garden activity into its project in response to reports of increased food insecurity emerging as a result of the pandemic and to empower women through skills in gardening and farming.

23. All grantees, in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, immediately put the additional funding to work. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, Conscience et Vie distributed food packages to self-identified sex workers living with HIV who had lost their income because of COVID-19. In Zimbabwe, the Bethany Project distributed dignity kits, including sanitary pads for adolescent girls. In addition, to replace face-to-face interactions, the organization set up online community forums as safe spaces for young girls to discuss sexual and gender-based violence and worked to strengthen its capacities and those of its implementing partners to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse during the pandemic. The organization Funds for Congolese Women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo equipped focal points in the field with smartphones and Internet access in order to facilitate their work within the target communities.

24. Grantees of the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations reported that, although there were new challenges, grantees were seeing the response to COVID-19 as an impetus to fuel women's movements grounded in survivors' needs. For instance, the Cameroon Association for the Protection and Education of the Child is working to strengthen its capacity and that of its partners (five grass-roots women's organizations) to implement and advocate sexual and gender-based violence services, including building staff capacity to provide comprehensive referral, counselling and case management services. The organization is also supporting engagement across sectors to create inclusive networks through faith leaders and communities.

25. The trust fund provided training to support all grantees of the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations through a series of webinars in how to effectively manage the additional resources for responding to COVID-19. They reached 420 participants and covered project modifications to respond to COVID-19, cash-based interventions intended to be carried out with those modifications and a new procurement training.

26. Some of the achievements of grantees that were funded under the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations in 2020 are described in the following paragraphs.

27. The Centro de Estudios de Mujeres, a women-led organization that is implementing a project in Honduras in partnership with Plataforma 25 de Noviembre, a network of 22 women's organizations, and CARE Honduras, reoriented its work to focus on online activities. An online campaign highlighted the increase in various forms of violence against women and girls as a result of confinement measures and drew attention to initiatives carried out by women in confinement to address the pandemic, as well as the contacts that can provide support to women and girls who are victims/survivors of violence. The feminist movement came together to pursue some common goals, such as preparing and advocating an emergency law addressing violence against women, which was approved.

28. In Argentina, the Fundación Andhes (Abogados y abogadas del noroeste argentino en derechos humanos y estudios sociales), a women-led non-governmental

organization, in partnership with CLADEM, an international network of women's organizations and activists, implemented a project to address violence against cisgender, transgender and lesbian women. The training of counsellors had to be redirected to an online platform, which required a rethinking of the entire process in terms of communication channels, techniques, materials, connectivity and the financial support to enable digital methods. A comprehensive advisory space was also maintained through phone calls, WhatsApp or video calls: 328 women were assisted during 2020.

29. In Imo State in Nigeria, the grantee Alliances for Africa became increasingly concerned about the surge in violence against women and girls and quickly took steps to mitigate risks. They included: mobilizing support for the inclusion of women in all COVID-19 task force committees; monitoring the distribution of government relief materials to increase accountability; and broadcasting reliable information on COVID-19 to counter misinformation and help stop the spread of the virus. The swift action further strengthened coalitions between State and civil society actors to address violence against women and girls – a key objective of the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations.

30. In Chad, some of the Public Interest Law Centre's work to eradicate harmful social norms, customs and practices and improve access to legal and psychosocial services for women survivors of violence was significantly affected by the pandemic. However, the grantee adapted and continued many of its activities. For example, it used radio broadcasts to raise awareness of violence against women by highlighting laws that punish perpetrators and by encouraging people to report violence. Through its 24/7 helpline, its trained paralegals provided listening services and offered legal support and advice on protection measures for survivors and those at risk of violence. The grantee used the additional funding from the Spotlight Initiative of the European Union and the United Nations for COVID-19-related responses to ensure staff well-being and enable remote working; invest in help centres so that women survivors and those at risk of violence could seek temporary shelter; provide sanitary kits and ration bags; and offer medical and psychological assistance to survivors of violence. Delphine Djiraibe, the Public Interest Law Centre's Senior Advocate, said: "This pandemic casts a shadow on the issue of violence against women and girls in our communities. [...] Women and girls suffer [from] impunity and utter indifference."

