Strategic Merger Assessment of UNFPA and UN Women: Final Consolidated Report

WORK PACKAGE 4 | Prepared by the UNFPA / UN Women Merger Assessment Task Team
APRIL 2026

INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE AND APPROACH

Introduction

The Secretary-General's UN80 Initiative, Shifting Paradigms: United to Deliver, calls for purposeful reform of the United Nations system anchored in clear ends and measurable improvements in people's lives. Within this context, the Secretary-General commissioned an assessment of "the benefits of a merger between the United Nations Population Fund and UN-Women and their respective mandates to create a unified voice and platform on gender equality and women's rights".

This assessment responds to a structural challenge, not an institutional performance gap. Both entities continue to deliver important results within their respective mandates. However, the external environment in which they operate has shifted materially and UN-system wide capacity to deliver for women and girls continues to require strengthening and innovative approaches, including through ongoing efforts of the UN Gender Equality Acceleration Plan.

Sustained political backlash against gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), declining and increasingly earmarked development financing, and rising expectations for demonstrable, end-to-end impact under UN system reform are placing growing strain on a fragmented institutional architecture.

The central question of the assessment is therefore not whether either one entity is effective in isolation, but whether the current configuration remains the strongest possible vehicle for translating globally agreed commitments on gender equality and SRHR into consistent, visible, and politically resilient results for women and girls across development, humanitarian, and peace and security contexts.

The assessment examines whether, under current geopolitical, funding, and institutional conditions, a merger between UNFPA and UN Women, together with other UN80 reforms, could help strengthen the UN system's ability to deliver such results, while ensuring a strengthened gender equality architecture at a time of unprecedented political push back, while safeguarding mandates, preserving all essential operations, and maintaining political and donor confidence, including the trust of civil society and other stakeholders.

The assessment is intended to inform decision-making. It provides an analytical and evidence-based foundation to assess the benefits, risks and trade-offs and judge whether a merger could be strategically coherent, politically credible, and operationally sound.

The assessment proceeds on the explicit assumption that the mandates of UNFPA and UN Women, including those based on the ICPD Programme of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW, will remain unchanged.

Thus, throughout the assessment, the integrity and protection of UN agency mandates related to gender equality, population, and SRHR are treated as non-negotiable analytical conditions.

From a legal perspective, any merger would require a decision of the General Assembly, as both entities are subsidiary organs established under Article 22 of the UN Charter.

The Problem the Assessment Seeks to Address

While the mandates established by the Beijing Platform for Action, the ICPD Programme of Action, and CEDAW remain relevant and widely endorsed, the United Nations' institutional architecture for advancing gender equality, women's empowerment, and sexual and reproductive health and rights was designed in a different geopolitical and financing context.

Today, responsibility for global norms, system-wide accountability, policy reform, civil society engagement, humanitarian response, and large-scale service delivery remains institutionally distributed across separate entities, funding streams, and governance arrangements. While this division of labor has enabled specialization and depth, it has also resulted in a structural reliance on coordination rather than shared institutional accountability to translate globally agreed commitments into consistent, visible, and scalable results for women and girls.

The mandate to drive system-wide accountability for gender equality is inherently comprehensive. Yet accountability cannot be exercised effectively without sufficient comprehensive operational presence, country-level leverage, political engagement, and sustained delivery capacity. Where responsibilities and capabilities are distributed across multiple institutions, end-to-end impact depends disproportionately on alignment across institutional boundaries rather than unified responsibility for outcomes.

These structural constraints are compounded by persistent funding gaps. Preliminary 2025 aid figures from the OECD show that official development assistance fell by 23.1 percent compared with 2024 - the largest annual drop on record. It was the second consecutive year of decline, and core contributions to the UN system fell by 27 percent, also a record drop. The OECD projects further cuts in 2026.[1] Additionally, high levels of earmarking, donor concentration, and limited growth in core resources reduce flexibility to invest across the full results pathway - from normative work and coordination to sustained country-level implementation. In practice, this creates difficult trade-offs between maintaining life-saving delivery, investing in systems reform, and sustaining global normative leadership and policy coherence.

Oversight observations across the UN development system, including from the Joint Inspection Unit and other review bodies, have highlighted governance complexity, fragmented accountability arrangements, and areas requiring strengthened risk management and results reporting. While these findings are not unique to either entity, they reinforce broader questions about whether current institutional configurations are optimally designed to deliver coherent, end-to-end impact in an increasingly demanding environment. In the case of gender equality, women's empowerment and sexual and reproductive health and rights, closely interconnected mandates are currently overseen through separate governance and reporting arrangements. While these arrangements safeguard mandate integrity, they also require

[1] https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2026/04/a-historic-decline-in-foreign-aid-preliminary-2025-oda-data.html

Member States to exercise oversight across parallel institutional frameworks rather than through a single line of sight across the full results continuum from global commitments to operational delivery.

Institutional scale and positioning further influence voice and leverage. In some contexts, relatively small programme footprints and highly technical positioning have limited sustained political influence at country level, particularly in contested environments. Power dynamics and gender biases within institutions - and within national political systems - can further affect the perceived authority and weight of gender equality actors, especially where mandates are politically sensitive. These dynamics underscore the importance of institutional clarity, scale, and consolidated political presence in advancing agreed commitments on gender equality and SRHR.

These structural questions, including the possibility of a merger between UN Women and UNFPA, have surfaced repeatedly over the last decades and are becoming more consequential under current global conditions. It is for this reason, coupled with mounting pushback against gender equality and SRHR, that the UN80 process has again placed the question of a merger on the table as one possible way to better position the UN to protect progress and drive further gains on gender equality.

In his [2025 Clarion Call for Gender Equality](), the Secretary-General underscored that progress on gender equality is under growing pressure and called for accelerated, system-wide efforts to translate global commitments into tangible results for women and girls, including through stronger institutional coherence, sustained political engagement, and demonstrable impact across the UN system. Since then, the operating environment has become even more demanding: political contestation around gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights has intensified, humanitarian needs affecting women and girls are rising, and development financing is increasingly constrained and concentrated. In such a context, the effectiveness of existing institutional arrangements in delivering coherent, end-to-end results requires continued examination.

In this context, fragmentation carries growing cost and the status quo is equally not cost neutral. Moreover, technical fixes such as increased coordination alone are insufficient to project the political weight, institutional clarity, and delivery credibility required to safeguard progress and accelerate results. Maintaining existing arrangements without adaptation is therefore not risk-neutral: over time, structural fragmentation may erode institutional influence, constrain country-level impact, and widen the gap between mandate breadth and delivery capacity, even where mandates remain unchanged.

Embedding this assessment and any future merger decision within the UN80 reform framework situates the analysis within the broader effort to strengthen delivery of UN mandates and improve coherence across the system. In this context, any future configuration would need to demonstrate a clear value-add in translating global commitments into stronger, more coherent results for women and girls at country level, while preserving mandate integrity, donor confidence and political legitimacy.

The assessment therefore examines whether a different institutional configuration could reduce existing structural constraints and strengthen accountability across the full results continuum from global norms to country-level delivery, while preserving operational continuity and political legitimacy, and whether the risks associated with structural change outweigh the risks of maintaining the status quo under sustained external pressure.

A Shared Vision

The assessment examines the potential benefits of one merged UN entity strengthened to realize the transformative vision of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and ICPD Programme of Action - a world where gender equality is a lived reality, where every woman and girl counts and thrives; where she is in full command of her rights and lives with equality, dignity, bodily autonomy, economic power, choices, equal voice and unlimited potential - while leaving no one behind.

The assessment examines whether such a consolidated entity could better advance gender equality, rights and choices, population issues, and the empowerment of women and girls by serving women, girls, and youth, representing more than half of the world's population. It considers whether such an entity could strengthen support to countries and communities in meeting their national and Sustainable Development Goals and across development, humanitarian, and peace contexts.

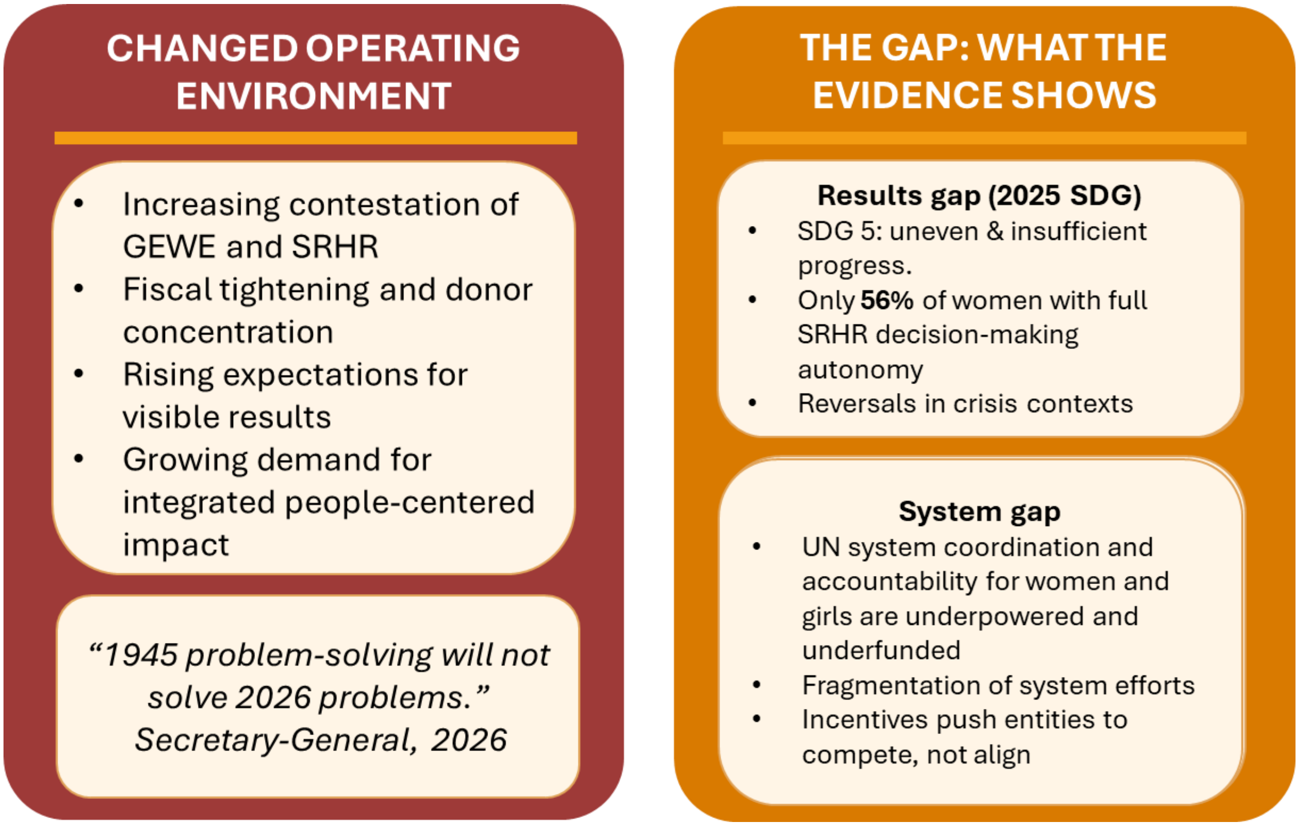
The assessment seeks to determine whether a unified entity could be built on the strongest elements of existing institutions, and how it could better deliver for women, girls, and youth by combining strong normative leadership, accountability, and coordination with stronger delivery capacity and broader operational reach, while modernizing governance, operational, and funding models. This would enable the UN to scale impact more consistently, protect mandates more effectively, and respond with greater agility and credibility in an increasingly contested and resource-constrained environment.

Working with governments and national and community partners, including civil society, women's rights and youth organizations, and humanitarian actors, the assessment asks whether such an entity would be positioned to drive impact at scale, to advance accountability, mobilize resources, and support the realization of global and national commitments on women's rights, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights and empowerment of women and girls.

Across countries with very young populations and those that are rapidly ageing, the entity would draw on population insights and demographic analysis to support forward-looking public policy, while respecting women's freedom to decide if, when, and how many children they have, and fostering conditions in which individuals and societies can thrive. Population data and demographic analysis and programmes are treated as system-enabling functions that support policy prioritization, investment decisions, and accountability across the full results chain. Consistent with the ICPD Programme of Action, this approach places human-rights-based frameworks, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, at the core of population and sustainable development.

This shared vision has been used in the assessment as a hypothesis to examine whether greater institutional integration could plausibly improve coherence, accountability, and impact, rather than as a normative or predetermined recommendation.

Figure 1: Key Pressures Shaping the Operating Environment for Gender Equality and SRHR



Purpose of the Assessment

The purpose of this assessment is to provide the Secretary-General with an evidence-based analysis of the feasibility, potential benefits, and risks associated with a possible merger between UNFPA and UN Women. See Terms of Reference in Annex 1.

The assessment is intended to inform strategic decision-making by providing:

- The current As-Is baseline, including existing mandates, institutional structure, operational models, funding structures, and system roles.
- The political, strategic, operational, and financial feasibility of a possible merger under different institutional configurations.
- The principal risks and potential benefits, including those arising from inaction.
- A cost-based analysis of the potential fiscal gains and transition costs.
- A set of credible merger pathways or approaches, and the conditions under which each is most likely to succeed taking into account political, legal, operational, and financial considerations.

Consistent with this purpose, any analysis of transition costs and potential efficiencies is treated as an input to sequencing and risk management considerations, rather than as a primary driver of merger timing or intergovernmental decision-making.

Scope

The assessment examines the political, strategic, operational, and financial implications of a possible merger between UNFPA and UN Women, across headquarters, regional, and country levels, and across development, humanitarian, and peace and security contexts.

