



AT RISK AND UNDERFUNDED: HOW FUNDING CUTS ARE THREATENING EFFORTS TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

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UN Women

New York, October 2025



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ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	UN Women's ACT to End Violence against Women and Girls Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, and other identities
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG 5	Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls)
UN	United Nations
UNTF	United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and Girls
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defender
WRO	Women's Rights Organization

1. INTRODUCTION

“ With all these funding cuts and reductions, panic and frustrations, ending [VAWG] gains achieved thus far are at risk of being lost because the issue is now no longer prioritized at all levels of decision-making by authorities. It continues to be dimmed and pushed to the back seat, instead of being put in the spotlight, yet the incidences of violence continue to rise at alarming levels from family, community, institutions, to country, region and international levels. Fearless advocacy at all levels has to be done more than ever before and has to be continuously targeting world leaders those with authority and power. The vulnerable and voiceless are banking on us. We cannot afford to let them down. It is now or never.”

(Survey Respondent, East and Southern Africa)

WROs and CSOs are Indispensable to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally, affecting at least one in three women throughout their lifetime.¹ The United Nations Secretary-General has described violence against women as “reaching epidemic proportions.”² Despite decades of commitments, progress towards eliminating VAWG has stagnated or even reversed, with one in four countries reporting a backlash against women’s rights.³ Global crises, new and ongoing conflicts, and the rise of digital technologies have exacerbated existing forms of violence while introducing new threats.⁴ The growing influence of anti-gender movements, shrinking civic space, and backlash against gender equality advocates are undermining prevention efforts and increasing risks for VAWG.⁵ Such efforts to roll back advances in equality have led to increased violence, discrimination, and a chilling effect on the rights of women and girls in all their diversity.

Evidence demonstrates that VAWG is preventable – and that women’s rights organizations (WROs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) are the single most critical factor to driving domestic and global policy change.⁷ These organizations are often the only sources of support for those facing violence, discrimination, or social exclusion.⁸ They provide critical, often lifesaving services – including shelters, psychosocial support, and legal aid – directly to survivors⁹. Trusted within their communities, WROs and CSOs implement context-specific prevention programmes, advance women’s economic empowerment, collect VAWG data, and promote inclusive peace and security efforts, including for marginalized groups such as LGBTIQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and Indigenous women and girls.¹⁰ WROs and CSOs also carry out crucial advocacy efforts for gender equality and women’s rights, engaging political parties and elected officials and holding them to account, and working towards legal reforms to challenge discriminatory laws.¹¹ When women and their organizations participate in mass mobilizations, the movements are both more likely to be successful and result in more equal democracies.¹² In fact, it is known that countries with strong feminist movements are more likely to have progressive policies, including those related to ending VAWG.¹³ During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries with strong feminist movements adopted on average three more measures addressing VAWG than those that did not, according to research undertaken by UN Women and UNDP.¹⁴

Key Statistics on VAWG⁶



Globally, **nearly one in three women** have been subjected to **physical and/or sexual violence**, or both at least once in their lifetime. This figure does not include sexual harassment.



An estimated **15 million** adolescent girls worldwide, aged 15-19 years, have experienced **forced sex**.



Women make up **91 per cent** of all victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.



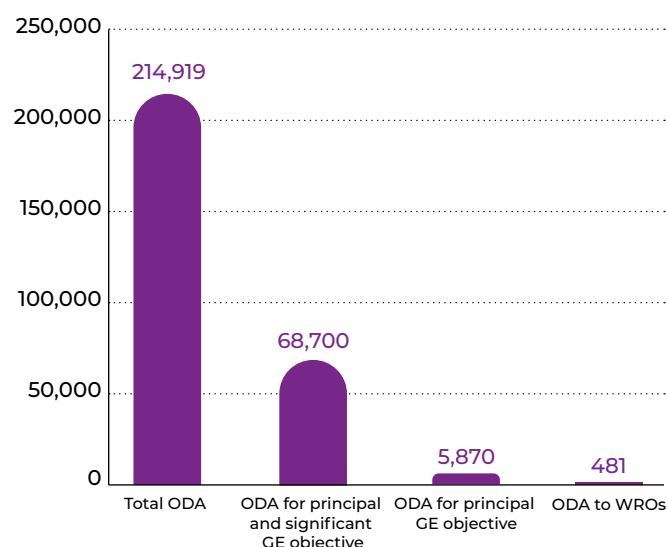
In 2023, on average, **140 women or girls** were killed every day by someone in their own family.

Mass Funding Cuts Are Starving WROs and CSOs of Life-Saving Resources

However, as the world faces intersecting crises, donors have shifted their priorities away from programming for ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG), and gender equality issues more generally. For some, these priorities shift toward national and global security, economic security, defence spending, or immediate humanitarian relief. It is within this context that various countries have engaged in massive funding cuts to their aid budgets – cuts that directly impact WROs and CSOs working to end VAWG.

Historically, funding for these movements has been minimal, with Official Development Assistance (ODA) for WROs and feminist movements accounting for less than one per cent of all aid dedicated to gender equality.¹⁵ From 2021–2022, only US\$ 563 million – or less than one per cent of all ODA – went to programmes designed to end VAWG.¹⁶ Only US\$ 410 million – 0.2 per cent of all ODA – went to VAWG prevention.¹⁷ The Secretary General's report on the 30 year review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action found that “[o]nly four per cent of aid went to programmes with gender equality as the principal objective.¹⁸ Philanthropic giving has constituted a mere 1.8 per cent of tracked funds.¹⁹

ODA directed towards gender equality, annual averages for 2022–2023, in millions of US\$.²⁰



This pre-existing financial fragility is now being exacerbated by a “domino effect” of widespread aid cuts, shifting donor priorities, and the increasing influence of anti-gender movements.²¹ Survey respondents reported being affected both by cuts to national budgets and cuts to ODA, although the latter cuts are having a more widespread impact. Estimates by the Alliance for Feminist Movements suggest that as of June 2025, the cuts to ODA totalled US\$78 billion.²² Concurrently, some private philanthropic foundations have decreased or entirely closed their women's rights portfolios, further exacerbating a trend of declining and less flexible support that has been observed for over a decade.

Surveyed organizations see the reduction of resources to gender equality and women's rights as “more of a political decision than a resource crisis,” with “political decisions and interests [...] limiting access to resources” (Survey Respondent, Americas and the Caribbean, Translated from Spanish).