31. In Eswatini and South Africa, the Sonke Gender Justice Network, a women-led human rights civil society organization, working with its implementing partners (the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse and the MOSAIC Training, Service and Healing Centre) reached 882 individuals through telephone counselling services, in particular during the COVID-19 lockdown. In addition, a new domestic violence amendment bill, which included submissions from the Sonke Gender Justice Network, was finalized and presented to Parliament in South Africa. The bill was expected to be signed into law before the end of 2020.

32. In Burundi, Ghana and South Africa, the International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS reported that, as Governments channelled resources towards addressing health problems caused by COVID-19, gender-based violence was increasing and services to address it were shrinking. In response, the project in Burundi trained and engaged 178 women through dialogue and created a WhatsApp group to share information. In Ghana, a community radio talk show was broadcast in three local languages and had an estimated 2,000 listeners, providing information to 5,109 women and girls in 2020; 2,697 reported changes in attitudes and behaviours to demand their rights; and 1,724 reported changes in their capacity to report and seek help in response to incidents of violence against women and girls.

IV. Achievements

33. The trust fund's current strategic plan, for the period 2015–2020, which is coming to a close, set out three priority areas: improving access for women and girls to essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services; furthering the implementation of legislation, policies, national action plans and accountability systems; and promoting the prevention of violence against women and girls. An analysis of the work under the strategic plan to inform future directions indicated that, over the past four years, a total of 22,699,683 people, including government officials and the general public, were reached by trust fund-supported projects and more than 1,056,750 women and girls benefited directly from grantee services, empowerment activities and protection from violence, including at least 107,428 survivors of violence (see figure IV).

Figure IV

Individuals reached by grantees over the past four years



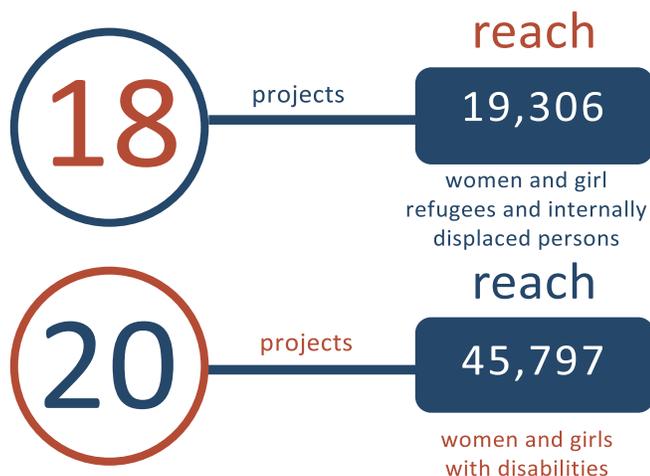
34. The trust fund invests in building the capacity of grantees to reach beneficiaries through projects that have a major impact. Through its capacity development activities, which reached more than 1,100 grantee participants in 2020, grantees received training on the effective management of projects, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and ethics and safety. Now, most projects have written policies in place both for the prevention of sexual harassment and assault and for sexual exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, feedback from 40 individuals on increased investment in access to core costs and self-care funds for small organizations, beginning in 2019, indicated that they found them very helpful in empowering women, addressing issues at an early stage, providing for mental health and counselling, and contributing to improved relations in the workplace and community.

A. Leaving no woman or girl behind

35. Addressing the needs of underserved women and girls is central to the work of the trust fund. It is precisely those groups, often at the intersection of different forms of discrimination, who are most frequently overlooked when efforts to address violence against women are developed and implemented. At least 75 projects supported by the trust fund in 2020 were focused on those who have historically been marginalized, including refugee and internally displaced women and girls; women and girls living with disabilities; indigenous women; and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, among others.