It covers mandates and governance, organizational and operational models, financial and staffing profiles, programme portfolios, partnerships, organizational culture, and high-level risk considerations.

Approach and Methodology

The assessment was conducted under the oversight of a Steering Committee chaired by the UN Deputy Secretary General (DSG) with the Executive Directors (EDs) of both entities and implemented by a Task Team comprising representatives from both entities, supported by relevant Secretariat departments and offices, including the Office of Legal Affairs, and external advisors with UN system experience, ensuring both institutional ownership and analytical independence.

The assessment relied primarily on publicly available information and applied a phased, mixed-methods approach, combining desk review, data analysis, structured interviews, external briefings, and hypothesis testing. Key inputs included:

- Analysis of financial, staffing, and operational data.
- Review of strategic plans, programmatic documents and associated evaluations.
- Interviews with UNFPA and UN Women leadership and staff, and information gathering from a small number of stakeholders - civil society and Member States briefings.
- A two-day Task Team workshop in January 2026 to test assumptions, surface risks, review evidence against key hypotheses, and explore merger approaches and sequencing.

Data gaps may limit the depth of some analyses, notwithstanding efforts by the Task Team to establish a data driven validation process.

Consideration of Member State Inputs During the Assessment Process

Following interactions with Member States, several requests and expectations were expressed regarding the scope, depth and outputs of the Strategic Merger Assessment. These inputs reflect strong engagement and underscore the importance attached to the assessment as a basis for any future decision.

The assessment has been conducted strictly within the scope of the Secretary-General's report, *Shifting Paradigms*, and the assumptions approved by the Steering Committee and set out in the Terms of Reference and Inception Report. Member State feedback has been carefully considered and has been addressed to the extent that it remains consistent with that scope.

Some requests fall squarely within scope and are reflected directly in this report. These include confirmation that the assessment does not predetermine a merger outcome; broad analysis across strategic, operational, financial, legal and governance dimensions; high level quantitative cost benefit analysis and indicative transition cost estimates; and structured analysis of mandate protection and the risk of reopening intergovernmental commitments.

Other requests extend partially beyond the current scope provided by the Secretary-General. These include a detailed exploration of alternatives to a full merger, country by country operational implications, guarantees regarding donor funding outcomes, detailed organizational design and staffing models, contract harmonization, and comprehensive implementation roadmaps. Such issues are referenced in this report at the level of risk identification, sequencing considerations and potential next steps.
Where issues fall beyond the approved scope, the report addresses them through three

approaches. First, explicit flagging of the issue where relevant. Second, clarification of sequencing considerations should a political decision to proceed be taken. Third, reference to potential follow up work, such as merger readiness or implementation planning phases, subject to appropriate intergovernmental guidance.

Structure of the Assessment Report

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 draws implications from the As-Is Analysis[2].
- Section 3 assesses feasibility.
- Section 4 examines risks and potential benefits.
- Section 5 outlines possible merger pathways and approaches, and associated considerations.
- Section 6 presents implementation considerations.
- Annexes: (1) Assessment TOR and (2) Risk log.

AS-IS ANALYSIS

Mandates and Core Roles

UNFPA and UN Women are distinct UN entities established by separate General Assembly resolutions.

UNFPA: Established by the United Nations General Assembly as a subsidiary organ under Art. 22 of the Charter in 1972 (Resolution 3019 (XXVII)) as the lead UN entity on population issues, UNFPA's mandate is to build knowledge and capacity to respond to population and development needs, promote awareness of population issues, and provide assistance tailored to country priorities.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) placed sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SRH & RR), including voluntary family planning, maternal health, gender equality and women's empowerment, at the heart of population and development. This reframing emphasized that population issues are not problems to be managed, but rather rooted in individual rights, choices and empowerment. Today, UNFPA is therefore the UN's lead entity on sexual and reproductive health and rights, working to ensure that every pregnancy is intended, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled, while supporting countries with population data, demographic analysis, population data systems, and population-informed policies for sustainable development. This mandate covers all segments of the population and combines normative authority with technical expertise, policy support and operational activities, particularly in contexts requiring large-scale service delivery and humanitarian response.

UNFPA’s core functions include providing technical expertise and policy guidance to governments, delivering essential reproductive health commodities, and supporting demographic data systems for evidence-based planning. UNFPA plays a critical role in humanitarian contexts as the global lead for SRH coordination and provider of last resort on gender-based violence (GBV) response within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). This role entails elevated operational, fiduciary, and risk-management responsibilities, including for life-saving interventions and supply chains. It also hosts the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (CRVS) Systems, advancing rights-based demographic policies. UNFPA is also a system lead on youth, peace and security. Through its

[2] https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/sites/default/files/2026-03/260306_As-Is Analysis as a baseline for the UNFPA UN Women Strategic Merger Assessment _WP4 5.pdf

decentralized structure, UNFPA combines normative work with policy support and large-scale programme delivery across humanitarian and development settings, focusing on reproductive health and family planning, maternal and newborn health, preventing and responding to GBV, and demographic foresight and analysis.

UN Women: UN Women was established by the United Nations General Assembly as a subsidiary organ in 2010 (Resolution 64/289), bringing together the mandates, functions and operational responsibilities of four UN entities through sequenced transitional arrangements while preserving continuity of existing mandates and activities.

UN Women's mandate encompasses three interlinked roles: supporting intergovernmental bodies in setting global norms and standards on gender equality and women's rights (normative); assisting Member States in implementing these standards through operational activities and partnerships with civil society (operational); and promoting coherence and accountability for gender equality across the UN system (coordination). Guided by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UN Women is the UN system's lead entity on gender equality and women's empowerment, operating under a triple mandate: normative support, UN system coordination on gender equality, and operational work. The triple mandate is leveraged by harnessing UN Women's expertise, institutional positioning, partnerships and globally regarded communications, advocacy and branding to drive systemic change. This aims to ensure that local realities inform global intergovernmental standards and UN actions, that global norms inform national frameworks, and that concrete results are delivered for women and girls.

UN Women's core functions include setting global norms and standards, supporting intergovernmental processes such as the Commission on the Status of Women, delivering comprehensive, integrated policy advice and operational work that drives forward women's rights and agency across development, peace and humanitarian settings, and driving system-wide accountability through mechanisms such as the UN-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard and hosting the UN System Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (GEAP). It serves as the UN's lead agency and advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment, with strong brand recognition and effective communications. It works to support Member States to translate policy commitments into action and impact for women and girls. It plays a crucial role in crisis contexts, leading the UN's work on issues of women, peace and security, and driving forward accountability for gender equality in humanitarian contexts, as the newest member of the IASC. Operationally, it delivers programmes on women's leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, peace and security, and humanitarian action, leveraging partnerships with governments, civil society, the UN system and the private sector. UN Women coordinates and drives accountability for gender equality integration in UN Country Teams and humanitarian responses and serves as the UN's largest funder of national women's rights organizations. UN Women administers the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and leads initiatives such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund and the Elsie Initiative Fund, on behalf of the UN System. It leads on the inter-agency coordination of gender statistics, produces data to close key gender data gaps, strengthens the enabling environment for gender statistics at country level, and ensures sound translation of data into policy decisions and results. Through its integrated global mandate, UN Women brings together normative leadership, system-wide coordination, policy advocacy and operational implementation to close the gap between global commitments and tangible impact on gender equality.

As-Is implication: Together, these mandates span the continuum from global norms and accountability to national systems, laws and policy development as well as working with local partners to deliver social norm change, capacity building and service delivery.

In practice, however, this continuum is distributed across institutional boundaries, making the realization of end-to-end impact for women and girls and young people dependent on sustained coordination rather than shared accountability.

Strategic Positioning and Programmatic Focus

Both entities operate under Strategic Plans for 2026–2029 aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (significantly SDG 3 and SDG 5), but with distinct strategic emphases, programme areas, and modes of engagement, reflecting mandate-driven priorities, and government and funding priorities.

UNFPA’s Strategic Plan is structured around four outcomes focused on ending unmet need for family planning, preventable maternal deaths, gender-based violence and harmful practices, and strengthening population-informed policies. Its programming covers all segments of the population and is characterized by scale and operational depth in the areas under its mandate, including sustained engagement with health systems, humanitarian actors, and national planning institutions. UNFPA’s strategic positioning is underpinned by large-scale operational delivery, including global procurement and supply chains for reproductive health commodities, sustained humanitarian engagement, and specialized fiduciary and risk-management frameworks, alongside its work on norms and rights.

UN Women’s Strategic Plan is structured around four thematic impact areas including ending violence against women, women’s leadership, women’s economic empowerment, and humanitarian action and its scaled work on women, peace and security. These priorities are advanced through a combination of normative support, policy and legislative reform, institutional strengthening, gender budgeting, gender data & statistics, coordination and accountability functions, and programmatic engagement at the country, regional and global levels. UN Women prioritizes systemic change through three outcomes, namely norms, institutions, and women’s agency. UN Women’s role within the UN system in supporting coordination and accountability for gender equality commitments is central to advancing a coherent, life-course approach to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Financial and expenditure profiles reinforce these distinctions between UN Women and UNFPA.

UNFPA's annual expenditure is three times larger than UN Women's, with both heavily weighting spending toward country-level delivery of mandate-specific services and humanitarian assistance.

UN Women's expenditure profile, in development, crisis and humanitarian contexts, is smaller in absolute terms but distributed across a wider range of mandate-specific programmatic, normative, and coordination functions that are intended to unlock broader systemic change in countries.
Both entities contribute to gender-based violence prevention and response, gender-

responsive humanitarian action, gender data & statistics, and gender equality outcomes, and they do so through largely complementary modalities and institutional roles.

As-Is implication: The assessment finds that functional overlap exists, but is limited, and that results are typically achieved through parallel and complementary engagement rather than substitution, with high complementarity across mandates. The current strategic positioning reflects a division of labor between large-scale operational delivery and system-level normative, policy, operational programming, civil society partnerships and accountability functions. While this specialization has enabled depth and expertise, it also means that progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment depends on the sustained alignment of actors operating at different scales, with different funding models, incentives, and political exposure. Whilst this is true across the UN System, there are differentiated implications for the gender-focused mandates of UN Women and UNFPA. In an environment of increasing backlash, constrained financing, and demand for demonstrable impact, this separation can make it harder to project a single, coherent UN value proposition for women and girls that combines political influence, normative authority, and operational reach.

Organizational and Operational Models

Both entities operate through decentralized organizational structures comprising headquarters, regional, multi-country, and country offices. Their operational models, however, reflect different institutional roles and priorities linked to mandate requirements and risk profiles.

UNFPA maintains a highly decentralized delivery model, with approximately 84 per cent of staff based in the field and a strong emphasis on Executive Board-approved country programmes aligned with national priorities. Its operational architecture supports large-scale service delivery, supply chain management for reproductive health commodities, humanitarian surge capacity, and sustained technical assistance. UNFPA plays a central role in humanitarian contexts as the global lead for sexual and reproductive health coordination and gender-based violence prevention and response, and hosts specialized functions related to population data and demographic analysis. This delivery-oriented posture supports access and operational space in sensitive political and humanitarian contexts, including for life-saving SRH and GBV services.

UN Women's decentralized model supports normative standard-setting and implementation, UN system-wide coordination and accountability for gender equality, policy engagement, and programmatic work at country, regional and global level, including direct grant-making to women's rights and civil society organizations – particularly those working in crisis and conflict and on ending violence against women. A higher proportion of staff are based at headquarters relative to UNFPA, reflecting differences in mandates. At country level, UN Women focuses on policy reform, institutional strengthening, accountability mechanisms, and programmes that advance women's leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, women, peace and security, and humanitarian action, and gender data/ statistics, including through support to - and partnership with - a large footprint of women's rights organizations at local and national levels. UN Women leads the accountability monitoring and reporting on behalf of the humanitarian architecture of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and anchors the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) mechanisms in 86% of crisis countries.

At country level, both entities are present in many of the same contexts, particularly crisis-affected settings. UNFPA maintains 121 country offices covering approximately 150 countries, while UN Women operates through 85 country offices delivering programmes in more than 100 countries. Delivery modalities and staff expertise and profiles also differ, with both entities implementing directly and through partners, but with different skills, risk appetites, and political and operational assurance models. These differences influence speed, scale, and tolerance for fiduciary and operational risk.

Both entities use the UN-wide Quantum ERP platform, though each has developed tailored systems layered on top (Quantum+ for UNFPA; PRISM for UN Women), reflecting different planning, monitoring, and risk-management needs.

As-Is implication: Decentralized structures, overlapping country presence, and shared corporate platforms create the foundations for joint impact, while divergent operational models reflect different institutional purposes and, partners, risk profiles. and different political positioning in many contexts. The As-Is indicates that delivery of results for women, girls and youth relies on clear role differentiation, subsequent political positioning with national stakeholders, and informal coordination at country level, underscoring the importance of continuity, role clarity, and protection of normative, policy and institutional support and programmatic operations in any future configuration.

Continuity of operations and protection of humanitarian service delivery and peace and security programmes depends on preserving mandate-specific programmes, capacities, differentiated roles, operational arrangements and focus on LNOB populations.

Financial Profile and Resource Structure

In 2024, UNFPA total expenses reached approximately USD 1.53 billion, compared to USD 669 million for UN Women.

UNFPA is 100% voluntary funded. Funding levels and trends reflect sustained donor confidence but also structural exposure to earmarking and concentration risk. Additionally, UNFPA has sizeable pass-through income streams related to third party procurement, income which supports the supply chain.