These cuts create a dangerous paradox: global instability and rising authoritarianism are increasing women's vulnerability to violence and poverty, yet the programmes that respond to and prevent VAWG and that are key to ensuring stability, security and prosperity are being starved of resources.²³ These trends threaten to erase decades of progress in efforts to end VAWG and deepen cycles of crisis into the future. As the world counts down to 2030, a failure to eliminate violence against women and girls not only represents a barrier to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality – it will impact the fulfilment of at least 14 of the 17 SDGs.²⁴

Efforts to End Violence Against Women and Girls are being Stymied

Nascent evidence on the impact of the funding cuts for WROs and CSOs is clear that the results on efforts to end VAWG could be catastrophic. The most immediate impact has been the rollback of life-saving services. For example, a rapid assessment by UN Women in Ukraine²⁵ showed that over 60 per cent of organizations addressing VAWG have been forced to reduce or suspend programmes. This means survivors are being turned away from shelters, denied representation in critical legal cases, and left without psychological support. An initial study by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) was clear about the knock-on effects of reducing or stopping immediate response services, with respondents “[highlighting] the critical impact of the suspension of legal and support services for survivors of domestic violence, forcing women to stay with their abusers and risking death.”²⁶ Evidence also shows that in conflict zones in Ukraine and Burkina Faso, the suspension of programming leaves populations exposed to extreme violence and exploitation without recourse.²⁷

In February 2025, in response to funding cuts by major donors, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and Girls (UN Trust Fund to EVAWG) conducted a rapid impact assessment with its active portfolio of grantee partners – 134 organizations – to better understand its impact on (1) EVAWG programming and survivors who rely on these services; and (2) activists, organizations, movements, and partnerships leading the work, in order to adapt its grantmaking and advocacy. The findings revealed an alarming reality: of the 92 grantee partners across 53 countries that responded to the survey, 60 per cent reported being directly impacted. From Nepal to Nigeria, Peru to Tajikistan, impacts ranged from essential service reduction to survivors (78 per cent), suspended or closed shelters and crisis centres, legal aid services, and psychosocial and healthcare support due to immediate funding gaps (73 per cent). Many are also struggling to meet rising demand for services with reduced staff capacity and burnout. Nearly all grantee partners expressed deep concern

about increased risks of VAWG in their communities if support is not restored. They also flagged rising concerns about further funding reductions and conditionalities and increasingly limited spaces to discuss these life-threatening concerns.²⁸

Simultaneously, the evidence shows that these cuts pose an existential threat to the organizations themselves. Nearly half of all WROs working in humanitarian settings reported that they may have to shut down within the next six months.²⁹ Those that remain are operating on a knife's edge: staff are being laid off en masse, unpaid invoices for rent and salaries are mounting, and exhausted teams are buckling under unsustainable workloads.³⁰

This financial strain forces a dangerous shift in strategy. To survive, organizations are compelled to abandon long-term advocacy strategies for short-term, donor-directed projects, often moving away from politicized issues like abortion and LGBTIQ+ rights.³¹ This "projectization"³² of movements undermines their core mission and autonomy, eroding their capacity to drive structural change and making them vulnerable to the next funding cycle. The result is a weakened feminist movement and a shrinking civic space.

Ultimately, the defunding of WROs and CSOs working to end VAWG represents a catastrophic, long-term reversal of hard-won gains, directly undermining the SDGs and leaving millions of women and girls vulnerable to discrimination and violence for generations to come.³³

Emerging Findings about Funding Cuts

*“ Without funding, movements fade into silence: Defunding of or reduced funding for WROs often go hand in hand with repression and closing civic space [...] Often, to be able to access funds, WROs shift to service provision instead of advocacy work or are unable to work on politicized issues such as Gender-based Violence (GBV), abortion and LGBTIQ+ rights. ”*³⁴



Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana

2. SURVEY AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose of This Report

While existing studies offer a critical snapshot about the impact of funding cuts, this is the only survey of this scale that is exclusively focused on WROs and CSOs working to end VAWG. The added value of this study lies in its scale and design; by drawing on a broad sample of WROs and CSOs across diverse contexts, it not only documents the immediate impacts of funding cuts, but also enables comparative insights that can inform global policy debate and donor strategies. This research generates the robust evidence base required to shed light on the urgent and sustained funding required for these organizations to survive.

Objectives



To capture the scale and scope of the recent funding cuts/reductions and their impact on WROs and CSOs working to end VAWG.



To illustrate how funding cuts are affecting key areas of EVAWG work – such as service provision, prevention activities, advocacy, and accountability mechanisms – at global, regional, and local levels.



To provide evidence-based recommendations for donors, governments, the UN, and other stakeholders to reverse harmful funding trends and strengthen feminist financing for EVAWG efforts.



To support advocacy efforts on EVAWG – including through the ACT Shared Advocacy Agenda – by offering timely, credible findings that inform joint messaging, policy influence, and movement-building³⁵.

Methodology

This report employed a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively assess the impact of funding cuts on WROs and CSOs working to EVAWG. The research combined: 1) a desk review of academic and grey literature; 2) a global survey of 428 WROs and CSOs; and 3) qualitative interviews with key stakeholders. The desk review established an evidence base on the impact of funding cuts, while the survey captured both quantitative and qualitative data on the scale

and consequences of cuts across diverse organizational types and regions. Interviews offered nuanced, lived experiences to contextualize the findings. All data sources were triangulated to strengthen validity, recognizing the urgent need for evidence to inform current and future advocacy strategies.

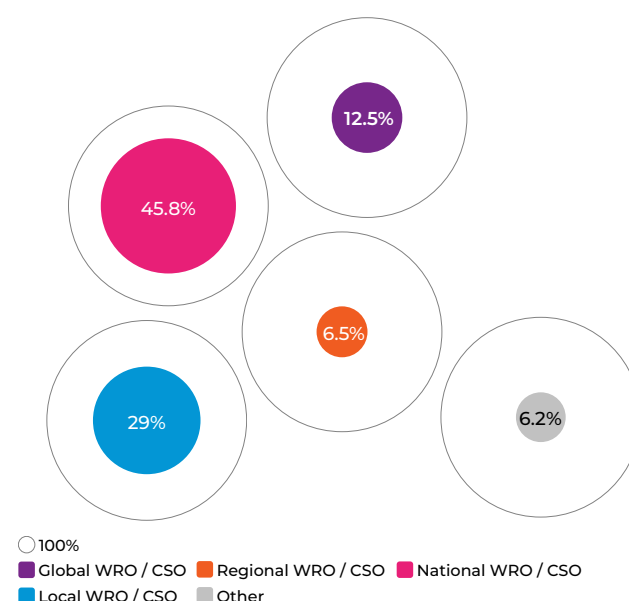
Desk Review

To provide background context to this study, a targeted desk review used 12 keyword combinations to search for recent (2024 onward) evidence on the impact of funding cuts on WROs and their work to end VAWG. From ~300 sources, nine met the inclusion criteria. These were combined with seven UNICEF reports and two snowballed sources. All 18 documents were coded using a framework analysing bibliographic data, organizational context, funding cut characteristics, and impacts across six tiers.

