



BEYOND THE BREAKING POINT

THE CONTINUING IMPACT OF FUNDING CUTS ON
WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN HUMANITARIAN
SETTINGS

SUMMARY REPORT

July 2026



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

Read the full report - [Beyond the Breaking Point: The Continuing Impact of Funding Cuts on Women's Organizations in Humanitarian Settings](#)

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This publication is produced by the Humanitarian Section, Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division, UN Women, Geneva.

Cover photo: Women displaced by the war in Sudan meet with UN Women staff at the Al-Zaeem Al-Azhari School in Port Sudan. Al-Azhari is sheltering displaced families who have fled their homes due to escalating violence. April 2025. Credit: UN Women/Ekram Hamad Fadlalla

Suggested citation: UN Women (2026) Beyond the Breaking Point: The Continuing Impact of Funding Cuts on Women's Organizations in Humanitarian Settings - Summary Report (UN Women: Geneva).

Publication date, July 2026.



OVERVIEW

Women and girls in humanitarian crises are already paying the price of a historic decline in international humanitarian assistance. At a time when humanitarian needs remain at record levels, the organizations best placed to reach them are themselves struggling to survive. Women-led and women’s rights organizations in crisis-affected countries are being forced to reduce services, weakening protection for women and girls while eroding the local capacity on which effective humanitarian action depends.

National and local women-led and women's rights organizations are indispensable first responders and long-term partners in humanitarian action. They are often the first – and sometimes the only – organizations able to reach women and girls in remote, conflict-affected and hard-to-reach settings, providing life-saving assistance where others cannot. They remain long after international attention has shifted elsewhere, serving as trusted partners for communities while advancing women's rights, leadership and recovery. Their erosion therefore represents not only a funding crisis for individual organizations, but a growing threat to effective, accountable and locally led humanitarian action.

Building on UN Women's [2025 assessment](#) of the early impacts of funding reductions, this report draws on a survey of 855 primarily national and local women-led and women's rights organizations across 52 countries and contexts, more than two thirds of which operate in 20 countries with significant humanitarian needs. In addition, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with women civil society leaders and women receiving support across 10 crisis contexts. The full report, [Beyond the Breaking Point: The Continuing Impact of Funding Cuts on Women's Organizations in Humanitarian Settings](#), contains the complete evidence base, methodology, country case studies and detailed analysis.

In early 2025, organizations warned that continued funding cuts would force them to reduce services, lose staff and weaken support for women and girls. Over one year later, this report finds that many of those warnings have now materialized. What began as an acute funding shock has become an entrenched operating reality, with organizations now functioning at permanently reduced capacity as the consequences for women and girls continue to deepen.

FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

ACCESS



of surveyed women-led organizations report rising need.



can no longer meet it



Nearly 1 million women and girls previously receiving support are no longer being reached.

PROTECTION

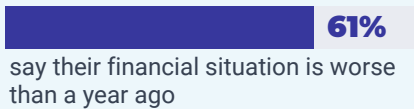
86% of organizations observe increases in gender-based violence

92% of organizations observe increases in economic vulnerability

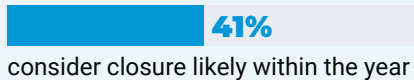
LOCALIZATION

Only **4.3%** of humanitarian funding reached local actors directly in 2025

FINANCIAL STRAIN



say their financial situation is worse than a year ago



consider closure likely within the year

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS WANT



89% call for flexible, multi-year core funding.

KEY FINDINGS

Women and girls are losing access to critical services

Demand for support continues to increase, but organizations are increasingly unable to respond. Eighty-four per cent report growing numbers of women and girls requiring assistance, yet 88 per cent say they can no longer meet current levels of need. Nearly six in ten organizations are reaching fewer women and girls than before January 2025, resulting in nearly one million women and girls no longer receiving support. This is a conservative estimate based on responses of surveyed organizations and therefore likely understates the wider impact across humanitarian settings. Nearly half have introduced waiting lists or are turning women and girls away.

The services being reduced are among those most critical to women's safety, protection and recovery. Livelihoods and economic empower-

ment programmes (72 per cent), safe spaces and women's centres (62 per cent), and gender-based violence case management services (61 per cent) are among those most frequently reported as unavailable or significantly reduced. These cuts fall hardest on women and girls already facing the greatest barriers to assistance, including those living in remote and conflict-affected areas, women and girls with disabilities, displaced women and girls, and female-headed households.