Total contributions received by UNFPA totaled $1.65 billion in 2024, continuing a growth trend averaging 3.8 per cent per year since 2021, when revenues stood at USD 1.46 billion.

Earmarked contributions accounted for approximately 77 per cent of total revenue, with the remainder provided through core resources. This trajectory reflects strong and relatively stable donor engagement, particularly in UNFPA's operational and humanitarian roles. Confidence is closely linked to UNFPA's established strong results track record, mature accountability systems, country presence, and capacity to deliver at scale in complex environments.

In the same year, UN Women reported approximately USD 520 million in revenues from new agreements and other income streams, with total contributions received amounting to approximately USD 592 million. While smaller in absolute terms, UN Women's funding base similarly relies predominantly on earmarked contributions, with core resources representing roughly one quarter of total income. UN Women's funding model supports a mix of normative, coordination, policy, and programmatic functions, but offers more limited flexibility than an assessed or predominantly core-funded model. Confidence in UN Women stems from its recognized normative mandate, global and country-level presence, strategic partnerships with governments and civil society, and its proven ability to deliver gender-responsive programming, including peace and security programming at scale across diverse and complex settings.

Both entities benefit from a broad donor base. In 2024, approximately 100 donors provided core support to UNFPA and approximately 85 donors to UN Women. However, donor concentration is a defining feature of both funding models: the top 20 donors accounted for approximately 70 per cent of total contributions to UNFPA and 85 per cent to UN Women. This concentration heightens exposure to shifts in political priorities and donor risk tolerance.

Both core and non-core funding are closely linked to mandate clarity, institutional continuity, and confidence in delivery arrangements.

Many partners provide support for specific outcomes, thematic priorities, or operational modalities. As a result, any perceived dilution of mandates or disruption to delivery frameworks carries a heightened risk of donor disengagement, increased earmarking, or reduced funding levels. However, given the current financial landscape, these risks may materialize even in a status quo scenario.

Cost structures also differ. A substantial share of UNFPA's non-core resources is linked to humanitarian response and pooled financing mechanisms, as well as to the UNFPA Supplies Partnership, which is anchored in UNFPA's technical, fiduciary, and operational capacity. UNFPA's expenditure reflects large-scale procurement, logistics, and humanitarian delivery in the areas under their mandate, including its role as the world's largest multilateral procurer of maternal health medicines and largest provider of donated contraceptives to developing countries. These activities require careful management of legal and liability risks and depend on stable regulatory and contractual frameworks. Based on the approved 2026-2029 Integrated Budget, 79% of core resources are allocated to programmes delivered predominantly in the field.

UN Women's expenditures reflect a range of programmatic activities spanning coordination and coherence across the UN system; policy advice and technical assistance to governments; institutional strengthening of national gender mechanisms; direct support to civil society and women's rights organizations; humanitarian action and crisis response; women, peace and security initiatives; and its core normative functions, including activities supported through the UN regular budget. Based on the approved 2026-2029 Integrated Budget, 80% of core programmable resources are allocated to programmes delivered at the regional and country levels.

Both entities operate under the harmonized UN cost-recovery framework, with broadly comparable effective recovery rates. Management cost shares differ, reflecting institutional roles rather than efficiency differentials.

When it comes to regular resource allocations, UN Women uses a transparent and rigorous resource allocation system, allocating its core programmable resources regionally, with Regional Directors having discretion as to how to then allocate resources by country, with the flexibility to adjust allocations as needs arise. UNFPA uses a transparent and rigorous resource allocation system, using internationally recognized indicators, and its Regional Directors also have the flexibility to adjust allocations by country based on local context and emerging needs. UNFPA internal systems provide senior management oversight of all funding streams and allocations.

As-Is implication: The current funding model of both entities, characterized by high levels of earmarking and donor concentration, limits flexibility to reallocate resources across the end-to-end results pathway without renegotiation with funding partners. In a merger context, expectations for impact and scope would likely expand more rapidly than available resources, as consolidation does not in itself unlock additional funding in a constrained and risk-averse aid environment. Positive funding outcomes would therefore be contingent on clear mandate preservation, for both entities' continuity of operational capacity and country presence, and maintenance of established accountability mechanisms with programme countries.

System Roles, Partnerships, and External Engagement

The entities play distinct but interconnected roles within the UN system and among external partners.

Under its mandate, UNFPA is a central service delivery partner for governments, humanitarian actors, and health systems, with strong relationships with ministries of health, planning, and finance. It holds global leadership roles in SRH and GBV coordination in emergencies and across the continuum and is a critical partner in population data systems and demographic analysis. It also plays an active role supporting UN coordination structures at global, regional and country levels. UNFPA's system role combines operational delivery with technical authority, enabling it to function as a trusted partner to governments in sensitive policy and service areas, including in humanitarian and fragile settings. UNFPA has a highly diversified base of partners, including strong and growing partnerships with a wide range of IFIs, philanthropic organizations, civil society organizations (including local, women-led and youth organizations), individual giving, and private sector entities. UNFPA works with approximately 1,600 implementing partners across different country contexts. These partnerships are often anchored in long-standing contractual and operational arrangements.

UN Women is a trusted system convenor and accountability driver at the country, regional and global level, working closely with Member States, UN entities, civil society, and the private sector. It has close relationships with Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Women, Labour, Economic Development, Finance, Justice, Defense, Environment, Social security and National Statistics Offices. It leads or supports UNCT gender coordination mechanisms, Humanitarian Country Team gender coordination mechanisms, inclusive of both GiHA working groups and Women's Advisory Committees and hosts global funding modalities for women's rights organizations. It plays a central role in advancing women's economic empowerment, women's leadership & decision-making, violence-against women, women, peace and security agenda, gender-responsive humanitarian action, and gender-responsive governance mechanisms at the country levels. Broad-based civil society engagement, particularly of women youth-led and feminist local organizations, is a defining feature of UN Women's model and footprint, including through formal grant-making and advocacy partnerships. The translation of global normative frameworks to policy change and concrete impact in the lives of women and girls at country level is a central component of UN Women's business model.

At a time when the UN system faces challenges in communicating with clarity and impact, UN Women stands out with a globally recognized brand and a proven ability to articulate complex and sensitive issues in accessible ways that support the translation of policy commitments into tangible action and gains for women and girls.

Both entities are deeply embedded in intergovernmental processes at global and regional levels, and maintain strong external visibility and advocacy roles, though with different audiences and messaging styles.

As-Is implication: External trust and influence are built through different but interdependent relationships with governments, civil society, humanitarian actors, peace and security actors, intergovernmental bodies. These relationships have developed over time and are sensitive to institutional continuity and clarity of role. These relationships enable reach across development, humanitarian, and peace contexts, but also mean that accountability for results is distributed across actors and institutions, rather than experienced as a single, coherent system response by partners and rights-holders. Partners and rights-holders often have to engage with multiple institutions to advance interconnected objectives, rather than through a single locus of accountability.

Population Data and Analysis and Considerations Related to Cooperation with DESA

UNFPA's role in population data and analysis is operational, system-enabling, and firmly anchored at country and humanitarian levels. With a dedicated population workforce of approximately 500 staff and annual expenditures exceeding USD 100 million, UNFPA supports Member States to conduct population censuses, strengthen civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) and administrative data systems, and apply population data for policy formulation, planning, investment decisions, and programme design. This includes sustained technical engagement with national statistical offices and line ministries, often in politically sensitive and capacity-constrained contexts.

UNFPA plays a central operational role in humanitarian population data, including through the Common Operational Datasets on Population Statistics, which provide rapid, subnational population estimates essential for emergency preparedness, response planning, and inter-agency coordination. Through these functions, UNFPA enables governments to produce and maintain the population data (censuses, surveys, and registration systems) on which the entire UN system relies. This role is not sector-specific but foundational to the functioning of the multilateral system: around 108 of 234 SDG indicators use population as a denominator, while many others depend on population data as core analytical inputs. Any disruption to population data systems would therefore have immediate, cross-cutting implications for SDG monitoring, humanitarian response, and evidence-based policymaking.

Population data directly inform policy debates on bodily autonomy, fertility, ageing, migration, and youth. UNFPA's ability to operate credibly in this space depends on long-standing trust, operational presence, and mandate-based authority at country level, as established through the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) framework.

In addition to data system support, UNFPA produces applied demographic analysis for programming and advocacy, most prominently through the annual State of the World Population report. These products translate demographic trends into operationally relevant insights, linking population dynamics to SRHR, gender equality, and development outcomes. UNFPA's comparative advantage lies precisely in this translation function: turning population data into actionable, policy- and investment-relevant intelligence at national and subnational levels, including in fragile and humanitarian settings.

UNDESA, through its Statistics Division and Population Division, leads the UN system's normative, methodological, and global analytical work on population statistics. These divisions establish international statistical standards, provide global census guidance, compile official population data, and produce globally comparable estimates and long-term projections on population size, fertility, migration, urbanization, and demographic trends. Flagship outputs such as the UN Demographic Yearbook and World Population Prospects underpin global monitoring, intergovernmental deliberations, and long-term policy analysis. The Population Division of UNDESA serves as Secretariat to the Commission on Population and Development and the Statistics Division serves as Secretariat to the UN Statistical Commission and to the newly established UN Committee of Experts on Population and Social Statistics.

As-Is implications: The Assessment Terms of Reference anticipate a later stage exploration of potential gaps and overlaps between the work carried out by UNFPA and DESA. The assessment team included conversations with DESA and have arrived at the following:

The current division of labour between UNFPA and UNDESA in population data and analysis is clear, coherent, and functioning effectively. UNDESA provides global norms, standards, and long-term demographic analysis, while UNFPA delivers the operational, country-level population data systems and applied analysis on which the UN system and Member States depend. These roles are complementary and mutually reinforcing, not overlapping.

There is no evidence of fragmentation, duplication, or inefficiency in population data functions that would warrant further restructuring, consolidation, or mandate realignment. On the contrary, the effectiveness of the system depends on preserving the distinction between normative global functions and operational country-level delivery, while maintaining strong coordination between them.

Accordingly, no further consolidation is recommended in this area beyond safeguarding existing mandates and continued close coordination arrangements. Any reform that risks weakening UNFPA's operational authority or disrupting established population data systems and demographic work would carry high systemic risk, with limited prospect of efficiency gains. Population data and analysis and demographic policy should therefore be treated as an area of institutional clarity and stability.

From As-Is to Forward Direction: Why Institutional Integration Merits Examination

The As-Is analysis shows that, together, UNFPA and UN Women already encompass the full spectrum of mandates, functions, and expertise required to advance gender equality, women's empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and population-informed development. The mandates anchored in the Beijing Platform for Action, the ICPD Programme of Action, and CEDAW remain intact and central under current global conditions.

The question therefore is not whether mandates should change. They must not. Rather, it is whether existing institutional arrangements create structural barriers that constrain their full and accelerated implementation in a rapidly evolving political, operational, and financing environment.

While the system possesses the substantive components required to translate global commitments into lived change, these are distributed across separate governance frameworks and funding streams. As a result, end-to-end impact depends heavily on coordination rather than unified accountability. Under current conditions - marked by intensified backlash against gender equality and SRHR, persistent funding constraints, and rising expectations for coherence under UN system reform - this fragmentation introduces growing structural friction. Maintaining existing arrangements without adaptation is therefore not neutral. Over time, fragmentation may limit influence in multilateral processes, constrain country-level scale relative to mandate breadth, and weaken the system's ability to project a coherent institutional voice in sensitive contexts.

The merger vision explored considers whether existing mandates could be placed within a single institutional framework capable of strengthening coherence, accountability, and delivery across the full results continuum. Feasibility depends critically on how such integration is authorized and sequenced. As both entities are subsidiary organs of the General Assembly, any restructuring would require General Assembly consideration and decision, with mandate preservation treated as a non-negotiable analytical condition.

Structural fragmentation as a constraint on delivery

The assessment finds that, while mandates are complementary and collectively span the full results continuum, they remain institutionally distributed across separate governance, funding and accountability frameworks.

As a result, delivery depends on coordination rather than unified institutional accountability. While this has enabled specialization, it also creates structural friction in translating global commitments into consistent, visible and scalable results.
Under current conditions this fragmentation is not neutral. It is becoming a growing constraint on the system's ability to project political weight, ensure continuity across contexts, and demonstrate impact at scale.

Critical Success Factors Emerging from the As-Is

The As-Is analysis indicates that feasibility is less a matter of technical design than of intentionally protecting and safeguarding certain conditions. It indicates that a merger is a technically sound proposal that has the potential to generate a stronger gender equality and SRHR entity at the heart of the UN, but only if undertaken under specific conditions. The following factors emerge as essential under any merger pathway.

Mandate continuity. Political legitimacy and external trust are rooted in distinct mandates anchored in ICPD, Beijing and CEDAW. Any restructuring would need to explicitly preserve these mandates and avoid reopening or narrowing intergovernmental commitments, particularly given current contestation in multilateral processes.

Protection of normative and operational functions across the full results continuum. Concrete change depends on safeguarding both normative leadership and uninterrupted operational delivery. This includes continuity of normative work – at the global and country level, sexual and reproductive health–services, gender-based violence response, women, peace and security programming, humanitarian surge capacity, supply chains, grant-making to civil society frontline organizations, and policy and coordination functions at national, regional and global levels.

Credible donor engagement and transition resourcing. High reliance on earmarked funding and donor concentration heighten sensitivity to institutional change. Sustained donor confidence, clear reinvestment logic and dedicated transition financing would be critical to prevent volatility and protect delivery.

Political support and coalition-building. Progress would require sustained engagement with Member States, the UN system and civil society to maintain legitimacy and shared ownership, particularly in a polarized environment.

