



# AT A BREAKING POINT: THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN AID CUTS ON WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES WORLDWIDE

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Cover Photo: Rabha, a Sudanese woman, stands at the Saada and Salaam gathering site in Port Sudan, on April 13, 2025. In partnership with UN Women, women-led organizations across Sudan deliver critical humanitarian assistance to women and girls affected by war and displacement.

Acknowledgements: This research was possible with thanks to frontline women's organizations who generously shared their time and perspectives to inform this report, whilst navigating the urgent demands of crisis response.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women-led and women's rights organizations in humanitarian crises worldwide are at a breaking point. In the face of deepening crises and dramatic reductions in foreign assistance, these organizations—recognized as essential to humanitarian action—are at risk of being further pushed to the margins.

Over the last year, several major donor governments announced significant cuts to their overseas development assistance. With only 7% of the \$44.79 billion required for global humanitarian needs secured, the entire humanitarian system is being forced to reform and scale back. Local and national women-led and women's rights organizations -and the crises-affected women and girls they serve- are among those hardest hit.

In March 2025, UN Women launched a rapid global survey, reaching 411 women-led and women's rights organizations across 44 humanitarian and crisis settings. The findings are stark. Ninety percent of surveyed organizations reported being financially impacted, with 47% expecting to shut down within six months if current conditions persist. Already, 72% have laid

off staff, and over half (51%) have suspended programming. Organizations report that programmes and services in GBV response (67%), protection (62%), livelihoods and multi-purpose cash assistance (58%), and health care (52%) have been the most affected.

As vital services decrease and safe spaces disappear, the lives, protection, and rights of crisis-affected women and girls are increasingly at risk. Women's organizations working with the most marginalized—migrants and refugees, women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and Indigenous communities—warn of rising violence, harmful coping strategies, and worsening poverty. The weakening of women-led and women's rights organizations is not only a funding crisis, it is a crisis of accountability, equality and rights.

Despite these setbacks, women-led and women's rights organizations continue to lead, adapt, and advocate for an equal, peaceful, and just future. They are revising their strategies, diversifying funding models, and calling on the international community not to turn its back on them.

*Afghanistan, 2024*



# I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## Escalating Global Humanitarian Needs and Rising Risks for Women and Girls

As of March 2025, an estimated 308 million people in 73 countries are in need of humanitarian assistance<sup>1</sup> due to the escalating and compounded effects of proliferating crises worldwide. The number of people, especially women and girls, affected by crisis is increasing as geopolitical conflicts, climate change, food insecurity, and disease outbreaks intensify. At least 117 million are currently forcibly displaced by conflict and violence, and 2024 marked the twelfth consecutive year of rising global displacement.<sup>2</sup> In 2023, approximately 612 million women and girls lived within 50 kilometers of a conflict zone, more than 50% higher than a decade ago.<sup>3</sup> The year 2024 was the hottest on record, with 152 unprecedented extreme climate-related disasters, including extreme heatwaves, floods, and droughts,<sup>4</sup> with women and girls among the most impacted by climate change.<sup>5</sup>

In conflict and crisis-affected countries, progress for women and girls has regressed or barely advanced.<sup>6</sup> During humanitarian crises, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the collapse of essential services; their basic needs are among the first to go unmet and they are typically expected to compensate for gaps in service provision, taking on increased care-related tasks, providing food and water and caring for the sick. Pre-existing gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms are often exacerbated, restricting women and girls' access to remaining services, rights, and

personal autonomy. Human rights violations and gender-based violence remain widespread in conflict contexts, while prevention, survivor services, and access to justice continue to fall short. At least one in three women<sup>7</sup> are reported to have experienced physical or sexual violence—a figure that can rise to two in three in conflict settings.<sup>8</sup> Women's health is also severely impacted: over one-third of maternal deaths occur in just 48 fragile and conflict-affected countries.<sup>9</sup> In crisis contexts, women are more likely to sacrifice their own nutrition and food security to prioritize their families.<sup>10</sup> The rate of child, early, and forced marriage in fragile states is twice the global average, further compounding cycles of vulnerability.<sup>11</sup> In crisis contexts, women tend to take on increased care-related tasks, such as providing food and water and caring for the sick, which further limits their ability to engage in other activities, compared to men.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these challenges, women and women's groups are on the frontlines of humanitarian responses around the world, providing life-saving assistance and advocating for their own needs as well as those of their communities. They are agents of change in advancing peace and security and inclusive development, working to ensure that community needs – and those of women and girls - are at the center of humanitarian, recovery and development strategies and responses.

Cox's Bazar, 2024





Gaza, 2025

## Funding Cuts to the Global Humanitarian System

Despite growing humanitarian needs, the humanitarian system is confronting a deepening crisis of resources.<sup>13</sup> In recent months, foreign assistance to humanitarian aid has undergone a dramatic and widespread contraction, with significant cuts announced in 2025 by several of the world's largest donor governments.<sup>14</sup> These funding cuts have global repercussions, with acute consequences and impacts on the lives of those affected by crisis.

