

Tip Sheet 1

Tracking National Action Plans on Violence Against Women and Girls

A practical tip sheet for women's rights organisations and allies

ACT COFEM

Advocacy, Coalition Building, and Transformative Feminist Action to End Violence against Women

Tip Sheet 1

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How to use this tip sheet

National action plans (NAPs) on violence against women and girls (VAWG) organise how states prevent violence, support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. They translate legal and political commitments into institutional responsibilities, timelines, budgets and reporting arrangements, often across multiple sectors and levels of government. When they are weak, uncosted or poorly governed, they risk becoming symbolic policy documents that signal concern without shifting systems.

This tip sheet shows women's rights organisations (WROs) and allies how to read a NAP as an accountability instrument: whether it is credible on paper, whether it is governable in practice, and whether its commitments translate into delivery. It is organised around a single idea: treat the plan as a tool for interrogation, not an end in itself.

You will find three kinds of content throughout:

- Short, action-oriented guidance in the main text: what to look for and what to do next.
- Background boxes that explain key concepts at a glance, so the narrative stays practical.
- Country examples that show what engagement looks like in practice.

Your NAP roadmap at a glance

The tip sheet walks you through three anchors for reading any NAP, followed by a set of advocacy strategies and a red-flags checklist.

ANCHOR 1
THE ELEMENTS OF A CREDIBLE NAP

What the plan says. Does it define VAWG in line with international standards, cover the full scope of prevention and response, and recognise intersecting discrimination?

ANCHOR 2
HOW A STATE EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTS A NAP

Is the plan governable? Is it anchored in political authority, embedded in government systems, and aligned across national and sub-national levels?

ANCHOR 3
HOW WROS AND ALLIES MONITOR A NAP

DO commitments translate into delivery? How do we interrogate what monitoring reports do and do not show, and how do we apply pressure through oversight moments?

ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

How to turn this reading into influence across the NAP cycle.

Background: Why read NAPs as accountability instruments?

NAPs on VAWG are often treated as technical coordination tools. In practice, they function more like political artefacts: they perform commitment while rarely compelling action. Reading a plan as an accountability instrument means asking a different set of questions from those posed by a design review: what can the plan compel the state to do, who has the authority to convene and direct across sectors, and what happens when targets go unmet? VAWG commitments are typically dispersed across justice, health, social development, education, policing, local government and finance systems. Without a plan that is both politically backed and institutionally embedded, dispersion produces fragmentation and issues such as underdeveloped prevention, uneven services, and weakened accountability. A credible NAP provides a structure to trace responsibility and assess performance. The three anchors that follow offer a practical way of reading any plan against this standard.

ANCHOR 1:
The elements of a credible NAP

Why it matters

The first anchor is the substance of the plan itself: how it defines VAWG, what it chooses to cover, and whose experiences of violence it takes seriously. A credible plan defines VAWG in line with international standards, recognises multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and addresses both prevention and response. This is the plan as a written document, what appears on the page before any question of implementation.

Drawing on UN Women's Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence Against Women[1], a comprehensive NAP should cover at least six areas of action: legislation and policy, coordination mechanisms, prevention, services and support, capacity-building, and data, research, monitoring and evaluation. The RESPECT framework, developed by WHO and UN Women, further emphasises that national planning must embed evidence-based prevention strategies rather than rely only on awareness campaigns or criminal-justice responses.[2] Plans that focus narrowly on survivor services or prosecution miss the structural drivers of violence: gender inequality, harmful social norms, economic insecurity and weak institutional accountability.

What to look for

Read the plan closely against four questions:

- ☑ **Framing:** Does it define the problem in gendered and rights-based terms, or in vague, gender-neutral, depoliticised language?
- ☑ **Scope:** Does it address prevention, protection, services, justice, economic measures, data and coordination, or only one part of the system (e.g. 'awareness' campaigns or criminal law)? Does the plan recognise the online-offline continuum of violence, and is it designed to respond to how violence moves across digital, physical and institutional settings?
- ☑ **Stated commitments:** Does it name specific institutions, timelines and indicators on the page, or rely on broad promises that are difficult to verify?
- ☑ **Intersectionality:** Does it explicitly recognise women and girls facing intersecting discrimination — across race, ability, Indigeneity, rurality, migrant and refugee experience, diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and age?