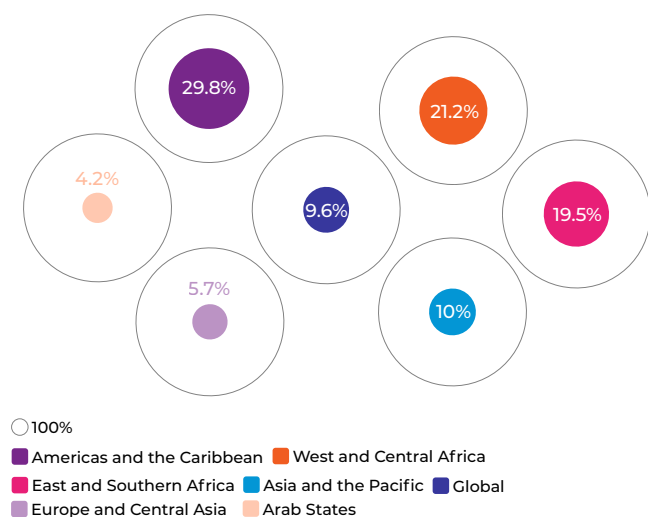
Survey Data Collection

The quantitative analysis drew from 428 complete responses to UN Women's global survey, collected over 37 days in June and July 2025. The questionnaire included 39 structured questions – comprising multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended responses – that captured: 1) organizational characteristics (name, type, geographic scope, leadership demographics); 2) funding sources and patterns; 3) nature and scale of funding cuts experienced; 4) specific impacts on operations and services; 5) impacts on the wider EVAWG ecosystem; and 6) mitigation strategies. The survey was available in English, French, and Spanish.

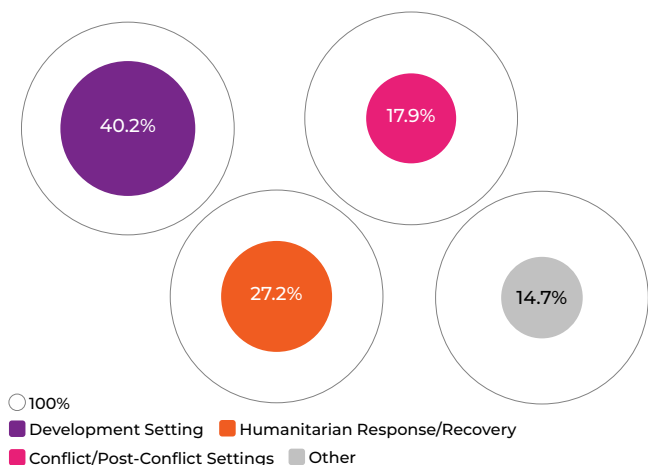
Types of Organizations Surveyed³⁶



Geographical Coverage of Organizations Surveyed



Context in which the Surveyed Organizations Operate



Importantly, all organizations that participated in the survey are involved in work to end VAWG and for the majority (84 per cent) this is their primary focus. Most organizations (90.7 per cent) were women-led, with many also led by or composed of marginalized groups, including survivors of violence, LGBTIQ+ women, Indigenous women, rural women, young women, and women with disabilities. Organizations actively engage a wide range of groups, most commonly young women (77.3 per cent), women's rights activists (68.5 per cent), rural women (65 per cent), and survivors of violence (62.5 per cent), reflecting a strong intersectional approach to their work. While collecting survey data, efforts were made to ensure responses from a diversity of CSOs and WROs, in terms of geographical location and region, type of organization, and intersecting focus of the organization. The 428 survey responses provide robust data, however, the survey should not be considered statistically generalizable, nor does it claim to represent all experiences. Rather, it highlights broad trends, allowing the report to offer important and unique insights into the actual impacts of the funding cuts on organizations working to end VAWG around the world.

Key Informant Interviews Data Collection

Five key informant interviews were conducted with WROs, networks, and coalitions working on EVAWG across different regions. These interviews allowed the researchers to capture more granular, qualitative information to contextualize the survey findings. Participants were identified through purposive sampling to ensure representation of diverse organizational types and geographic contexts. To protect sensitive information, all organizational identifiers were removed during transcription.



Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana

3. KEY FINDINGS

The Findings Section is structured around eight top level messages, supported by both quantitative and qualitative data drawn from the survey and the key informant interviews.

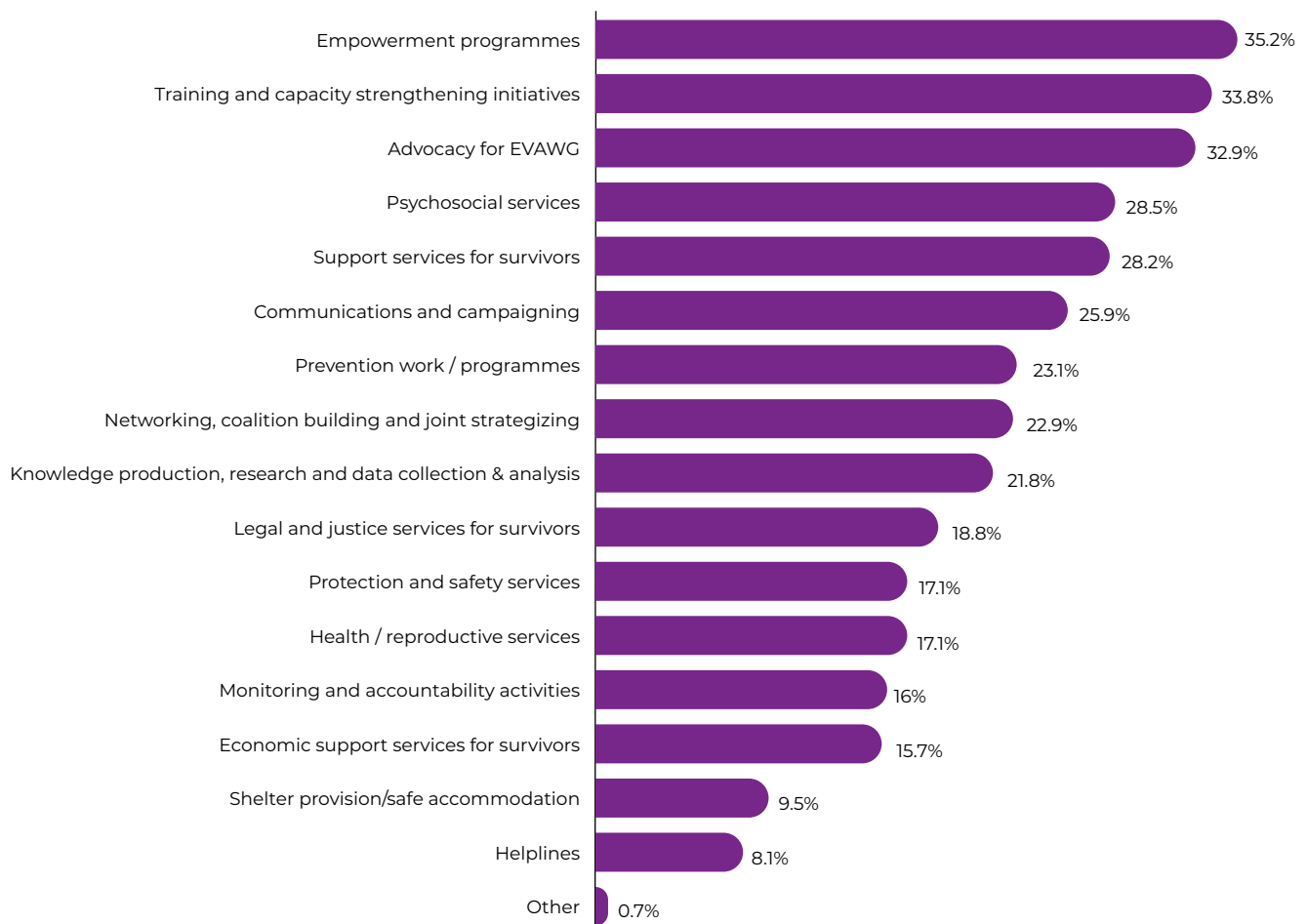
#1. A widespread and significant funding crisis has already resulted in significant reductions in programming to end VAWG.