Clear governance and aligned institutional logics. Normative, coordination and operational functions must be aligned under coherent decision-making authority and accountability structures. Ambiguity during transition would increase risk.

UNCT representation. A larger entity combining gender equality, SRHR and population functions would be well positioned as a strong UNCT and HCT member, capable of providing more integrated and consistent support to Member States and partners.

Explicit transition discipline and reform alignment. Phased sequencing, interim clarity on roles and authorities and alignment with broader UN80 reforms are essential to manage complexity and preserve operational continuity.

Taken together, these conditions underscore that integration is viable only if designed to strengthen implementation of existing mandates and implemented with disciplined attention to political, legal, funding and operational safeguards.

FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

Feasibility in this assessment is defined not by the technical possibility of institutional consolidation, but by whether a future configuration could credibly strengthen implementation of existing mandates under current and foreseeable conditions. This includes the capacity to enhance coherence, accountability and end-to-end impact for women, girls and youth, while preserving mandate integrity, political legitimacy, donor confidence and continuity of delivery.

Feasibility is therefore assessed as conditional rather than absolute. It depends on whether political, legal, operational and financial foundations can be aligned in a manner that reduces structural barriers to implementation without introducing disproportionate risk. In this framing, feasibility is not a binary judgement on whether a merger can occur, but an evaluation of whether the system can manage change in a way that strengthens results relative to continuation of the current configuration.

Two dimensions of feasibility are particularly material:

First, strategic and legal feasibility. As both entities are subsidiary organs of the General Assembly, a merger would require intergovernmental authorization. Feasibility therefore depends on whether a pathway can be designed that explicitly safeguards existing mandates and avoids unintended exposure to renegotiation in a polarized geopolitical environment.

Second, operational and financial feasibility. Institutional integration entails governance alignment, systems integration, workforce adjustments and phased operational harmonization. These processes carry front-loaded costs and management complexity. Feasibility requires disciplined sequencing, dedicated transition resourcing and clear interim accountabilities to prevent disruption to life-saving services, normative functions and country-level operations.

This assessment also recognizes that inaction carries cumulative risk. Sustained fragmentation under conditions of political contestation, constrained financing and rising expectations for coherence may progressively weaken institutional influence and impact. Feasibility must therefore be considered relative to the risks of maintaining the status quo.

The following subsections assess strategic, legal, operational and financial feasibility in turn, identifying where prospects appear strongest, where risks are most material and what this implies for pathway design and sequencing.

Strategic Feasibility

Strategically, the As-Is analysis provides a strong foundation for feasibility. Taken together, the entity mandates anchored in the Beijing Platform for Action, the ICPD Programme of Action, and CEDAW span the full pathway required to advance gender equality and deliver results for women, girls, and youth, from global norms and accountability, through policy and institutional change, to large-scale service delivery across women's economic empowerment, gender-based violence, women, peace and security, women's leadership and governance, SRHR, and humanitarian action. This alignment directly supports the merger vision of an end-to-end, women and youth-centred pathway from global commitments to lived change.

The As-Is analysis also shows that current arrangements rely heavily on coordination and parallel action across institutional boundaries. While this has enabled specialization and depth, it has resulted in uneven translation of ambition into results across contexts and sub-optimal response to Member State needs and requests. From a strategic perspective, this points to a clear opportunity for a united entity to strengthen shared accountability for end-to-end outcomes, provided this can be achieved without undermining existing strengths, access, or political capital. Moreover, as mentioned under section 2.7, a merger offers an opportunity to expand and strengthen the UN's country-level infrastructure on gender equality in a cost-effective manner.

Mandate sensitivity remains central. Any perception that a merger would reopen, dilute, or reprioritize agreed mandates would significantly weaken a new entity from the outset. Strategic feasibility is therefore highest where a merger is framed not as a renegotiation of mandates, but as a means of safeguarding and jointly advancing Beijing, CEDAW, and ICPD commitments within a more coherent institutional configuration. It is also important to recall that any merger would require a General Assembly decision, regardless of pathway. Broad consensus would strengthen legitimacy and operational acceptance. Conversely, a formally adopted decision reached without it could result in practical constraints, including restrictions on country-level operations, partnerships, or funding where political support is uneven.

External dynamics reinforce this assessment. UN80 system reform, rising expectations for coherence and results, and growing political pressure on gender equality, women's empowerment, and SRHR strengthen the strategic relevance of a more unified institutional response. At the same time, these dynamics reduce tolerance for transition risk, operational disruption, or mandate ambiguity, raising the bar for strategic credibility.

Legal Feasibility

There is no legal impediment in proceeding with any of the three merger options set out in section 5.3. Any of the three merger options requires a decision of the General Assembly (which could be in two stages e.g. an initial decision on merger and a subsequent decision on the details of the arrangements, or in a single decision addressing both aspects). This is because both UNFPA and UN-Women are subsidiary organs established by the General Assembly.

Any of the three options set out in section 5.3 requires preparation of institutional and transitional arrangements in order to avoid legal issues at a later stage. This includes the continuity of mandates; arrangements for a governing structure; arrangements for the secretariat, including the appointment of the head of the entity; the continuity of existing operational arrangements; the continued application of the existing host country agreements; and administrative and financial arrangements, such as the transfer of assets and liabilities (including contractual obligations). The arrangements adopted when UN-Women was established could serve as a basis.

Operational Feasibility

Operationally, the As-Is analysis indicates that a merger is feasible, provided transition is carefully managed and safeguards are embedded. Operational feasibility is therefore contingent on continuity of delivery, protection of humanitarian space, protection of peace and security work, the protection of civic space and preservation of existing operational authorities throughout any transition period, as well as on funding being available for both transition and ongoing operations.

The two entities have different structures, organizational cultures, technical expertise, delivery models, and country-level footprints. While complementary, these differences introduce a risk that a merger could slow progress if it creates additional layers or competing priorities.

Both entities operate through decentralized structures with overlapping country presence, particularly in fragile and crisis-affected contexts, and share UN-wide platforms such as Quantum. Long-standing experience with joint programming, coordination mechanisms, and inter-agency leadership further supports operational feasibility. However, shared platforms and prior collaboration do not in themselves fully mitigate the risks associated with integrating distinct delivery, assurance, and risk-management models.

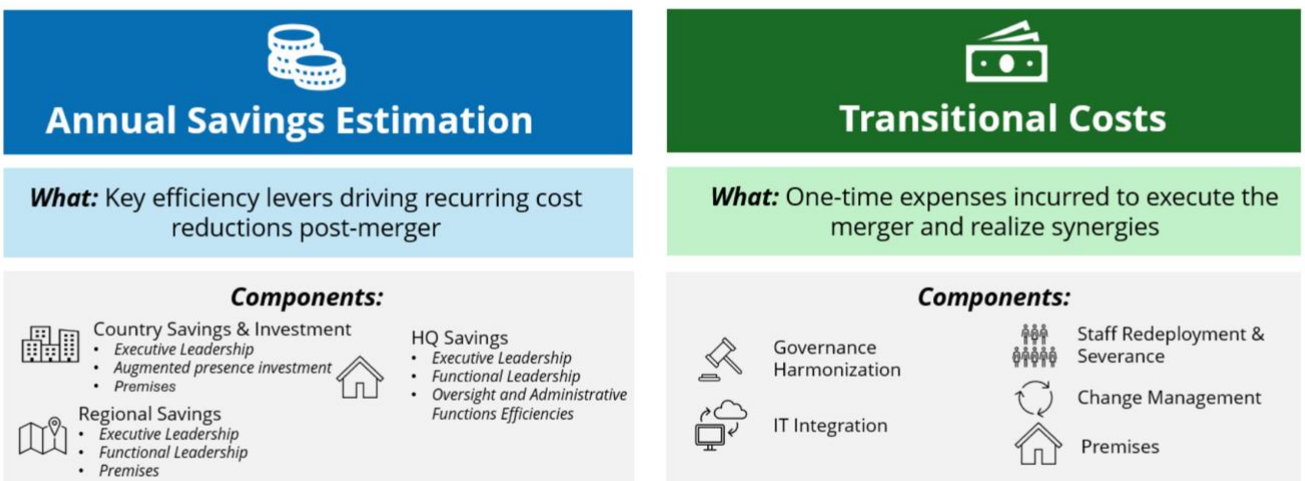
Operational models are optimized for different but complementary purposes, with one entity emphasizing large-scale service delivery on issues of SRHR, GBV and population dynamics – including in humanitarian response settings, and the other entity prioritizing normative leadership, UN System coordination, and operational programming in the areas of economic empowerment, women's leadership, and the elimination of violence against women, including in peace and security settings. This programming includes direct civil society support and partnership, gender data & statistics, policy influence and communications and advocacy. These differences are not barriers to feasibility, but design parameters that must be respected. Failure to do so would increase the risk of service disruption and loss of operational access.

Operational feasibility therefore depends on sequencing, continuity, and clarity during transition. The As-Is analysis indicates that phased approaches, continuity of strategic plans recently adopted, explicit interim accountabilities, and protection of critical operations are essential, while rapid or "big-bang" integration would introduce avoidable risk. Operational feasibility is further contingent on continued license to operate, including host country agreements and delegated authorities.

Financial Feasibility

Financial feasibility must be assessed against three structural realities. First, both entities operate predominantly on voluntary funding models (in the case of UNFPA, 100% voluntarily funded) characterized by high levels of earmarking and donor concentration. Second, resources are constrained as they are for many other UN entities. Third, transition costs are front-loaded, while efficiency gains accrue gradually and only as integration progresses.

Figure 2: Cost and Savings Categories Used for Preliminary Analysis



The preliminary cost-benefit analysis is intended to inform early sequencing considerations and risk management, not to serve as a business case or justification for reform. It is not meant to be exhaustive and provides indicative ranges, illustrating the order of magnitude of potential transition costs and plausible minimum recurring efficiencies.

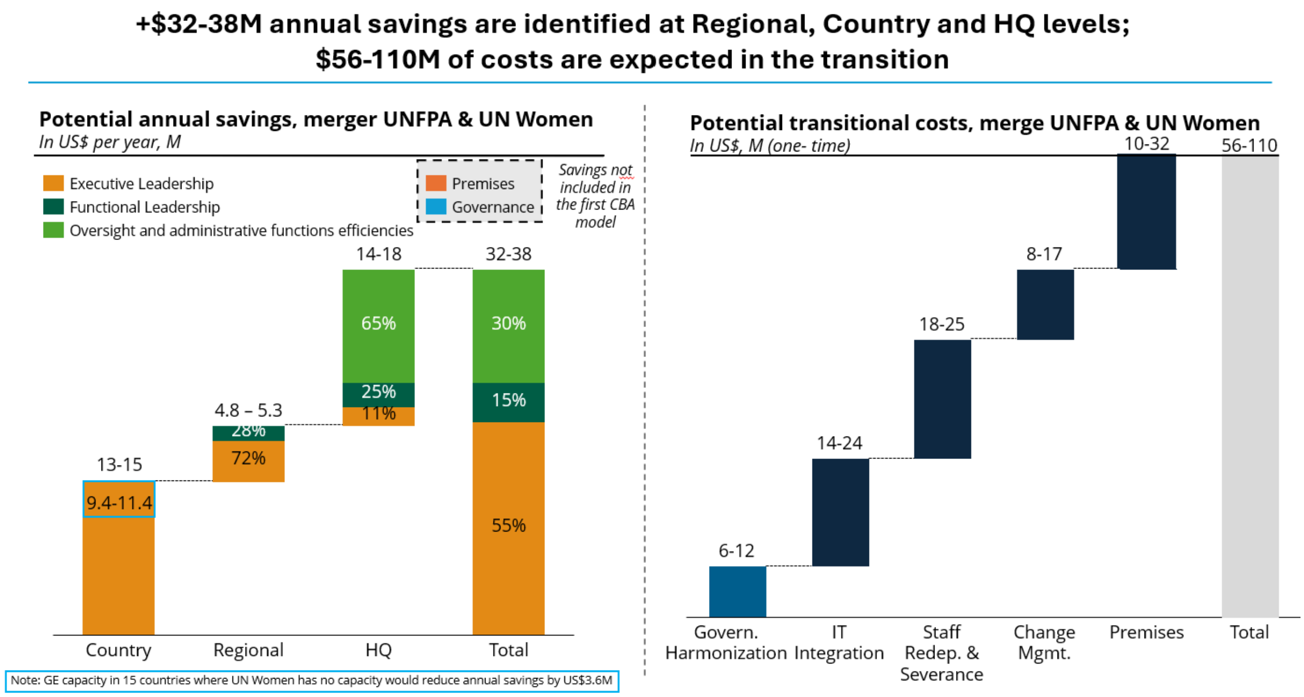
The analysis assumes consolidation of overlapping leadership, oversight and administrative positions, which underpins the estimated recurring efficiencies, alongside broader workforce transition measures including redeployment and, where required, separation costs.

Transition costs are based on standard categories from previous UN reforms: governance alignment, systems integration (including ERP), change management, and premises consolidation across headquarters, regional, and country levels. Systems integration assumes phased alignment with temporary parallel systems, rather than full immediate replacement.

The analysis does not assume any reduction in mandates or overall budgets. Any efficiency gains, if realized, would need to be reinvested to support the transition and strengthen delivery across the full, combined mandate.