These questions matter because the boundaries of the plan determine the boundaries of accountability. If the plan excludes prevention, it will not be funded. If the plan does not specify survivor services, they remain discretionary. If the plan does not identify marginalised groups, implementation defaults to the needs of those easiest to reach.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

Peru[3]: National Plan against Gender-Based Violence 2016–2021

Peru's 2016–2021 National Plan is widely cited as an example of substantive framing. It defines gender-based violence across the life course and across public and private spheres, sets out five strategic objectives spanning prevention, attention, protection and sanction, and explicitly names Indigenous, rural and Afro-Peruvian women, women with disabilities and LBTQ women as groups facing intersecting discrimination. Adopted by supreme decree and developed with civil society input, it gave feminist organisations a clear accountability reference for testing subsequent reforms and budget allocations. Its weaknesses, notably fragmented subnational implementation, fall into Anchor 2 territory, but as a written plan its framing set a high bar.

ANCHOR 2:

How a state effectively implements a NAP

Why it matters

Plans do not implement themselves. The second anchor moves from what the plan says to whether it is governable, whether it is anchored in political authority, embedded in government systems, aligned across the institutions and levels of government that have to deliver it, and linked to credible budgeting and resource allocation processes. A plan can meet every Anchor 1 test on the page and still fail here.

NAPs often assign coordination to departments or units with limited authority, small budgets or weak convening power. In these cases, "coordination" becomes an administrative function rather than a directive one. Meetings are held and reports are produced, but implementation remains uneven because no single actor compels cross-system compliance. Sector responsibilities are another point of failure: plans distribute roles across justice, health, policing, education and social services without aligning them in practice, producing a familiar pattern in which each sector delivers within its own mandate while gaps emerge between them.

Implementation is further shaped by how plans travel through everyday government processes. When commitments remain at high-level intention, they are easier to endorse than to execute. When they are written into departmental plans, performance agreements and service-delivery frameworks, they are more likely to shape practice. Plans are often most strained at sub-national level: provincial or local authorities assume responsibilities without corresponding authority, capacity or clarity, producing uneven implementation in which some areas build functioning responses while others rely heavily on civil society to fill gaps.



COUNTRY EXAMPLE

Uruguay[5]: Ley 19.580 and the Integrated System of Response to Gender-Based Violence

Uruguay's 2017 Ley Integral de Violencia hacia las Mujeres basada en Género (Ley 19.580) offers a clear example of implementation architecture written into statute. The law creates a formal Sistema Interinstitucional de Respuesta that obliges health, justice, police, education and social development to work from shared definitions and referral protocols, and anchors coordination in the Consejo Nacional Consultivo, a cabinet-level body chaired by INMUJERES within the Ministry of Social Development. The operational plan sits inside this system rather than alongside it, which gives the lead institution real convening authority over other ministries.

The Uruguayan experience also shows where implementation architecture strains. Budget allocations to specialised units, shelters and frontline services have not consistently kept pace with the statutory mandate; departmental-level delivery is uneven; and feminist organisations have had to press repeatedly for stronger disaggregated reporting. The case illustrates both what Anchor 2 looks like when it is taken seriously - statutory backing, cabinet authority, a named system rather than a stand-alone plan — and the points at which even well-architected systems need sustained civil-society pressure to deliver.

What to look for[4]

Assess implementation architecture across the full institutional chain. Where Anchor 1 asks whether the plan says the right things, Anchor 2 asks whether the state can actually run it:

- ☑ **Political authority:** Is there cabinet, presidential, ministerial or parliamentary backing strong enough to compel cooperation across sectors, not merely to endorse the plan, but to direct its execution?
- ☑ **Lead institution's real power:** Does the coordinating body have the seniority, convening authority and institutional weight to direct other departments, or is its mandate administrative in practice?
- ☑ **Integration into government machinery:** Have commitments been written into medium-term strategic plans, annual performance agreements and sectoral delivery frameworks, or do they sit alongside them as parallel documents?
- ☑ **Cross-sector harmonisation:** Are justice, health, policing, education, social development and local government working from shared definitions, referral protocols and data standards or operating in parallel silos?
- ☑ **Sub-national alignment:** Do provincial or local authorities have the mandate, staffing, training and resourcing to deliver their assigned responsibilities and are national and sub-national reporting systems aligned?
- ☑ **From allocation to execution:** Are the activities the plan names actually reaching frontline services through the budget cycle (execution rates, procurement, staffing, disbursement to sub-national delivery points), or are they stranded in headline allocations? (See the companion *Budget tip sheet* for how to trace this.)

Taken together, these dynamics shape whether a plan moves beyond coordination on paper to harmonisation in practice. Weak authority, diffuse responsibility and poor integration into government systems rarely produce outright failure, but something more difficult to challenge: partial, uneven implementation that is tough to measure and easy to overstate.