“ With just \$3.05 billion—less than seven percent—of the total \$44.79 billion required secured, humanitarian actors are being forced to scale back life-saving operations, prioritize the most urgent needs, and streamline coordination structures.<sup>15</sup> ”

In February and in April 2025, OCHA conducted two iterations of a rapid global survey across 20-25 humanitarian operations on the impact of the US funding freeze. The first assessed the US suspension orders and waivers<sup>16</sup>, and the second assessed the announcement of the US grants' termination, and included additional inquiries, such as the impact of termination on gender and women-led organizations, coordination and information management.<sup>17</sup> OCHA's most recent findings estimate that at least 79 million people will no longer be targeted for assistance, with 76% of surveyed organizations reporting an impact on the delivery of life-saving assistance for women and girls.<sup>18</sup>

National NGOs, with higher rates for Women-Led and Refugee Led Organizations, are disproportionately impacted by the cuts — as compared to INGOs and UN entities.<sup>19</sup> Findings regarding the disproportionate impact of funding cuts on NGOs are corroborated in ICVA's rapid global survey of NGOs and NGO networks conducted in late January-early February.<sup>20</sup>

# Women's Organizations in Crisis Contexts: Critical Responders, Consistently Underfunded

Women-led organizations (WLOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs) are essential to humanitarian response. They play critical roles as essential service providers, advocates, and watchdogs, and often provide this support at great personal risk in the context of crises.<sup>21</sup> These organizations deliver life-saving services, trusted community-based protection, and vital advocacy for the rights and needs of women, girls, and marginalized populations in crises. In many contexts, they are the leading providers of critical services for women and girls, such as safe shelters, case management for survivors of gender-based violence, referrals, sexual and reproductive health care, psychosocial support, cash assistance, livelihoods programmes and critical. As per the IASC Gender Policy, "prioritizing the inclusion of WROs/WLOs as first-hand responders and equitable partners in humanitarian response is integral to the humanitarian system's commitments to accountability to affected populations (AAP) and is a minimum requirement to ensure community trust/buy in."<sup>22</sup>

Despite increased recognition of their central role and widespread commitments to localization and gender-responsive funding, women-led and women's rights organizations and movements have historically been severely underfunded.



According to the OECD,  
bilateral allocable ODA supporting

**feminist,  
women-led and  
women's rights organizations**  
and movements in conflict-affected countries has  
remained at

**less than 1 per cent of bilateral aid  
to conflict-affected contexts**  
in recent years.<sup>23</sup>

Women's rights organizations and feminist movements have been at the forefront of much of the progress on women's empowerment made in the past decades worldwide. Global research consistently demonstrates that women's empowerment and gender equality are among the strongest predictors of peace, with gender-equal societies more resilient to violent conflict and instability.<sup>24</sup> Supporting and resourcing them is a matter of equality and rights, it is also a strategic imperative.

## BOX 1: DEFINITIONS OF WOMEN-LED AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS, ACCORDING TO THE 2024 IASC GENDER POLICY<sup>25</sup>

A **Women-Led Organization (WLO)** is an organization with a humanitarian mandate and/or mission that is (1) governed or directed by women; or (2) whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50 percent or more occupying senior leadership positions.

A **Women's Rights Organization (WRO)** is 1) an organization that identifies as a women's rights organization with the primary focus of advancing gender equality, women's empowerment, and human rights; or 2) An organization that has, as part of its mission statement, the advancement of women's and girls' interests and rights (or where 'women,' 'girls,' 'gender,' or local language equivalents are prominent in their mission statement); or 3) An organization that has, as part of its mission statement or objectives, the goal of challenging and transforming gender inequalities, unequal power relations, and promoting positive social norms.

## II. SURVEY PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

In March 2025, UN Women conducted a **global survey on how the recent foreign aid reductions have impacted women-led and women's rights organizations operating in humanitarian crises**. The survey examined the scope of humanitarian aid cuts by asking organizations whether they receive funding from a government or governments that have recently suspended or significantly reduced humanitarian assistance. The exercise was designed to inform donor decision-making, strengthen advocacy, and ensure that the experiences and perspectives of women-led and women's rights organizations shape the evolving humanitarian reset and localization agenda, complementing other surveys that have been or are in the process of being conducted including by OCHA and humanitarian and civil society networks.

The questionnaire assessed both operational and institutional impacts in the immediate term as well as possible longer-term implications on the work of these organizations and on the situation of women and girls in the settings where they operate. It probed into aspects such as what services and programs for women and girls have been most affected, how long organizations expect to remain operational under current conditions, staff and financial implications and strategies organizations are using to sustain their work.