36. To date, the trust fund has supported 18 civil society-led projects that were focused on ending violence against women and girls in humanitarian contexts, with a combined total of \$7.2 million (see figure V). Those projects, which primarily addressed community prevention and response to violence, including providing coordinated multisectoral services, including psychosocial and legal aid, have reached at least 19,306 refugee or internally displaced women and girls since 2016.

Figure V
Projects leaving no one behind since 2016



37. Women and girls in humanitarian settings are particularly at risk of violence and the challenges faced by grantees in addressing their needs were intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in Afghanistan, Women for Afghan Women noted that social distancing measures further exacerbated violence against women in communities of internally displaced persons and returnees, with higher reported rates of intimate partner violence. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Fund for Congolese Women, already working in a complex humanitarian setting involving conflict, the Ebola epidemic and an economic crisis, now had to adjust to COVID-19.

38. Women and girls with disabilities often experienced a lack of prioritization in services and justice responses, even before the pandemic. The estimated 1 billion people with disabilities in the world are expected to be among the hardest hit by COVID-19. Grantees such as the Society for Life Changers and Good Parental Care in Nigeria, Beyond Borders in Haiti and Rozan in Pakistan focused on violence prevention by producing materials on COVID-19 and violence against women and girls in multiple, accessible formats. Several grantees, such as the Asociación para el Desarrollo Legislativo y la Democracia in Guatemala, focused on advocacy to ensure that women and girls with disabilities were prioritized for services and outreach, given their heightened risk of violence. Reaching women and girls with disabilities continues to be a priority for the trust fund; since 2016, trust fund grantees reached at least 45,797 women and girls living with disabilities (see figure V).

39. Grantees were also ensuring the provision of services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, who were also particularly at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in Albania, a project run by the Shelter for Abused Women and Girls in partnership with Streha, a shelter for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women survivors of domestic violence, rapidly adjusted its work to maintain services during the pandemic. The project provided safe accommodation in shelters and rented apartments, food, hygiene materials and psychological support.

B. Preventing violence against women and girls

40. Since the beginning of its current strategic plan, the trust fund has invested \$47 million in projects that are solely or partly focused on preventing violence against women and girls. The majority of grantees engaged in prevention projects were women's organizations, which are also a strategic focus of trust fund investment.

41. Grantees have worked on the entire range of prevention and response activities relating to violence against girls in and around schools. For example, since 2015, as a result of the work of 34 grantees, 816 schools have improved their curricula or implemented policies, practices or services to prevent and respond to violence against women (including extracurricular school activities). That area of work was particularly affected by the closure of educational institutions in response to COVID-19. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, the special education centre for girls with disabilities of Dignité et Droits pour les Enfants had to be closed during the lockdown. In addition, increased reliance on online delivery methods highlighted and exacerbated the digital divide and the need to leave no one behind. However, prevention programmes remain vital. For example, a grantee in Ukraine, Eney, reported that, in the first month of lockdown, the national violence prevention hotline received 1,500 calls from survivors, compared to 1,100 calls per month before the restrictions.

42. A project implemented by the non-governmental organization Cenderos with a small grant from the trust fund in Costa Rica specifically seeks to prevent violence against women and girls from Nicaragua who are at risk of or who have experienced gender-based violence. Thus far, 505 migrant women have received psychosocial aid and information through 36 coffee afternoons in seven communities; 271 refugee applicants were provided with shelter; and 10 women at risk of femicide were placed in a safehouse administered by Cenderos. In addition, 30 women migrants and asylum seekers stated that, with the aid of Cenderos, they now feel safe in community spaces and have found support within women's collectives to help them cope with their living conditions. To ensure the sustainability of the project's impacts, 16 women migrants and asylum seekers have been trained as community promoters. In addition, 81 participants have received leadership training and have made a commitment to lead activities to protect and welcome women in situations of violence.