ANCHOR 3:

How WROs and allies monitor a NAP

Why it matters

Monitoring is where plans are made to look like they are working, and where that claim needs to be interrogated. Most plans include indicators, targets and reporting requirements. These systems create the appearance of oversight, but what is measured is often uneven and superficial. Reporting tends to prioritise activities such as trainings delivered, campaigns run and guidelines produced over results. Far less attention is given to whether survivors can access quality, survivor-centred essential services across health, justice, policing and social support systems, whether responses are coordinated across sectors, or whether prevention efforts are reducing risk and shifting norms over time. Activity-based reporting is easier to produce, easier to aggregate and less likely to expose institutional weakness, but it leaves core questions of effectiveness largely untested.

The design of monitoring systems also shapes what remains invisible. Weak or absent baselines make it difficult to assess change. Limited disaggregation obscures who is and is not being reached. Indicators that are not aligned between sectors prevent a coherent view of system performance. In some cases, data exists but is controlled or released selectively, limiting its usefulness for external scrutiny.

Even where monitoring systems are in place, the consequences of poor performance are often unclear. Reports are produced, but follow-up action is inconsistent and responsibilities for addressing gaps are diffuse. Over time, this produces a cycle in which plans continue to be cited as evidence of commitment, even as coordination weakens and implementation slows. This is how plans survive failure: they remain visible in policy language, public statements and donor reporting, while the systems required to deliver on them falter or stall. Rather than exposing this dynamic, monitoring can inadvertently sustain it if it prioritises activity over outcome and reporting over accountability.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE - South Africa[6]

South Africa illustrates both the potential and the limits of formal GBV accountability architectures in a context of strong feminist mobilisation. Feminist protests and advocacy after the 2018 Presidential Summit on GBVF pushed government to adopt a National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP GBVF) in 2020, establish an Inter-Ministerial Committee, and commit to a multi-sectoral National Council on GBVF as a statutory body. Yet implementation reports and emerging monitoring initiatives underline a persistent gap between policy ambition and delivery: key NSP targets have been missed in the first three years, resources remain fragmented, and civil-society actors continue to play a central role in documenting femicide, tracking police and court responses, and pressuring the state to close implementation and data gaps. Used this way, monitoring becomes less a technical exercise and more a site of contestation that tests claims of progress, names delivery gaps, and pushes plans from symbolic visibility towards concrete obligations

What to do

For feminist activists, the task is not only to read monitoring reports, but to interrogate what they do and do not show. Women's rights organisations can also draw on comparative accountability tools and databases to strengthen monitoring and advocacy efforts, including the UN Women Global Database on Violence Against Women, which provides country-level legislative and policy data, as well as broader indexes that track state responses to gender inequality and violence.

A simple accountability cycle is useful here:

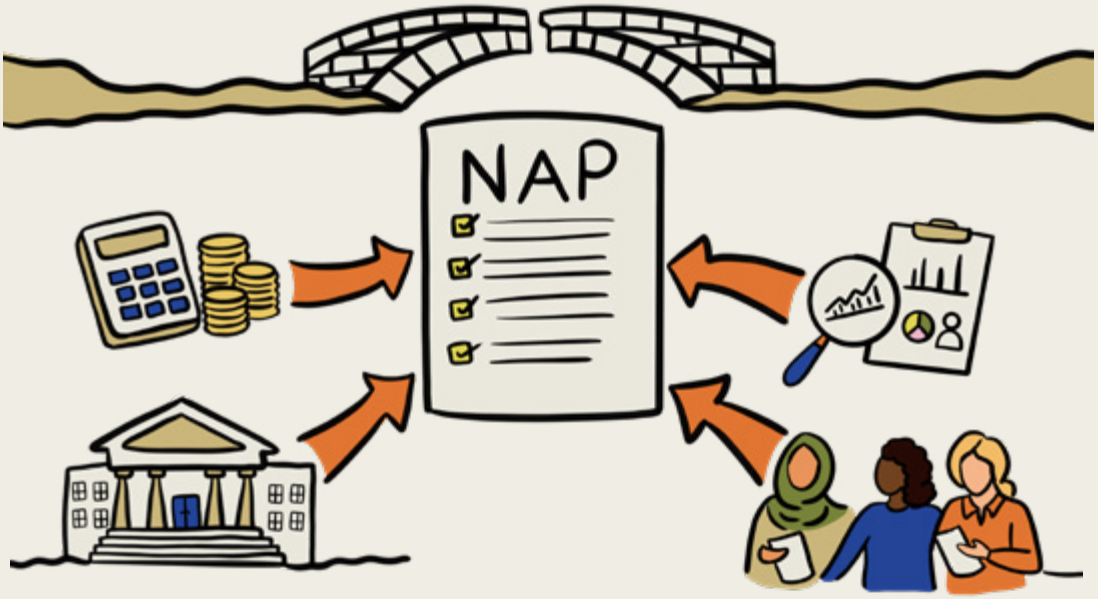
- ☑ **Read the plan against law and policy:** Compare it to constitutional duties and to regional and international instruments (CEDAW, the Maputo Protocol, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the Belém do Pará Convention, the Istanbul Convention).
- ☑ **Track incorporation into government systems:** Look for the plan in medium-term strategies, annual plans, performance agreements and departmental budgets.
- ☑ **Compare commitments with reporting:** Identify what is measured, what is omitted and where indicators are too weak to reveal implementation.
- ☑ **Use oversight moments:** Parliamentary hearings, audit processes, civil-society scorecards and public reviews can test progress claims and surface gaps.
- ☑ **Name red flags early:** Absent costing, unclear leadership, no baseline data, irregular reporting and heavy reliance on ad hoc projects usually signal that implementation will drift.

