

BEYOND PROGRESS

Securing Gains to End Violence against Women and Girls

Impact Report
2024-2025



Spotlight
Initiative

In every major crisis, women and girls face violence.



Berthe, Laurette, Mado and Carine opened a restaurant in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after attending training by Fondation Femme Plus, supported by Spotlight Initiative and WPHF. Photo: Fondation Femme Plus



How can we build lasting peace and democracy?



How can we protect our planet and mitigate the effects of climate change?



How can we effectively fight global poverty and ensure progress reaches those furthest behind?



How can we make our digital spaces safer as technology continues to reshape our lives?

The answer must include ending violence against women and girls.

The good news?

We already know how – effectively and sustainably.

Violence against women and girls is a global crisis, with at least **1 in 3 women** experiencing it firsthand.

Countless more cases go unreported or ignored.

The physical and psychological effects are dire and devastating.

The social and economic costs ripple across entire communities and nations.

No country or society is immune.



More than 130 Indigenous women leaders attended training focused on eliminating violence against women and girls in Puyo, Ecuador. Photo: Spotlight Initiative/Johanna Alarcón

SPOTLIGHT BY THE NUMBERS*

More than

385 million people

were reached by campaigns to prevent violence against women and girls.

Nearly

8 million young people

participated in programmes that promote gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours.

More than

540 laws or policies

that help protect women and girls from violence were signed or strengthened.

Approximately

3 million women and girls

accessed gender-based violence services, including long-term recovery services.

50 countries

strengthened their National Action Plans to eliminate violence against women and girls after working with Spotlight Initiative.

Close to

6 million men and boys

were educated on positive masculinity, respectful family relationships and non-violent conflict resolution.



2x
the overall
conviction rate
for gender-based
violence across at
least 13 countries.

*Results since 2019.

Securing the wins

Spotlight Initiative is the United Nations high-impact initiative to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

Since 2017, we have transformed how the international community responds to the global crisis of gender-based violence.

We leverage the expertise and reach of the UN system to bring greater capacity and political commitment. And with the support of our partners, these investments are bearing fruit.

We partner with diverse stakeholders, from governments to civil society, media, academia, traditional and religious leaders, and the private sector – many of whom are working together on this issue for the first time.

Violence against women and girls affects all of society, so the entirety of society must act to end it.

Getting to the root causes of violence is key.

Our programmes strengthen laws, policies, institutions and data. They also address harmful social norms and behaviours; support access to quality services for survivors; and strengthen women's movements, promoting women's full and equal participation in all aspects of life.

This comprehensive approach means that results in one area often drive progress in another, fostering more sustainable change.



Spotlight Initiative's
comprehensive model
has been shown to be

70-90% more effective

at reducing violence against women and girls than project-based or siloed approaches.¹

1. Dalberg (September 2022). *Imperative to invest: How addressing violence against women and girls today reduces violence over time, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to reach their full potential – all of which advances us toward the SDGs.*

“

Spotlight Initiative has shown that comprehensive approaches to eliminating gender-based violence can work. We have helped keep 1 million more girls in school. **We have helped prevent 21 million women and girls from experiencing gender-based violence.** And across 13 Spotlight Initiative countries, the conviction rate for gender-based violence has doubled. These achievements prove that when we unite behind ambitious strategies, we can deliver real change.

But our work is far from over.

”

– António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations



“

Spotlight Initiative has been transformative for the United Nations in stepping up its efforts, showing us new ways of placing women's rights organizations and movements at the heart of programming, and teaching us the power of a United Nations that delivers as one.

”

– Sima Bahous, UN Women Executive Director



Civil society at the centre

Since day one, civil society has been our primary collaborator. Their experience and expertise is engaged at every phase of Spotlight Initiative programming, from design and implementation to monitoring, decision-making and governance. Civil society leadership continues to shape and sustain our progress.

Women's rights organizations, in particular, play an essential role. Research shows that feminist movements are one of the most effective drivers of domestic policy changes that protect women from violence.²

Yet these important actors are severely underfunded. Studies show that only 1 per cent of gender-based aid goes to women's rights organizations.³



Afyatoon members meet with school students after winning the FGM Hacklab for innovative solutions to female genital mutilation. Photo: Afyatoon

To help close the funding gap, nearly half of Spotlight Initiative's activity funds are delivered directly to civil society organizations.

