

Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace: Preventing Violence and Promoting Social Cohesion in ASEAN (2021–2025)

Abridged Evaluation Report

1. Context and purpose of the evaluation

The regional project “Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace – Preventing Violence and Promoting Social Cohesion in ASEAN” was implemented from 2021 to 2025 through a partnership between UN Women and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with financial support from the Governments of Canada, the Republic of Korea and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The project aimed to consolidate regional women, peace and security (WPS) policy frameworks, strengthen institutional capacities, foster multi-stakeholder collaboration and support national-level policy development and implementation across ASEAN Member States and one Observer State. It advanced the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS (RPA WPS); strengthened the capacities of ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, civil society and national institutions; supported the development and implementation of national action plans; and promoted the accountability and inclusion of marginalized groups. In later phases, the project emphasized communities of practice and sustained coordination mechanisms to reinforce long-term implementation.

To inform accountability, learning and future WPS programming in ASEAN, the evaluation assessed the project’s relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, contribution to impact, and the integration of human rights and gender equality.

About this abridged version

This document presents an abridged version of the Final Evaluation of the Project: Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace – Preventing Violence and Promoting Social Cohesion in ASEAN (2021–2025). It has been prepared to support accessible online dissemination of the evaluation’s key findings, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations for policymakers, ASEAN stakeholders, donors, civil society and the wider public. The abridged version summarizes the most significant evidence-based results while maintaining the accuracy and neutrality of the full evaluation. The complete evaluation report is available at: <https://wps.asean.org/resources/final-evaluation-empowering-women-for-sustainable-peace-preventing-violence-and-promoting-social-cohesion-in-asean/>

2. Scope and methodology

The evaluation covered regional and national interventions implemented between 2021 and 2025 across eight ASEAN Member States (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam). It applied a mixed-methods, gender-responsive and theory-based approach aligned with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and UN Women evaluation policy, drawing on document review, interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), surveys and selected field missions. Evidence was gathered from a wide range of stakeholders, ensuring inclusive and participatory analysis.



3. Recommendations

1 Develop an ASEAN-led transition plan to secure long-term sustainability.

ASEAN and UN Women should co-design a structured transition toward progressively autonomous ASEAN leadership of the WPS agenda, including strengthened institutional capacity, predictable financing, coordinated governance, and risk-mitigation measures to sustain policy, monitoring, and knowledge functions beyond the current project cycle.

2 Expand and deepen national-level engagement across ASEAN Member States.

Future efforts should broaden participation in countries not yet fully engaged while strengthening implementation in those already advancing WPS, through tailored technical support, flexible financing, peer learning, and continued high-level political advocacy.

3 Strengthen vertical coherence between regional commitments and national and subnational implementation.

More systematic feedback loops, joint monitoring, harmonized reporting, and strengthened knowledge exchange are needed to ensure that lessons from country-level practice inform regional policymaking and that regional priorities translate into consistent implementation on the ground.

4 Institutionalize capacity development and reinforce follow-up support.

Embedding WPS training within civil service systems, sustaining peer learning and mentoring, and strengthening outcome-tracking will help translate strengthened knowledge and skills into durable institutional practice and long-term impact.

5 Consolidate policy gains while prioritizing implementation and results.

ASEAN's significant normative progress should be balanced with practical delivery through implementation roadmaps, pilot initiatives, outcome-oriented monitoring, and regular reviews linking policy commitments to measurable change.

6 Maintain and institutionalize UN Women's co-location and close cooperation with ASEAN.

Continued proximity, coordination mechanisms, and sustained engagement between UN Women and the ASEAN Secretariat are essential to preserve trust, responsiveness, policy coherence, and effective regional support for WPS implementation.

7 Manage localization to preserve coherence and focus on implementation.

As WPS action expands across national and sectoral levels, strengthened alignment with regional and national frameworks, streamlined reporting, coordinated governance, and measurable implementation milestones are needed to prevent fragmentation and sustain results.

4. Key Findings



Relevance

The evaluation found the project to be highly relevant across regional and national contexts. It aligns strongly with ASEAN priorities, national gender equality and WPS commitments, and global normative frameworks, including United Nations Security Council resolutions on WPS and broader gender equality instruments.

The project's participatory and adaptive design, engagement with civil society and marginalized groups, and responsiveness to evolving challenges – such as the COVID-19 pandemic, political transitions, and emerging security risks – further strengthened contextual relevance and ownership.