Member States are decreasing their funding for EVAWG programming, both domestically and internationally. **The cuts have led to programme suspension and/or termination amongst one-third (34.5 per cent) of the responding CSOs/WROs.** In particular, the most severely impacted EVAWG activities have been those related to empowerment programmes (35.2 per cent), training and capacity strengthening initiatives and/or activities (33.8 per cent), advocacy for EVAWG (32.9 per cent), psychosocial services (28.5 per cent), and support services for survivors (28.2 per cent).



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

Type of EVAWG Work Affected in CSOs (per cent of CROs/WROs that responded affirmatively)



#2. Funding cuts have forced WROs and CSOs offering direct service provision to scale back their essential, life-saving services or shut down entirely.

When it comes to direct service provision, **40.5 per cent of WROs and CSOs reported service reduction to women and girls**. They report that they already find themselves in a situation where they must close shelters, safe spaces, and safe home services. Some are being shut down entirely, while others have had their capacity significantly reduced. Beyond shelters and safe spaces, organizations are also having to let go or reduce the working hours of specialist staff such as psychologists and legal experts. This raises concerns about their ability to offer survivors of VAWG comprehensive services that will allow them to both leave and stay out of violence situations.

Examples of how direct service provision has been affected by funding cuts.

“ We operate three shelters for survivors and have had to close one of them ”

(Survey Respondent, Americas and the Caribbean, translation from Spanish).

Respondents from rural and marginalized communities were particularly concerned about the suspension of direct service provision, noting that there are often limited or no other places for those experiencing violence to turn to. Some have turned to offering online rather than in-person services, however access to the internet and limited digital literacy rates present barriers to women who may want to access them. Referral networks between actors responding to VAWG have been interrupted or broken, creating situations where survivors are ‘falling through the cracks’ in terms of their access to lifesaving support and care.



Scope of Funding Cut Impacts on WROs and CSOs

- **Egypt – Funding Cuts Limit Vital Support for Sudanese Refugees:** A key respondent from the Arab States recounted how funding cuts have impacted CSO-run shelters and legal centres. These centres were previously the only option for Sudanese refugee women, who suffer high rates of violence: “They cannot help them as they used to help them before.”
- **Cameroon – Funding Cuts Lead to the Closure of Safe Spaces and Shelters:** A survey respondent from Cameroon reported that their organization was forced to close five safe spaces that supported survivors of VAWG due to funding cuts. These spaces, which provided support services, recreational activities, and vocational training, typically served over 50 survivors daily. Respondents are observing that the closures have exposed girls to early forced marriage and other harmful practices.

Examples of how direct service provision has been affected by funding cuts.

“ Additionally, we had to let go of one psychologist and one lawyer, and shut down a regional office ”

(Survey Respondent, Americas and the Caribbean, translation from Spanish).

#3. Funding cuts are significantly reducing access to protection and critical support for victim-survivors coupled with growing impunity leaving survivors at risk of intensifying violence.

A staggering **89 per cent of respondents reported that funding cuts are leading to a high or severe reduction in women and girls’ access to support services for survivors**, compounded by 82 per cent reporting high or severe limitations on access to safe shelter and accommodation. 79 per cent of organizations reported a high or severe impact on how many remaining specialist services are available for women and girls in their community, and 78 per cent noted a high or severe impact on access to abortion, sexual health, and HIV-prevention services for survivors of sexual violence.

This is not merely a statistical decline; it is a life-and-death issue. When women and girls are not able to access shelters, safe spaces, and legal, medical, and psychological support, their risks for intensified violence increase. This crumbling of services forces survivors back into dangerous situations, isolates them from support, and signals that their safety is a deprioritized issue.

Indeed, we know from the COVID-19 pandemic that a reduction in services to support victims, due in part to operational challenges and decreased funding to local women’s organizations and law enforcement, impacted rates and intensity of violence.³⁷

Furthermore, **59 per cent of respondents perceive an increase in impunity and normalization of violence**, suggesting that perpetrators are acting with a growing sense of entitlement and without fear of consequence.



Honduras – Funding Cuts Impact Women’s Experiences with the Justice System:

A key respondent highlighted in an interview that recent donor funding cuts have impacted resources that used to go towards training and sensitizing personnel within the justice system about how to adopt a gender-sensitive and survivor-informed approach. “The impact is noticeable, we see it, we feel it. We feel it when we take legal cases to court with our lawyers, you feel it strongly. It’s not just about at the community level, but also at the level of access to justice for women,” she highlighted.

#4 Prevention efforts and economic empowerment programmes are being deprioritized, creating the conditions for heightened VAWG in the future.

23 per cent of the surveyed CSOs and WROs working to end VAWG reported that they are having to interrupt or completely halt their prevention programming in light of the mass funding cuts. Investment in prevention has always been weak (prior to the cuts, it represented 0.2 per cent of total ODA³⁸); with these cuts it will be even worse. Respondents were clear that funding cuts to prevention efforts undermine decades of progress in gender equality and create enabling conditions for heightened VAWG in the future.



Examples of how prevention programming has been affected

A South Asian organization reported that “Community-based education, including girls’ clubs and leadership training, have been curtailed in some areas, limiting preventive efforts against gender-based violence.”

An organization in Africa noted that they have not been able to pay school fees for teenage mothers with children since the beginning of the year. Keeping girls in school is an important way to prevent their exposure to VAWG, and without funding girls may be forced to leave school.

A critical element of prevention programming that has been affected by funding cuts is **economic empowerment programmes, which allow women to generate their own incomes and resource, with 35 per cent of organizations reporting that the funding cuts are impacting their work in this area.** Organizations expressed concerns that cutting these programmes will impact their ability to leave violent home lives, and will also increase the risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking.



Example of how economic empowerment programs have been affected.

A representative from an organization from the Americas and the Caribbean reported: “currently I have a project suspended due to lack of resources. The project consists of economic empowerment for female heads of household, caregiving women, empowering them economically within their homes, as a tool in the fight against gender violence, so that they have the certainty that it is possible to generate income from homes and dignify the work of caregivers.”



Impact of Funding Cuts on Prevention Programmes

Tanzania – Suspension of Economic Empowerment and Prevention Programmes: An organization in Tanzania is unsure about how long they can continue operating without funds. They highlighted that if their programme were to close, over 3,000 vulnerable women and children (many of whom are survivors of violence) would lose access to life-saving support. Their programme empowers survivors to cultivate nutritious gardens, sell produce, and lead healing circles, transforming their lives. In their view, losing this programming would mean abandoning thousands of survivors and risking increasing abuse and preventable child deaths.