Transforming the funding landscape is just one way we work to address deep-rooted power imbalances and ensure more meaningful engagement with marginalized groups, including indigenous women, women with disabilities, migrant women, LGBTIQ+ people, women and girls living in rural areas and those affected by conflict.

2. Nidal Karim (2022). *Feminist and women's movements in the context of ending violence against women and girls: An external literature review* (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women).

3. The Equality Institute & The Accelerator for GBV Prevention (November 2023). *What counts: The state of funding for the prevention of gender-based violence against women and girls*.



Christa leads a youth group that does community and environmental work in Toledo, Belize. Photo: UNICEF Belize/NVISION

5,000+

local and grassroots women's rights organizations worldwide reported having greater influence and agency since working with Spotlight Initiative.

“

The success realized from Spotlight Initiative's far-reaching approach must be used as a blueprint for mobilizing the right mix of resources to end the scourge of violence against women and girls. We cannot slow down or give up in spite of tightening belts and other distractions.

”

– Terry Dale Ince, Spotlight Initiative
Global Reference Group member



Our holistic approach works

Together with governments and a broad range of partners, Spotlight Initiative has made significant strides in ending violence against women and girls.

We engage entire communities – including men and boys, parents and youth – to raise awareness and change harmful beliefs and behaviours.

We successfully work across sectors – including health, education, justice, social services and creative industries – not only

to develop more effective interventions but also to leverage resources and build buy-in for lasting reform.

We train parliamentarians, government officials and traditional leaders to improve institutional systems and become advocates for justice.

We champion new and better policies and legislation that prevent violence, safeguard women's rights and hold perpetrators accountable.

We make it easier for women and children to get the care they need by improving service providers' capacity and expanding access to health, legal and psychosocial support.

We collect and increase the use of quality data to build the clearest picture of violence possible.

As a result, Spotlight Initiative is estimated to have prevented at least 21 million women and girls from experiencing violence.⁴



In Tajikistan, Marjona and her family were able to access psychological, legal and long-term support.
Photo: UNICEF/M.Ruziev

4. Dalberg (September 2022). *Imperative to invest: How addressing violence against women and girls today reduces violence over time, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to reach their full potential – all of which advances us toward the SDGs.*

Scaling change, lasting impact

We are building on the powerful results of Spotlight Initiative's first phase and expanding our proven, evidence-based approach to create even greater impact.

We have new programmes underway in Ecuador, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia. There is also a new regional effort in Africa, delivered in partnership with the African Union Commission and European Union. Together, we are continuing to combat harmful practices like female genital mutilation and child marriage.

Even where initial Spotlight Initiative programmes have concluded, the progress continues. **Our unique partnerships with governments ensure more national ownership and funding**, including increased domestic resource mobilization. Our prevention tools and approaches are being replicated, adapted and scaled. The catalytic nature of our approach also means impact is often felt beyond programme timelines and borders.

For example, in Niger, the four "one-stop" centres that were established under Spotlight Initiative to provide survivors of violence with medical, police, legal and psychological services in one location have continued to operate after the programme ended despite limited resources. Similarly, 23 of the 25 legal clinics that were established during the programme remain operational today.⁵

Spotlight Initiative has helped unlock nearly

USD 50 million

in domestic funding to reduce violence against women and girls in Ecuador, Liberia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda.⁶

97%

of Spotlight Initiative countries and regions sustained achievements, even after programme closure.

Achievements included strengthened laws and policies; continued gender-based violence services; strengthened civil society and women's movements; and greater collaboration between the UN, government and civil society on gender equality and ending violence against women and girls.⁵

5. This data is excerpted from the forthcoming Sustainability Assessment, which will present a fuller picture of Spotlight Initiative's programmatic sustainability.

6. Spotlight Initiative (June 2025). *Why domestic public resources are key to ending violence against women and girls*.

UGANDA

In Uganda, nearly 95 per cent of women and girls experience physical or sexual violence.⁷

Spotlight Initiative and our partners are working to ensure women and girls in Uganda have access to the support, services and protections they deserve.

Since 2024, our programme has reached an additional 443,000 people through lifesaving services, support networks and behaviour-change campaigns.

Our life-skills training for girls aged 10 to 19 reached 98 per cent of eligible girls in project districts. This signals a growing recognition by families and communities of the importance of raising resilient daughters.

Behind these achievements is a strong coalition of UN agencies – UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA and UN Women – working to deliver as one and maximize impact.