A defining driver of relevance was the complementarity between ASEAN and UN Women. ASEAN's participation in the project provided legitimacy, coherence and political momentum, while UN Women supplied the technical expertise, evidence base and facilitated operationalization of commitments.



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Effectiveness

The evaluation assessed the project as highly effective, with planned targets achieved before project closure and clear progress toward intended outcomes. Capacity-building, peer learning, and policy development initiatives significantly strengthened the knowledge, skills, confidence, and engagement of ASEAN institutions, national authorities, and non-state actors. Regional knowledge products and platforms increased access to WPS evidence and guidance.



The project could not have been as effective or efficient without UN Women's presence in Jakarta underlining the value of embedded partnership for political and operational agility



At the same time, the translation of strengthened capacity into consistent institutional practice and implementation varied across ASEAN contexts due to political, structural, and resource constraints. This gap between capacity gains and applied change is a key limitation.



Coherence

The project demonstrated strong internal and external coherence, closely aligned with the ASEAN RPA WPS, ASEAN sectoral priorities, and UN Women's corporate strategic frameworks at regional and country levels. Collaboration with other UN entities was complementary and contributed to policy dialogue and programming. Strengthened UN system coordination could further enhance coherence beyond project-based collaboration.





Human Rights, Gender Equality, and Leave No One Behind

Human rights and gender equality were systematically integrated throughout project design and implementation, including deliberate engagement of persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, indigenous and minority women, and survivors of violence. This contributed to greater participation, access, and visibility of marginalized groups. However, inclusion remained uneven across institutions and countries, underscoring the need for more consistent resourcing, institutionalization, and monitoring of inclusive approaches.



Contribution Toward Impact

The evaluation found that the project contributed to emerging impact at regional and national levels, particularly through shifts in perceptions and attitudes toward women's roles in peace and security, strengthened institutional capacities, and increasingly gender-responsive policy and programming environments. Coordinated capacity-building, policy engagement, and advocacy fostered recognition of women as active peacebuilders and leaders, expanded their visibility and participation in conflict prevention, mediation, and community resilience efforts, and generated localized examples of empowerment and social norm change.

However, while attitudinal and institutional advances are evident, their translation into sustained community-level impact and measurable long-term change remains limited. This reflects the early stage of WPS institutionalization.



Efficiency

Project implementation was efficient and well managed, supported by clear governance arrangements, coordinated partnerships, lean staffing, adaptive delivery mechanisms, and effective use of resources. Monitoring and reporting systems enabled consistent tracking of implementation progress and immediate outcomes.

At the same time, post-training and longer-term outcomes were not systematically captured in the original monitoring design, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen follow-up and outcome-tracking approaches and further enhance learning on sustained behavioural and institutional change over time.



Sustainability

The evaluation identified promising prospects for sustainability, grounded in strong political commitment within ASEAN, strengthened institutional partnerships, and enhanced regional and national capacities. Nevertheless, long-term sustainability depends on dedicated financing, continued civil society engagement, institutional embedding of WPS mechanisms, and resilience to political change. Ongoing UN Women engagement remains vital to sustain coordination, policy development, and the translation of capacity gains into measurable outcomes.

5. Key Lessons Learned

1



Regional political ownership is essential for advancing WPS.

Sustained progress on WPS in ASEAN depends on strong regional leadership, legitimacy, and standard-setting authority. Regional endorsement creates momentum, coherence, and space for national-level action.

2



Complementarity between ASEAN and UN Women drives traction.

The partnership model – ASEAN's convening and normative role combined with UN Women's technical expertise, evidence base, and operational support – proved critical for translating commitments into policy dialogue, capacity-building, and implementation.

3



Capacity-building must move beyond training toward institutionalization.

While knowledge and confidence increased significantly, sustained change requires embedding skills in institutions, follow-up support, mentoring, and integration into formal systems and procedures.

4



Localization is necessary to translate policy into impact.

Regional frameworks and national plans alone are insufficient. Community-level engagement, locally driven implementation, and context-specific approaches are essential to achieve tangible outcomes for women and communities.

5



Inclusive participation strengthens relevance and legitimacy.

Meaningful engagement of marginalized and underrepresented groups improves the credibility, reach, and responsiveness of WPS initiatives. However, inclusion must be systematically resourced and institutionalized to be sustained.

6



Monitoring systems must capture long-term outcomes and behavioural change.

