

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



PERFORMANCE, RESULTS, & OUTLOOK



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Executive Summary

The year **2025 unfolded in a highly volatile global environment** marked by geopolitical fragmentation, democratic backsliding, and increasing resistance to gender equality. These dynamics **placed multilateral institutions under sustained pressure and directly affected the operating context of GWL Voices**. While this environment posed significant challenges, it also reinforced the strategic relevance of our mission: strengthening multilateralism through women's leadership.

From a performance perspective, 2025 was a year of consolidation, protection of gains, and targeted advancement. GWL Voices delivered results across advocacy, thought leadership, coalition-building, and institutional strengthening, while adapting its strategy to a context where progress is increasingly non-linear and contested.

The period required fast adaptation.

We learned that **change is increasingly non-linear**. Progress on gender equality and women's leadership can no longer be assumed to follow a linear trajectory. In many contexts, advancing change now requires actively defending existing gains while seeking to move forward. Backlash and policy reversals can emerge rapidly, even in environments that were previously supportive.

In response, **we are adapting** by pairing progress with protection—prioritising coalition-building, rapid response coordination, and evidence-based advocacy to safeguard established norms while continuing to press for greater influence for women. This learning extends to the global order and multilateralism. The growing disregard for international law, the UN Charter, and its principles, underscores the need for an understanding of existing institutional frameworks, international law, with a willingness to rethink and reset the architecture. Navigating this tension—between preserving foundational norms and reimagining and redesigning institutions—is central to our approach.

It also became even more apparent that **collective action is more effective than isolated advocacy**. Individual voices—even strong ones—have limited impact unless they are part of coordinated, cross-sector coalitions. Change increasingly happens when actors align narratives, timing, and messaging.

We are strengthening our role as a connector and convenor—investing more intentionally in network cohesion, shared messaging, and joint interventions with women's rights organisations, youth coalitions, academic partners, and policy actors. Our foundational principle of "being a network of networks" is more needed than ever.

Executive Summary

Evidence is necessary but not sufficient—Narrative Matters. We understood that data and research remain essential, but evidence alone does not shift power dynamics or policy outcomes. How evidence is framed—particularly in relation to “merit,” effectiveness, and institutional legitimacy—has become critical. In sum we understood that data and knowledge do not suffice, it requires an intentional and well articulated communication and advocacy strategy.

We are adapting by pairing rigorous research (e.g. WIM Report and the spotlights on global health and climate) with narrative strategies that speak to institutional performance, credibility, and crisis response—making the case that women’s leadership is both merit-based and outcome-enhancing.

There is a need to create **spaces of trust and partnership**. Formal multilateral spaces are increasingly constrained, while informal, trusted, and high-level dialogue spaces are where candid exchange and alignment can still occur.

We are working on curated dialogues, Chatham House–style convenings, and intergenerational exchanges that allow for honest discussion, relationship-building, and agenda-setting beyond formal negotiations. We are also taking part in the main established international forums: the Paris PeaceForum, the Doha Forum, among others.

And, last but not least, **adaptability is a strategic asset**. The pace of geopolitical and normative shifts requires organizations to be flexible, politically aware, and responsive without losing strategic clarity.

We are refining out strategic planning to allow for faster recalibration, scenario-based thinking, and responsiveness to emerging risks and opportunities—while remaining anchored in its core mission.

The past period reinforced that change in today’s context is collective, contested, and iterative. We are adapting by strengthening alliances, refining narratives, protecting gains, and investing in leadership platforms that can withstand volatility while shaping long-term transformation.

Susana Malcorra
President



María Fernanda Espinosa
Executive Director



Strategic Context & Positioning

Throughout 2025, trust in international institutions continued to erode, while polarisation among major powers constrained multilateral decision-making. In parallel, anti-gender narratives gained visibility, challenging long-standing international commitments on women's rights and gender-based violence.

Another significant contextual shift was the increased instrumentalization of "merit" in leadership debates to resist gender-responsive approaches. GWL Voices adapted its messaging accordingly, emphasizing that women's leadership is both merit-based and essential for effective institutional performance and transformation.