The survey captured data and testimonies from 411 women-led and women's rights organizations across 44 humanitarian and refugee response country contexts in all regions; 90% of the respondents represent local or national organizations.<sup>26</sup>



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**411 women-led and women's rights organizations**

across 44 humanitarian and refugee response country contexts in all regions.

**90% of the respondents represent local or national organizations.**

### TYPE OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED

● National NGO ● Local NGO ● INGO

49%

41%

10%

*What type of organization do you represent? [A local NGO operates in only one region of the country; a national NGO operates in two or more regions across the country; and an international NGO operating in two or more countries]*

### Geographical coverage:

Armenia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Mali, Moldova, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Pacific Island Countries and Territories, Pakistan, Palestine, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Togo, Turkiye, Uganda, Ukraine<sup>27</sup>, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

## HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS WHERE ORGANIZATIONS WORK

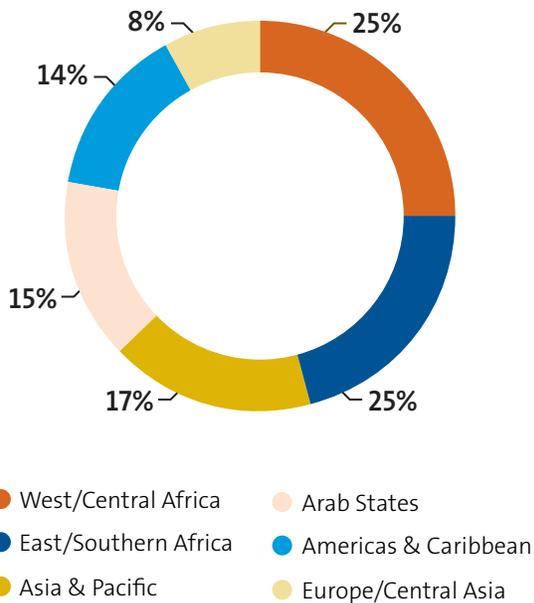


Between March 10 and 25, 2025, UN Women disseminated a rapid global survey via KOBO, comprising of 15 questions. The survey primarily captured quantitative data, with limited qualitative responses. To enhance accessibility and maximize response rates, the survey was disseminated in nine languages (English, Arabic, French, Spanish, Romanian, Burmese, Turkish, Portuguese, and Armenian). The survey data is not representative and should be interpreted as indicative of broader trends rather than statistically generalizable findings.

Key secondary sources were also reviewed, including reports from partner humanitarian agencies and global funding analyses, to complement and contextualize the findings.<sup>28</sup>

The survey was based on and inspired by a similar initiative led by the UN Women Country Office in Ukraine in February 2025.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the UN Women Country Office in Afghanistan carried out a survey in March 2025, assessing the impact of the U.S. funding cuts, which were streamlined into its regular operational monitoring. Key findings from both country-specific surveys are presented in this report on page 16.

### REGION OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED



Myanmar, 2025

*In which region of the world does your organization operate?*

# III. KEY FINDINGS

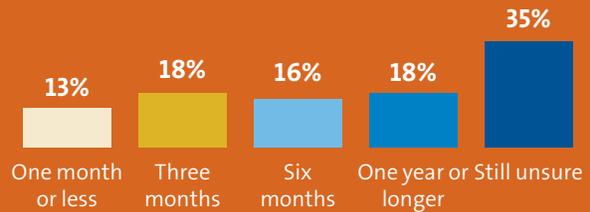
The findings section of this report is structured around seven top-line key messages, each supported by a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence drawn directly from the survey.

## # 1 - WOMEN-LED AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS ARE FACING OPERATIONAL CRISES AND ARE AT SEVERE RISK OF CLOSURE DUE TO FUNDING CUTS.

**Almost half (47%) of women-led and women's organizations surveyed expect to shut down within six months if current funding levels persist, while over one-third (35%) remain trapped in uncertainty, unable to plan or sustain their work. Only 18% report that they anticipate to stay operational for more than a year.**



### ANTICIPATED DURATION TO SUSTAIN OPERATIONS AT CURRENT FUNDING LEVELS



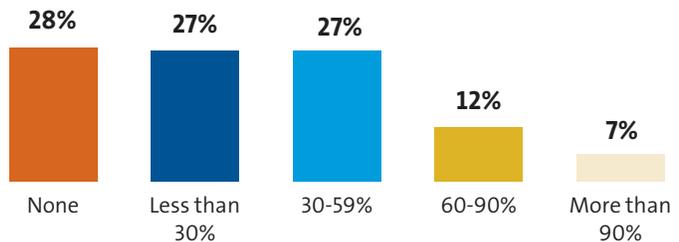
*How long does your organization anticipate being able to sustain operations at the current funding levels?*