Used this way, monitoring becomes less a technical exercise and more a site of contestation. It tests claims of progress, names gaps, and applies pressure to shift plans from symbolic visibility to delivery.



Advocacy strategies: where to push, and why it matters

National action plans create an entry point for advocacy, but they do not, on their own, shift systems. Their value lies in how they can be used to test, expose and challenge the gap between commitment and delivery. At the same time, many WROs are undertaking this work in a context of deepening funding cuts and organisational strain, which has significant implications for sustained monitoring, coalition-building and advocacy capacity.



Locate the plan inside the state.

Establish whether it has formal backing, how it connects to broader government priorities, and where responsibility for coordination sits. Plans that are not anchored in decision-making structures are easier to endorse than to implement, and advocacy that focuses only on activities risks reinforcing that gap.

Trace how the plan travels through the state.

Track whether commitments appear in departmental strategies, performance agreements and service-delivery frameworks, and whether responsibilities are translated into operational terms. Where commitments remain at high-level intention, they are less likely to shape institutional behaviour.

Build shadow monitoring.

Develop a small set of tests: are commitments time-bound and publicly trackable; are frontline services and prevention programmes costed and staffed; do reports include outcome-relevant indicators; do WROs participate meaningfully in review? Track these over time.

Link to budget advocacy.

Connect plan commitments to national and sub-national budgets by following allocations, execution rates and re-prioritisations, and use economic-cost data where available to argue for investment. (See the companion *Budget tip sheet*.)

Use oversight moments.

Parliamentary hearings, audit processes and formal review cycles create opportunities to test claims of progress and ask where implementation has stalled. These moments move the conversation from general commitment to specific questions of responsibility and performance.

Shape public narratives.

Plans are often cited as evidence of action long after implementation has weakened. Challenging this requires linking the existence of a plan to its actual delivery, and making visible where systems are not functioning as intended.



In a nutshell: what to look for in a national action plan

Red-flag checklist

Warning signs to surface early in any NAP review:

- **Framing:** gender-neutral or vague language; narrow, domestic-violence-only framing; silence on structural drivers of violence (gender inequality, harmful norms, economic insecurity).
- **Scope:** principal focus on awareness campaigns or criminal-justice responses, with prevention, survivor services, economic measures and data treated as secondary.
- **Governance:** shared responsibility without authority; vague "coordination"; no enforcement or escalation mechanism.
- **Budget:** no costing; heavy donor dependence; activities listed without identifiable budget lines or traceable allocations.
- **Monitoring:** activity-only reporting; no baselines; irregular or unpublished reports; indicators that cannot be independently verified.
- **Inclusion:** "one-size-fits-all" approach; limited disaggregation; no attention to women and girls facing compounded exclusion.
- **Sub-national delivery:** persistent gaps between national commitments and provincial or local execution; reliance on civil society to fill services the plan names as state responsibility.

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[2] World Health Organisation, 2025, RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence against Women, Second Edition

[3] Library of Congress 2016, 'Peru: National Plan on Gender-Based Violence 2016–2021'

[4] Women's rights organisations can also engage UN Women country offices as a source of technical support and advocacy leverage on implementation questions. In many contexts, UN Women provides direct assistance to governments on implementation architecture, including inter-ministerial coordination, gender-responsive budgeting, monitoring and evaluation systems, and institutional strengthening related to national action plans.

[5] República Oriental del Uruguay 2017, Ley 19.580: Ley Integral de Violencia hacia las Mujeres basada en Género.

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