



Project “Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II”  
(2021-2023)

FINAL EVALUATION



# Project “Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II” (2021-2023)

## FINAL EVALUATION

ALEKSANDRA ČALOŠEVIĆ, JOVANA ĐINĐIĆ

April 2024

This publication was produced in the framework of the UN Women project “Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II”, funded by the European Union. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.



<b>Project Details</b>	
<b>Project title:</b>	“Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II” (Short Title: Gender Equality Facility – GEF II)
<b>Implementing organization:</b>	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
<b>Countries:</b>	Republic of Serbia
<b>Project reference:</b>	UN ref. no: 00126014, donor reference 2020/420-725
<b>Project duration:</b>	01/03/2021-29/02/2024 (36 months) – note that project extension was ongoing at the time of the evaluation
<b>Funding:</b>	2 million EUR, IPA II allocation for the Republic of Serbia
<b>Project Evaluation</b>	
<b>Commissioned by:</b>	UN Women
<b>Evaluators:</b>	Aleksandra Čalošević, Jovana Đinđić
<b>Evaluation period:</b>	23 October 2023-30 April 2024
<b>Evaluation management group:</b>	An Evaluation Management Group (EMG) is conformed to act as the main decision-making body for the evaluation and is composed of UN Women Project team members, UN Women Head of Office in Serbia, and UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office Evaluation Specialist. The EMG is responsible for the overall management of the evaluation and oversees the day-to-day business of the evaluation and communication with the Evaluation Team. The representatives of the UN Women Office in Serbia are responsible for the day-to-day management of the evaluation and the coordination of the field visits, including logistical support.
<b>Evaluation reference group:</b>	An Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) is established to ensure that the evaluation approach is relevant to stakeholders and to make certain that factual errors or errors of omission or interpretation are identified in evaluation products. The reference group provides inputs at key stages of the evaluation draft and final reports.
<i>The Evaluation Team would like to express their gratitude to the management and project team at the UN Women Office in Serbia for their support, the stakeholders, and the participants for taking an active role in this evaluation process.</i>	

# Contents

List of Figures and Tables .....	6
List of Acronyms .....	7
Executive Summary .....	8
List of Recommendations .....	133
Lessons Learnt .....	144
1. Introduction .....	155
1.1 Evaluation Approach and Methodology .....	166
1.2 Methods, Data Sources and Sampling .....	18
1.3. Evaluation Management Structure .....	19
1.4 The Ethical Approach and Limitations.....	20
1.5 Stakeholder Participation in Evaluation.....	20
2. Country Context .....	23
2.1. General Overview .....	23
2.2 Gender Equality Overview .....	25
2.2.1 Legislative and Policy Framework.....	25
2.2.2 Institutional Framework.....	255
2.2.3 The Current State of Gender Equality in Relevant Areas.....	266
3. Description of the Project and Theory of Change.....	29
3.1 Project Background.....	29
3.2 Project Objectives and Interventions.....	300
3.3 Theory of Change .....	32
4. Evaluation Findings .....	34
4.1 Relevance .....	34
4.2 Coherence .....	39
4.3 Effectiveness .....	45
4.4 Efficiency .....	56
4.5 Impact .....	61
4.6 Sustainability.....	65
4.7 Gender Equality and Human Rights.....	711
5. Conclusions .....	73
6. Lessons Learnt.....	75
7. Recommendations .....	76
8. Annexes .....	81
Annex 1: Evaluation Questions .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix .....	84
Annex 3: Result Framework.....	90

Annex 4: Documents Reviewed.....	94
Annex 5: List of Consulted Stakeholders.....	96
Annex 6: Data Collection Instruments .....	100
Annex 6.1 Questionnaire for UN Women Project Team .....	100
Annex 6.2 Key Questions for KIIs.....	103
Annex 6.3 Survey for Women’s CSOs.....	105
Annex 6.4 Key Questions for FGDs.....	108
Annex 6.5 Key Questions for the Donor .....	109
Annex 7: ToRs .....	110
Annex 8: Composition of EMG and ERG .....	111

## List of Figures and Tables

Table 1. Details on the evaluation phases.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Table 2. Map of stakeholders involved in data collection .....	21
Table 3. At-risk-of-poverty rate by sex and age, 2022 .....	23
Table 4. Key facts for the Republic of Serbia .....	24
Table 5. List of key enablers and challenges in the Project implementation .....	53
Figure 1. The UN Women evaluability criteria.....	16
Figure 2. The evaluation process.....	18
Figure 3. Progress within the six domains of the Gender Equality Index in Serbia .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Figure 4. Gender Equality Index for the Western Balkans and EU-27 (2022) .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Figure 5. Key labor market statistics, 2022 .....	30
Figure 6. Impact (Overall Objective), Specific Objective (Outcome) and Results (Outputs) of the Project.....	30
Figure 7. Project ToC reconstructed.....	33

## List of Acronyms

<b>CBC</b>	Cross Border Cooperation
<b>CBGE</b>	Coordination Body for Gender Equality
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CPE</b>	Commissioner for the Protection of Equality
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>DoA</b>	Description of the Action
<b>OECD-DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
<b>EMG</b>	Evaluation Management Group
<b>ERG</b>	Evaluation Reference Group
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GAP III</b>	The EU Gender Action Plan III
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GEF</b>	Gender Equality Facility
<b>GEI</b>	Gender Equality Index
<b>GEEW</b>	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
<b>GERAAS</b>	Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System
<b>GRB</b>	Gender-responsive Budgeting
<b>IPA</b>	European Union Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>LGE</b>	Law on Gender Equality
<b>MEI</b>	Ministry of European Integration
<b>MHMRS</b>	Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>RACER</b>	Relevant, accepted, credible, easy to monitor and robust
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SMART</b>	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNEG</b>	United Nations Evaluation Group
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>UN Women ECA RO</b>	UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office

# Executive Summary

This report presents the main findings, lessons learnt, conclusions and recommendations of the final evaluation of the Project “Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II” (abbreviation Gender Equality Facility – GEF II, hereinafter the Project) implemented in the period 01/03/2021-29/02/2024 (36 months). The Project extension was ongoing at the time of the evaluation by the UN Women Office in Serbia.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this evaluation is to comprehensively assess the Project implemented in Serbia. The Project was initiated to support the Government of Serbia to comply with national and international gender equality commitments and the European Union (EU) gender equality acquis. Through a thorough examination of the Project's design, implementation, and outcomes, this evaluation aims to provide key insights into the successes, challenges, and areas for improvement. The findings are intended to inform future initiatives, policy decisions, and resource allocation.

**Intended Audience:** This executive summary is tailored for policymakers, government officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), international donors, and other stakeholders involved in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in Serbia. The information presented here is designed to offer a concise overview of the Project's achievements, shortcomings, and recommendations. By targeting this audience, the aim is to facilitate informed decision-making, promote accountability, and contribute to the ongoing efforts to fulfil national and international gender equality commitments.

**Context:** The legislative framework for gender equality in Serbia is guided by the obligations under the key international legal instruments, but also requirements of the EU accession. Serbia published the third edition of the Gender Equality Index in October 2021. Serbia scored 52.4 points in 2016, 55.8 in 2018, and 58.0 in 2021. This indicates continuous, albeit not rapid, progress in improving gender equality. Women's participation in the labor force has increased, and there have been efforts to promote gender equality in education and political representation. However, women continue to face discrimination in the workplace, including lower wages and limited access to leadership positions. Additionally, traditional gender roles and stereotypes persist, influencing societal attitudes and perceptions. Efforts to address these challenges include legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, and initiatives to empower women economically and politically, the Project being one of them.

**Project Background:** The Project is implemented in Serbia due to the support of the EU pre-accession funds. The Project is implemented from March 2021 to the end of February 2024, in partnership with the Government of Serbia, in particular, the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and the Ministry of European Integration as key political partners, and represents a continuation of the GEF I project (2018-2020). The Project aims to further support Serbia's refined execution of the EU gender equality acquis, including via the National Strategy for Gender Equality. It supports all tiers of the Serbian gender machinery specifically dedicated to gender equality, where an avenue is particularly directed to supporting the Ministry of European Integration and other institutions involved in the programming of EU funds provided to Serbia to also include gender perspective in the planning and programming activities. As partnering with local women's civic groups is crucial for UN Women's projects globally and a usual strategy of choice, the Project also promotes gender equality by fostering inclusivity and sustainability at the community level via partnering with women's CSOs.