“Smaller WLOs may be at risk of closing down and need immediate financial injections.”  
Local women’s organization in Palestine



**72% of women-led and women's rights organizations surveyed have been forced to lay off staff—many at significant levels—undermining their capacity to serve communities in crisis. 18% of organizations have laid off 60% of their staff or more.**

### RESULTING STAFFING REDUCTIONS



*What percent of staff members have been terminated or laid off to date due to these foreign assistance reductions?*

“Employment opportunities for women in the NGO sector have diminished, affecting livelihoods.”  
Local women’s organization in Pakistan

## # 2 - WOMEN-LED AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS ON THE FRONTLINES OF HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES WORLDWIDE ARE FEELING THE SHOCK OF FOREIGN AID REDUCTIONS.

 **90% of women-led and women's rights organizations surveyed report that they have been financially impacted (significantly - 62% or somewhat – 28%) by the recent global foreign assistance reductions.**

These organizations, already operating under resource constraints, are now facing mounting challenges as funding decreases, threatening their ability to deliver critical services and support to crisis-affected women and girls and their communities.

Even when not directly affected by funding cuts, women-led and women's rights organizations are feeling the pressure of having to manage increased caseloads and fill critical service gaps due to the recent disruptions in humanitarian service delivery, which places additional strain on already limited resources within the broader women's movement.

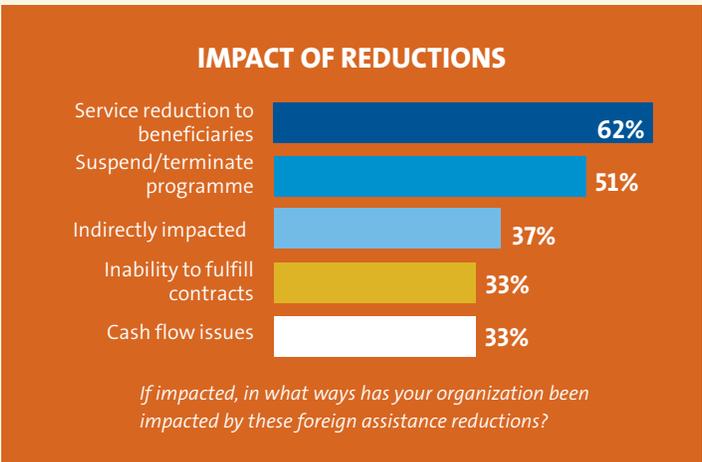


“ *We are not impacted directly. But, we have been indirectly impacted because there are local NGOs ...[that] cut their activities so more beneficiaries are coming to [our region] to get assistance.*” Local women's organization in Ethiopia

“ *It impacted my organization because we can no longer make referrals to the organizations directly impacted.*” Local NGO in Nigeria

## # 3 - LIFE-SAVING SERVICES FOR CRISIS-AFFECTED WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE BEING SEVERELY DISRUPTED.

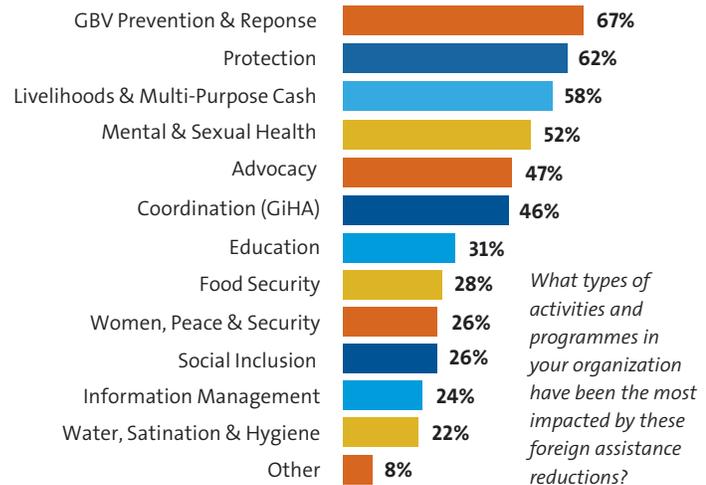
 **62% of women-led and women's rights organizations surveyed have had to reduce services to women and girls, 51% been forced to suspend programmes, and 33% are facing severe cash flow issues.**





**According to the women-led and women's rights organizations surveyed, the services most affected by funding cuts include gender-based violence prevention and response (67%), protection services (62%), livelihoods and cash assistance (58%), and health care (52%).**