#5. Funding cuts have limited CSOs’ and WROs’ ability to engage in important advocacy and accountability work.

33 per cent of respondents report that the funding cuts have significantly impacted their ability to engage in advocacy and accountability exercises. Without funding, their ability to mobilize, engage, and hold duty-bearers accountable has been weakened. They note that they must use their remaining resources for service provision, rather than advocacy work.

Respondents report a reduced capacity to participate in policy dialogues, monitor the implementation of EVAWG commitments, and sustain grassroots advocacy campaigns. Without adequate resources, they are no longer able to document violations, collect data, and amplify survivors’ voices. Thus, their key role in challenging impunity for VAWG has been diminished

Example of how funding cuts have impacted advocacy efforts.

“ These cuts seriously affect the capacity to respond to violence in contexts of mixed migratory flows, where women, girls and adolescents face multiple risks, including gender-based violence, trafficking, and smuggling. Without this funding, not only was direct assistance interrupted, but also our ability to influence, document and make visible these violences in a humanitarian scenario where institutional abandonment is structural. The lack of resources further obscures these populations and perpetuates impunity ”

(Survey Respondent, Latin America, own translation from Spanish).

Impact of Funding Cuts on Advocacy Efforts



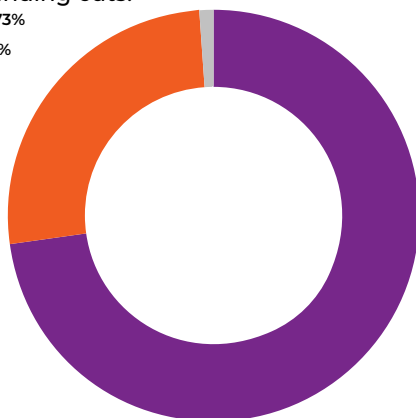
33 per cent of the surveyed organizations reported that their advocacy efforts have been affected by funding cuts.

#6. Capacities of CSOs and WROs are severely impacted undermining feminist leadership and movements

73 per cent of respondents experiencing funding cuts reported that their organization has been “significantly impacted” by the cuts, while 26 per cent indicated that their organization is “somewhat impacted.” Critically, no organizations reported that they were facing “no impact at all” in the wake of the cuts.

Severity of the financial impact on organizations that have experienced funding cuts.

- Significantly impacted 73%
- Somewhat impacted 26%
- No impact at all 0%
- Other 1%



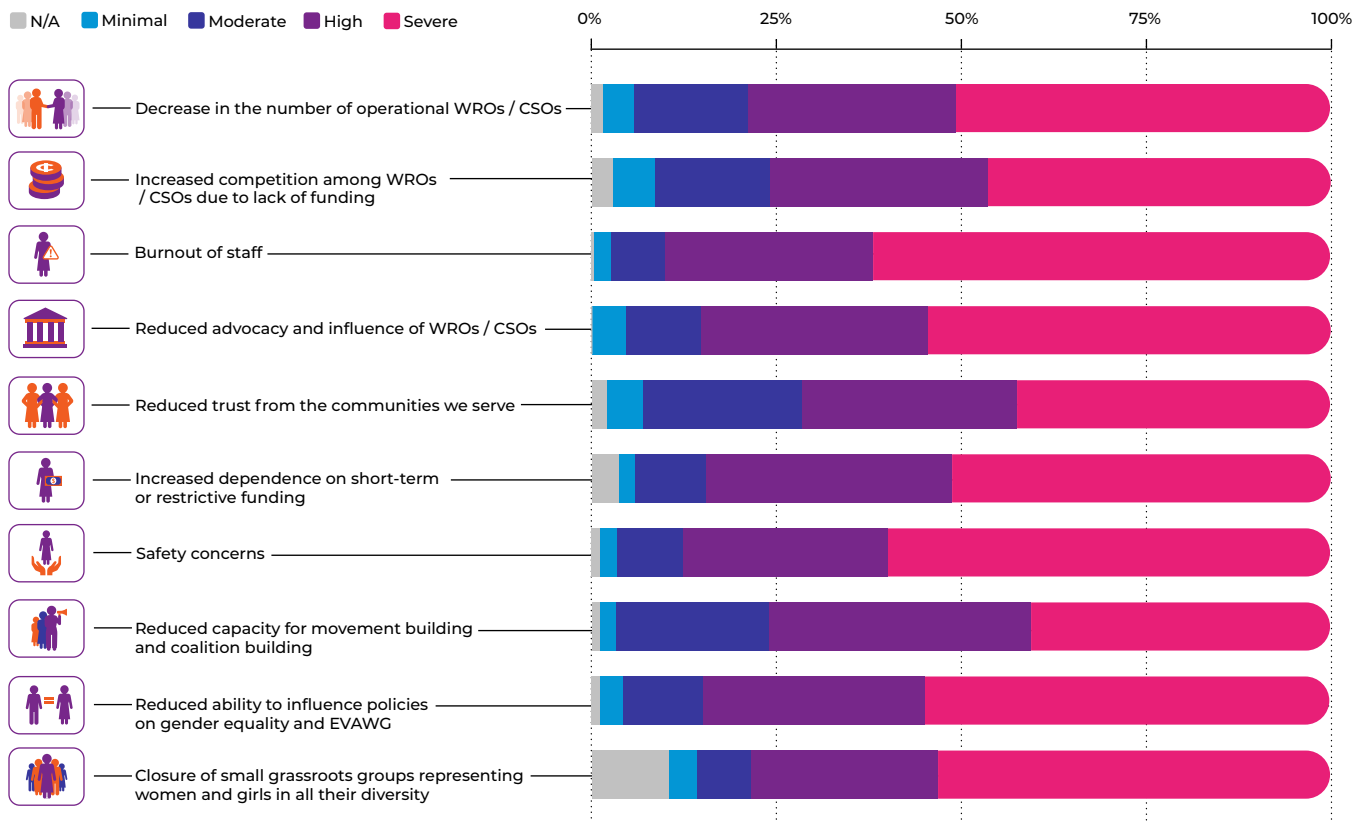
A substantial portion of organizations face severe cuts to their budgets. 21 per cent of participants reported that their organization anticipates that between 30 per cent and 59 per cent of their 2025 budget will be affected, while 12 per cent of respondents expect this to be 60 to 90 per cent. Worryingly, nearly five per cent of respondents project that more than 90 per cent of their budgets will be affected. Many organizations now face an uncertain future, **with 41 per cent reporting that they do not know how long they will be able to sustain operations or that they will only remain operational for one year or less. Only five per cent of those surveyed anticipate being able to sustain current operations for two years or longer.**

When asked how these fundings cuts would impact on the capacities of women's rights organizations and movements, the most acute issues respondents reported were staff burnout (62 per cent) and safety concerns (60 per cent). CSOs and WROs also report that funding cuts undermine their ability to build movements, sustain collective action, and support feminist leadership in the long term, as evidenced by reduced ability to influence policy on gender equality and EVAWG (55 per cent), as well as movement-building capacity (41 per cent).