**Approach and Methodology:** The evaluation was conducted by two independent evaluators. The evaluation purpose was to assess the programmatic progress and performance of the intervention from the point of view of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, gender and human rights and added values. The findings of the evaluation will hopefully contribute to organizational learning, future decision-making, and effective programming and accountability. The methodology employed mixed methods including quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (documentation review, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and online surveys) and analytical approaches to understand the complexity of the processes. In total, over 50 people were reached through the evaluation through surveys, interviews and focus groups, of which 16% were men. Also, over 70 documents were reviewed, including project documentation, research studies, analyses, and legal and policy documents. The evaluation adhered to UN Women and UN Evaluation Group standards and policies. Conclusions and recommendations are based on gender-related data and gender analysis. The evaluation considered the UN's commitment to disability inclusion and covered disability through evaluation questions. Any observed limitation was compensated through triangulation of data and methods.

The evaluation conclusions and findings across the evaluation criteria are the following:



**Conclusion 1 (Relevance, key findings 1, 2, 3):** Stakeholder interviews and feedback from beneficiaries affirm the Project's significant relevance in the context of gender equality in Serbia. Despite ambitious goals and various complexities, that mainly dealt with understaffed line agencies and frequent leadership changes in governmental counterparts, the Project has demonstrated consistency with its original intentions, ensuring also continued alignment with the evolving needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. The Project's overarching objective remains consistent with its original or adapted intentions and the detailed outcomes outlined in the Project plan further spell out its anticipated trajectory.

**Conclusion 2 (Relevance, key findings 1, 2, 3):**

Given that this Project is focused on policy, contextual information on policies is closely linked with the Project's relevance. The evaluation concludes that the implementation of gender equality strategies and action plans in Serbia is viewed among stakeholders as showing some progress yet remaining uneven and facing challenges. While efforts have been made to develop and enact policies promoting gender equality, there remains a noticeable gap between policy formulation and effective implementation on the ground. Key issues such as insufficient budget allocation, limited institutional capacity, and a lack of systematic and meaningful monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are highlighted as hindering the full realization of gender equality objectives. Thus, while the Project's efforts are acknowledged, there is a critical need for stronger commitment, improved coordination, and enhanced accountability mechanisms to ensure meaningful progress in advancing gender equality in Serbia and strengthening its institutional framework.

**Conclusion 3 (Relevance, key findings 1, 2, 3):**

Comprehensive joint dialogues provide a platform for all stakeholders to contribute their perspectives, needs, and priorities. By not engaging in such inclusive dialogues, the Project may have missed opportunities to validate and refine its relevance based on a broader range of inputs. This could result in a limited understanding of the diverse needs and priorities of the target beneficiaries and stakeholders, potentially leading to gaps in the Project's design and implementation. Therefore, the absence of comprehensive joint dialogues may have impacted the Project's relevance by limiting its ability to fully align with the collective interests and concerns of all stakeholders involved.

The main findings are the following:

**Key finding 1**

The Project demonstrates strong contextual relevance to Serbia's specific needs and priorities, effectively addressing diverse stakeholder priorities, needs, and gaps. Stakeholder input was successfully integrated into the project design.

**Key finding 2**

The Project encompasses three dynamic streams of actions, each carrying significant relevance. The third stream, which focused on engaging with CSOs, holds particular importance for advancing the mission of UN Women and the broader gender machinery in Serbia. By addressing the vital role of CSOs, this stream of action also enhances the overall appeal of the Project for positive change and is perceived as the most prominent feature of the Project as a whole.

**Key finding 3**

The evaluation identifies instances of sub-optimal collaboration, with stakeholders indicating that the Project's relevance could have been improved by strategically integrating various capacity-building initiatives. This includes not only addressing gender mainstreaming within external development funds but also intensifying efforts to engage with and leverage domestic development funds. Strengthening collaboration with key stakeholders such as the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, EU Delegation staff, and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) programming consultants could have enhanced the Project's relevance. Additionally, forging partnerships with additional CSOs could have further increased its pertinence. Prioritizing intersectionality could have ensured a more comprehensive approach to addressing beneficiaries' interconnected layers of identity and experience.

**Conclusion 4 (Coherence, key findings 4, 5, 6):** The Project aligns with UN Women's strategic framework and clearly showcases the collective impact of UN Women's interventions, while alignment with national strategies is evident. However, under-capacitated gender machinery hinders implementation. This is highly relevant to the Project's coherence because it directly impacts the alignment, synergy, sustainability, and collaborative effectiveness that coherence aims to ensure. An under-capacitated gender machinery suggests that, while strategic alignment exists, the practical alignment with the operational

capacity of key stakeholders is lacking. Under-capacitated machinery indicates a gap between the strategic intent and practical execution, highlighting a lack of coherence in operational capacities.

#### **Key finding 4**

The Project demonstrates alignment with UN Women's strategic priorities and there are internal UN-related synergies identified, however, only a limited extent of capitalization from other countries is observed. Direct alignment with projects of other bilateral donors was not identified.

#### **Key finding 5**

The Project developed pertinent national development strategies and achieved strong complementarity with other actors through collaborative IPA programming with various line ministries. Additionally, there's a robust alignment with nationalized Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### **Key finding 6**

The Project encountered challenges while collaborating with understaffed bodies and agencies undergoing leadership and institutional changes, hindering efforts to enhance gender mainstreaming processes or introduce new initiatives, such as gender testing. The local enforcement and administrative context emerged as critical factors necessitating careful consideration for the coherent implementation of future gender equality initiatives at national or local levels.

#### **Conclusion 5 (Effectiveness, key findings 7, 8, 9):**

In summary, the Project's overall effectiveness is evidenced by the successful completion of targeted changes, some of which have the potential to generate lasting value and positive impact. Across the board, the undertaken activities are in alignment with the Project's purpose, and there is observable satisfaction among stakeholders and beneficiaries with the progress that the Project has generated.

#### **Conclusion 6 (Effectiveness, key findings 7, 8, 9):**

Negative factors such as political instability, economic downturns, and entrenched gender norms posed significant challenges to the Project's progress. Political transitions, changes in government priorities, and bureaucratic red tape hindered the smooth implementation of Project activities, leading to delays and resource constraints. Moreover, deeply ingrained gender stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and cultural barriers impeded efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

#### **Key finding 7**

The Project has demonstrated a high level of achievement in reaching its intended goals and objectives yielding tangible and sustainable results. A notable milestone was the adoption of the new Action Plan for implementing the National Strategy for Gender Equality until 2030, marking a significant achievement in advancing the Project's objectives. Some key achievements include developing and enacting several key policies promoting gender equality, which provided a foundational framework for future initiatives. The Project also facilitated capacity-building workshops, enhancing the skills and knowledge of local stakeholders and it established effective partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, creating a collaborative environment for gender mainstreaming.

#### **Key finding 8**

There are various unforeseen results, some of which had a catalytic effect, including the local social dialogues around gender-sensitive language, that gained public popularity, putting the inheritance topics on the public agenda which further developed into a stand-alone civil society initiative, and particularly effective communication activities, gaining a large audience and involving prominent public figures as message conveyers.

#### **Key finding 9**

Identified factors contributing to the Project's dynamics include engaged civil society and media/public figures, along with, some, stakeholder commitment. Conversely, challenges stem from leadership changes in key governmental institutions, new

mandates from local authorities due to legal system alterations, and limitations in funding and resources at both national and local levels, including within national agencies and ministries.

**Conclusion 7 (Efficiency, key findings 10, 11):**

The Project has demonstrated solid efficiency in resource allocation, strategically deploying financial, human, and technical support to achieve outcomes, albeit it will still require a no-cost extension (which was being dealt with at the time of this evaluation). The overall conclusion is that the Project maximized the use of available resources, such as time, budget, and personnel, to achieve its objectives and desired outcomes with minimal waste or redundancies. Tasks were successfully completed and there is evidence of cost-effectiveness.

**Key finding 10**

The Project's management and leadership exhibit efficiency, demonstrating strong capacities in planning, organizing, and monitoring implementation. They adeptly coordinate diverse stakeholders, fostering very good collaboration throughout the Project. The grant administration mechanism, however, can be further optimized.

**Key finding 11**

It appears that deliverables have been consistently achieved, on time. Despite various constraints, the Project has shown resilience and has overcome challenges, including political, practical, and bureaucratic obstacles, showcasing a proactive approach to ensuring success.