### TYPE OF PROGRAMMERS & SECTORS MOST IMPACTED

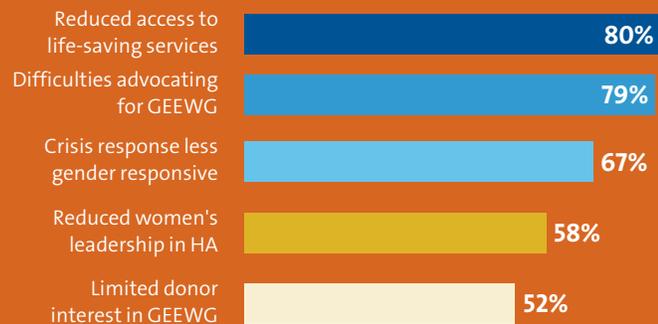


**“ We are a non-profit organization that survives solely on donor funding. We are now in a dire situation. Many of our beneficiaries—women who have survived violence, HIV-positive women, former prisoners, sex workers—urgently need adaptation support and social services, but due to funding cuts, we can only offer phone consultations.”**  
Local women’s organization in Ukraine



**80% of women-led and women's rights organizations surveyed anticipate that foreign assistance reductions will severely undermine access to life-saving services.**

### ANTICIPATED IMPACT OF CRISIS AFFECTED WOMEN AND GIRLS



*In your opinion, how has or may these foreign assistance reductions impact women and girls affected by crisis in your country/region?*



**Amid shrinking services, women-led organization and women’s rights organizations fear that gender-based violence will be left unaddressed or escalate in severity.<sup>30</sup>**

**“ The foreign assistance reductions have increased gender-based violence especially the physical abuse because a lot of men lost their job and were laid off.”**  
Local women’s organization in Nigeria

**“ Due to funding cuts, there seems to be a decrease in the number of in-person services provided to GBV survivors, including consultations, information sessions, referrals, and financial support... Additionally, cash-based support for GBV survivors has also decreased, making it more challenging for them to access safe spaces and strengthen their resilience.”**  
International women’s organization in Turkiye and Syria

## #4 - GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN FUNDING CUTS ARE PLACING WOMEN AND GIRLS AT GREATER RISK—ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE MOST MARGINALIZED.

When women and girls lose access to income, food, or safe spaces, they face an increased likelihood of gender-based violence, exploitation, and harmful coping strategies such as early marriage, transactional sex, or unsafe migration. Organizations emphasized that specific marginalized groups- migrants, refugees, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, older women, and LGBTIQ+ individuals- will be among those most severely affected by funding cuts. These groups, whose specific needs are often overlooked by humanitarian responses, will face even greater hardships as resources dwindle. The impact is particularly acute for organizations working with marginalized women and those in rural or areas with armed conflict, who already struggle to access essential services and support.



**62% of women-led and women's rights organizations are concerned that this will cause long-term economic hardship and financial precarity as women's economic empowerment programmes (livelihoods, microfinance, and vocational trainings) are discontinued (from graph on page 13).**

**“ Women with disabilities led organizations suffer most because they didn’t have much funding initially and with new ban, their situation has become so much worse.”** Local women’s organization in Cameroon

**“ In Ethiopia, foreign assistance reductions have severely impacted women-led and women’s rights organizations (WROs), particularly those supporting returnee migrants, GBV survivors, and internally displaced women... The lack of funding threatens efforts to restore women’s livelihoods... leaving many vulnerable to poverty and exploitation.”** Local women’s organization in Ethiopia

**“ As an indigenous women’s movement, we feel this represents a setback for women’s rights. We also feel that funding has been key to developing prevention initiatives...the financial impact is massive on our movement.”** Local women’s organization in Colombia

## #5 - FUNDING CUTS THREATEN TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF OPERATIONAL WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND UNDERMINE THEIR COLLECTIVE MOBILIZING AND ADVOCACY, WITH LONG-TERM RISKS FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN CRISIS CONTEXTS.

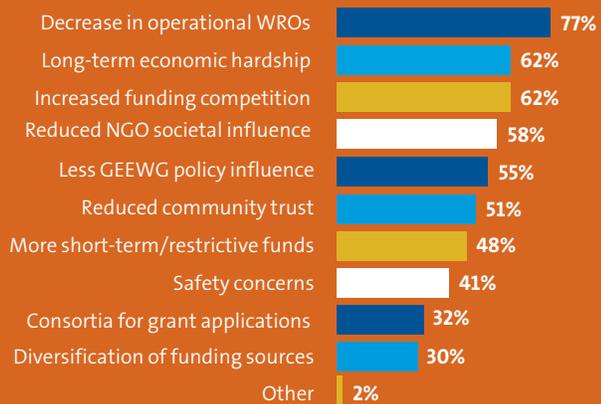
The potential weakening of women-led and women's rights organizations threatens to undo decades of progress in gender equality and women's rights. These organizations are crucial for driving change at the community level and advocating for women's rights. Without sustained support, their capacity to influence policy and protect women's rights will diminish, risking a reversal of critical gains in gender equality and humanitarian action.