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“Due to the enormous increase in needs, we were forced to put more than 1,500 female-headed households on a waiting list. The most affected groups are single mothers and their children, for whom postponing support has worsened food insecurity and malnutrition.”

—Survey respondent, women-led organization, Democratic Republic of the Congo



Photo: Staff members of the Rassemblement des Femmes Engagées de Ouanaminthe (RFEO) display dresses made by women supported by the organization in Ouanaminthe, in northeastern Haiti. 1 June 2026. Photo: UN Women/Jess DiPierro Obert

Protection risks are increasing as support systems contract

As essential services become less available, organizations report worsening conditions for the women and girls they serve. Ninety-two per cent observe increasing economic vulnerability, 88 per cent worsening mental health distress, 86 per cent increasing gender-based violence, and 85 per cent a growing unpaid care burden on women and girls.

Eighty-two per cent report rising school dropout among girls. Nearly three-quarters report increases in early or forced marriage, while 62 per cent observe increasing survival or transactional sex.

These findings suggest that as protective services contract, women and girls are facing heightened risks with fewer avenues for support. This comes at a time when conflict-related sexual violence is increasing globally, underscoring the importance of maintaining the very services now being reduced.

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"Now, because we no longer have the resources, we have had to shift to a system where survivors must come to the organization by themselves. Many of the most vulnerable women cannot afford to travel."

—Survey respondent, women-led organization, Democratic Republic of the Congo



Photo: A woman consults with a doctor and pharmacist at a women-led organization in central Afghanistan which also provides mental health counselling, psychosocial support, and livelihoods training. The organization, supported by UN Women, was forced to reduce staff in 2025 as a result of aid cuts. Further reductions in funding will force it to scale back its medical services. Photo: UN Women/Sayed Habib Bidell

¹ Participation was voluntary and self-selected; findings should be read as indicative of broader trends rather than statistically representative of all women-led and women's rights organizations in humanitarian settings. Figures on impacts to women and girls reflect organizations' own observations of the communities they serve, not direct reporting by women and girls themselves.

Women's organizations are reaching breaking point

Funding reductions are no longer a temporary disruption but a structural feature of the humanitarian operating environment. Eighty-eight per cent of organizations reported moderate or severe impacts of funding cuts in 2025, and 83 per cent expect similar impacts to continue through 2026. Sixty-one per cent say their financial situation has deteriorated over the past year, including 14 per cent that describe it as critical.

Among organizations able to quantify their losses, respondents collectively reported losing approximately \$170 million in international assistance during 2025 alone, with a median loss of approximately \$112,500 per organization. Forty-five per cent report having six months or less of operational funding remaining, while 41 per cent consider suspension or permanent closure likely within the coming year.

To sustain services, organizations have reduced staff (77 per cent), struggled to cover core operating costs (68 per cent) and increasingly relied on unpaid or volunteer labour (65 per cent). Many leaders also describe drawing on personal savings or debt to keep their organizations operating. Adaptation has enabled many organizations to survive, but often at permanently reduced levels of capacity. Sixty-six per cent describe themselves as adapting or stabilizing, but recovery remains rare: only 9 per cent report having recovered or strengthened, while a third describe their situation as declining or at a crisis point.

The systems that make humanitarian action safe and accountable are among the first functions to be reduced. Nearly one in three organizations report being forced to suspend or significantly

reduce safeguarding, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) or accountability to affected populations (AAP) functions - not by choice, but as a last resort to keep frontline services running. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle: weakened organizational systems make it harder to meet donor requirements, making it more difficult to secure the very funding needed to recover.

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"The continued reduction in aid does not only threaten the existence of organizations as legal entities - it threatens the social fabric and safety networks that we have built with women and girls over years. Reliance on short-term grants prevents us from achieving sustainable structural change and keeps us in a permanent state of emergency response."

— Representative of a women-led organization, Lebanon



Photo: In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), women leaders in North Kivu convened in Bukavu to share experiences and ambitions in a roundtable discussion with UN Women and the DRC Ministry of Gender. August 2023, Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

Progress towards gender equality and locally led humanitarian action is being reversed

Faced with shrinking resources, organizations are increasingly forced to prioritize immediate humanitarian assistance over longer-term work to advance gender equality. Fifty-eight per cent report declining participation of women in community decision-making, 31 per cent report reduced capacity to advocate for women's rights, and one in five has suspended longer-term gender equality programming altogether.