**Conclusion 8 (Impact, key finding 12):**

There are long-term effects and changes resulting from the Project that go beyond the immediate and short-term results, some of which are broader, sustainable and transformative.

- At the individual level, there is heightened awareness and understanding of gender equality, evidenced by increased participation of women in income generation, economy, family inheritance, culture, business and farming networking.
- Communities have experienced improved social cohesion through enhanced dialogue on gender-related issues.
- Institutionally, the adoption of a new Action Plan for the National Strategy for Gender Equality until 2030 marks a significant achievement, aligning policies with contemporary gender perspectives.
- Pre-accession processes of Serbia have also championed gender.
- Systemically, the Project has contributed to institutionalizing gender considerations, with policy revisions reflecting a more inclusive framework.
- Civil society action and civic participation have been strengthened.
- The Project has also paved the way for social entrepreneurship among women.

These accomplishments collectively underscore the Project's substantial and multi-level impact on its target groups and beneficiaries.

**Key finding 12**

Impacts were observed at the individual level, within communities, institutionally and systemically.

Grants have proven to be particularly impactful, offering a platform for the exploration of new and innovative themes. They have facilitated meaningful local collaborations, fostering partnerships that extend the Project's reach and effectiveness. Moreover, the grants have played a pivotal role in skills/knowledge/attitude development, empowering individual women and girls (and women's organizations) with the resources and tools necessary for sustained impact. The direct support provided to vulnerable women through some of these grants has not only addressed immediate needs but has also contributed to their long-term resilience and empowerment.

### **Conclusion 9 (Sustainability, key findings 13, 14, 15, 16):**

Concerning sustainability, a modest horizon unfolds, with moderate institutional capacity, resources that fluctuate or vary over time, and a visible void where policy aspirations await full implementation. While the Project has secured certain ongoing sustainability, the imperative is also highlighted for additional efforts in strengthening both national and local institutions. The current scenario reveals that policy and practice changes have only been partially institutionalized, suggesting a strong residual overreliance on external support, especially around policy and IPA gender mainstreaming (or any other developmental effort). This observation underscores a crucial remaining gap that warrants further attention and intervention and addressing this gap continues to be essential for fostering sustainable institutional development and ensuring a more self-reliant and resilient framework within national and local gender equality machinery, within the EU accession processes.

#### **Key finding 13**

The Project proactively initiated dialogues encompassing pivotal themes, including but not limited to women's inheritance rights, gender mainstreaming in donor funding, and the incorporation of gender perspectives into critical domains such as climate change, energy, and the construction sector. Notably, the Project engaged in a strategic and innovative collaboration with the media to amplify these discussions, thereby enhancing public awareness and discourse on these crucial gender-related issues.

#### **Key finding 14**

Overall, identified key elements that hamper sustainability primarily include:

- Insufficient financial resources allocated to sustain Project activities beyond the funding period can hinder sustainability.
- Weak institutional capacity within partner organizations still impedes their ability to continue Project initiatives independently.
- There is over-reliance on external support and expertise without building local ownership and capacity which can hinder sustainability.

Overall, the evaluation finds that frequent institutional changes, unclear and overlapping mandates, competition between different governmental bodies, as well as high fluctuation of the personnel in the public administration are major risk factors for sustainability.

#### **Key finding 15**

The Project has demonstrated positive sustainability efforts in promoting replication and up-scaling of successful practices (examples include obstetric violence issue addressing, strategically embedded gender perspectives into critical domains like climate change, energy, and the construction sector, etc.).

#### **Key finding 16**

Stopping grant support for women's CSOs poses a significant risk, as UN Women stands as the primary and, in many cases, sole financial supporter for these organizations, crucial for the realization of their missions. Ensuring sustained grant assistance is not only imperative for the continuity of their operations but also strategically aligns with UN Women's pivotal role in advancing the empowerment and objectives of women's civil society organizations.

### **Conclusion 10 (Human rights and gender equality, key findings 17, 18):**

The Project's design explicitly incorporates gender and human rights principles by prioritizing equal opportunities, challenging stereotypes, and promoting non-discrimination. Evidence suggests that the Project largely ensured equal opportunities for all, challenged area-based and gender discrimination, and promoted rights and dignity. Further improvements could have taken place around disability inclusion and overall, around inclusive consultations including within the intersectionality approaches.

#### **Key finding 17**

Gender and human rights principles and strategies are at the core of the Project (apart from multiplicative intersectionality), which is reflected in the initial design of the Project, all the way through its implementation.

## Key finding 18

The Project generally follows the UN Women’s strategic commitment to fully dedicate to mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout its work, in line with disability inclusion strategy and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, the evaluation evidence has not identified any structured corresponding measures of it within the Project’s execution so far. For example, the Project has not demonstrated a commitment to disability inclusion through accessible communication materials, adaptive technologies, and tailored interventions that accommodate diverse abilities and also such actions were not budgeted.

## List of Recommendations

<b>Recommendation 1</b>
<p>Recognizing the role of the UN Women Office in Serbia and position in Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, and the fact that this recommendation requires additional funding, this is to suggest to UN Women and donors, including EU Delegation/EU, to continue providing support to UN Women with an aim to keep on building capacity of the CSOs.</p> <p>Hence, it is recommended to ensure stronger consistency and continuity of engagement with civil society in Serbia including via a) maintaining open and regular communication through consultations and feedback loops that can ensure responsiveness to the dynamic context, b) creating forums for knowledge sharing and mutual learning, c) investing in the in-kind capacity-building of CSOs to enhance their sustainability, d) establishing long-term collaboration frameworks with CSOs that can provide a stable framework for sustained collaboration.</p> <p>The recommendation to UN Women and the donor community to ensure stronger consistency and continuity of engagement with civil society in Serbia is of high urgency given the dynamic context and the critical role of civil society in advancing gender equality.</p>
<b>Recommendation 2</b>
<p>Enhance stakeholder involvement to ensure inclusivity, collaboration, and a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives, via regular consultations with a wider array of actors (employment agency, line ministries tasked with labor, health, education, safety, etc., CSOs not associated with grant funding, sector development experts, etc.) to gather feedback, insights, and recommendations, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process and by including groups such as EU Delegation staff, IPA programming consultants, and sector development experts in the gender mainstreaming teaching and technical assistance programs and other capacity building interventions.</p> <p>The recommendation to UN Women to enhance stakeholder involvement for inclusivity, collaboration, and a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives is of utmost urgency given the complexity of gender issues and the need for inclusive decision-making processes.</p>
<b>Recommendation 3</b>
<p>It is strongly recommended that grant programs to women’s CSOs be sustained and prioritized through continued support or alternative funding mechanisms. This will ensure the ongoing empowerment of women’s organizations, fostering their vital contributions to gender equality initiatives and wider community development.</p> <p>The recommendation to sustain and prioritize grant programs for women's CSOs is of high urgency due to the crucial role these organizations play in advancing gender equality and community development.</p>
<b>Recommendation 4</b>
<p>Conduct a thorough needs assessment of governmental counterparts, including those that address gender equality horizontally, but also those whose sectoral policies are important for ensuring gender equality (e.g., employment, social affairs, climate change, transport, health, safety, education, etc.), to identify specific areas of gaps, underperformance, deficiency, and understaffing. Tailor the support program accordingly, addressing the identified gaps and building upon existing strengths. Consider developing performance improvement plans in collaboration with a wide array of national</p>

institutions, outlining specific steps and benchmarks for addressing deficiencies and enhancing performance over time within horizontal and sectoral, as well as national and local parts of gender equality machinery.

The recommendation to conduct a thorough needs assessment of governmental counterparts is of critical urgency to ensure effective collaboration and alignment of efforts towards gender equality.

#### **Recommendation 5**

The recommendation to ensure the Project's visual identity, in the future similar actions, reflects national ownership to foster a sense of shared responsibility and commitment among stakeholders is of moderate urgency.

## **Lessons Learnt**

- **Lesson learnt 1:** Grants and regranting programs significantly enhance Project effectiveness and bolster sustainability. By channelling funds to diverse stakeholders, these programs foster innovation, empower local initiatives, and fortify Project impact.
- **Lesson learnt 2:** Strengthening of the gender machinery demands not only resource mobilization and capacity building but also a strategic repositioning within the political landscape, as this machinery suffers from a chronic lack of resources, severe understaffing, and a complex political climate where gender equality lacks prioritization. To 'fortify this machinery', strategic alliances, innovative funding models, and targeted advocacy efforts are imperative. Addressing the dearth of 'fuel for this machinery' necessitates engaging both domestic and international partners to infuse vital resources and elevate gender equality on the political agenda.

# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide an encompassing analysis of the implementation of the project "Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II" (Shorter title: Gender Equality Facility - GEF II, hereinafter the Project) which took place from 1 March 2021 until 29 February 2024<sup>1</sup>. The Project was financially supported by the European Union (EU), specifically through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) II allocations for Serbia, with a budget of two million Euro.

The evaluation is gender-responsive and the methodology draws on a clear theory of change (ToC), well-defined goals, baseline data, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) indicators, robust monitoring, a supportive context with resources and capacities, and a clear management structure.

The evaluation process itself took place from October 2023 to February 2024, when the data collection was finalized. The main findings were presented at the session with stakeholders in March 2024.

Evaluation users include the donor (EU, who has funded the Project), implementing organization (UN Women), entities who were responsible for executing the Project on the ground, including CSOs, government agencies and beneficiaries: individuals and communities who directly benefit from the Project's activities and outcomes, especially women and girls.

Explicitly, the purpose of the evaluation is accountability, learning, and decision-making. In terms of accountability, evaluation assesses whether the Project achieved its intended objectives and whether resources were used efficiently and effectively. In terms of learning, it identifies strengths and weaknesses to inform future project design and implementation strategies and concerning decision-making it provides evidence-based insights to guide funding decisions, program adjustments, or policy changes related to gender equality initiatives.

A particular emphasis is placed on extracting lessons learned analyzed from both programmatic and coordination standpoints. Nonetheless, the primary objective remains to evaluate programmatic progress and performance through the lenses of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and gender equality and human rights. Additionally, the evaluation report aims to offer specific recommendations to guide the UN Women Office in Serbia in shaping future similar projects. These recommendations will address interventions requiring ongoing support, opportunities for expanding successful initiatives, and improvements to the project management framework.

The specific objectives of this evaluation are designed to cast a comprehensive gaze on various aspects of the Project. The objectives were to:

- Analyze the relevance of the Project's objectives, strategy and approach at the local and national levels for the Government support to comply with national and international gender equality commitments and EU gender equality acquis.
- Assess the effectiveness of the Project and progress towards impact for the target group across all three results.
- Assess organizational efficiency and coordination mechanisms of the Project.
- Assess the sustainability of the results in advancing gender equality in the target group.
- Analyze how the human rights-based approach and gender equality principles are integrated into the Project implementation.
- Identify and document lessons learned, good practices and innovations, success stories and challenges within the Project, to inform future work of participating United Nations agencies in the frameworks of gender mainstreaming and good governance.
- Identify strategies for replication and up-scaling of the Project's best practices.

Geographically, the evaluation included Serbia. The chronological scope encompasses the entirety of the Project's duration at the time of the evaluation. There were no regions/municipalities that received more coverage by the evaluation. This assessment thoroughly examines all aspects of the Project, dedicating resources to evaluating programmatic progress and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the distribution of expenditures among various Project components.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that the project extension was being processed at the time of the evaluation.

The evaluation team was composed to combine international and national expertise. It features an international consultant in the role of the team leader, supported by one national consultant.

## 1.1 Evaluation Approach and Methodology

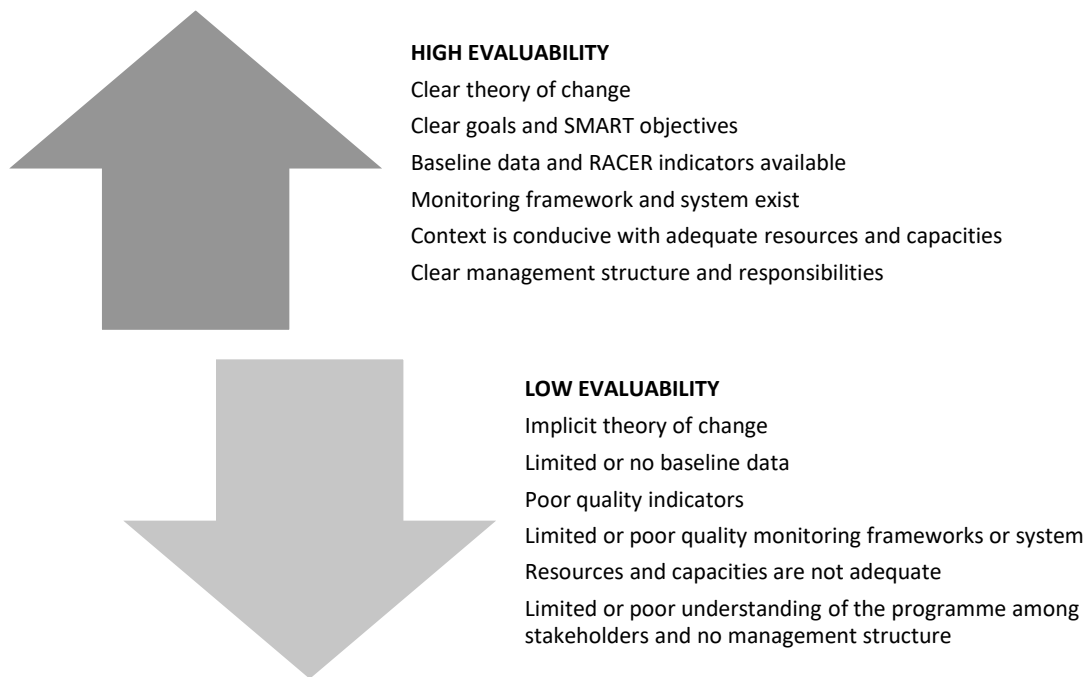
The evaluation uses a ToC approach with mixed methods for data collection and analysis to understand complex processes, structures, and gender relations. As required by the Terms of Reference (ToR), the evaluation assesses progress and challenges for each of the results, with measurement of the specific results achievements and gaps, and how and to what extent these have affected the overall progress. It assesses progress and challenges for each result, measuring specific achievements and gaps, and utilizes gender-disaggregated data whenever possible.

### Evaluability Assessment

The Project's evaluability is assessed positively, based on UN Women's criteria, including a clear ToC, objectives, baseline data, SMART indicators, monitoring framework, resources, management structure, and context. The inception phase has concluded that the Project has a clear ToC and the logical framework matrix, including impact, outcomes, and outputs, followed by available indicators, baseline and targets. The Project has a clear set of defined target groups, a management structure, and a conducive context.<sup>2</sup> All these indicated high evaluability.

The evaluability of the Project is assessed in line with criteria defined in the UN Women Gender-responsive evaluation methodology, which include clarity of ToC, goals and objectives, availability of baseline data and relevant, accepted, credible, easy to monitor and robust (RACER) indicators, solid monitoring framework, a relevant conducive context with adequate resources and capacities, clear management structure and responsibilities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The UN Women evaluability criteria



<sup>2</sup> "Conducive context" refers to a favorable or supportive environment or set of conditions that are conducive to achieving a particular goal, outcome, or desired result. In various contexts, whether in business, education, development projects, or other endeavors, a conducive context provides the necessary conditions for success or effectiveness. For example, in the context of a project or initiative, a conducive environment may include factors such as supportive policies, sufficient resources, a positive organizational culture, stakeholder collaboration, and external conditions that facilitate the intended objectives. The term implies that the circumstances and surroundings are conducive to the desired activities, making it more likely for goals to be achieved or outcomes to be realized. It suggests an alignment of factors that promote rather than hinder the intended progress or success of a particular endeavor.



The evaluation was conducted using the OECD-DAC (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee) evaluation criteria. The evaluation methodology considered the purpose defined in the ToR, UN Women's gender-responsive evaluation approach from the Evaluation Handbook and OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability).<sup>3</sup> In line with UN Women's practices, it also addresses an additional criterion on gender equality and human rights. The final report as a final project evaluation combines both summative and formative approaches.

The approach was gender-responsive and delved into power dynamics, empowerment, participation, inclusion, autonomy, integrity, transparency, quality, credibility, and ethics, employing appreciative inquiry and positive deviance methodologies. The evaluation team accentuated strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and accomplishments.

The evaluation is aligned with the UN Women's Evaluation Policy,<sup>4</sup> United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation,<sup>5</sup> Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct,<sup>6</sup> and UNEG guidance on integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality into evaluations<sup>7</sup>. It incorporates gender-responsive and human rights approaches throughout the evaluation process, considering broader human rights context, gender and intersectional discrimination, power structures, inclusion, and the rights of vulnerable populations.