Tracking outputs and immediate results is valuable but strengthened follow-up and outcome-level monitoring are needed to generate clearer evidence of sustained behavioural and institutional change.

7



Sustainability depends on financing, institutional embedding, and continued coordination.

Long-term continuity of WPS gains requires sustained resources, durable institutional mechanisms, ongoing civil society engagement, and continued coordination support, including strategic engagement by UN Women.

These lessons highlight pathways for strengthening future regional WPS programming.

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The evaluation concludes that the project's trust-based facilitation model — coupled with contextual framing, technical rigour, and inclusive partnerships — proved highly effective in accelerating policy adoption and strengthening institutional capacity. The approach's success lies in its balance: it respects ASEAN's diplomatic norms while delivering practical, locally relevant results.

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6. Main Conclusions

CONCLUSION 1

Engaging with ASEAN on the WPS Agenda elevated political prioritization and institutional legitimacy, though participation remains to be developed.

Engagement with ASEAN positioned the WPS agenda as a recognized regional priority, strengthening its political visibility, institutional legitimacy, and integration within ASEAN's peace and security architecture. This relevance contributed to substantial government uptake, reflected in the advancement of national WPS policies, strengthened coordination mechanisms, and expanded capacity-building and participation initiatives across several Member States.

However, implementation remains uneven across sectors and regions, coordination between national and subnational levels is often limited, and sustained financial and human resources are not consistently secured, indicating the need for deeper institutionalization and more consistent operational practice to translate regional progress into nationwide implementation.

CONCLUSION 2

Vertical alignment between policy and practice has improved but needs further support.

The project strengthened vertical linkages between regional WPS frameworks and national and subnational implementation through knowledge platforms, training systems, and coordination mechanisms, enabling greater coherence between policy commitments and field-level practice. In several contexts, clearer policy-to-practice pathways supported faster decision-making and tangible results.

Nevertheless, systematic feedback loops from national and local implementation to regional policymaking remain underdeveloped, and localized delivery continues to depend on uneven institutional capacities across Member States. Strengthening structured mechanisms for bottom-up learning and continuous alignment between regional priorities and country realities remains important.

CONCLUSION 3

Policy achievements have been substantial, but there is a risk of over-norming at the expense of implementation.

The project achieved significant progress in advancing WPS policy development and institutional frameworks across ASEAN, contributing to a comprehensive regional plan of action, expanding national strategies, and a shared regional understanding of WPS. These achievements enhanced coherence, legitimacy, and ASEAN's standing as a reference point for regional WPS policymaking.

At the same time, the evaluation highlights the risk that continued emphasis on frameworks and policy production may outpace implementation, monitoring, and demonstrable change at national and community levels, underscoring the need to balance normative progress with operational delivery and field-level learning.

CONCLUSION 4

Capacity development was transformational at individual and policy levels but requires sustained support for implementation.

Capacity-building investments generated a paradigm shift in understanding women's leadership, gender-responsive governance, and the WPS agenda across ASEAN institutions and Member States, strengthening individual competencies and contributing to evolving institutional cultures.

However, sustaining and applying these gains requires continued support to translate knowledge into consistent institutional practice. Ongoing mentoring, peer learning, and institutional embedding of training within formal systems are needed to consolidate progress and ensure durable capacity development.

CONCLUSION 5

Sustainability gains are evident but require continued investment and a follow-on phase.

The project established a strong foundation for sustainability through institutional mechanisms, knowledge platforms, strengthened partnerships, and increased ASEAN ownership of the WPS agenda. Trust, coordination, and integration within ASEAN systems enhance prospects for long-term continuity.

However, sustainability remains dependent on predictable financing, continued technical and advocacy support, and sufficient human resources. Continued investment – including a follow-on phase – would be important to consolidate achievements, deepen institutionalization, and support ASEAN's capacity to sustain WPS implementation autonomously.

CONCLUSION 6

Close cooperation and co-location were critical to project success.

The co-location of the UN Women ASEAN team within the ASEAN Secretariat enabled close collaboration, rapid coordination, and real-time alignment with ASEAN priorities, contributing significantly to the project's effectiveness, responsiveness, and visibility. This proximity fostered trust and facilitated sustained engagement with ASEAN processes and decision-making.

Maintaining and strengthening this cooperation model will remain important for future programming, supporting policy coherence, timely coordination, and continued integration of gender considerations across ASEAN's work.