43. Stars of Hope is implementing a project in the West Bank and Gaza in the State of Palestine to improve access to essential, safe and adequate multisectoral services for women and girls with disabilities. The project, which is being implemented in collaboration with Al Marsad, an organization of academics and researchers, focuses on marginalized communities in refugee camps, Area C territories and Bedouin communities. A qualitative study carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic found, for example, that only 5.9 per cent of Police and Family Protection Unit buildings were accessible. The project also provided capacity-building for focal points, including skills development training for 14 focal points who were able to document 10 cases of violence reported by women with disabilities between 25 and 59 years of age during the year.

44. Action on Disability and Development International is implementing a project in Cambodia, with trust fund support, in partnership with two local women's organizations, two local organizations of persons with disabilities and three women's networks. A one-to-one survey among 200 beneficiaries found visible signs of social change as a result of the project's intensive education campaign in communities. As a result of project activities, 20,602 caregivers, relatives, community members and duty bearers have increased their awareness of the rights of women and girls with disabilities. For example, of 401 people interviewed, 230 reported having changed their negative attitudes, confirming the effectiveness of the project's strategy. Results of the project before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic also show that activist survivors experience less violence owing to improved knowledge about violence and disability rights, prevention measures and changes in attitudes. Among the women-led organizations receiving training from the project, three women-led networks improved their capacity to lead primary prevention of violence against women and girls with disabilities by developing their organizational capacity and annual operational plan, while 48 self-help groups (with a total of 829 members) were

reached through regular meetings. The project responded to COVID-19 by ensuring the safety and well-being of beneficiaries by providing women and girls living with disabilities with sanitation and hygiene packages (319 women), technological support (30 women) and livelihood support (32 women and girls).

C. Improving access to multisectoral services

45. Under the pillar of work on improving access to multisectoral services, the trust fund supports projects to improve the access of women and girls to specialized support services, including psychological counselling, medical services and shelters, as well as access to justice through the provision of legal aid. Since 2016, at least 60,048 women and girls have accessed specialist support services through trust fund grantees. Training of service providers is also an important component of projects seeking to enhance access to essential, safe and adequate services for women and girls. Since 2016, at least 11,425 service providers around the world have improved their provision of services, supported by trust fund grantees.

46. The details in the following paragraphs demonstrate some of the progress made by grantees in adapting and delivering services for survivors in 2020.

47. Ensuring access to essential and adequate services was a cornerstone of the COVID-19 response plans of many grantees. Where services for survivors could not be delivered face-to-face, grantees quickly moved services to phones or online. For example, civil society organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and Zimbabwe set up new helplines or expanded the reach of existing helplines to respond to increased caseloads. Grantees providing legal aid and psychosocial services moved online to ensure that there was no break in service and to maintain trust and communication with survivors. For example, Rozan in Pakistan moved psychological counselling online and Women's Forum-Tetovo in North Macedonia offered online legal counselling.

48. In India, the International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care focuses on improving the protection of women affected by burns that were either self-inflicted or inflicted by relatives in the context of domestic and intimate partner violence. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the grantee made concrete progress in establishing services for women burn victims and initiated talks for partnerships and collaborations in the next phase, and Memoranda of Understanding were signed with hospitals across 11 intervention districts in Tamil Nadu. As a result of those initial activities, women burn survivors were able to begin accessing burn care services that were knowledgeable about domestic violence and trauma. A robust multi-stakeholder national support line was created using a database of 1,355 burn survivors who were discharged from the hospital in 2019, facilitating regular follow-up calls to the women. A total of 413 calls were received by the national support line, which also led to 24 referrals.