The Government of Uganda has also adopted gender-responsive budgeting since partnering with Spotlight Initiative. Our programme trained 141 district officials in how to budget with women and girls in mind, building long-term capacity to end gender-based violence. As a result, funds were allocated from local government budgets and social grants for prevention and response efforts in 2024-2025.

7. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) (December 2021). *Uganda violence against women and girls survey 2020*.



In Uganda, Marcyline attended vocational training to strengthen her employment opportunities. Photo: Spotlight Initiative/Timothy Webster

AFGHANISTAN

When de facto authorities took over Afghanistan in 2021, they imposed a plethora of restrictions on women and girls. In response, Spotlight Initiative established a grant-making mechanism to sustain grassroots and rural civil society organizations. This enabled these organizations to remain operational and continue delivering essential services to women and girls within the severely constrained civic space.



ECUADOR

Ecuador's femicide rate is alarming. According to national authorities, a woman is killed every 26 hours – often at the hands of a family member or intimate partner.⁸

Spotlight Initiative partnered with the Government of Ecuador to develop the country's first Femicide Reparation Policy. This effort included broad consultation with women's rights organizations, survivors, families of victims, academia and service providers.

In 2024, we made further strides in strengthening laws, policies, institutional capacities and data systems to combat violence against women and girls. In July 2024, the approval of the Organic Law on Reparations was passed. This major milestone established a comprehensive legal framework for reparations for femicide victims and their families.

Ecuador is now a regional leader in femicide prevention with the development of an Early Warning System for Femicide – a vital step in identifying and preventing the most extreme forms of violence against women and girls.

8. Spotlight Initiative (26 March 2025). *Shining a light on gender-based violence in Ecuador*.

“

We must urgently redouble our commitment [to ending violence against women and girls] because the situation is becoming increasingly complex. It is unthinkable to give up.

”

– Cecilia Suárez, Actress and UN
Global Advocate for Spotlight Initiative



The Red Bench in Portoviejo, Ecuador is a symbol of resistance against gender-based violence and solidarity with survivors and victims. Photo: Nicoletta Marinelli, Fundación ALDEA

Better coordination, better results

From the beginning, Spotlight Initiative has advanced reform of the United Nations.

Our model brings UN agencies together around a common vision, leveraging each agency's unique expertise to support local and national leadership to end violence against women and girls.

This approach is increasingly viewed as the new blueprint for multilateralism.

We've clearly demonstrated how an integrated and coordinated approach to development leads to better outcomes and national ownership.

Our model was designed to avoid duplication and reduce administrative barriers while maximizing opportunities for knowledge sharing, learning and analysis.

We continue to boost our effectiveness and efficiency by bringing together resources and expertise through pooled funding mechanisms.

Spotlight Initiative serves as a global centre of excellence, offering high-quality technical assistance on ending violence against women and girls to countries.



UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed addresses an International Women's Day march in Port Moresby during the 2020 launch of Spotlight Initiative in Papua New Guinea. Photo: UN/Andrew Hau

The high costs of inaction

The physical, emotional and social toll of gender-based violence on survivors and their loved ones is immeasurable.

Yet the economic and societal costs to communities and nations can be quantified – and they are staggering.

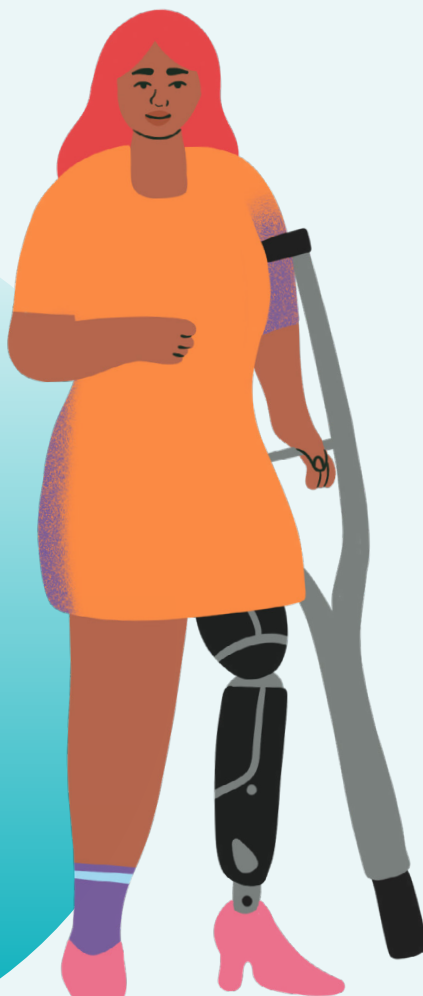
In addition to direct costs like medical care and legal proceedings, there are immense indirect costs. Lost productivity, behavioural and emotional issues, reduced school attendance, and eroded trust in institutions can have profound and lasting consequences for generations to come.