The initial, high-level analysis of potential annual savings provides indicative ranges rather than definitive projections and do not (in contrast to transition costs) include governance and premises savings. The estimates are based on entity-provided data and agreed assumptions regarding potential efficiency levers. They are presented as ranges in recognition of the absence of an agreed merger pathway, institutional blueprint or detailed transition plan

Figure 3: Indication of Distribution of Potential Annual Savings and Transition Costs



The analysis suggests that a merger could generate recurring annual savings in the range of approximately USD 32 to 38 million once integration is fully implemented, savings that would need to be channeled back into a combined entity if it were to be effective and result in a strengthened end-to-end entity. These efficiencies are primarily associated with consolidation of overlapping administrative and support functions across headquarters, regional and country levels. The estimates do not imply predetermined workforce reductions or a defined future structure. Savings could potentially materialize progressively and would depend on the depth and sequencing of integration.

One-time transition costs are estimated in the range of approximately USD 56 to 110 million. These costs include workforce alignment, systems integration, governance harmonization, change management, premises consolidation and temporary dual-running arrangements during transition. The breadth of the range reflects sensitivity to pathway design, sequencing choices and the duration of systems coexistence.

A more precise projection and a full-fledged cost-benefit analysis of both transition costs and recurring efficiencies will only be possible once a specific pathway has been selected and organizational design options have been developed. Decisions regarding governance structure, field footprint, corporate service models, workforce integration and sequencing will materially affect both cost levels and realization timelines. The current analysis

should therefore be interpreted as directional and scenario-based rather than predictive.
Under central assumptions, recurring efficiencies could offset transition costs over a medium-term horizon. However, projections remain sensitive to several variables, including the chosen pathway, the future organizational design, the pace of operational harmonization, staff transition approaches and country-level implications.

Methodological note on preliminary cost estimates

The estimates are indicative and based on:

- Entity provided expenditure, staffing and footprint data (HQ, regional, country levels).
- Standard UN transition cost categories observed in recent institutional reforms (e.g. governance harmonization, systems integration, workforce transition, dual running).
- Conservative assumptions regarding pace of integration, reflecting the absence of an agreed merger pathway, avoiding assumptions of rapid consolidation or immediate efficiency gains.

Importantly, the financial case does not constitute a rationale for reform. The proposed integration is not conceived as a cost-reduction exercise. In the current geopolitical and funding environment, the principal financial objective is to protect mandate delivery while creating space for reinvestment of potential recurring savings in country-level capacity, humanitarian response, women, peace and security programming and under-resourced gender equality functions, SRHR and population issues as well as strengthened fiduciary management and oversight functions of a consolidated entity. It is the belief of the assessment team that any savings generated through a merger would need to be redeployed within a new organization, to enable it to deliver on what would be a larger combined mandate.

Financial feasibility therefore depends on three conditions. First, dedicated transition financing that does not divert resources from ongoing programmes. Indeed, neither entity has dedicated resources or budget lines to finance this transition. Second, sustained donor confidence during the transition period. Third, a transparent framework for reinvestment of any recurring savings generated through consolidation.

Preliminary Cost-Benefit Analysis

The analysis identifies several potential efficiency levers across headquarters, regional and country levels. These include consolidation of corporate services, alignment of management structures, rationalization of overlapping administrative functions and optimization of premises where feasible. A significant proportion of projected recurring savings is associated with regional and country levels, reflecting scale effects rather than headquarters concentration.

Savings assumptions are sensitive to strategic choices. For example, expansion of gender equality capacity in countries where presence is currently limited in scope or expertise would reduce projected annual savings. This illustrates that efficiency outcomes are directly linked to decisions regarding mandate scale, field footprint and service delivery ambition.

Certain potential efficiencies, including those associated with longer-term systems harmonization, premises, and procurement alignment, remain unquantified at this stage. Conversely, additional transition costs could arise depending on IT coexistence duration and workforce transition policies.

The cost-benefit analysis should therefore be interpreted as a directional assessment rather than a deterministic projection. It supports the conclusion that integration is financially manageable if undertaken with disciplined sequencing and secured dedicated transition financing that does not divert resources from ongoing programmes. It does not justify acceleration of intergovernmental decision-making on financial grounds alone.

Overall Feasibility Assessment

Taken together, the evidence indicates that institutional integration is technically feasible under demanding but achievable conditions. The rationale is to remove structural barriers to impact for women, girls and Member States without altering mandates. Operational feasibility builds on existing structures and experience, while financial feasibility depends on realistic expectations, dedicated transition support, and early funding commitments.

Feasibility is therefore less about whether integration can work, and more about how risks are managed and how the process is designed, sequenced and governed to strengthen delivery while preserving mandate integrity, operational continuity, donor confidence and political legitimacy.

Feasibility should be understood as conditional and design dependent. This assessment does not presume an outcome but provides a basis for judging whether integration could strengthen impact compared to the current configuration.

RISKS AND BENEFITS ASSESSMENT

This section examines the principal strategic benefits and risks of a possible integration, including both transition risks and those that may persist post-integration, as well as the risks of maintaining the status quo under growing political, humanitarian and financial pressure.

Risk mitigation is treated as a core design parameter. Key measures include continuation of existing mandates in any General Assembly decision; phased and sequenced implementation; dedicated transition financing; safeguards for normative, humanitarian and life-saving operations; and proactive engagement with Member States, donors and civil society. Further detail is provided in Annex 2.

Combined strength

Country-level analysis indicates that combining UNFPA and UN Women would materially strengthen institutional presence in a significant number of programme countries, including in high-need and complex settings. Based on 2024 expenditure data, the combined entity would rank among the largest UN actors in approximately three-quarters of the countries where it operates, compared to under two-thirds for UNFPA alone. While institutional size is not determinative in itself, a larger and more integrated presence is associated with stronger positioning in UN Country Teams and can support leadership continuity, system-wide engagement, and political resilience in contested contexts particularly when combined with clear mandates, coherent programming, and effective leadership.

Strategic Opportunities

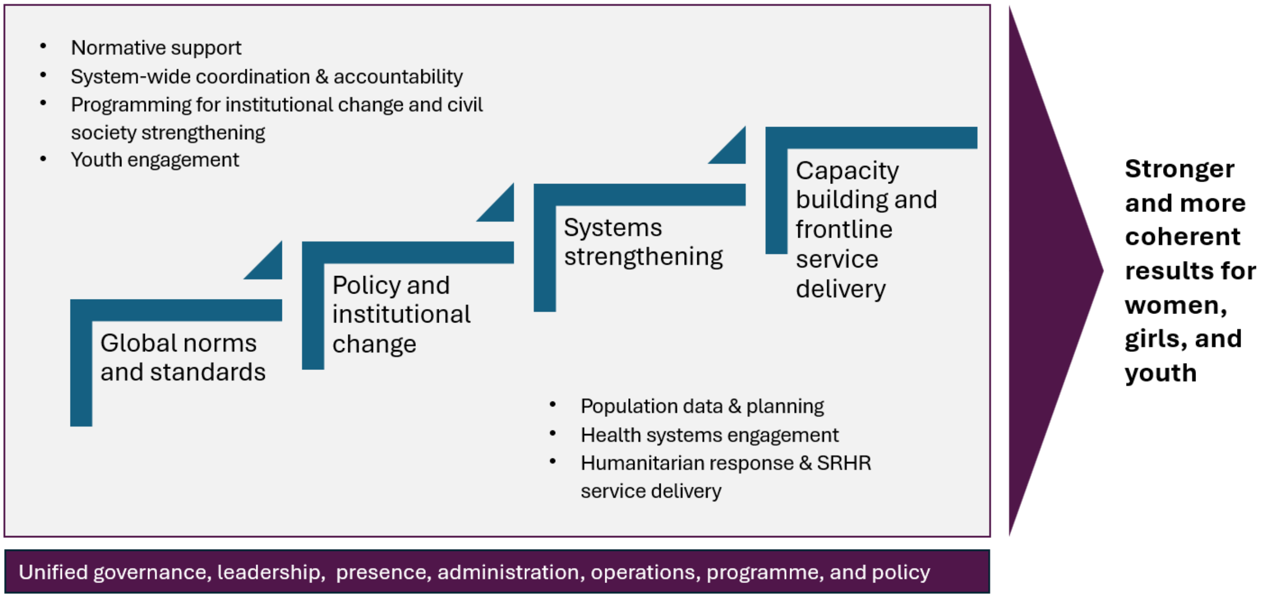
Institutional integration could generate significant structural advantages in a geopolitical environment where scale, coherence and institutional weight increasingly determine influence and impact.

Size and scale matter in multilateral diplomacy and national policy engagement. Institutional size affects visibility, bargaining power, negotiating leverage and the ability to sustain political space in contested environments and the ability to be responsive to Member State needs and requests. A single entity encompassing the full continuum of gender equality, women's empowerment, women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and population informed policy would carry greater structural and financial weight than two separate institutions operating in parallel. It would also diminish any potential competition between the agencies, better incentivize cooperation, and expand the UN's infrastructure on gender equality and women's rights, by bringing together the footprints, resources and strong mandates of the two entities. Together, consolidation could strengthen the United Nations' ability to defend agreed commitments, maintain relevance in polarized debates and project consistent leadership across global and national arenas. It could materially strengthen the UN's reach, presence and institutional capacity for countries on gender equality at a time when that capacity is needed more than ever.

Many UN entities contribute to gender equality outcomes but do so alongside other core mandates and operational priorities. A stronger gender entity represented in more countries with a specific institutional mandate and accountability to women and girls helps to ensure that these rights remain explicitly represented within the UN's leadership and voice at country level, consistently advocated for, and institutionally anchored, particularly in contexts where they are under pressure.

Integration could also create unified end-to-end accountability across the results continuum. At present, normative leadership, system accountability, policy reform, humanitarian delivery and service provision are institutionally distributed. While coordination mechanisms exist, accountability for impact remains fragmented. Bringing these functions under a single governance and leadership framework could reduce structural friction and clarify responsibility from global commitments through national systems to front line service delivery. This alignment may enhance measurable results and strengthen donor confidence in the pathway from investment to impact.

Figure 4: Illustration of a Coherent Pathway from Global Norms to Country-Level Delivery



Closer institutional alignment could improve coherence in crisis and conflict contexts. Women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence prevention, humanitarian surge capacity and recovery programming are deeply interconnected in fragile environments. A more integrated platform may strengthen continuity from emergency response to recovery and systems reform, while safeguarding essential and life-saving operations, advocacy and communications and normative engagement in politically sensitive settings.

Integration may further enhance strategic coherence where demographic change intersects with gender equality. Aligning population data, demographic foresight and life course programming with normative and policy engagement could strengthen forward looking public policy support at a time when fertility, ageing, migration and youth transitions are increasingly politicized.

Institutional integration could also enhance resilience in a constrained funding environment. Larger and more coherent institutional platforms are often better positioned to manage donor concentration, diversify financing and negotiate multiyear flexible commitments. While financial efficiencies are not the primary rationale for reform, consolidation of corporate services may create medium term fiscal space for reinvestment in under resourced contexts and priority programme and fiduciary areas.

These opportunities extend beyond administrative consolidation. They relate to structural weight, political leverage, institutional coherence and delivery credibility. Realization of these benefits depends on explicit continuation of the existing mandates, political legitimacy and disciplined implementation.

Pre-Integration Risks

Pre-integration risks arise in the process leading up to full operational integration. These risks are time bound but require deliberate management.

Mandate exposure is the most sensitive transition risk. Both entities derive legitimacy from distinct General Assembly mandates. In the current geopolitical environment, any formal negotiation process carries the possibility of efforts to reopen, narrow or reinterpret agreed language. Mitigation requires explicit preservation of existing mandates and functions in any General Assembly decision, sustained engagement with Member States and careful sequencing to ensure that structural alignment does not inadvertently reopen substantive commitments.

Operational disruption during transition represents a second material risk. Governance alignment, systems integration, workforce adjustments, and the harmonization of funding and reporting frameworks will increase management complexity. Poor sequencing could weaken clarity of authority, disrupt programme implementation, or affect the legal continuity, indemnification and delegated operational authorities. This risk is particularly acute for essential and life-saving functions, including the procurement and delivery of reproductive health commodities, humanitarian surge capacity, peace and security work, grant-making to civil society frontline actors, and global advocacy in support of the feminist movement, including on legal reform. Phased sequencing, interim governance clarity, and operational continuity safeguards will be essential to manage this risk during the transition.

Funding volatility and lack of dedicated transition funding constitute a third significant risk. Both entities rely heavily on earmarked funding and face donor concentration. In a risk averse funding climate, perceptions of institutional instability, mandate ambiguity or delivery disruption could lead to short term reductions in core or flexible funding. Transition costs will be front loaded and require dedicated financing that does not divert resources from ongoing programmes. Without early clarity on rationale, safeguards and reinvestment commitments, funding predictability may be affected.

Workforce uncertainty and potential loss of critical expertise represent an additional transition risk. Integration processes may create anxiety among staff and affect retention of specialized technical and operational capacity. Clear communication of transition principles, retention strategies for critical functions and disciplined workforce planning are required to preserve institutional capability.

These transition risks are material but can be managed and addressing them will require different actors to take the lead on different issues, including UN Women, UNFPA, UN entities and Member States. Their magnitude depends largely on sequencing, pathway selection and quality of governance during implementation.

Post-Integration Risks

Post-integration risks relate to the sustainability and performance of the integrated entity once transition has concluded.

One potential risk concerns governance complexity within a larger institutional structure. Combining normative, coordination and operational functions could increase internal complexity if decision making and accountability are not clearly defined. Effective mitigation requires a coherent governance architecture, aligned strategic planning and unified executive accountability.

A second risk involves imbalance across mandate components. If one dimension of the integrated mandate were to dominate resource allocation or leadership attention, coherence across the results continuum could weaken. Balanced strategic frameworks, integrated performance metrics and transparent resource allocation processes are necessary to prevent such distortion.