49. In Albania, Woman Forum Elbasan responded immediately to the COVID-19 pandemic both in terms of supporting staff, who were able to work from home, and in adapting their services for survivors of domestic violence. The adaptations included providing telephone and hotline services to replace face-to-face counselling and psychological support for survivors of violence; in March and April 2020 alone, the grantee provided 285 telephone counselling sessions. The grantee also used social media to raise awareness about COVID-19 prevention measures and to disseminate crucial social and legal information almost daily for survivors of domestic violence, including children. Services continued to be offered free of charge for women and girl survivors of violence. During the year, until August 2020, the organization's counselling centre provided 909 psychological counselling sessions; its advocates studio provided 554 legal counselling sessions; and 32 women with 32 children were

housed in its emergency shelter. Owing to the COVID-19 crisis, women survivors of violence struggled to access food and other basic necessities, and Woman Forum Elbasan responded by redirecting flexible financial support from the trust fund to distribute food baskets to survivors.

50. In Albania, the Shelter for Abused Women and Girls and its partner, the Streha Centre for Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Women Survivors of Domestic Violence, brought together two well-established shelters to provide multisectoral services for survivors of violence in four remote areas of the country (Vorë, Lushnjë, Shkodër and Skrapar). The project offered services to 27 survivors, including 9 lesbian, bisexual or transgender women and girls. All survivors were offered a range of services: safe accommodation, medical examinations and medication, transport and psychosocial services, legal assistance and career opportunities through professional training. Some 82 per cent of those who came into contact with the project reported a greater awareness of gender-based violence and of the services available to address and report it. Outreach activities enabled the project to reach an additional 16 members of the lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in Tirana, Elbasan and Mat.

51. In Punjab Province, Pakistan, CBM International and its partner, Bedari, a local women's rights organization, are implementing a project to strengthen disability-inclusive practices within their broader work to end violence against women and girls. In addition to socioeconomic barriers, women and girls living with disabilities in Pakistan faced increased violence and marginalization during the COVID-19 pandemic, as both formal and informal protection mechanisms were disrupted and diverted. The project worked to ensure that measures to address violence against women and girls were included in the COVID-19 response at the community level, and its field personnel are coordinating with communities to provide immediate support or referral services to survivors of violence. Simultaneously, Bedari is delivering online psychosocial support through its regular helpline programme and working with men, while continuing longer-term support facilitated by CBM International.

D. Fostering implementation of law and policy

52. Since 2016, trust fund grantees have supported at least 1,062 local, subnational or national government institutions to improve their effectiveness in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls. In addition, at least 97 institutional policies or protocols on violence against women and girls have been developed or improved at the various institutional levels over the past three years.

53. The Secretary-General has called on Governments to include addressing violence against women as part of their national response plans, but many grantees still report challenges in ensuring that women's rights organizations are included in COVID-19 response planning. For instance, International Solidarity Foundation reports that female genital mutilation and violence against women are increasing in Somalia as a result of the pandemic, while the Government prioritizes COVID-19 prevention. Grantees report that the sustained action of women's rights and civil society organizations is essential in ensuring that the issue of violence against women is included in national response and action plans. Nevertheless, grantees did make progress in that area during the year. Some of their achievements are described in the following paragraphs.

54. A project implemented by a women-led organization in Kenya, the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness, is working to address gaps in the implementation of legislation on violence against women. Before the pandemic, the project had reached the target number of beneficiaries: 640 adolescents (ages 10–19); 787 young women (ages 20–24); and 1,370 women (ages 25–59). It had reached 1,427 women

and girl survivors of violence. In terms of work to improve service delivery from State and non-State actors, the grantee had reached 262 government officials who were part of the multisectoral service mechanism and 32 parliamentarians. A survey found that, following the intervention, 38 per cent of service providers reported having the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to respond to the needs of survivors of violence against women and girls, compared with a baseline of 24.7 per cent at the start of the project. The project also reached 3,819 community-based groups, and 52 per cent of members reported improved skills and knowledge on gender equality and non-violence.