The United Nations system-wide Action Plan evaluation criteria<sup>8</sup>, including Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (GEEW), are integrated into the analysis, methodology, and findings. Disability inclusion is also addressed through evaluation questions and stakeholder mapping.<sup>9</sup>

To ensure quality and completeness, evaluation experts self-assessed the draft report using the UN Women Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS).<sup>10</sup>

The evaluation follows a participatory approach involving an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) representing key Project stakeholders. This group participates in various stages of the evaluation, including methodology validation, data collection, presentation of preliminary findings, and validation of the final report. The data collection process includes consultations with government representatives, civil society, women's groups, and the donor.

The evaluation employed mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, with the methodology tailored to each stage, as presented below:

*Table 1. Details on the evaluation phases*

Phase	Inception	Data Collection	Analysis
<b>Details</b>	In the inception phase, the overall evaluation methodology, data collection methods, and analytical instruments were developed.	Data collection involved two components: a) the data collection mission and b) debriefing with the UN Women team. Various data collection methods were utilized depending on the participants - individual interviews, group interviews, focus group	In the analysis phase, data was coded according to the evaluation matrix and questions. Validation meetings were conducted to verify initial findings, and triangulation was

<sup>3</sup> OECD/DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance:

<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2012/10/evaluation-policy-of-the-united-nations-entity-for-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102>

<sup>7</sup> Including: Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation - Towards UNEG Guidance; UNEG Handbook for Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality Perspectives in Evaluations in the UN System.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1452>

<sup>9</sup> UN Disability Inclusion Strategy for further reference: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/03/UNDIS\\_20-March-2019\\_for-HLCM.P.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/03/UNDIS_20-March-2019_for-HLCM.P.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/about%20us/evaluation/evaluation-geraas-guidance-en.pdf?la=en&vs=408>

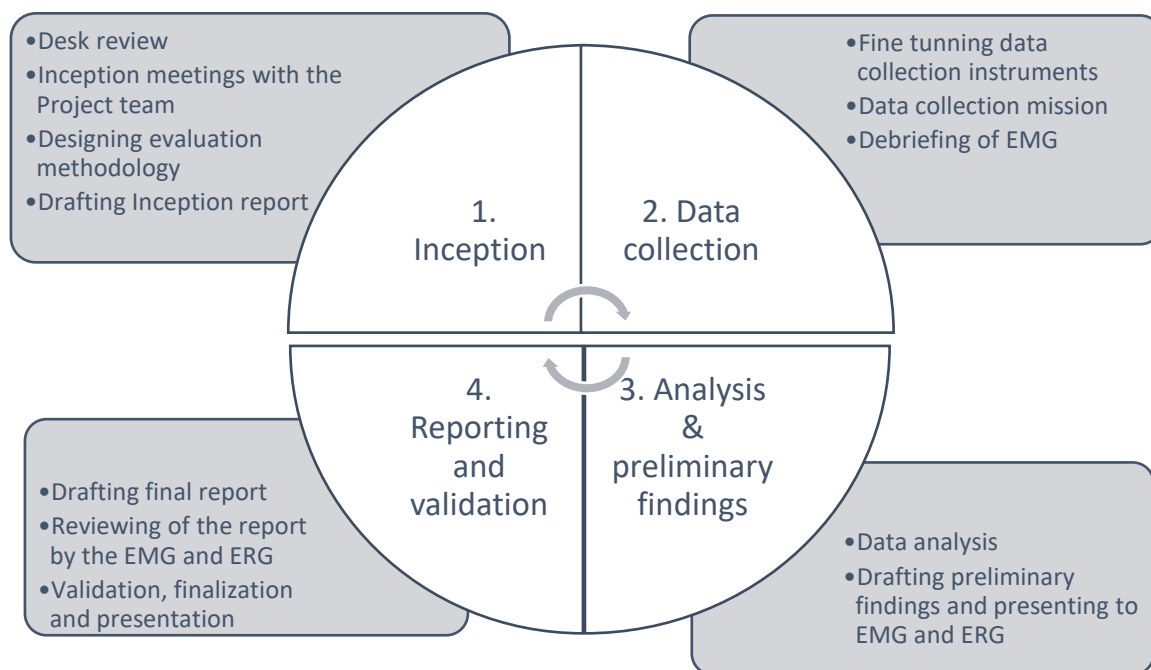
		discussions and a self-administered online surveys <sup>11</sup> .	achieved through desk analysis.
<b>Stakeholders consulted/data sources</b>	ERG was consulted.	Data sources included document reviews, inputs from UN Women, stakeholders, grant beneficiaries, direct beneficiaries, and development partners (such as donor).	Data from different sources were cross-referenced to enhance validity. Preliminary findings were prepared and presented to the Evaluation Management Group (EMG) and ERG at the end of the data analysis phase.

The evaluation team successfully gathered substantial evidence for assessing the evaluation criteria through extensive document review and primary data collection. A full list of stakeholders involved in the evaluation mission, a full list of the documents reviewed, and the data collection instruments are all presented in the annexes to this report.

## 1.2 Methods, Data Sources and Sampling

The evaluation methodology used mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The evaluation methodology is presented in more detail along the evaluation process (Figure 2) as each stage requires a different combination of methods.

Figure 2. The evaluation process



### 1. Inception phase

During the inception phase, the overall evaluation methodology as well as data collection and analytical instruments were designed. Members of the EMG and ERG groups were consulted.

This phase included several components:

<sup>11</sup> Two surveys were administered. Specifically, the Project Team from the UN Women Office in Serbia filled out a questionnaire as a team, while the women's CSOs supported through this Project received a link with access to an online survey (15 out of 16 contacted CSOs filled out the questionnaire).

- Desk research of project documentation, relevant reports, and studies, as well as secondary data from official statistics or similar sources, which enable understanding of the context in which the Project was implemented.
- Series of inception meetings with the UN Women team discussing ToC, evaluation context, stakeholder mapping, methodology and work plan.
- Drafting the Inception Report containing the description of evaluation objectives, context, scope, approach, methodology, evaluation questions, ethical standards, and data collection instruments.
- Feedback from the EMG on the draft of the Inception Report.
- Finalization of the Inception Report.

## *2. Data collection*

The data collection phase included two components: a) data collection mission and b) debriefing of the UN Women team.

Data collection (data sources) was based on the documents reviewed and information provided by UN Women, stakeholders, grant beneficiaries, direct beneficiaries, and development partners (such as donor).

A mix of evaluation tools was used:

- Project document review and desk research.
- Key Informant Interview (KII). KIIs were used for gathering information from individuals who possess in-depth knowledge and expertise related to the subject under evaluation. Individuals, known as key informants, are selected based on their experience, roles or positions relevant to the evaluation context. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility for interviewers to explore specific areas of interest while maintaining a conversational and open-ended format.
- Focus group discussion (FGD). Online FGDs were conducted with the target groups, that is, local gender equality mechanisms, IPA units across sectors, and women's civil society organizations (CSOs).
- Online surveys. Two online surveys were developed to collect data from different stakeholders, i.e., the UN Women Project team and women's CSOs.
- Validation (Client – UN Women – Implementing party) meeting served as a tool to validate initial findings.

Identification of stakeholders was undertaken using the information from the received project documents.

Debriefing of EMG and ERG on the data collection mission and preliminary findings was done after the data collection.

## *3. The Analysis phase*

The analysis phase was conducted following the data collection phase. Data was coded in line with the evaluation matrix and evaluation questions. Data from different research sources were triangulated to increase its validity. At the end of the data analysis, preliminary findings were drafted and presented to EMG and ERG.

## 1.3 Evaluation Management Structure

The management structure for this evaluation included:

- EMG composed of UN Women Project team members, UN Women Serbia Head of Office, and UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECA RO) Evaluation Specialist and was responsible for the overall management of the evaluation, overseeing the progress of the evaluation, keeping communication with the evaluation team, and provision of comments to inception and final evaluation reports.
- ERG composed of representatives of key national institutions involved in the Project and gender experts tasked to ensure that the evaluation findings and recommendations meet the purpose and are relevant to stakeholders.

- A task manager, designated by the UN Women Office in Serbia to support the day-to-day management of the evaluation and coordination of the KIIs and meetings of EMG and ERG.