At the same time, direct funding to women-led organizations continues to decline. Fifty-seven per cent report receiving less direct funding since 2025, including 17 per cent that no longer receive any. Sixty-seven per cent also report reduced participation in humanitarian coordination and decision-making forums. A decade after the Grand Bargain set a 25 per cent target for direct funding to local and national actors, only 4.3 per cent reached them directly in 2025.

These findings point to a broader systemic risk. As women-led organizations lose staff, expertise and institutional capacity, the humanitarian system loses trusted local partners, community relationships and the ability to deliver effective, accountable and gender-responsive assistance where it is needed most.

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"Women-led organizations are small in number but play a huge role... even without funding we continue. Imagine what we could do with direct support."

— Representative of a women-led organization, Sudan

Organizations continue to adapt, but resilience has limits

Despite these challenges, women-led and women's rights organizations continue to demonstrate extraordinary resilience. They are seeking new donors, forming partnerships and coalitions, sharing staff and resources, reducing operational costs and adapting how they deliver services in order to continue supporting women and girls.

Yet adaptation cannot compensate indefinitely for sustained funding reductions. Two in five organizations secured no new funding during 2025–2026, underscoring that resilience cannot substitute for predictable, flexible and accessible financing.



Photo: Régine Zéphirin Diègue, founder of the Movement for the Integration and Emancipation of Disabled Women (MIEFH), Haiti's first organization dedicated to women and girls with disabilities, located in Cap-Haitien. Since founding MIEFH in 2009, Régine has led more than 15 years of work to uphold the dignity, rights, and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities. UN Women supports women-led organizations like MIEFH all over Haiti, delivering critical services to women and girls. 2 June 2026. Photo: UN Women/Jess DiPierro Obert

The current financing model is failing women's organizations

The findings indicate that the challenge is not simply the volume of humanitarian funding available, but the way it is delivered. Organizations consistently emphasize that what would make the greatest difference is financing that is more direct, flexible and predictable.

Eighty-nine per cent call for flexible, multi-year core funding. Eighty-six per cent call for direct engagement with donors, and sixty-six per cent flag the number of intermediary layers between them and funders as a specific barrier. Respondents most often cite short grant durations without multi-year security, inadequate coverage of core and overhead costs, and donor preference for larger international organizations over local actors as the practices doing the most damage to their work.

CONCLUSION

Women-led and women's rights organizations have demonstrated extraordinary resilience. They have adapted programmes, formed partnerships, shared resources and continued serving their communities despite unprecedented financial pressure. But resilience cannot substitute for sustainable financing.

The evidence presented in this report is clear. Protecting women-led and women's rights organizations is not only an investment in gender equality. It is essential to preserving the trusted local capacity that enables humanitarian action to reach women and girls where it is needed most. Without urgent action, the organizations that have sustained women and girls through some of the world's most severe crises risk becoming another casualty of conflict and funding cuts.



Photo: Roselene Pierre, President of Rassemblement des Femmes Engagées de Ouanaminthe (RFE0) – an organization in northeast Haiti supported by UN Women – walks to the border to meet women and girls deported from the Dominican Republic. 1 June 2026. Photo: UN Women/Jess DiPierro Obert

PRIORITY ACTIONS



Protect essential services for women and girls

Donors and humanitarian actors should prioritize funding for gender-responsive humanitarian services, including gender-based violence prevention and response, safe spaces, women's centres and integrated referral pathways.



Prevent irreversible organizational loss

Donors, pooled funds, and UN agencies should establish stabilization and bridge-funding mechanisms to help women-led organizations retain staff, preserve essential capacity and avoid permanent closure.



Reform humanitarian financing

Bilateral donors, multilateral organizations and the UN system should expand direct, flexible and multi-year funding that covers core organizational costs, reduces intermediary funding layers and enables organizations to plan beyond short emergency funding cycles.



Invest in women-led organizations as strategic humanitarian partners

Humanitarian coordination mechanisms, Humanitarian Country Teams, clusters, donors and UN entities should recognize women-led and women's rights organizations as essential humanitarian actors by strengthening their participation and leadership in coordination, decision-making and humanitarian reform processes, and embedding equitable partnerships across humanitarian response.



Photo: Women displaced by the war in Sudan meet with UN Women staff at a displacement site in Port Sudan. April 2025. Photo: UN Women/Ekram Hamad Fadlall

Read the full report here: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2026/07/beyond-the-breaking-point-the-continuing-impact-of-funding-cuts-on-womens-organizations-in-humanitarian-settings>

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

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

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are



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