**Women-led and women's rights organizations anticipate that these foreign assistance cuts will make advocating for gender equality increasingly difficult in the humanitarian space (79%) and reduce women's leadership in humanitarian response (58%).** (see graph on page 11)



**Women-led and women's rights organizations surveyed report that the impact of foreign assistance reductions on the women's movement will be severe, with 77% believing that the number of operational women's rights NGOs will decrease, 62% anticipating growing competition over shrinking funds.**

### ANTICIPATED IMPACT ON WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS



*In your opinion, how has or may these foreign assistance reductions impact the work of women's rights organizations in your location/country/region overall?*

**“ Without the presence of women-led and women's rights organizations, the progress made in gender equality risks regressing.”** National women's organization in Cameroon

**“ Without the presence of women's organizations, women will be increasingly neglected and their rights will be trampled on.”** Local women's organization in DRC

## #6 – DESPITE FUNDING UNCERTAINTY AND SETBACKS, WOMEN-LED AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS CONTINUE TO LEAD, RESIST, AND REBUILD.

Women-led and women’s rights organizations remain determined and active, even as funding becomes uncertain, and crises deepen. These organizations are pursuing various strategies to sustain their work. Many are seeking new donors or trying to secure additional resources from existing donors. Alongside this, they are focusing on advocacy, scenario planning, and building solidarity across movements. Some organizations are resorting to adaptive yet difficult coping mechanisms. There is a growing recognition that to ensure sustainability, they may need to reform their business models and reduce reliance on external funding. The call for long-term sustainability plans is becoming more urgent, as women-led and women’s rights organizations look for ways to continue their critical work.



To address the consequences of foreign assistance reductions, women-led and women’s rights organizations

surveyed are primarily pursuing donor-focused mitigation strategies—

**74% are approaching new donors** and

**72% are seeking additional support**

from existing ones—alongside advocacy (52%), developing risk mitigation plans (48%), and cross-movement solidarity (46%).

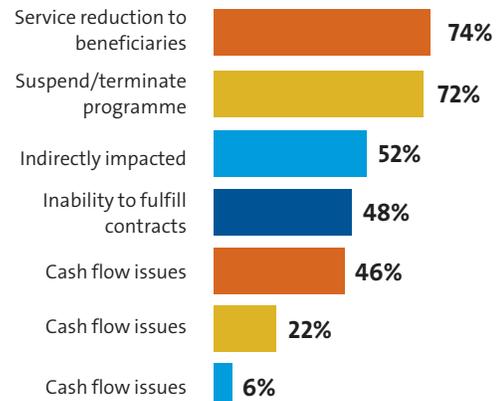
“Despite foreign assistance reductions, WLOs and WROs remain at the forefront of responding to crises, advocating for women’s rights, and supporting vulnerable groups.”  
Local women’s organization in Armenia

In the face of dwindling funding, many women’s organization are deploying resourceful coping strategies—such as self-funding through freelance work, selling assets, cutting operational costs—to stay afloat. And while competition over resources is a concern, 32% of surveyed organizations said they anticipated that these shifts will encourage consortia for grant applications (see graph on page 13).



Several women-led and women’s rights organizations surveyed expressed the need to revise their organizational models to include revenue-generating strategies that enhance sustainability and reduce dependence on foreign assistance.

### IMPACT OF REDUCTIONS



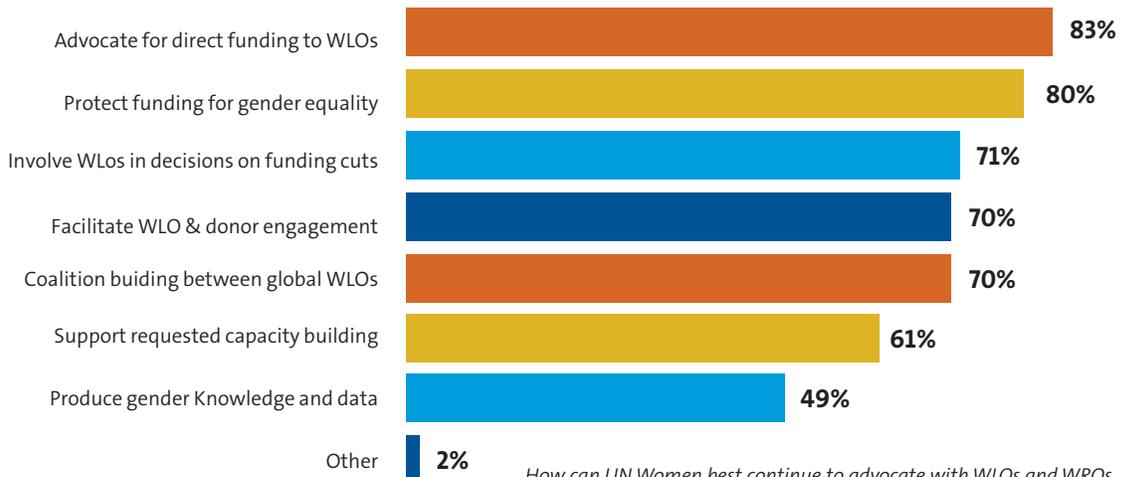
What mitigation strategies is your organization putting in place to deal with the negative impacts of these foreign assistance reductions?