Photo: UN Women/Luis Ponce

Impact on the capacities of WROs and CSOs (per cent of response rate per category)



Survey respondents from across regions highlighted that they are unable to pay rent for their offices, pay their contractors, or afford their internet and phone bills, work-essential subscriptions, or transport costs. One organization from the Americas and the Caribbean reported: "If we don't even have enough to pay for Zoom, how can we continue our work?" Some stated that they are going into debt as they struggle to pay salaries to their employees.

Examples of how funding cuts impact operational costs

"Staff have been laid off, programmes suspended, the organization is struggling to pay salaries for staff while waiting for other donors to take over."
(Survey Respondent, South Asia).

"Right now the funds come out ONLY [from] our individual volunteers pockets."
(Survey Respondent, West and Central Africa).

"Our staff have experienced increased workload and emotional strain due to heightened demand and fewer partners to share responsibilities"
(Survey Respondent, Asia and the Pacific)



Impact of Funding Cuts on CSO Operations

Bangladesh – Funding Cuts Shut Down Shelters for Survivors of Violence: The director of a women's organization explained that while they own their shelter, they still have to pay utilities, food, and medical treatment for survivors of violence. They further cannot pay the salary of their psychosocial counsellor. "There is... a very big effect – because [now] we cannot do anything for them. We are helpless," she said.

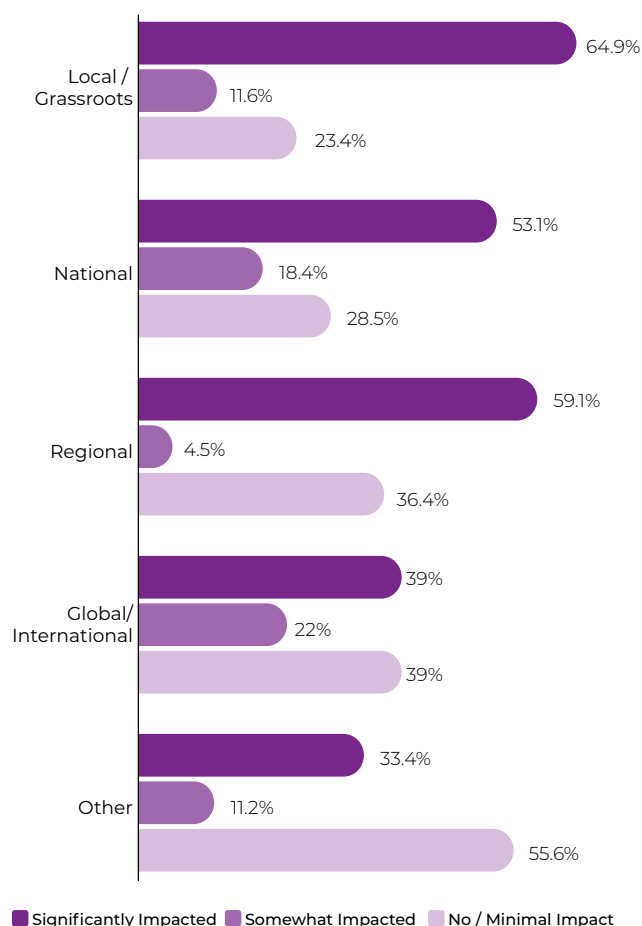
#7. Small and grassroots CSOs and WROs face increased exclusion from both national levels funds and international funding due to donor preferences for larger NGOs in the current funding climate.

The funding cuts are causing a universal crisis; however the impacts are disproportionately devastating for local and grassroots organizations, which form the backbone of community-level support and services for EVAWG. Of the 197 local/grassroots organizations that responded, **65 per cent (128 orgs) reported being "significantly impacted."** This is the highest raw number and one of the greatest proportions of severe impact among all categories.

Example of how funding cuts will impact small CSOs and WROs

“ Grassroots level groups in the developing world will be hit hardest ”
(Survey Respondent, Arab States).

Type of Organization Affected



The swift reduction of available funding for organizations working to end VAWG has resulted in increased competition for smaller pots of money. As referenced above, these smaller, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often represent the only EAWG service available, particularly in rural areas. As one survey respondent outlines:

“ In reality, there are very few funders left, and for small organizations like mine or leadership movements, it is almost null, as even when there were more resources, the obstacles or rules to obtain funding were quite cumbersome, despite us being the first line of action as we have direct access to victims [own translation from Spanish] ”
(Survey Respondent, Latin America).

#8. Funding cuts take place in a global context of rising backlash against efforts to EAWG and growing risks for women human rights defenders and activists.

Funding cuts come at a time when we see a concerted backlash against women's rights and a deliberate constriction of civic space. 1 in 4 countries say backlash has hampered progress on gender equality in the past 5 years,³⁹ 85 per cent of surveyed organizations predicted a high-severe level of backsliding, when it comes to laws and policies that protect women and girls' rights. Organizations warn that without sustained and flexible funding, the hard-won gains of past decades are at risk of being systematically eroded, leaving women and girls without essential legal protections.

In parallel, risks to women human rights defenders (WHRDs) working to end violence against women and girls are increasing. **60 per cent of respondents to the survey reported being severely impacted by the rise of anti-women's rights movements** and reduced civic space, and 57 per cent of respondents expressed severe concerns about increased risks for WHRDs and activists. These concerns are amplified in rural areas and among vulnerable populations, including LGBTIQ+, rural women, migrant women, women with disabilities, and Indigenous women. Frontline workers in conflict zones and areas experiencing insecurity report that their security risks are escalating, with fewer resources to protect women human rights defenders.

In parallel, certain governments are enacting legislation to stop WROs and CSOs from receiving (remaining) international funding, which a UNTF report identifies as a primary mechanism of backlash.⁴⁰ The current funding cuts further lower the pool of available funds for those working to end violence against women and girls.

Example of how new laws restrict access to funding.

“ Today, NGOs in [our country] face significant challenges [...] One of the key problems is limited access to international grants. Due to the current legislation, international donors often face bureaucratic barriers, which leads to a decrease in the volume of foreign aid. Receiving foreign funding requires complex registration and approval procedures, which discourage both donors and local organizations. Additionally, there is no effective mechanism for state funding of independent NGOs. State grants are usually limited in scope, have a formal nature, and are often distributed in favour of loyal structures. This leads to the fact that many active, professional, and independent organizations are deprived of a chance for sustainable development ”
(Survey Respondent, Europe and Central Asia)

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR EVAWG EFFORTS

The graph on the next page outlines how respondents rated their concerns about different consequences of the funding cuts; in what follows we provide more detail about these concerning implications.

As the key findings have shown, the impacts of the funding cuts span from the individual level, where victims/survivors face escalating violence because when they do not have access to the life-saving services they need, to the community level, where a lack of prevention programming creates the conditions for heightened violence against women and girls.