The global cost of violence against women and girls is estimated at approximately 2 per cent of GDP — or USD 1.5 trillion annually.⁹ Some countries lose as much as 3.7 per cent of GDP to gender-based violence.¹⁰

**If we fail to act now,
these costs will only grow.**

Violence against women
and girls is estimated to
cost countries up to

3.7% of GDP.



9. UN Women (April 2020). *COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls*. Issue brief.

10. World Bank (25 September 2019). *Gender-Based Violence (Violence Against Women and Girls)*.

Colliding crises

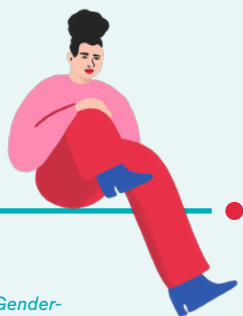
Rising temperatures and climate-induced disasters are linked to increased and more severe forms of gender-based violence.

When disasters and crises such as flooding, fire and drought lead to displacement, insecurity for women and girls is heightened and often creates a spike in violence. This can include higher risk of femicide, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, child marriage and human trafficking.

In addition to more frequent and extreme weather events, the climate crisis creates a strain on natural resources that can fuel conflict and forced migration, exposing women to heightened risks of rape and sexual violence as they continue to seek food and water for their families during emergencies.

At the same time, violence undermines women's and girls' ability to drive climate action and solutions, and reduces our collective capacity to address climate change.

Despite these links, less than 0.04 per cent of climate aid prioritizes gender-based violence.¹¹



11. OECD (2022). *Development Finance for Gender-Responsive Climate Action*. (Paris, OECD Publishing).

12. Spotlight Initiative (April 2024). *Colliding crises: How the climate crisis fuels gender-based violence*. Issue brief.

Every
1°C
rise in temperature
is associated with a
4.7% rise in
intimate
partner
violence.¹²



In Jamaica, Shelly-Ann attended business and life skills training and is now a successful farmer. Photo: UNDP/Ricardo Makyn

It's time to work together

2025 has been a turbulent year for the development sector. Severe funding shortfalls and aid disruptions have collided with a global economic slowdown, escalating humanitarian emergencies and conflict. This convergence of challenges is threatening decades of hard-won gains – and raising urgent questions about the path ahead.

But one thing remains clear: We must end violence against women and girls if we want to achieve peace, protect human rights, advance climate action and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

We recognize the fiscal pressures on national budgets today. As a success story that has enhanced coordination across the UN, government and civil society, **Spotlight Initiative offers a cost-effective opportunity to maximize impact and work in partnership** with leading actors in this field, including local grassroots organizations and large international institutions.

The European Union (EU) provided more than USD 500 million in seed funding in 2017 because it understood the vast global impact that Spotlight Initiative could make. Today, the EU remains a key partner as we continue to engage with new donors. Belgium has contributed unearmarked funds, while funds from Ireland, the Netherlands and the United States target specific new country programmes.

Our partnership with the World Bank Group helps to advance our comprehensive model at scale by leveraging the World Bank's expertise in data, evidence and analytics to support national governments in addressing violence against women and girls.

Given our track record, demand for Spotlight Initiative programmes is high.

At least 60 UN country teams have expressed interest in partnering with Spotlight Initiative. All that we need are the financial resources to realize their ambition.

Despite the devastating toll of violence against women and girls on individuals, communities and society, efforts to end it remain painfully slow and under-resourced. Funding decisions are political. And, right now, they are failing women and girls – and standing in the way of lasting peace and progress.

This must change. We have the tools and know-how to tackle this problem. We also have the country buy-in, partnerships, data and track record. There are no excuses. And we are running out of time. Sustainable development is only possible when everyone – including women and girls – can live free from fear and violence.



We can bring Spotlight Initiative to your country. But we need your support to make these programmes a reality.

Time is of the essence. Failing to invest in the rights of women and girls today will come at a far greater cost in the future.

Contact

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Actress and UN Global Advocate for Spotlight Initiative Cecilia Suárez visits a women's refuge in Ecuador. Photo: Spotlight Initiative



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