## 1.4 The Ethical Approach and Limitations

In the external evaluation, the evaluation team adhered to a rigorous ethical approach, ensuring that their work was conducted with integrity, fairness, and respect for all stakeholders involved. This included several following features:

1. **Transparency:** The evaluation team maintained transparency throughout the process, clearly communicating their objectives, methods, and findings to all stakeholders involved.
2. **Confidentiality:** The evaluation team ensured the confidentiality of sensitive information obtained during the evaluation, especially when dealing with individual respondents or organizations. Respecting confidentiality helps protect the privacy and interests of participants and maintains the integrity of the evaluation process.
3. **Avoiding Bias:** The evaluation team has taken steps to minimize bias in their assessment, including using rigorous research methods, triangulating data sources, and critically analyzing their own assumptions and preconceptions.
4. **Accountability:** The evaluators held themselves accountable to the highest professional standards, adhering to relevant ethical guidelines and codes of conduct in evaluation practice.

The evaluation has fully complied with UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation and the UNEG Ethical Code of Conduct. The evaluation was conducted with integrity and respect for the beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environment, for human rights and gender equality, and the 'do no harm' principle.

Focus groups, meetings, surveys and interviews were led with a tone of respect, openness, and rapport. Evaluators have shown respect for the rights of institutions, organisations and individuals to provide information in confidence. Before collecting any data, an explanation of the purpose and the intention of the evaluation was given in Serbian language. The presentation of findings in this report respects the principles of anonymity of the key informants.

The evaluation experts have the final judgment on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report, and must be protected from pressures to change information in the report.

The evaluation identified several limitations. First of all, these included general challenges in measuring qualitative changes in gender norms. To address these challenges, the evaluation team ensured comprehensive data collection methods that included various groups' perspectives and employed participatory approaches to capture nuanced shifts in gender dynamics. Regular consultations with the EMG also helped identify and address emerging limitations throughout the evaluation process. Secondly, assessing the long-term impact of the Project has proven difficult as changes around gender equality often take years to become evident and short-term evaluations may not capture the full picture of the Project's effects. Furthermore, difficulty in quantifying qualitative changes in attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices related to gender equality can make evaluation outcomes less robust. However, the evaluation did manage to collect and analyze some evidence of impact, later explained in the appropriate section. Despite these limitations, the evaluation team successfully gathered sufficiently robust evidence to assess the evaluation criteria. Intersectionality is also another limitation. Failure to consider intersectional factors such as ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity may lead to overlooking unique challenges faced by different groups of women within the Serbian context. Hence, the issue was discussed with the gender consultants involved in the interviews and their views were considered.

## 1.5 Stakeholder Participation in Evaluation

Project target groups (according to evaluation ToR) are:

- Coordination Body for Gender Equality (CBGE), the government body mandated to ensure the coordination of the government's actions in gender equality. Their role in the Project was to oversee the implementation of this specific project and its initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality. This included coordinating activities and monitoring progress to ensure that program objectives are met effectively and efficiently.

- Approximately 20 local gender equality mechanisms. Local gender equality mechanisms serve to implement gender equality policies, provide community-level support, advocate for women's rights, and ensure accountability for gender mainstreaming initiatives and they benefited from the Project's initiatives, assistance and funds.
- At least 20 gender focal points in line ministries and key institutions. Gender focal points in line ministries and key institutions play a pivotal role in integrating gender perspectives into policies, programs, and practices, ensuring gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality within their respective organizations. The Project supported their role and provided technical assistance and capacity building to them.
- The staff of the Ministry of European Integration (MEI), responsible for organizing and coordinating processes on IPA planning, programming, implementation, monitoring and reporting. The Project supported their role and provided technical assistance and capacity building to them.
- IPA units, participating in the abovementioned processes across sectors through the mechanisms of Sector Working Groups and Sectoral Monitoring Committees, as well as members of the negotiating group for Chapter 22, approximately 100 civil servants. The Project supported their role and provided technical assistance and capacity building to them.
- Women's CSOs - approximately 18 women's CSOs (as per proposal) and 16 supported within the implementation. Women's CSOs in a UN Women project in Serbia provide grassroots expertise, advocacy, and community engagement, ensuring women's voices are heard, needs addressed, and rights upheld for effective gender equality programming. They benefited from the Project's initiatives, assistance and funds.

Following the inception phase activities, the list of stakeholders is devised, also noting their planned involvement in the evaluation.

Table 2. Map of stakeholders involved in data collection

No.	Stakeholder groups/organisations	Method	Number of people	Total no. of people <sup>12</sup>	Men <sup>13</sup>	Women <sup>14</sup>
1.	UN Women	Interview: 1 group interview and 2 individual interviews	Group interview = 4 Individual interviews = 2	6	1	5
		Survey	4			
2.	Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia	Interview	1	1	0	1
3.	Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography	Group interview	2	2 <sup>15</sup>	1	1

<sup>12</sup> The difference in the number of people per method and the total number of people is due to some individuals participating in more than one activity.

<sup>13</sup> Data are disaggregated by sex according to evaluators' perceptions based on external cues (e.g., personal name, gender expression, pronouns used) given that stakeholders were not asked about their gender identity or intersex status.

<sup>14</sup> Data are disaggregated by sex according to evaluators' perceptions based on external cues (e.g., personal name, gender expression, pronouns used) given that stakeholders were not asked about their gender identity or intersex status.

<sup>15</sup> The interviewed State Secretary of the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography is also a chairperson of the expert group of the Coordinator Body for Gender Equality so she is listed two times, as she provided information from the point of view of both of her positions.

No.	Stakeholder groups/organisations	Method	Number of people	Total no. of people <sup>12</sup>	Men <sup>13</sup>	Women <sup>14</sup>
4.	Coordination Body for Gender Equality	Interview: 1 group interview and 1 individual interview	Group interview = 2 Individual interview = 1 <sup>16</sup>	2	0	2
5.	Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue	Interview	1	1	1	0
6.	Ministry of European Integration	Group interview	2	2	0	2
7.	Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs	Interview	1	1	0	1
8.	Public Policy Secretariat of the Republic of Serbia	Group interview	2	2	1	1
9.	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia	Interview	1	1	0	1
10.	IPA units	Focus group discussion	5	5	2	3
11.	Local gender equality mechanisms	Group interview	3	5	1	4
		Group interview	2			
12.	Women's CSOs	Group interview	2 (1 organization)	17 people (15 CSOs)	1	16
		Focus group discussion	7 (7 organizations)			
		Survey	15 (15 organizations)			
13.	Direct beneficiaries	Interview: 3 individual interviews	3	3	0	3
14.	Gender experts	Interview: 3 individual interviews	3	3	0	3

<sup>16</sup> Individual interview was held with the Chairperson of the expert group of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality who is also a State Secretary of the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography.

No.	Stakeholder groups/organisations	Method	Number of people	Total no. of people <sup>12</sup>	Men <sup>13</sup>	Women <sup>14</sup>
				51	8 (16%)	43 (84%)

A final list of consulted stakeholders is annexed to the report.

## 2. Country Context

### 2.1. General Overview

The Project implementation period was marked by various shocks that have affected the global economy, including that of Serbia, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which impacted food security and energy prices. Southeastern European countries and territories continued to engage in regional cooperation initiatives, addressing common challenges and fostering economic and political ties, but have also remained influenced by broader geopolitical dynamics. Serbia continued its balancing act between maintaining close ties with Russia and pursuing its goal of joining the EU. The ongoing dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and regional stability remained key political considerations.

These global shocks affected the already poor and vulnerable people disproportionately, within the Serbian population, threatening to wipe out decades of progress. Luckily, due to a strong track record of fiscal consolidation over 2014-19, the negative impact of the pandemic on the economy and the labour market in Serbia was greatly reduced. In fact, Serbia experienced only a mild recession.<sup>17</sup> The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at 2.3 per cent in 2022 and the fiscal situation of the country remains stable, considering the current economic and geopolitical challenges.<sup>18</sup>

In line with positive trends of macroeconomic indicators, the labor market indicators in Serbia show positive developments. Specifically, the employment and activity rates increased since 2015. However, the available data also suggest that some groups continue to face disadvantages in the labor market, including women, young people, the Roma population, persons with disabilities and trans people. Social assistance programs and social services continue to be non-responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable people.<sup>19</sup>

In 2022, the at-risk-of-poverty rate<sup>20</sup> in Serbia was 20.0% – 1.2 percentage points lower than in 2021. Persons aged 65 and over were most exposed to the risk of poverty, especially women, followed by persons aged 55 to 64. Data disaggregated by sex and age are shown in Table 2.<sup>21</sup> The at-risk-of-poverty or social inclusion rate<sup>22</sup> reached 28.1%, which is 0.3 percentage points lower than in 2021. In comparison, the average EU-27 at-risk-of-poverty or social inclusion rate in 2022 was 21.6%. Serbia is among the European countries with the highest income inequality represented by the Gini coefficient<sup>23</sup>. In 2022, the Gini coefficient for Serbia was 32.0 and the average for the EU-27 was 29.6.