In response, GWL Voices positioned women's leadership as a lever for institutional credibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy. This framing informed all major interventions, dialogues, and publications during the year, reinforcing our value proposition to partners and stakeholders.

Programmatic Results and Impact

Despite a difficult operating environment, GWL Voices achieved measurable results aligned with its strategic objectives:

1. Influence on Multilateral Policy Debates

GWL Voices actively participated in high-level policy discussions linking gender equality to multilateral reform and global governance. This included engagement in the UN Reform process, CSW, Beijing+30 commemorations, Financing for Development processes, Climate COPs and peace and security forums. Notably, GWL Voices contributed to discussions shaping the Resolution on the Revitalisation of the UN General Assembly, the outcome document of the Sevilla Conference on Financing for Development and efforts toward the implementation of the Pact of the Future, including elements related to leadership selection and institutional transparency.

2. Thought Leadership and Evidence Production

In 2025, GWL Voices issued:

- The fourth edition of the *Women in Multilateralism (WIM 2025)* report, with a specific focus on governing bodies of UN agencies and programs.
- A *Women in Global Health* report.
- Contributions to the Women in Politics knowledge stream.
- A series of statements, policy recommendations and op-eds.

Programmatic Results and Impact

These products strengthened GWL Voices' positioning as a data-driven, credible voice capable of countering narratives that frame gender equality as secondary or negotiable. They were used in advocacy, convenings, and bilateral engagements with policymakers and partners.

3. Narrative shaping on Leadership & Merit

GWL Voices successfully reframed debates around leadership and "merit," demonstrating through comparative analysis that women's leadership is both merit-based and outcome-enhancing. This narrative gained traction in policy conversations and reinforced alignment with institutional reform agendas.

4. Inclusion & Leadership Pipelines

Through initiatives such as **#HerTurn** and **Women in Politics**, GWL Voices expanded spaces for Global South, women leaders in local and regional government, and intergenerational engagement. These platforms enabled co-creation, leadership development, and exchange across regions, strengthening future leadership pipelines within the multilateral system.

Institutional Performance

In parallel with programmatic delivery, GWL Voices made significant progress in institutional strengthening:

Fundraising & Financial Resilience

- Diversified the funding base by adding two European donors (one foundation and one government) and additional U.S. philanthropic support.
- Reduced reliance on a limited donor pool, improving financial predictability, sustainability, and resilience.
- Maintained strong fiduciary standards, producing the third audited financial statement with clean opinions and preparing a fourth.

Programming Systems & Planning

- Advanced the development of an integrated programming and monitoring tool connecting planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- Established a structured annual planning cycle, with strategic reviews conducted each November to recalibrate priorities and guide the year ahead.
- While full operationalisation of the tool has been delayed, a pilot is in use and refinement is ongoing, with completion expected in the last quarter of 2026.

Institutional Performance

Communications & Visibility

- Expanded the communications team from 1.5 to 3 staff.
- Achieved stronger social media performance, improved traditional media engagement, and more consistent messaging.
- Shifted to a more strategic, targeted communications approach aligned with advocacy priorities.

Governance & Operations

- Formalised organisational roles and processes following team expansion.
- Appointed designated GWL Voices representatives to the UN in New York, Geneva, and Nairobi.
- Concerted effort to distribute the GWL Voices representational role more broadly across the membership. In 2025, we successfully delegated participation in a number of high-level engagements to several members, with positive results both in terms of visibility and member engagement.
- Strengthened internal coordination through the creation of a Chief of Office function.

Key Learnings

Performance in 2025 underscored several strategic insights:

- Progress increasingly requires defending existing gains alongside advancement.
- Collective, network-based action outperforms isolated advocacy.
- Evidence must be paired with compelling narratives and good communication strategies to influence outcomes.
- Informal, trusted dialogue spaces are critical as formal processes narrow.
- Organisational adaptability is now an essential core asset.