As governments cut funds, difficult decisions are made about what programming and measures to continue. It is known, however, that to see reductions in VAWG a whole-of-government, comprehensive approach needs to be taken. **The rates of intimate partner violence are 2.5 times lower in countries with comprehensive prevention and response measures compared to those with weak protections⁴¹.** Thus, the implications of the funding cuts on our collective efforts to end VAWG are dire.

Additionally, organizations report that cuts have devastated their capacity for data collection, research, and knowledge production, which are the cornerstones of evidence-based advocacy, policy, and intervention. One organization highlighted: “[there is an] increase in femicides among young women at the country level without financial capacity to conduct research for tracking concrete national data” (Survey Respondent, East and Southern Africa, translated from Portuguese). In cases like this, violence is rendered invisible, and impunity thrives. This lack of concrete data not only hampers the development of targeted prevention strategies, but also makes it impossible to accurately measure the scale of the problem, thereby silencing the voices of victims and further marginalizing vulnerable populations.

Another damaging impact of funding cuts reported is the severe erosion of trust between organizations, the communities they serve, and donors. When projects are abruptly truncated and essential services like shelters are closed due to a lack of funds, it

breaks a vital promise of support to communities, damaging an organization's reputation and undermines years of work to build reliable relationships. An organization working with Indigenous villages notes that without funding, they “don’t just lose a programme, we lose momentum, trust, and livelihood” (Survey Respondent, East and Southern Africa).

At the macro-level, funding cuts threaten the possibility of achieving SDG 5 and undermine progress on the sustainable development agenda more broadly as well as a wide range of other global commitments to gender equality and to eliminating VAWG. **67 per cent of respondents reported that they perceive a severe de-prioritization of gender equality and EVAWG on political agendas.**

“ Now is not the time to reduce funding for women and girls – it is the time to strengthen it. Around the world, women are on the frontlines of peacebuilding, economic recovery, health care, education, and climate resilience. Cutting support now would not only reverse decades of progress.”
Survey respondent from a global organization

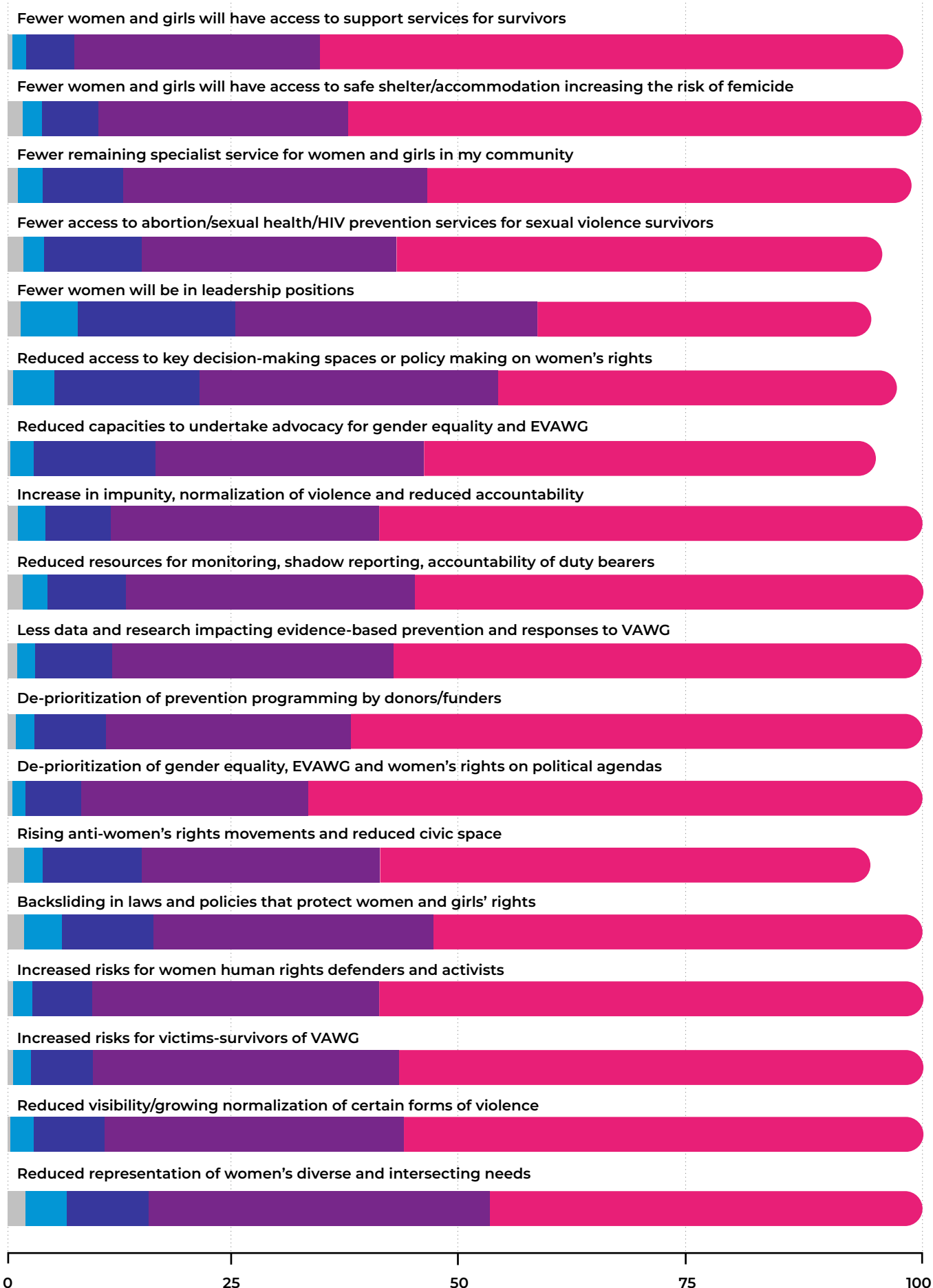


Laos – The Declining Access to Reproductive Health Services has a Knock-On Effect

In a rural community in Laos, a donor-funded programme that offered comprehensive reproductive health services (including family planning, prenatal care, and HIV and AIDS prevention) and legal aid for survivors of domestic violence was terminated. Respondents have seen a subsequent decline in maternal and child health, an increase in unplanned pregnancies, and a rise in VAWG cases, leaving women without support.