Table 3. At-risk-of-poverty rate by sex and age, 2022

	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Total	20.0	19.3	20.7

<sup>17</sup> World Bank, "Serbia Policy Notes," (Belgrade: World Bank, 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, "Serbian Economy Macroeconomic Overview 2022," (Belgrade: Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, 2023).

<sup>19</sup> World Bank, "Serbia Policy Notes," (Belgrade: World Bank, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> The at-risk-of-poverty rate represents the share of persons with disposable income below the relative poverty line of RSD 26,509 a month for a single-person household. This rate does not show how many people are poor but how many people have an income below the poverty line.

<sup>21</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2023/Html/G20231287.html>

<sup>22</sup> At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate represents the share of individuals at risk of poverty or who are severely materially and socially deprived or live in households with very low work intensity.

<sup>23</sup> The Gini coefficient gives the extent to which the distribution of income within a country deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini value of 100 means that only one person receives all the income in the country, while a Gini value of 0 means that income is distributed equally across the population.

0–17	20.3	20.1	20.6
18–64	19.0	18.8	19.2
18–24	20.4	18.4	22.3
25–54	17.9	17.8	17.9
55–64	21.6	22.2	21.1
65 and older	22.6	20.0	24.6

Results of different global indicators of the rule of law, freedom and democracy show that further efforts need to be invested to improve the situation concerning areas of human rights, freedoms and democracy (Table 4). Challenges in judicial effectiveness, corruption, and media freedom remain recurring themes. Prioritizing institutional reforms, fostering transparent governance, and enhancing civic engagement remain vital for advancing the rule of law, freedom, and democracy in Serbia. Developmental needs also include addressing unemployment through targeted economic policies, enhancing social welfare programs to alleviate poverty, investing in education and healthcare infrastructure, and implementing measures to bridge gender gaps in employment and representation, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for improved human development, social welfare, well-being, employment, and gender equality.

Table 4. Key facts for the Republic of Serbia

<b>Population</b>	
Population total (population census 2022) <sup>24</sup>	6,647,003 F: 51.4% M: 48.6%
Population change rate 2022 <sup>25</sup>	-6.6
Life expectancy at birth, 2021 <sup>26</sup>	F: 75.64 M: 69.96
<b>Government</b>	
Global Freedom Index 2023 <sup>27</sup>	60/100, partly free
Corruption Perception Index 2022 <sup>28</sup>	36/100 Rank: 101 out of 180 countries
<b>Economy</b>	
GDP per capita 2022 (constant 2015 US \$) <sup>29</sup>	7,354
GDP Growth rate 2022 <sup>30</sup>	2.25%
Activity rate, population 15+, 2022	T: 55.5% F: 47.9% M: 63.6%
Employment rate, population 15+, 2022 <sup>31</sup>	T: 50.3% F: 43.2% M: 57.9%
<b>Human Development 2021/2022<sup>32</sup></b>	

<sup>24</sup> <https://popis2022.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn>

<sup>25</sup> <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/180701?languageCode=sr-Cyrl>

<sup>26</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Demographic Yearbook, 2022, p. 33, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2022/Pdf/G202214019.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2023>

<sup>28</sup> Transparency International's index ranks 180 countries and territories around the world by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, scoring on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean), <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/srb>

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

<sup>30</sup> World Bank, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

<sup>31</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Labour Force Survey 2022, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2023/Pdf/G20235695.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2021/2022, p.275-282, [https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf\\_1.pdf](https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf)



Human Development Index score	0.802
Human Development Index rank	63/191
<b>Gender Equality</b>	
Gender Development Index, 2021/2022 <sup>33</sup>	0.982
Gender Inequality Index, 2021/2022 <sup>34</sup>	0.131
Gender Equality Index 2021 <sup>35</sup>	58.0/100

## 2.2 Gender Equality Overview

### 2.2.1 Legislative and Policy Framework

The legislative and policy framework for gender equality is directed by the obligations specified in the international conventions and other instruments that Serbia has ratified, most notably the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Optional Protocol to the CEDAW, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security, and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.

The Constitution of Serbia foresees that all citizens are equal before the law and prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, including, inter alia, based on sex. Protection against discrimination is further regulated by the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, an umbrella anti-discrimination regulation. The key legislation on gender equality is the Law on Gender Equality (LGE), adopted in 2021, which sets out the institutional framework, measures, planning acts and obligations of different actors in the process of achieving gender equality. The LGE replaced the Gender Equality Law adopted in 2009. Additionally, gender equality clauses have been integrated into the different sectoral laws. Other relevant legal acts include the Law on the Prohibition of Domestic Violence, the Law on the Planning System which stipulates that the effects on gender equality should be taken into account when drafting and implementing planning documents, and the Budget System Law that regulates gender-responsive budgeting.

The key gender equality strategic documents are the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030, the Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025, and the Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination 2022-2030. Moreover, measures to promote gender equality are integrated into several sectoral planning documents in different domains (e.g., employment, social protection, youth policies, Roma inclusion, etc.).

When it comes to the process of joining the EU, the improvement of gender equality is recognized as an important aspect in the Action Plan for Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and the Action Plan for Chapter 19 – Social Policy and Employment. The EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) and the EU Gender Country Profile for Serbia provide a comprehensive and structured gender analysis in the six key thematic policy areas, including ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence, strengthening economic and social rights and empowering girls and women, and advancing equal participation and leadership.

### 2.2.2 Institutional Framework

The LGE sets out an institutional framework for the implementation, monitoring and improvement of policies for achieving gender equality in Chapter VII.

At the national level, the main bodies established by the Government are the CBGE, mandated to guide and coordinate the work of state authorities concerning gender equality, consider all the relevant issues and improve the state of gender equality, and the Council for Gender Equality, an advisory body of the Government. The CBGE has been active since 2014, while the Council for Gender Equality was established in 2023. The Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, established within the National Assembly, reviews draft laws and other legal acts from a gender equality perspective and

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 287.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 292.

<sup>35</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia (SIPRU), "Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia 2021 – Digitalization, future of work and gender equality," (Belgrade: SIPRU, 2021), [https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Gender\\_Equality\\_Index\\_for\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Serbia\\_2021.pdf](https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Gender_Equality_Index_for_the_Republic_of_Serbia_2021.pdf)

examines the implementation of laws and other acts by the Government and other bodies and officials responsible to the National Assembly. Additionally, the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue (MHMRSD) plays an important role as the institution mandated to perform state administration tasks related to the protection and improvement of human and minority rights, drafting of regulations on human and minority rights, monitoring of compliance of domestic regulations with international agreements and other international legal acts on human and minority rights, gender equality and anti-discrimination policy. In addition, public authorities that have more than 50 employees have appointed a person in charge of gender equality, in accordance with the LGE. In 2022, there were 505 persons in charge of gender equality in such public authorities.<sup>36</sup>

Concerning the provincial level, the authorities of the autonomous provinces also implement an equal opportunities policy and have established mechanisms to improve gender equality. According to the LGE, the assembly of the autonomous province shall establish a standing working body for gender equality and the provincial government should form a coordination body for gender equality and a council for gender equality. When it comes to the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the key institution is the Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality within the Provincial Government and there are also independent bodies at the provincial level, such as the Provincial Ombudsman. In 2022, the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina established the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and the Council for Gender Equality. Concerning the assembly, the Committee on Gender Equality has been working within the Parliament of Vojvodina. In addition, it is important to mention the Institute for Gender Equality, an expert body created to promote the concept of gender equality and make recommendations for gender mainstreaming of all policies, measures, actions and programmes of the Provincial Government.