55. In Malaysia, Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor is using a trust fund grant to provide both cisgender and transgender women with the language, tools, know-how and support to counter sexual and gender-based violence. With the support of Justice for Sisters, a key organization working with the transgender community in Malaysia, the organization seeks to defend and promote women's right to freedom of expression and engagement in decision-making in public and political spaces. The project has reached more than 50 beneficiaries, and it has also released the first of three videos to raise public awareness about sexual and gender-based violence. Through an ongoing research process with participants, the grantee has identified the challenges to exercising their rights in engaging with Members of Parliament and other key government decision makers.

56. A project by Women Challenged to Challenge worked with two implementing partners – Advantage Africa, a non-governmental organization based in the United Kingdom, and the Kibwezi Disabled Persons' Organization – in three ethnically diverse locations in Kenya to reduce violence against women and girls with disabilities and increase the rate of conviction of abusers. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the project provided refresher training for 80 women living with disabilities and 24 duty bearers. Some 70 per cent of participants, who included eight adolescents and younger women, showed good knowledge and awareness of strategies to prevent and respond to violence. The majority of women living with disabilities in the project sites showed improved confidence in how they approached duty bearers and demanded their rights, which translated into concrete success in bringing to justice the perpetrator of abuse involving a 13-year-old girl with disabilities and in accounts of improved responses from the police, the chief and the village elder when reporting attempted rape. Women also reported that they saw an improvement in the treatment of women and girls with disabilities in the community, including greater respect and a willingness to report violence against them.

57. A project implemented by the Centre for Women's Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina is working to improve protection mechanisms for survivors of intimate partner violence, focusing on strengthening the capacity of judges and prosecutors to deal with such cases and increasing social workers' understanding of gender-based violence. The grantee took initial steps in creating alliances with relevant professionals; during COVID-19, initial communication and preparation were conducted by telephone and email. Preparatory activities were undertaken to organize seminars for judges and prosecutors, including obtaining the necessary approvals, disseminating plans and working to organize seminars with participants in the multisectoral working group and the expert group that are being convened. That led to an important achievement: for the first time since the establishment of the Judicial and Prosecutorial Training Centre, the seminar on changing attitudes and perceptions of judges and prosecutors was included in the regular annual training programme for judges and prosecutors. In addition, the Centre has drafted and submitted a proposed amendment to the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence.

V. Building evidence for change

58. Over the past five years, the trust fund has sought to build a global evidence hub on ending violence against women and girls, based on the evaluated grantee results, and to create a platform for collecting and disseminating practice-based knowledge and lessons learned from the work of grantees. As part of those efforts, the trust fund has provided support on evaluation management and promoted national evaluation capacities, as well as periodic analysis, across the work of grantees.

59. The trust fund continued to invest in improving evaluation management by grantees in order to promote a culture of learning and enhance the capacity to deliver gender-responsive, locally led and participatory evaluations grounded in the voices of beneficiaries. An independent meta-evaluation reviewed 79 evaluation reports (covering interventions that began in the period 2011–2019). Published in 2020, it revealed significant improvements in the quality of evaluations over the course of the current strategic planning period. The percentage of evaluations that were rated satisfactory or better reached 82 per cent, as compared to 60 per cent in the initial meta-evaluation completed in 2016. Investing in the improvement of evaluations is essential, as they aid in revealing what is and what is not effective in ending violence against women and girls.

60. A meta-analysis¹⁰ was undertaken based on a subset of 30 reports on projects implemented between 2012 and 2019 and determined to be of high quality through the meta-evaluation exercise. It highlighted five key conclusions and recommendations in terms of project effectiveness. First, it found that projects supported by the trust fund, regardless of the form of violence they addressed or their setting, effectively promoted positive attitudes and beliefs. For example, projects such as gender sensitization trainings with male and female teachers in Viet Nam, transitional justice outreach training for survivors in Cambodia and sexual and reproductive rights trainings with female self-identified sex workers in Guatemala demonstrated how, in order to be effective, trainings must be designed or adapted from the ground up, with clear calls to action and behaviour change.