Impact on the Wider EVAWG Ecosystem (per cent of response rate per category)

■ N/A ■ Minimal ■ Moderate ■ High ■ Severe



5. MITIGATION STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY WROS & CSOS

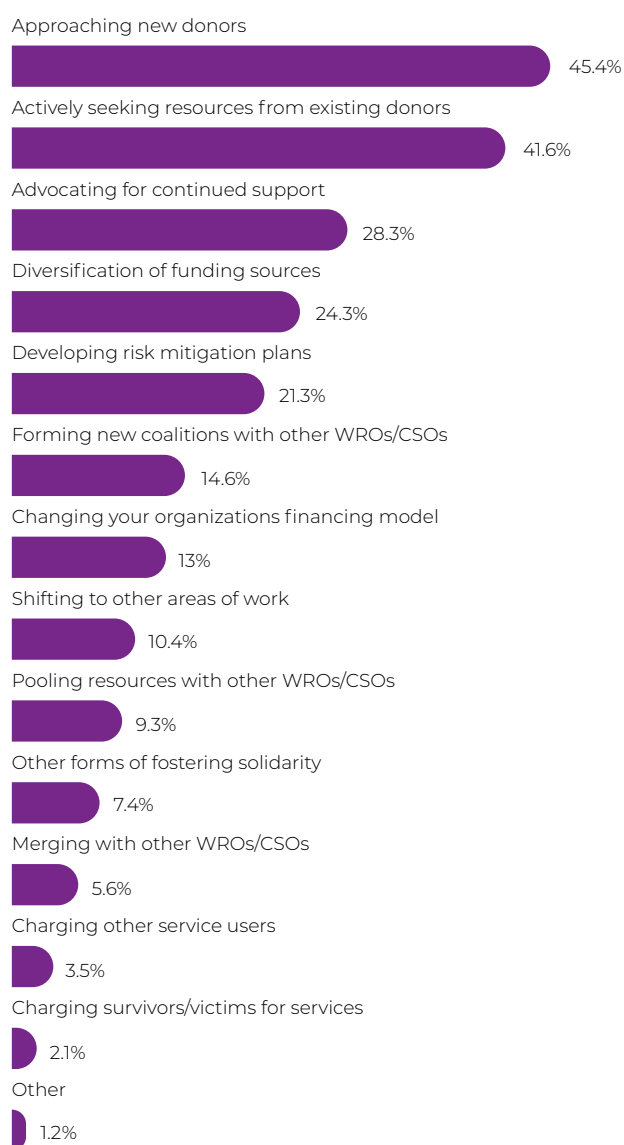
WROs and CSOs are working hard to positively adapt to the new funding landscape. They are adjusting their donor relationships with 45 per cent of the survey respondents reporting that they are now approaching new donors, and 42 per cent re-engaging with existing donors. Some are now planning to diversify funding (24 per cent), form coalitions (15 per cent), or develop risk plans (21 per cent), while others are aiming to pivot to self-sufficiency models (13 per cent) or charge service fees to (non-survivor) participants (four per cent). Alarmingly, some (two per cent) even report that their organizations are now charging survivors for services. Collaborative strategies like resource-pooling (nine per cent) and mergers (six per cent) point to growing solidarity between WROs and CSOs amid a shared situation of financial precarity.

Example of Mitigation Strategies

“ Identifying organizations that have been affected by the crisis and organizing/forming new coalitions to share challenges and opportunities would be ideal ”
(Survey Respondent, East and Southern Africa)

Organizations are also looking to expand their funding horizons, brainstorming creative ways to seek resources. Some have expressed interest in approaching the philanthropic and private sectors now they find their former funding streams have dried up. Others have mentioned that they might explore crowdfunding and other forms of offline and online community fundraising. Others report applying for funding not necessarily designed for EAWG activities, including educational or rule of law initiatives. Many were clear that they want support to strengthen their capacity for alternative fundraising in this new ecosystem.

Types of Mitigation Strategies Adopted by CSOs/WROs (% that responded affirmatively).



6. CONCLUSION

This report has compiled and analysed vital information that underscores the immediate and urgent nature of the impact of funding cuts on efforts to end VAWG. Specifically, survey respondents report that the funding cuts are not merely a byproduct of economic constraint but often represent a widespread and deliberate political strategy to roll back gender equality, directly resulting in the dismantling of essential and lifesaving services for women and girls.

Funding cuts have crippled the frontline response to violence against women and girls, shuttering safe spaces, legal aid programmes, and survivor support services, thereby exacerbating risks of heightened violence and femicide. The survey also reveals how funding cuts have wide-reaching indirect consequences, including increased staff burnout, the creation of a toxic environment given

heightened competition for scarce resources, and a chilling effect on advocacy that empowers anti-rights movements and threatens to reverse decades of hard-won progress for women and girls.

Without immediate action to reinstate – and increase – funding for WROs and CSOs, the consequences will be devastating. Victims/survivors of violence will be left without the support and follow-up that they need, movements for gender equality will lose momentum, and decades of progress towards ending VAWG will unravel. Women and girls will face heightened risk of violence, and many will die. And the enabling conditions and drivers for heightened violence in the future will be paved.



Photo: UN Women/Tensae Yemane

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the impacts and implications of funding cuts on efforts to end VAWG, this report outlines a set of recommendations for actors including Member States, donors and funding agencies, as well as the UN system. Recommendations are directly informed by responses to the survey and key informant interviews.



Secure and safeguard funding for EVAWG both nationally and internationally

- Adopt and implement fully budgeted comprehensive, whole-of-government national action plans on EVAWG.
- Ringfence national EVAWG budgets across key ministries and mainstream EVAWG across health, education, justice, security, social protection, climate change, development, digital policy, and other cross-cutting policy areas.
- Mandate EVAWG services at the country level – such as shelters, hotlines, and legal/clinical aid – as essential, with contingency funding to ensure continuity.
- Sustain and increase dedicated EVAWG funding through ODA and earmark a share of funds from intersecting policy areas including security, democracy, climate, digital development and rule of law (amongst others) for EVAWG programming.
- For countries that have already reduced aid, push for retroactive exceptions for EVAWG funding given the life-threatening impact of service cuts.



Reform funding models

- Ensure immediate, core, long-term, flexible, and unconditional funding to CSOs/WROs working on EVAWG to cover operating costs, prevention, and strategic work.
- Prioritize multi-year EVAWG funding moving beyond short-term project-based funding to give CSOs and WROs the stability to continue operations in uncertain contexts.
- Simplify funding and direct resources to grassroots groups, with quotas for youth-led and feminist organizations.



Strengthen resilience of feminist movements

- Support CSOs and WROs to build resilience through investment in digital security, privacy protection, and technology infrastructure to safeguard their work to EVAWG. Further provide funding for security, safety and protection, and self and collective care, including mental health support.
- Countries leading on gender equality – including those with feminist foreign policies – should use their political capital in multilateral spaces to spotlight EVAWG funding and the role of feminist movements.
- Play a bridge-building role, promoting partnerships between the private sector and CSOs/WROs working to end VAWG and provide support to strengthen capacities of CSOs/WROs on resource mobilization.
- Play a role in strengthening movements and coalitions, and in designing strategies for collective and unified advocacy to resist backlash. Push forward by amplifying and elevating the voices and demands of women's rights movements including through facilitating their participation in decision-making fora, ensuring representation of youth and marginalized groups.
- Urge states with restrictive legislation on international funding for CSOs to remove barriers, leveraging trade agreements or development aid where appropriate.

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³⁵ ACT to End Violence Against Women³⁵ is a European Commission and UN Women partnership that strengthens feminist movements through Advocacy, Coalition Building, and Transformative Feminist Action (ACT) to accelerate efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

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UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead UN entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social behaviours and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations translate progress into lasting changes. We make strides forward for women and girls in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and women, peace and security as well as humanitarian action.

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