A third risk concerns overextension relative to available resources. Integration may generate expectations for expanded footprint or programming without corresponding funding growth. There is a risk of the combined entity attracting less income than the two entities currently attract individually. Realistic phasing of any expansion, alignment between ambition and resourcing and continued engagement with partners and diversification of funding are required to maintain credibility.

Finally, reputational risk arises if integration fails to demonstrate tangible added value. Clear articulation of the integration logic, early identification of measurable improvements and regular reporting to governing bodies are necessary to sustain confidence in the reform.

Risks of Inaction

Risks of inaction are cumulative rather than immediate. They arise through gradual erosion of political space, uneven translation of global commitments into national systems, funding stagnation and declining institutional influence.

The global environment for gender equality, women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights has materially deteriorated. Political contestation of previously agreed commitments has intensified across multilateral processes and national contexts. Democratic institutions and civic space are under pressure in multiple regions. The number of women and girls affected by conflict, displacement and humanitarian crisis has increased substantially. Funding for gender equality and related mandates remains constrained and increasingly concentrated.

In such an environment, fragmentation across mandates, governance arrangements and funding streams may progressively limit the UN system's ability to respond with sufficient coherence, speed and institutional weight. Where humanitarian demand rises, separation between normative leadership and operational delivery can constrain continuity across emergency response, recovery and systems strengthening.

A merger as a strategic option

The assessment identifies institutional integration as a strategic option to address structural fragmentation and strengthen end-to-end delivery across the full mandate.

Potential benefits include greater political weight, clearer accountability, and improved coherence across development, humanitarian and peace contexts. However, these benefits are not automatic.

Realization depends on explicit mandate protection, preservation of core normative and operational functions, sustained donor confidence, and disciplined, phased implementation.

At the same time, maintaining the current configuration is not risk neutral. Under conditions of increasing political contestation, rising humanitarian demand and constrained financing, continued fragmentation may further limit coherence, scale and institutional influence.

Over time, the cumulative effects may include reduced influence in intergovernmental negotiations, constrained country level scale relative to mandate breadth, uneven translation of global commitments into national systems and increasing difficulty projecting a unified institutional position in politically sensitive contexts.

Funding dynamics compound this risk. In a competitive and risk averse donor environment, institutional fragmentation may weaken perceived clarity of accountability and reduce confidence in the pathway from investment to impact. Without structural adaptation, downward pressure on core and flexible resources could intensify, further constraining strategic flexibility.

Both entities continue to deliver important results within their respective mandates. However, under conditions of sustained political pressure, rising humanitarian demand and funding constraint, maintaining the current configuration is not risk neutral. Absent deliberate structural adjustment, the system may retain its mandates but experience gradual weakening of influence, coherence and scale relative to the magnitude of global need.

Overall Risk-Benefit-Balance

Institutional integration presents meaningful strategic opportunity alongside material but manageable risk. The balance is conditional and execution dependent. It turns on mandate protection, disciplined sequencing, credible transition financing and sustained political engagement.

Preliminary financial analysis indicates potential medium-term efficiencies, and thus a potential opportunity to re-invest into programmes and operations, but these should not be treated as a primary driver of decision making. The central question is whether integration strengthens the system's capacity to defend and implement existing commitments in a more demanding external environment and respond with agility to countries' needs.

Under explicit mandate safeguards, phased implementation and proactive risk management, the potential benefits in terms of scale, coherence, political weight and delivery credibility are significant. Conversely, failure to meet these conditions would materially increase exposure to mandate dilution, delivery disruption or funding volatility.

The potential merger is therefore framed not as a predetermined outcome but as a strategic option whose viability depends on disciplined design and careful judgement of both the risks of action and the risks of inaction.

PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVING THE MERGER VISION

This section examines different pathways through which the merger vision described in Section 1 could be realized. All pathways aim at the creation of a single institutional entity advancing gender equality, women's empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and population informed policy across the life course. They differ primarily in sequencing, institutional anchoring and transition mechanics rather than in ultimate purpose.

Over recent months, Member States have repeatedly asked why the assessment focuses on merger pathways leading to the creation of a single entity, rather than further expansion of existing collaboration arrangements. The starting point for the assessment was that a full merger could potentially bring positive political and organizational focus, power and weight to matters of gender equality and women's rights. Moreover, the environment for considering structural and ambitious reform has shifted since most recent review of the UN's gender equality architecture.

The assessment has considered the findings and notably the follow up to The

Independent Review of the UN System's Capacity to Deliver on Gender Equality (11 February 2023). The Review did not favor a merger at the time and pointed to the potential of strengthened collaboration and a clearer division of labor across entities. However, the Review also documented persistent system-wide fragmentation, including siloed mandates, diffused accountability, uneven leadership, and limited coherence. These factors continue to constrain both the political weight and operational effectiveness of gender equality efforts in the system. Evidence points to ongoing challenges in clarifying roles, reducing overlap where it exists, and ensuring collective accountability, with collaboration often remaining voluntary, under-resourced, and at times competitive, particularly at country level.

Illustrative examples of collaboration between UNFPA and UN Women

Over time, UNFPA and UN Women have pursued a range of collaborative and coordination arrangements at global, regional and country levels. These approaches have delivered important results within the existing institutional architecture and remain essential to day-to-day cooperation.

Joint and complementary programming. The two entities work alongside each other across a range of thematic areas, including gender-based violence prevention and response, sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's empowerment, and humanitarian action. The Spotlight Initiative has offered a strong example of complementary work delivering tangible results, albeit with high transaction costs.

Country-level coordination and UN system mechanisms. Collaboration takes place through UN Country Teams, development of UNSDCFs and humanitarian coordination structures, including joint leadership of Gender Theme Groups (GTGs), Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) mechanisms, and other Delivering as One arrangement.

Normative and policy alignment. At the global level, both entities contribute to the advancement of intergovernmental frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and the ICPD Programme of Action, with efforts made to align policy messaging, guidance, strategic political engagement and advocacy across mandates.

Shared platforms and operational enablers. UNFPA and UN Women utilize common UN-system wide corporate platforms, such as Quantum, and participate in system-wide reform initiatives, enabling a degree of administrative alignment and operational efficiency within existing institutional boundaries.

Ongoing and past efforts including joint programming, inter-agency coordination mechanisms and system-wide frameworks have delivered important results but have not addressed the underlying structural fragmentation of authority and responsibility across the results continuum. This can lead to gender equality being treated as "no one's responsibility," with limited resources and weak institutional accountability. Under current geopolitical and financing pressures, this fragmentation increasingly constrains the UN system's ability to sustain normative commitments, ensure continuity across humanitarian-development-peace contexts, and demonstrate impact at scale.

The Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (GEAP) was prepared and launched in 2024 by the Secretary General in response to the findings of the Review and as a system-wide commitment to deliver better and advance the rights of all women and girls. The latest GEAP progress report 2026[3] shows that while the UN is becoming more aligned and active on gender equality, progress needs to continue and accelerate in leadership, financing and country-level work to deliver real change in the lives of millions of women and girls.

The difference between now and 2023 is not simply that the environment has shifted, though it has dramatically. It is that the evidence base for what collaboration can and cannot fix is now stronger. The strengthened evidence base indicates that voluntary coordination, while valuable in many settings, may face constraints in addressing today's compounded political, financial, and humanitarian pressures without complementary institutional authority.

Against this background, the assessment examines whether a merger resulting in a single institutional entity offers a more effective pathway to address these structural constraints, while preserving mandate integrity and operational continuity.

The Envisioned Integrated Entity

Regardless of pathway, the assessment envisioned a single entity that brings together normative leadership, system wide accountability, policy reform, operational delivery and demographic foresight within one coherent institutional framework.

The integrated entity would preserve the full scope and integrity of existing mandates anchored in the Beijing Platform for Action, the ICPD Programme of Action and CEDAW. It would combine global normative authority with strengthened country level presence and operational reach. Governance would be unified under a single executive leadership structure, supported by consolidated corporate services and aligned regional and country offices. Lifesaving operations, humanitarian surge capacity, service delivery, work on peace and security, support to civil society, and support to normative progress would remain protected throughout transition and beyond.

The objective is not to merge or dilute mandates, but to remove structural barriers to high impact implementation and place existing commitments within a single institutional framework capable of accelerating delivery in a more contested and resource constrained environment.

As mentioned above, there is no legal impediment in proceeding with any of the three merger options set out in section 5.3. Any of the three merger proposals requires a decision of the General Assembly which, inter alia, ensures continuity of mandates. The distinction among pathways lies in sequencing, political exposure and operational manageability.

Governance: Leadership and Board Structure

Effective governance is a critical design parameter for any merger pathway and a central determinant of political legitimacy, mandate protection and operational coherence. A merger resulting in a single institutional entity would require a unified governance and leadership framework, explicitly authorized by the General Assembly, while ensuring intergovernmental oversight and accountability, including during any transition period.

Under a single-entity configuration, governance would need to provide one clear line of executive authority, supported by a coherent board structure with responsibility for strategic direction, oversight of performance,

3 https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2026/03/geap_progress_report_2026.pdf

accountability for results across the full mandate, and stewardship of financial integrity. Fragmented or parallel governance arrangements would risk perpetuating the very structural constraints the merger is intended to address, including split accountability across normative, coordination and operational functions.

Drawing on UN system precedent, including the establishment of UN Women, an initial governance model could include:

- A single Executive Head, appointed by the Secretary-General and accountable to a unified governing body.
- A single Executive Board, operating under General Assembly authority, with membership, regional representation and working methods determined through intergovernmental decision.
- Governance arrangements that explicitly recognize and safeguard the full scope of existing mandates, including normative, coordination and operational responsibilities anchored in the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and the ICPD Programme of Action.

At the same time, governance would need to reflect the different roles and functions brought together in a single entity. This may require internal leadership and advisory arrangements to ensure that all major mandate areas such as gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, population dynamics, humanitarian action, peace and security, and engagement with civil society are properly represented and overseen.

Governance arrangements would also need to reflect how the integrated entity is structured at country, regional and headquarters levels. Clear decision-making authority, accountability, and representation across these levels will be essential to support more coherent engagement with UN Country Teams, humanitarian coordination mechanisms, and broader UN reform efforts. Without this alignment, changes to country or regional structures risk reinforcing fragmentation rather than improving coordination and impact.

During any transition period, governance would also need to ensure continuity of oversight for ongoing programmes, funding commitments, and existing agreements. Phased transition arrangements - including interim governance where needed - would be important to maintain operational stability, donor confidence, and country-level engagement until the new governance structure is fully in place.

Detailed design of governance structures, including board composition, and decision-making processes, falls beyond the scope of this assessment and would require further intergovernmental guidance. However, the assessment indicates that clear, unified governance is a necessary condition for any merger pathway seeking to address structural fragmentation and establish shared accountability across the results continuum.

Evaluation Criteria

The pathways are assessed against a common set of criteria reflecting the complementary mandates and operating models of UNFPA and UN Women, as well as current geopolitical and funding realities. No mandate is treated as subordinate to the other. Assessment considers:

- Protection of the full scope of both entities' mandates across normative, policy and operational dimensions.
- Continuity of life saving operations, peace and security and humanitarian surge capacity.
- Continuity of support to the global feminist movement and normative progress.
- Political and intergovernmental feasibility, including exposure to mandate reopening.

- Transition complexity and manageability.
- Institutional coherence and end to end accountability potential.

The Three Optional Pathways

Composite Construction Drawing on Existing Institutional Precedent

Under this pathway, a reconfigured composite entity would be established as a new subsidiary organ, through consolidation and transfer of the existing mandates, functions and authorities from both entities into a unified institutional framework.

The composite entity approach draws on established UN precedent, notably the creation of UN Women under General Assembly resolution 64/289 (See Box 3). Any composite entity arrangement would require an explicit General Assembly decision, as it ultimately entails the consolidation and - at a predetermined indicative time - the dissolution of existing subsidiary organs. The concept provides a structured, sequenced approach to integration, enabling continuity of operations, preservation of the existing mandates and phased transitional arrangements.

It is recommended that if a merger occurs, integration should occur progressively and sequenced to maintain continuity of delivery and country level presence and normative leadership and avoid disruption to life saving operations.

This pathway offers political advantages and a balanced distribution of continuity and integration. It signals parity of mandates and coming together as a stronger unified institutional framework avoiding the perception that one entity is subsuming the other. It supports a balanced institutional identity.

Its principal challenges relate to design complexity and governance clarity. The new entity would build as much as possible on existing arrangements, such as financial, fiduciary, oversight, employment, administrative, and operational arrangements.

Successful implementation would require disciplined sequencing, explicit language on the continuation of the existing mandates and careful management of transition milestones.

The creation of UN Women as an institutional precedent for a composite entity

The establishment of UN Women in 2010 provides a directly relevant institutional precedent for the creation of a composite entity within the United Nations system.

In General Assembly resolution 63/311 on system-wide coherence, Member States requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive proposal on establishing a composite UN gender equality entity. Following this request, and the proposal contained in the SGs' comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women, UN Women was established through GA resolution 64/289. UN Women was established by consolidating four previously separate entities with related but distinct mandates: the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Prior to consolidation, the UN's gender equality architecture was characterized by fragmented institutional responsibility for normative standard setting, policy advocacy, coordination and operational delivery. These functions were distributed across multiple entities with different governance arrangements, funding models and institutional authority. This was widely recognized by Member States as constraining coherence, visibility and the UN system's ability to translate globally agreed commitments into consistent results at country level.