“Women-led NGOs shall not depend on government-supported programmes which are politically driven... A sustainability strategic plan is urgently required.” Local women’s organization in Yemen

“We are selling our assets.” National NGO in Venezuela

## #7 – WOMEN-LED AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR SOLIDARITY AND ACTION FROM THE UN – INCLUDING UN WOMEN - MEMBER STATES AND THE HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY AMID DEEPENING FUNDING CUTS

### REQUESTED SUPPORT FROM UN WOMEN DURING THIS CRISIS



*How can UN Women best continue to advocate with WLOs and WROs to effectively influence the global humanitarian space in light of these foreign assistance reductions?*



**Women-led and women's rights organizations seek support from the UN – including UN Women - Member States and the humanitarian community to sustain funding for their critical work and to uphold gender equality in humanitarian action.**

They seek meaningful participation in decision-making on humanitarian budget cuts, advocacy and direct engagement with donors to protect gender equality funding, and support for coalition-building and targeted capacity strengthening.

**Women-led and women’s rights organizations surveyed identified the following priorities: championing direct funding to WLOs/WROs (83%), accelerating donor advocacy to protect gender equality financing (80%), and supporting meaningful participation in decision-making bodies around humanitarian funding cuts (71%). Respondents also emphasized the importance of facilitating donor engagement (70%), coalition-building (70%), and targeted capacity support (61%).**

**“UN Women is urged to help in mobilization of resources for WLOs & WROs to survive this resource crisis.”** Local women’s organization in Pakistan

**The need for direct, flexible, and long-term funding to support local women-led and women’s rights organizations is urgent.**

**“We urge international donors and humanitarian actors to prioritize funding for women-led organizations. Sustainable, flexible, and long-term funding mechanisms are critical to ensuring that grassroots organizations can continue to address gender-specific needs effectively.”** Local women’s organization in Somalia

## BOX 2: CONTEXT SPECIFIC SURVEYS FOR WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN UKRAINE AND AFGHANISTAN

Women-led and women's rights organizations in Ukraine and Afghanistan were not targeted in the UN Women's global humanitarian survey at scale, as separate surveys addressing the unique needs of these contexts were already underway, focusing on the immediate impact of the U.S. stop work order. Highlights from those humanitarian contexts are elaborated below.

### Afghanistan

The UN Women Country Office in Afghanistan, in partnership with the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group and the Humanitarian Access Working Group (HAWG) assessed the impact of the U.S. funding freeze between February 27 and March 13, 2025, adding survey questions to its regular operational monitoring. The below findings reflect responses from 207 respondent organizations, including national NGOs (NNGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), with (66%) 136 of them being women-led international NGOs (INGOs), and UN agencies, delivering assistance under both the humanitarian and basic human needs sectors.

#### KEY FINDINGS<sup>31</sup>

- The U.S. funding freeze has significantly disrupted humanitarian operations, affecting project implementation, staffing, and the ability to support women and girls, with disproportionate impact on women's participation in the humanitarian response.
- 61% of partners expect fewer projects for affected populations, and 50% say initiatives for women and girls are directly impacted.
- 39% report that all U.S.-funded projects are on hold, including those supporting women and girls.
- The freeze has undermined women's participation in humanitarian action: 30% of partners reduced salaries, 27% could no longer cover Mahram-related costs, and 27% lost the ability to maintain separate workspaces or hours for women staff.

### Ukraine

The UN Women Country Office in Ukraine, in partnership with the Apparatus of the Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy and the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group, launched a rapid survey to assess the impact of the U.S. foreign assistance suspension on women-led and women's rights organizations. The survey, circulated through government and GiHA networks, collected responses from 99 women-led and women's rights organizations between February 14 and 25, 2025. The findings offer initial insights into how the funding pause is affecting the operations, sustainability, and gender equality work of organizations active across humanitarian, early recovery, and development sectors.

#### KEY FINDINGS<sup>32</sup>

- Almost 50% of the surveyed women-led and women's rights organizations had either received or were expecting U.S. financial support in January 2025.
- 72% reported severe disruptions, threatening the continuation of emergency response, humanitarian, and development initiatives across the country.
- 35% of surveyed women-led and women's rights organizations say that they are likely to have to stop working after 6 months, if no new funding is found to replace lost resources.
- The most affected programmes are those addressing gender-based violence (GBV), with over 60% of organizations forced to reduce or suspend services, leaving survivors without safe spaces or legal and psychological support.