Outlook and Way Forward

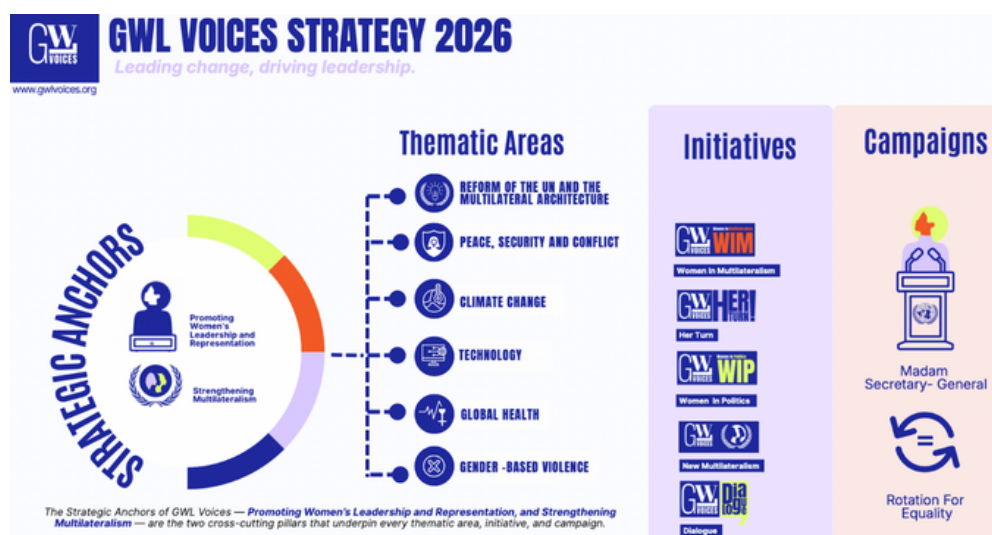
Looking ahead, 2026 represents a critical inflection point for the multilateral system. The process leading to the selection of a new United Nations Secretary-General places questions of leadership, legitimacy, and institutional renewal squarely at the center of the global agenda. In this context, GWL Voices' **Madam Secretary-General** campaign will be a central pillar of our work—and a defining test of our collective capacity to translate years of analysis, coalition-building, and advocacy into tangible influence, even in the face of mounting pushback.

Our planning for 2026 reflects a deliberate shift toward sharper prioritization, disciplined resource allocation, and concentration on a limited number of high-impact interventions aligned with political opportunity. This focus is essential in an environment where progress is contested and windows for influence are narrow. As we move forward, GWL Voices does so grounded in evidence, strengthened by partnerships, and guided by the collective leadership of its members.

The **planning for 2026** therefore prioritizes:

- **Strategic engagement around the Secretary-General selection process**, including advocacy for transparency, merit-based leadership, and gender equality as integral to institutional credibility and effectiveness.
- **Active engagement and influence in negotiations and discussion regarding the reform of the United Nations and the international system**, thinking beyond UN80 and beyond the UN.
- **Targeted coalition-building** with governments, civil society, youth networks, and policy actors to amplify shared messaging and coordinated interventions at key moments.
- **Evidence-based narrative shaping**, drawing on GWL Voices' research and data products to counter regressive arguments and reinforce the case for women's leadership in multilateral institutions.
- **High-trust convenings and dialogues**, including curated and intergenerational spaces, designed to enable alignment, candid exchange, and agenda-setting beyond formal processes. The 2026 GWL Voices Dialogue represents the kick-off for this phase of work.
- **Organizational discipline**, ensuring that programming, communications, and resource allocation remain aligned with these strategic priorities.

The snapshot below illustrates how these priorities translate into our 2026 workplan.



Outlook and Way Forward

While the external environment remains volatile and uncertain, the experience of 2025 demonstrated not only the resilience and hard-won trust of GWL Voices, but also the enduring relevance of its mission and the distinct value it brings to the multilateral system. In moments of fragmentation and retreat, GWL Voices has shown that collective leadership—grounded in evidence and driven by purpose—can still shape outcomes.

As we move into 2026, GWL Voices does so with clarity of intent, strengthened partnerships, and the collective authority of its members—fully committed to advancing women’s leadership as a necessary condition for a more legitimate, effective, and responsive multilateral system.

We are under no illusion about the difficulty of the task ahead. The challenges are substantial, and the costs of inaction are high. Yet if not now, when should we bring our collective voice, experience, and strength to bear?