In response, the General Assembly decided to establish UN Women as a new subsidiary organ, endowed with a single Executive Director, unified governance arrangements and a consolidated institutional framework covering normative, coordination and operational functions. Importantly, the establishment of UN Women did not reopen or renegotiate existing intergovernmental mandates. Instead, the mandates, functions, staff, programmes, assets and liabilities of the predecessor entities were transferred into the new organization through a multi-year sequenced transitional arrangement, designed to ensure continuity of operations and political legitimacy throughout the transition period.

The UN Women precedent highlights several features that are directly relevant to the composite entity pathway examined in this assessment. First, the establishment of a composite entity by consolidating UNFPA and UN-Women (both established by the General Assembly) is to be carried out by a General Assembly decision. Second, mandate protection can be achieved by clearly separating the political decision to preserve the existing mandates from subsequent organizational and administrative steps required to implement that decision. Third, operational, legal and reputational risks associated with consolidation can be mitigated through phased implementation and explicit safeguards embedded in the relevant General Assembly resolution.

Integration Anchored in UNFPA

Under this pathway, integration would proceed by building on UNFPA's existing mandate and legal and operational framework, with UN Women's mandates and functions progressively incorporated into a reconfigured structure.

This approach benefits from UNFPA's extensive country presence, established regulatory and fiduciary frameworks, humanitarian surge capacity, and global supply chain infrastructure. As the larger operational entity with an established delivery platform across development and humanitarian settings, UNFPA provides an existing institutional architecture capable of supporting large-scale programme delivery and sustained engagement with national systems. Anchoring integration in this platform could simplify aspects of transition and help reduce operational risk, particularly in areas requiring scale, speed, and fiduciary assurance, including large-scale service delivery in fragile and humanitarian contexts.

At the same time, this pathway carries political and optical sensitivities. It may be perceived as narrowing or subordinating the distinct normative leadership, coordination, and advocacy roles associated with UN Women. There is also a risk that UNFPA's specifically defined SRHR, gender and population mandate, organizational culture, and delivery-oriented skill set could disproportionately shape the integrated entity, rather than supporting a fully balanced institutional culture aligned with the comprehensive gender equality and women's rights agenda. Full preservation and strengthening of UN Women's normative authority, system-wide coordination role, and women, peace and security functions would therefore require explicit governance safeguards, leadership visibility, and sustained resource commitments.

Integration Anchored in UN Women

Under this pathway, integration would proceed by building on UN Women's existing mandate and legal and governance framework, with UNFPA's mandates and operations progressively incorporated into a reconfigured structure.

This approach would build on an established architecture designed to advance gender equality across the UN system and to support Member States in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW. This approach benefits from UN Women's comprehensive mandate, its extensive country presence, its comprehensive programming, its partnerships with governments and civil society, its coordination role across the UN system, and its recognized strengths in normative leadership, advocacy, communications, and political engagement. Anchoring integration in UN Women could align the new entity with the UN's most recent institutional reform architecture in this area.

At the same time, this pathway presents political, operational and institutional challenges. SRHR is contested by a number of Member States. UN Women's current institutional architecture would require substantial strengthening to absorb and safely sustain UNFPA's large-scale clinical, commodity-based, and humanitarian operations, including procurement, quality assurance, supply chains, and surge capacity. These functions operate at significant scale and under specialized regulatory, fiduciary and operational frameworks that would need to be carefully preserved during any transition. Without phased institutional reinforcement, explicit operational safeguards, and substantial resource investment, there is a material risk of disruption to life-saving SRHR services and humanitarian delivery. Preserving UNFPA's operational authority, technical depth, and country-level delivery credibility would therefore be a central design and sequencing requirement under this pathway.

How mandate preservation and continuity were ensured in the creation of UN Women

The establishment of UN Women incorporated a number of design features that enabled institutional consolidation while safeguarding continuity and political legitimacy:

- Preservation of mandates: Existing intergovernmental mandates were neither reopened nor renegotiated; they were brought together intact within a single institutional framework.
- Continuity of operations: Ongoing programmes, normative work, partnerships, and coordination functions continued during transition, avoiding disruption to delivery.
- Sequenced transition: Institutional integration was carried out in stages, allowing time for governance, management, and operational arrangements to adjust while maintaining stability.

These features demonstrate how consolidation can be undertaken in a manner that protects mandates and sustains operational continuity and are relevant as precedent for any future composite entity pathway.

Comparative Observations and Next Steps

The assessment indicates that all pathways examined could, in principle, lead to the realization of the merger vision. The differences between them lie less in their ultimate institutional end state than in how political, operational and transition risks are distributed and managed during implementation.

Pathways anchored in one of the existing entities provide greater operational continuity during transition. However, they may also generate perceptions of institutional absorption or mandate hierarchy, particularly given the politically sensitive nature of both gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights mandates. Such perceptions could complicate stakeholder acceptance and risk undermining the balanced institutional positioning required to sustain broad political and donor support.

The composite entity pathway offers a different distribution of risks and opportunities. Building on the institutional precedent established through General Assembly resolution 64/289 in the creation of UN Women, this approach enables the consolidation of mandates, functions and governance arrangements within a single institutional framework while offering a pathway for preserving mandate continuity and allowing for carefully sequenced transitional arrangements. Importantly, it avoids the perception that one existing institution is absorbing the other and therefore provides a more balanced platform for integrating the full scope of mandates across gender equality, women’s empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and population dynamics.

The composite pathway requires deliberate design and disciplined sequencing to ensure operational continuity and institutional stability during transition. Implementation would depend on clearly defined merger readiness criteria, phased integration of operational platforms and strong transition governance. These requirements are manageable but underscore the importance of preparatory organizational design work prior to any intergovernmental decision.

On balance, the assessment concludes that the composite pathway provides the most viable strategic direction under current conditions. It offers the strongest basis for safeguarding mandate integrity, maintaining political legitimacy and securing broad stakeholder support while creating a unified institutional platform capable of strengthening end-to-end impact for women and girls.

For these reasons, the assessment identifies the composite entity pathway as the preferred direction for further exploration and organizational design work.

Nomenclature Considerations

The pathway assessment should be followed by a structured, risk- and opportunity-based reflection on nomenclature. The name of any future entity would carry political and operational significance, with implications for mandate protection, donor confidence, and country-level acceptance. Options range from transitional, dual naming that preserves both institutional identities during phased implementation, to evolutionary approaches that retain established brands while explicitly signaling expanded scope, to fully new names anchored in agreed normative language. In the current geopolitical context, premature decisions on nomenclature could amplify political exposure or reopen mandate sensitivities. A sequenced approach, aligned with the chosen pathway and timing of intergovernmental engagement, would therefore be essential and warrants further dedicated analysis.

SEQUENCING, TIMING, AND CONTINUITY

Implementation should be pursued within an ambitious yet realistic transition timeline: ambitious in delivering early, visible gains for people, and realistic in sequencing political, legal, funding and operational risk. The objective would be for the merger to begin making a tangible difference on the ground within approximately 12-18 months, while completing core institutional consolidation no later than the end of 2028. The achievability of this timeline is contingent on timely availability of dedicated transition funding, and the preservation of uninterrupted delivery throughout phased implementation.

Throughout any consideration of merger pathways, it is essential to underscore that the Strategic Plans of UNFPA and UN Women for 2026–2029, recently adopted by their respective governing bodies, remain fully in force. These plans provide the authoritative framework for normative leadership, programmatic delivery, humanitarian response, and system-wide coordination in the coming years. This continuity is particularly critical in relation to normative work, coordination, and accountability functions, which must continue without interruption. In the current context of intensified backlash against gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, sustained normative engagement, policy influence, and system-wide leadership are not discretionary activities but core functions. The assessment therefore assumes continuity of these roles throughout any preparatory or transitional phase, with merger-related work reinforcing rather than diverting institutional focus, including protection of programmatic flexibility in politically sensitive contexts.

Beyond protecting continuity, the transition must also reimagine how the new entity supports girls, adolescents, youth, and women across the life course in countries with both youthful and ageing populations. This requires embedding population insights and demographic analysis into early transition decisions, ensuring that public policy and programmatic investments remain grounded in human-rights-based, people-centred frameworks consistent with the ICPD Programme of Action. It is essential that the merger both safeguards and strengthens the normative foundations of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The new entity must therefore be positioned to counter norm erosion, support national implementation of global commitments, and maintain uninterrupted SRHR and gender equality leadership throughout the transition.

Any implementation would need to be guided by the following principles:

i. Explicit protection of CEDAW, ICPD, Beijing commitments, outlining how will these guarantees materialize, and when.

ii. Continuity of essential and life-saving operations, humanitarian response, peace and security work, funding to civil society and women's movements and normative and programmatic support to Member States to drive forward gender equality outcomes - given the contested environment. This includes protection of operational access, supply chains, and surge capacity in fragile and crisis-affected contexts, continuity and strengthening of normative leadership, coordination, and accountability functions, including sustained country level action and work and engagement with intergovernmental processes, national policy frameworks, and civil society.

iii. Disciplined sequencing of higher-risk operational changes.

iv. A focus on strengthening end-to-end impact rather than structural consolidation alone.

v. Alignment with broader UN80 system reform, including coherence with RC system and regional architecture reforms.

vi. Early and continuous engagement with the Executive Boards as key advisory bodies in this matter, and relevant intergovernmental stakeholders to manage sequencing, transitional arrangements, and political expectations.

vii. Explicit separation between political decision points and operational integration milestones, ensuring that cost-generating transition actions are undertaken only once mandate protection, funding continuity, and legal safeguards are secured to avoid premature cost exposure or delivery disruption, and;

viii. Financial viability and/or the availability of transition costs.

These principles assume continuity of mandates, host country agreements, delegated authorities, and regulatory frameworks throughout the transition period.

Early gains are most feasible in areas that do not require regulatory change. Early phases should therefore focus on unified strategic leadership, a shared results framework, and clearer end-to-end accountability in priority countries and crisis contexts, with improved coherence between global norms, national systems, and service delivery becoming visible well before formal institutional consolidation. Operational changes such as supply chains, and staffing arrangements must be sequenced with particular care, as any interruption to authorities governing procurement, quality assurance, indemnification, or humanitarian access would materially affect delivery.

Achieving the merger vision may also require a shift in the posture of the new organization, enabling more inclusive, forward looking engagement models and financing approaches. To secure the broad-based global engagement necessary to step up the advancement of this agenda, the entity could explore mechanisms for deeper participation of philanthropic foundations, civil society, youth-led organizations, and women's rights groups, including potential representation within governance structures such as the Executive Board. In parallel, innovative funding models - flexible financing windows, catalytic pooled funds, partnerships with philanthropic actors, and mechanisms that protect SRHR and gender equality financing in politically sensitive contexts - will be essential to ensure long-term sustainability. These adjustments should be sequenced carefully to protect existing funding streams and legal authorities while laying the groundwork for a more resilient, inclusive, and mission-aligned financing ecosystem.

An indicative timeline could include:

⇒ Initial Member States guidance in the form of a General Assembly Resolution.

⇒ Design of a possible organizational blueprint, possible governance options and draft transition plans, including careful sequencing of the transitions.

⇒ Early impact phase focused on protecting delivery, strengthening joint accountability, and demonstrating improved coherence on the ground.

⇒ Progressive institutional consolidation, subject to agreed conditions and periodic review of progress against the merger vision.

CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

Merging UNFPA and UN Women is both technically feasible and potentially beneficial, but only if it is managed with care, sequenced deliberately, and judged by a single overriding criterion: whether it delivers more consistent and measurable impact at scale for women and girls, including adolescents and youth, on the ground.

The objective should not be consolidation for its own sake, but the creation of a stronger and more coherent UN champion for all those being left furthest behind. An entity capable of advancing rights and choices across development, humanitarian, and peace contexts, while remaining responsive to diverse country realities.

Existing mandates on gender equality, women's empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as well as the generation and use of population and demographic evidence, should be preserved and reinforced rather than reopened at a time of growing political contestation.

Ultimately, success should not be assessed by the speed or form of institutional integration, but by whether global commitments translate into strengthened rights, expanded choice, and greater protection, resulting in tangible improvements in the lives of women and girls across different contexts and population groups.

ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR THE STRATEGIC MERGER ASSESSMENT OF UNFPA AND UN WOMEN

BACKGROUND

The Secretary-General's UN80 Initiative, *Shifting Paradigms: United to Deliver*, proposes assessing the merger of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

As emphasized in the Secretary-General's UN80 report, reform must be 'purposeful, anchored in clear ends, and measurable improvements in people's lives.' This assessment will align with these principles to reduce duplication, streamline operations, and optimize efficiencies while safeguarding mandate integrity. The aim is to realize the transformative vision of the Beijing Platform for Action and ICPD Programme of Action - a world where every woman and girl counts and thrives; where she is in full command of her rights and lives with equality, dignity, bodily autonomy, economic power, choices, voice and unlimited potential - while leaving no one behind.

OBJECTIVE

The goal of the Strategic Merger Assessment is to assess the benefits, risks, and feasibility of merging UNFPA and UN Women, and provide recommendations to the Secretary-General. The assessment reflects that there are two entities with mandates that under a potential consolidated structure, will share one vision.

Guided by the UN80 reform, the assessment of the possible merger between UN Women and UNFPA will focus on strengthening the UN's capacity to deliver with more impact for women and girls around the world.

SCOPE OF WORK

This assessment will conduct a high-level review of the strategic, operational, financial benefits and risks of merging UNFPA and UN Women. The assessment will cover the full programmatic portfolio[4] of both entities. The assessment will establish a factual mapping of the "as-is" baseline of both entities, examining the overlap and complementarity of their mandates, structures, and field presence. A core task will be to outline each entity's distinct value and comparative advantage to ensure mandate integrity and demonstrate potential for synergy and enhanced impact in a merged structure.