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Malawi, 2024

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report finds that the recent reductions in Overseas Development Assistance are threatening progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment, pushing many women-led and women’s rights organizations in the world’s most fragile and crisis-affected settings to a breaking point. Life-saving service provision for women and girls and broader advocacy work for women’s rights and empowerment are at stake. Women-led and women’s rights organizations have lost staff, scaled back services, and closed programmes, even as demand for their work continues to grow. This is endangering the lives, protection, dignity and rights of crisis-affected women and girls who receive critical services, information and support tailored to their needs by women-led and women’s rights organizations.

As safe spaces and livelihood programmes disappear and protection services are scaled back, women and girls in crises risk being driven deeper into poverty, instability, and violence. The weakening of the institutional capacities of women-led and women’s rights organizations is also negatively impacting the extent to which they can engage in humanitarian coordination structures which is key for ensuring the voices, needs, and priorities of crisis-affected women and girls are

factored into decision-making. The likely contraction in size and scope of women’s movements bears significant risks for sustaining and further advancing longer-term progress on women’s rights and gender equality in some of the world’s most challenging contexts at political and policy levels.

At the same time, women-led and women’s rights organizations are showing strong resilience and creativity in navigating the current funding crisis by adapting service delivery with limited resources and continuing the fight for gender equality in increasingly hostile and underfunded environments. They call on the international community not to turn its back on their efforts, but to support them with the resources needed to continue serving those most at risk.

The following section outlines key recommendations to the humanitarian community and decision-makers, funding organizations and donors at global, regional and country levels. The recommendations draw on previous evaluations<sup>33</sup>, ongoing policy commitments and initiatives in support of gender equality and gender responsive localization including in the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Grand Bargain.

## 1. Prioritize and track direct, flexible, and multi-year funding to local women-led and women's rights organizations in crisis countries.

- *Strengthen tracking and accountability for humanitarian funding to local women-led and women's rights organizations.* This is not only to uphold commitments to localization and gender equality — but also to ensure that available resources are used to their greatest effect in an increasingly resource-constrained humanitarian landscape. Specifically:
  - *Set and deliver on an ambitious target for a specific share of Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs)<sup>34</sup> allocated to local women-led and women's rights organizations - surpassing the 2024 estimated global average of 11%.<sup>35</sup>*
  - *Integrate disaggregated classification within the Financial Service Tracker (FTS) to enable systemic identification and public reporting of funding to local women-led and women's rights organizations.<sup>36</sup>*
- *Preserve existing partnerships with local women-led and women's rights organizations under current agreements, and when not possible, communicate clearly, early, and transparently about anticipated funding shifts and programmatic changes to allow transitions that prioritize continuity of services, minimize harm, and support organizations to plan and adapt with dignity and agency.*
- *Shift from project-based to institutional support to women-led and women's rights organizations, including long-term core funding for organizational development and financial sustainability.*
- *Support holistic and tailored capacity strengthening for women-led and women's rights organizations, grounded in their self-identified priorities.* This includes functional areas like fundraising, financial management, compliance, alongside peer learning and institutional development. Oversight mechanisms should be designed to support — not restrict — access, pairing accountability with practical support and flexible processes that reflect the Grand Bargain commitments to equitable partnerships and the UN's role in addressing structural barriers.<sup>37</sup>
- *Fund and support collective structures for women-led and women's rights organizations, such as feminist networks and consortiums at national, regional, and global levels, as a strategy to enhance collaboration and counteract competition and scarcity among local actors.*

## 2. Center local women's leadership and meaningful participation as a core pillar in the humanitarian reset.

- *Embed and enforce participation requirements for local women leaders, women-led and women's rights organizations - and where applicable - national gender equality institutions and women's machineries from crisis contexts across all levels of humanitarian coordination and decision-making bodies.*
- *Actualize women's representation through resourced dedicated seats and advisory roles, in line with the IASC Gender Policy and Gender Accountability Framework<sup>38</sup> and existing good practices from specific contexts.*
  - *At the Global Level:* Secure representation in key decision-making bodies and forums with specific attention to those related to the Humanitarian Reset and Grand Bargain localization workstreams.
- *At Country-Levels:* Ensure the participation in bodies such as Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT), funding allocation committees, inter-cluster coordination groups, and technical working groups involved in decision-making around country-level prioritization under Humanitarian Needs Response Plans (HNRPs), the streamlining of coordination structures, and transitioning to nexus and longer-term development plans.

Women-led and women's rights organizations and movements are on the frontlines of effective humanitarian action, peace building and rights-based, inclusive and sustainable recovery and development in countries around the world. We must work collectively to ensure that their critical work and

organizational capacities are sustained and strengthened in the context of foreign aid reductions, escalating conflicts and crises and the overall pushback against gender equality and the rights of women and girls in all their diversity.



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