

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE SAFEGUARDING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SERBIA - SWGS

Project Details:

Project title: **Safeguarding Women and Girls in Serbia - SWGS**
Implementing organisation: UN Women's Office in Serbia
Country: Republic of Serbia
Project duration: From 21 October 2021 until 21 January 2024
Funding: Total cost of the Action: 600,000 GBP

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The SWGS Project, led by UN Women in Serbia with funding from the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, is a robust initiative aimed at enhancing gender equality and addressing domestic and gender-based violence in line with the EU Gender Equality Acquis. Launched on 21 October 2021 with a substantial budget of 600,000 GBP, the project is poised to achieve its objectives by 21 January 2024. Its core mission is to initiate a fundamental change in institutional attitudes and responses to violence against women and girls, moving the focus from private to public spheres and advocating for broader societal shifts towards gender equality.

The project's strategic implementation is structured around three primary outcomes: at the national level, it supports the creation and enactment of measures to combat gender-based violence through evidence-based strategies; at the local level, it equips authorities with tools like the Women's Safety Audit Tool to increase public safety for women and girls; and it enhances the quality and accessibility of shelters for survivors, aligning with GREVIO and Council of Europe standards. These concerted efforts have fostered a collaborative network of government agencies, civil society, and other partners committed to forging a safer, more just society for women and girls across Serbia.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

The Evaluation Consultant (EC) crafted an evaluation matrix to capture key questions and the OECD/ DAC Criteria, the Project's relevance and coherence, effectiveness and efficiency, impact and sustainability, making room for cross-cutting criteria like gender mainstreaming and the "leave no one behind" principle. A mixed-method approach, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative means, was the bedrock of this process. This approach highlighted inclusivity and empowerment and relied heavily on data sources ranging from national strategic documents to open-source publications. Techniques such as key informant interviews, group discussions, and reflection workshops were integral. Remarkably, 32 key informant interviews (29 women and 3 men) were conducted in the respondents' native languages, ensuring authenticity and candour in the feedback. Further, literature reviews were centred around the external factors influencing the Project's execution and recorded experiences in gender mainstreaming.

The final evaluation of the Project was conducted between September and December 2023. The targeted users for the evaluation include UN Women and UN Women staff in Serbia, and other UN Women's offices- primarily, UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECA RO). In addition, the Government of Serbia, local authorities, safe houses, civil society organizations and other national stakeholders would benefit from this report.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Relevance: The SWGS project has been centrally relevant in promoting gender equality and tackling violence against women in Serbia. It adopted a participatory approach, engaging government entities, local authorities, and civil society organisations to forge a comprehensive strategy for gender equality and enhance public safety for women and girls. The project addressed the needs and priorities of beneficiaries and stakeholders, as evidenced by a nationwide survey and a well-aligned priority-setting process within the framework of national reforms. Additionally, the project focused on strengthening safe houses' operational and functional capabilities, aiming to extend the quality and accessibility of their services, particularly for marginalised women, including with disabilities.

Coherence: The Project adeptly aligned with UN Women's strategic objectives and national priorities, crafting a coherent approach to EVAWG. The project's design and execution reflected a clear integration with international frameworks like CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, and it actively contributed to advancing Sustainable Development Goals related to gender equality. UN Women's expertise fostered significant strides in gender-responsive urban planning and public safety, catalysing transformative changes well-suited to Serbia's context. The

project established itself as a benchmark for gender equality initiatives, demonstrating a sustainable change model that resonates with national imperatives and global gender equality standards.

Effectiveness: The effectiveness of the Project showed various results, including conducting a national survey on women's safety in public spaces, which has influenced national strategies and action plans, signifying a move towards evidence-based approaches for public safety and gender equality. The Project's implementation of the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) in selected municipalities has enhanced local capacities to address violence against women in public spaces, contributing to safer and more tailored community solutions. Additionally, the SWGS has effectively strengthened infrastructure and services for shelters aiding survivors of gender-based violence, utilising strategic partnerships and development plans to meet critical needs and improve support systems. Establishing the Community of Practice (CoP) has fostered collaboration and dialogue among service providers, enhancing shared learning and planning.

Efficiency: The Project displayed strategic resource utilisation, effective management, adaptability, collaborative engagement, and robust communication. It aligned resources with national priorities and gender equality goals, maintaining delivery speed and resource allocation within budget and time constraints, even when extending the project timeline for a more significant impact. The Project's leadership and management were crucial for steering it efficiently while fostering strong partnerships and stakeholder engagement for comprehensive and reflective strategies. Additionally, the Project implemented a sound communication strategy.

Sustainability: The Project holds potential for lasting results but faces challenges in sustaining its success. It has integrated results into national gender equality frameworks, emphasising the need for quick policy implementation and alignment with international standards like the Istanbul Convention. Challenges include consistently applying enhanced local capacities amidst political changes and ensuring the institutionalisation and financial sustainability of initiatives like the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) and safe houses. Sustained results hinges on strong leadership and strategic direction from national partners to maintain the momentum built by the project.

Impact: The SWGS has shown a potential impact on policy changes, particularly enhancing public space security. Its national survey brought critical women's safety concerns to the forefront, influencing policy formation and the adoption of preventive and responsive measures at both national and local levels. This impact is further evident in integrating the Project's insights into the Urban Development Strategy's Action Plan and legislative inputs for improving shelter standards for GBV victims. Locally, the Project influenced the formulation of new gender-sensitive Local Action Plans, incorporating urban development and public safety. The practical application of tools like the WSAT has also enhanced safety for women and girls in public areas. Additionally, the Project supported safe houses, improving security, infrastructure, and services.

Human rights and gender equality: The project is fully committed to gender equality, and it is grounded in a human rights approach. The implementation was aligned with the disability inclusion principles, but the limited budget restrained opportunities to apply the more diverse approach to the disability inclusion tools in designing and disseminating key project products.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. UN Women should continue technical assistance, including capacity building for relevant institutions and stakeholders involved in addressing aspects of violence against women and girls in various critical areas.

R2. UN Women should advocate for sufficient resources to support institutional mechanisms and services addressing violence against women and girls. The priority is to ensure longer-term commitments and increase funding from governments (and other development partners) for EVAWG prevention, protection and support measures and services.

R3. UN Women should institutionalise the WSAT at the local level, integrating it with Local Action Plans for Gender Equality, and extend its use to more municipalities, ensuring its longevity and broader impact.

R4. UN Women should capitalise on its unique position to advance efforts against violence against women by bolstering partnerships, enhancing support to authorities, and promoting integrated interventions within the EVAW framework.

R5. UN Women is encouraged to ensure the integration of gender equality and violence against women priorities into national development strategies, focusing on inclusivity across all sectors and advocating for the rights of marginalised groups.

R6. The EC suggests that UN Women develop a coherent and comprehensive EVAW framework, aiming for strategic alignment across all program components and employing realistic indicators and targets for measuring progress and impact.