The team undertaking the task will produce an evidence-based analysis of the potential benefits and risks of a merger, organized under the following six strategic headings and potential lines of enquiry:

Impact

- How could a merger increase voice and influence at global, regional, and country levels on gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as population dynamics, covering development, peace, and humanitarian settings?

[4] including UNFPA's population work (capacity building of national statistical systems, census support, demographic data, etc.) as well as both entities' normative and coordination roles in support of the above vision.

- Can a merger improve results through joint normative, programmatic/operational, and coordination capacities?
- What risks would a merger present, including related to mandates, governance, and legal, including existing accreditation/hosted entity agreements?

Streamlined Structures

- What institutional overlaps, duplications or gaps could be resolved through a merger?
- How could a merged structure help to align with Resident Coordinator system reforms and Delivering as One principle?

Efficiency

- What are the indicative areas for cost savings (administration, back office, field presence)?

Credibility

- Examining brand identity, advocacy and communications, could combining brand strengths and mandates enhance donor confidence (including resource mobilization), effectiveness and public trust?
- How might a merger bring together diverse partnerships for women and gender equality, including with the private sector, and civil society?

Culture

- What cultural strengths from UNFPA and UN Women could be combined to create a more agile, inclusive, and impactful organization?
- What shared values and practices could serve as a foundation for a unified identity and sense of purpose in a merged entity?

Relevance

- How could a merged entity respond better to emerging global challenges (e.g., climate, crisis, digital)?
- Could a merger increase agility and responsiveness in humanitarian and development contexts?
- How could a merger strengthen humanitarian action, and peace and security work, including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in emergencies, gender-based violence prevention, and rapid deployment in crisis contexts?

METHODOLOGY AND GOVERNANCE

Methodology

The assessment will be conducted by a Task Team chaired and supported by independent experienced advisors working with staff from both entities. Strategic oversight of the work will be provided by the Steering Committee. It will be collaborative and ensure neither entity's mandate is diluted.

The methodology will include:

- **Desk Review:** Systematic review of all relevant mandates, Strategic Plans, host country agreements (legal implications of potential changes), and core documents, including existing agency-specific assessments (e.g. MOPAN).
- **Quantitative Analysis:** Data-driven mapping of budgets, staffing, footprint, structures, supply chain functions, expenditure and communications footprint, to quantify efficiency gains and transition costs.
- **Structured Consultations:** Focused set of interviews with leadership, staff across all levels (HQ, regional, country) and Member

States, donors, civil society and other stakeholders.

Governance Structure

- **Steering Committee:** Chaired by DSG with equal participation of the Executive Directors of UNFPA and UN Women. This body provides overall strategic oversight.
- **Task Team:** Co-chaired by Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen and Gulden Turkoz-Cosslett, three LEAD consultants (Tina Friis Hansen, Ruby Sandhu-Rojon and Mads Svendsen), and 2 staff from each entity (Sarah Hendriks and Rachel Dore-Weeks from UN Women, and Samuel Choritz and Nigina Muntean from UNFPA) who will provide 1) day-to-day management oversight, support and guidance; and 2) support for analysis, documentation, consultation logistics, change management and communications.
- **Data & Analytics Support:** Under the coordination of the Task Team, Jens Wandel with the support of the UN Advisory Alliance will provide data and analytics support, including quantitative assessments of each entity's footprint, finances, CEB data on personnel, procurement, partnerships, coordination capacities, brand identity, advocacy and communications footprint, etc.

KEY DELIVERABLES

- **Strategic Merger Assessment Report (Nov-January):** The assessment findings shall be delivered to the Steering Committee in mid-January and subsequently to the Secretary-General for his review and further action, enabling presentation to the Executive Boards at their sessions in February 2026. The Strategic Merger Assessment Report will include:
    - Executive Summary and Strategic Recommendations.
    - Evidence-based analysis based on the scope of the TOR.
    - Risk and benefit considerations and options for further exploration.

ANNEX 2. RISK LOG: RISK STATEMENTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#	RISK STATEMENT	MITIGATION MEASURES
1	Mandate reopening and political exposure. Establishing a new entity may invite reopening of ICPD and Beijing commitments or create opportunities for mandate dilution amid geopolitical polarization. Also, a formally adopted decision reached without consensus could result in practical constraints, including restrictions on country-level operations, partnerships, or funding where political support is uneven.	Put in place a robust political engagement strategy. Regular stakeholder consultations. Clearly articulate mandate preservation as an essential component of a merger; secure cross regional political alignment early; avoid pathways requiring renegotiation of mandates; conduct sequenced consultations before submitting any GA resolution. Explicitly affirm continuity of recently approved strategic plans for both entities. Ensure the merger is not stand alone but part of UN80 reform package. Aim at all times for a consensus agreement.
2	Perceived dilution or weakening of the GEWE mandate. Organizational integration may be perceived as diluting or weakening the visibility, influence, or coordination role of the gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) mandate. If safeguards protecting GEWE leadership and functions are not clearly designed and communicated, key stakeholders may view the restructuring as regressive.	Embed explicit mandate protections in governing decisions; establish visible and empowered GEWE leadership and coordination structures; publish clear accountability mechanisms; demonstrate early normative and coordination gains; maintain sustained engagement with feminist movements and civil society; use transitional dual branding where appropriate. Explicitly affirm continuity of recently approved strategic plans for both entities. Ensure the merger is not stand alone but part of UN80 reform package.
3	Perceived dilution or weakening of the SRHR and population mandate. Organizational integration may be perceived as diluting or weakening the visibility, influence, or technical focus of the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and population mandate. If safeguards protecting SRHR leadership, expertise, and delivery functions are not clearly designed and communicated, stakeholders may view the restructuring as undermining mandate integrity.	Embed explicit mandate protections in governing decisions; establish visible SRHR leadership and technical structures; publish clear accountability mechanisms; demonstrate early mandate continuity and delivery safeguards; maintain sustained engagement with Member States and partners; use transitional dual branding where appropriate. Explicitly affirm continuity of recently approved strategic plans for both entities. Ensure the merger is not stand alone but part of UN80 reform package.

4	Exposure to political restrictions on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Combining GEWE and SRHR mandates in a new entity subjects the entire organization to donor driven political restrictions.	Diversify donor base; engage donors early on structural options; sequence merger decisions to protect funding continuity; explore and design internal financial firewalling where feasible; provide clear communication on mandate protection and funding safeguards; build alternative funding streams.
5	Exposure to political restrictions related to broader gender equality, inclusion, and rights-based programming. Recent expansions of donor political conditionalities extend beyond sexual and reproductive health and rights to encompass a wider range of gender equality, inclusion, and rights-based services and advocacy.	Engage donors early on structural and compliance options; design internal safeguards and financial or programmatic firewalling where feasible; maintain contingency financing; closely monitor legal and policy developments and adjust sequencing and implementation accordingly.
6	Donor funding stability during transition. Uncertainty about institutional identity, mandate balance, and transition execution may lead donors to pause, reduce, or rebalance funding, increase earmarking, or delay multiyear commitments.	Engage donors proactively; share detailed transition plans; articulate mandate continuity and delivery safeguards; establish protected GEWE and SRHR funding windows; secure explicit donor commitments where possible; demonstrate continuity of delivery.
7	Donor funding reductions driven by assumed efficiency gains. Donors may assume that organizational integration or mandate consolidation will generate rapid efficiency gains, leading to reduced contributions or expectations of immediate cost savings during a period requiring upfront transition investment.	Communicate realistic cost trajectories; emphasize that efficiencies materialize later; provide clear financial analysis; secure transitional financing; engage donors early to prevent efficiency driven reductions; demonstrate uninterrupted delivery.
8	Loss of clarity and focus in humanitarian assistance. In the context of organizational integration or restructuring, donors may perceive a consolidated humanitarian appeal as insufficiently differentiated between life-saving emergency response and broader development or normative programming.	Maintain a distinct, high visibility humanitarian financing window within consolidated appeals; clearly signal life-saving priorities and thresholds; preserve separate tracking and reporting for emergency SRHR and GBV interventions; engage humanitarian donors early to reinforce the urgency and specificity of life saving funding needs.

9	Availability of transition cost funding and cost escalation. Creation of a new entity requires significant investment in systems, legal work, and staffing, risking unmanaged cost escalation.	Seek dedicated additional funding upfront so funds are not diverted from ongoing programmes; stage system build out; align with broader UN80 reforms to reduce duplication of infrastructure costs.
10	Loss or dilution of UN Women's institutional identity. Organizational restructuring or integration may result in the loss, dilution, or perceived absorption of UN Women's globally recognized institutional identity, visibility, and symbolic leadership as the UN entity dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment.	Maintain transitional dual branding; ensure consistent and visible use of UN Women identity during transition; safeguard narrative positioning in governing and communications decisions; engage feminist movements and civil society early and consistently; sequence communications to reinforce continuity of identity.
11	Loss or dilution of UNFPA's institutional identity. Organizational restructuring or integration may result in the loss, dilution, or perceived weakening of UNFPA's globally recognized institutional identity, visibility, and standing as the UN entity associated with sexual and reproductive health and rights and population related work.	Maintain transitional dual branding; ensure consistent and visible use of UNFPA identity during transition; safeguard narrative positioning in governing and communications decisions; sustain engagement with Member States and partners; sequence communications to reinforce continuity of institutional identity.
12	Loss of partner and country level confidence during transition. Organizational restructuring or integration may create uncertainty or misinterpretation among governments, partners, and civil society regarding institutional continuity, political positioning, or engagement models, leading to hesitation or reduced confidence at country level.	Maintain continuity of country teams and partnership modalities; implement transitional identity and signaling measures; engage governments and civil society early and consistently; preserve existing engagement models where effective; allow differentiated country approaches; proactively manage political messaging at country and regional levels.
13	Disruption of life saving humanitarian and SRHR service delivery. Transition related bottlenecks in governance, procurement, and operational systems may disrupt life-saving humanitarian and sexual and reproductive health services, including the delivery of essential reproductive health commodities, particularly in high fragility and crisis contexts.	Ring fence frontline operational and humanitarian budgets; maintain parallel procurement and supply chain authorities throughout the transition; designate a dedicated transition supply chain and humanitarian continuity task force; protect local and regional supply chains until safe transfer conditions are met; prioritize uninterrupted country level delivery.

14	Transition complexity and operational disruption. The scale and complexity of organizational transition, including staff transfers, systems rebuilding, regulatory and governance changes, procurement redesign, and fiduciary reconfiguration, may create prolonged ambiguity and operational disruption.	Implement a phased and sequenced transition design; establish an empowered transition management office; clarify decision rights early; protect critical operational authorities until safe transfer conditions are met; run a deliberate, well-resourced change and communications process.
15	Loss of focus on specialized target groups and delivery approaches. Organizational integration or mandate broadening may reduce the visibility, prioritization, or resourcing of specialized target groups, thematic areas, or delivery approaches that currently benefit from focused institutional attention. This risk applies across mandates and may arise if programme architecture, financing signals, or accountability mechanisms are not sufficiently differentiated.	Design programme architecture that preserves differentiated delivery tracks within an integrated mandate; maintain visible priority windows for specialized interventions were justified by risk or vulnerability; ensure disaggregated tracking and accountability for targeted outcomes; periodically review portfolio balance to confirm that integration strengthens rather than weakens reach and effectiveness.
16	Politicization of SRHR affecting access and delivery. Sexual and reproductive health and rights programming, if perceived narrowly or framed in ways that amplify ideological contestation, may trigger politicization and opposition in certain political and country contexts.	Affirm and communicate the full scope of SRHR across the life course, including maternal health, family planning, adolescent health, HIV/STIs, gender based violence response, and population dynamics; maintain clear separation between normative positioning and operational delivery where appropriate; preserve country level flexibility in framing and implementation; strengthen political engagement and stakeholder mapping; reaffirm international commitments while tailoring messaging to context.
17	Reduced diversity of programme delivery modalities. Organizational integration may narrow the range of programme delivery modalities available at country level.	Preserve a differentiated set of programme delivery modalities alongside CPDs; retain delegated authority for direct support mechanisms in restrictive environments; periodically review modality effectiveness to ensure that integration strengthens, rather than narrows, operational reach.

18	Institutional uncertainty affecting staff morale and retention. Prolonged uncertainty regarding organizational direction, leadership, roles, and integration sequencing may undermine staff morale, slow decision making, and weaken internal coherence during transition.	Communicate clear milestones and decision points; provide structured staff transition pathways; clarify roles and leadership early; invest in organizational development and change management; maintain strong, transparent internal communication and engagement mechanisms.
19	Cultural dominance shaping mandate expression. Differences in organizational culture and operating models may result in one legacy organization's norms, priorities, and decision-making approaches dominating the integrated entity, potentially narrowing how mandates are expressed in practice.	Embed balanced leadership and governance arrangements; ensure visible mandate stewardship roles; invest deliberately in culture integration and shared organizational values; align systems and incentives to reflect the full mandate; monitor mandate balance over time.
20	Insufficient merger readiness for large scale operational integration. The receiving institutional platform may not yet have the regulatory authority, fiduciary permissions, systems maturity, and organizational capacity required to safely absorb and manage large scale operational, procurement, and supply chain functions. Premature integration before readiness thresholds are met could result in significant operational and delivery risks.	Define and agree explicit merger readiness criteria; sequence integration based on demonstrated readiness rather than fixed timelines; maintain existing operational platforms until readiness thresholds are met; adopt dual running arrangements; invest in systems, staffing, and governance capacity in advance; implement a multi-year readiness and capacity strengthening plan.