61. Second, the meta-analysis found that, while projects supported by the trust fund had adopted various effective strategies to change harmful social norms, some deep-seated norms remained hard to shift within three years and required significant time and skills and intensive community engagement. Third, projects that anticipated barriers to action throughout the life cycle of the project had been effective in inducing collective action to end violence against women and girls. For example, grantees in contexts as diverse as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Chile, Jordan, Liberia and Tunisia all worked to create networks of safe spaces for beneficiaries in situations in which gatherings were difficult or forbidden.

62. Fourth, project strategies for engagement with service providers and policymakers that were well planned, focused and meaningful were effective in working with key secondary beneficiaries to improve service delivery and strengthen institutional responses. For example, a grantee in the United Republic of Tanzania helped to improve the reporting experience of survivors by empowering police personnel at gender desks in local police stations and equipping them with materials and resources relevant to their work. That highlights the need to carefully design, manage and plan the terms of engagement with service providers and policymakers so that the “ask” is meaningful, practical and feasible for them. Finally, projects that

¹⁰ Monica Biradavolu, Radhika Viswanathan and Lisa Bochey, *What Can We Learn from Evaluations of Projects Funded by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women?* (UN-Women, 2020), available at <https://unf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/what-can-we-learn-from-evaluations-of-projects-funded-by-the-un-trust-fund>.

anticipate the challenges that women may face in asserting their independence and find ways to mitigate them have been effective in reducing violence against women and girls. While investing in strategies to help women become change-makers, projects need to consider mechanisms and strategies for sustained support to alleviate the burden that women might feel at being the primary agents of change.

63. In terms of project impacts, the meta-analysis found that almost half of the projects in the sample had measured and observed reductions in men's perpetration of or women's experience of violence, but each evaluation measured it differently, which points to the challenges of measuring such goals within short time frames and with restricted resources. Critically, however, projects supported by the trust fund have led to significant impacts on such issues as self-efficacy and self-identity and on the sustainability of project results well after the life cycle of the project, showing the cascading effects of project activities beyond the stated overall project goals.

VI. The way forward in the next strategic plan

64. Building on the findings of the mid-term review of the strategic plan for the period 2015–2020, the trust fund engaged in an extensive participatory development process to devise the strategic plan covering the period 2021–2025. In November 2019, stakeholder consultations took place at the trust fund's first-ever Global Grantee Convention, which was held in Sarajevo. Consultations continued throughout 2020 with more than 200 partners, stakeholders and experts, including from States Members of the United Nations, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations and trust fund grantees, as well as an independent expert advisory group.

65. At the centre of the new strategic plan will be a strong emphasis on the human right of all women and girls to live a life free of violence. The strategic plan will seek to further that aim through global solidarity and partnerships that enable civil society organizations, and especially women's rights organizations, to play a central role in delivering survivor-centred and demand-driven initiatives in a manner that contributes to the growth of feminist movements globally.

66. With women and girls firmly at the centre of its work, the trust fund's next strategic plan takes forward priorities based on feedback and inputs from the extensive consultations undertaken, which highlighted the need to increase the proportion of flexible funding in grants and to create opportunities for grants of longer duration. They also underscored the importance of creating opportunities to pilot and test innovative approaches to ending violence against women and of increasing the resources available to support the work of civil society organizations, including by building their capacity. The next strategic plan will also continue to focus on broadening and deepening work on building and enriching knowledge by capturing practitioner-based knowledge, high-quality evaluations and the sharing of lessons learned and good practices.

67. The trust fund will continue to ensure that women and girls benefit from supported initiatives through improved access to essential specialized, safe and adequate services, including access to justice; transformed social norms, a key factor in preventing violence; and more effective legislation, policies and national action plans that are shaped by the participation and voices of women and girls in decision-making processes. Through those focused outputs, the trust fund will continue to support efforts that enable civil society, and especially women's rights organizations, to make progress towards achieving their goal of ending violence against women and girls and creating stronger feminist movements.