As the LGE stipulates, local self-government units should form a commission for gender equality as a permanent working body of the assembly and the council for gender equality in the administrative bodies of the local self-government unit. According to the data collected by the women's CSO FemPlatz, in 2020 113 local self-government units had established some form of gender equality mechanisms.<sup>37</sup> The data provided by the MHMRSD indicate that in 2022 36 local self-government units had a commission and/or a council for gender equality established.<sup>38</sup>

There are also two independent bodies for the protection of human rights relevant from the gender equality perspective – the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality (CPE) and the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman). The CPE is mandated to combat all forms and types of discrimination. The Ombudsman's task is to control the legality and regularity of operations of public authorities concerning the exercise of individual and collective rights of citizens and to protect and promote human and minority freedoms and rights, including gender equality.

The LGE provides a foundation for the development of gender equality mechanisms and for overcoming identified challenges for their effective and efficient work. The main obstacles encountered by the CBGE are a lack of permanent structure and limited human and financial resources.<sup>39</sup> Overall, gender equality mechanisms are subjected to a lack of permanent structure and an adequate budget, unclear responsibilities, and a small number of employees, who often perform these tasks in addition to other responsibilities.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the level of relevant knowledge of persons in charge of gender equality varies.<sup>41</sup>

### 2.2.3 The Current State of Gender Equality in Relevant Areas

Despite the progress achieved in the last decades, women in Serbia are still at a disadvantage compared to men in all areas of life. Many women face multiple discrimination which creates specific barriers and impacts their quality of life and well-being. As the European Commission noted in its 2023 progress report for Serbia *"Roma women, older women, poor women, women with disabilities, refugee and internally displaced women, continue to experience multiple and intersecting forms of*

---

<sup>36</sup> Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, "Report on the Achievement of Gender Equality in the Republic of Serbia for the Year 2022", available at <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/doc/izvestaji/izvestaj-o-ostvarivanju-rodne-ravnopravnosti-uRSza2022.godinu.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> FemPlatz, "Report on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Serbia for the Year 2020," (Pancevo: FemPlatz, 2021).

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, "Report on the Achievement of Gender Equality in the Republic of Serbia for the Year 2022", available at <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/doc/izvestaji/izvestaj-o-ostvarivanju-rodne-ravnopravnosti-uRSza2022.godinu.pdf>, page 97.

<sup>39</sup> Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, "Report Following Her Visit to Serbia from 13 to 17 March 2023," available at <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-serbia-by-dunja-mijatovic-commissioner-for-human-rights-of-t/1680ac88cc>; UN Women, "EU Gender Country Profile for Serbia," available at <https://serbia.un.org/en/download/89887/160415>

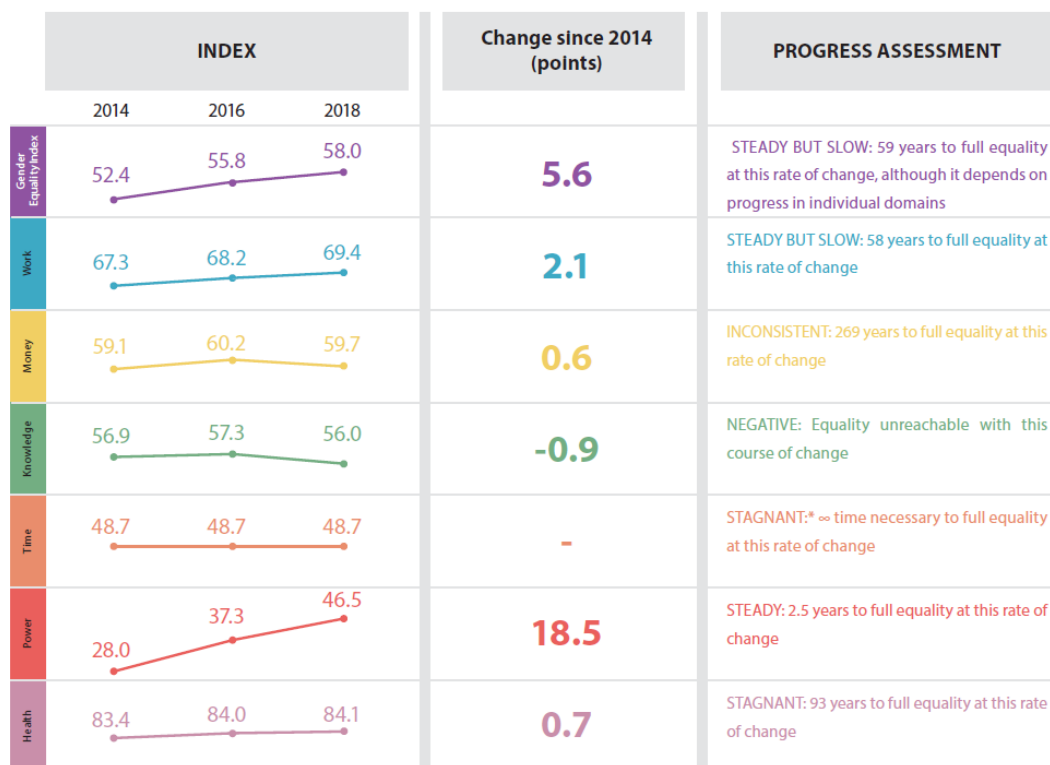
<sup>40</sup> The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030, available at <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/doc/strateska-dokumenta/Strategija-za-rodnu-ravnopravnost-za-period-od-2021.do2030.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

discrimination. These women continue to have limited access to health, education, employment, and social assistance, and they lack protection from gender-based violence.”<sup>42</sup>

The available data suggest that gender-based disparities exist in key sectors, including employment and education, and that violence against women is still present. In 2021, Serbia published a third edition of the Gender Equality Index (GEI), an instrument for measuring gender equality in the EU in six core and two satellite domains.<sup>43</sup> The 2021 GEI was calculated based on data from 2018 and amounted to 58.0 points<sup>44</sup>, which is an increase of 5.6 points compared to the first edition of the index published in 2016 (based on data from 2014). Trends observed via GEI from 2014 to 2018 are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Progress within the six domains of the Gender Equality Index in Serbia; Source: SIPRU, “Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia 2021 – Digitalization, future of work and gender equality”, 2021.



\* Data for domain of time are available only for year 2015, and therefore stagnation is the consequence of the lack of new data and not the factual stagnation.

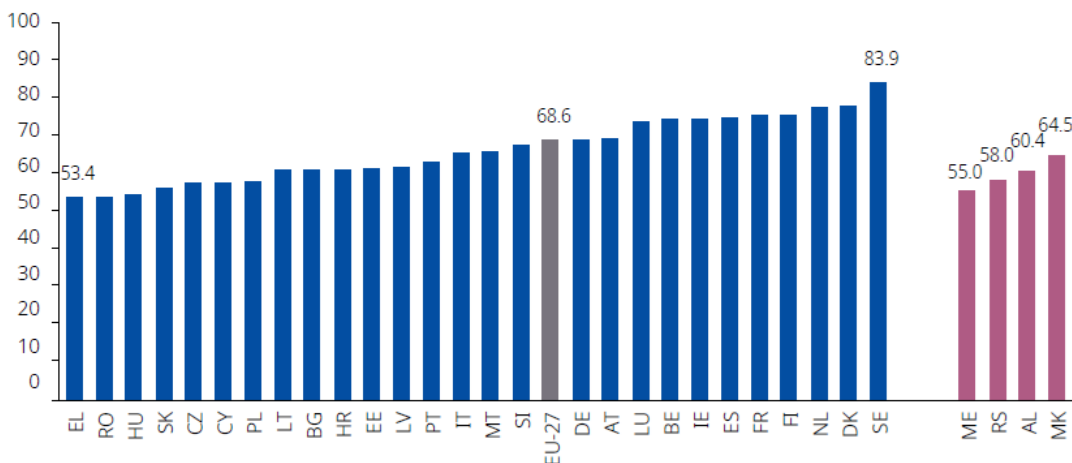
Compared to the EU-27, Serbia still has lower index values (Figure 4), but this difference has been decreasing.

<sup>42</sup> European Commission, “Commission Staff Working Document – Serbia 2023 Report,” (Strasbourg: European Commission, 2023), p. 47.

<sup>43</sup> The core domains of the GEI are work, money, knowledge, time, power and health, and the two satellite domains refer to violence against women and intersecting inequalities.

<sup>44</sup> GEI measures the level of achievement and the gender gap in different areas, using a scale from 1 (full inequality) to 100 (full equality).

Figure 4. Gender Equality Index for the Western Balkans and EU-27 (2022), Source: EIGE, “Gender Equality Index: Measuring progress in the Western Balkans 2023”, 2023.

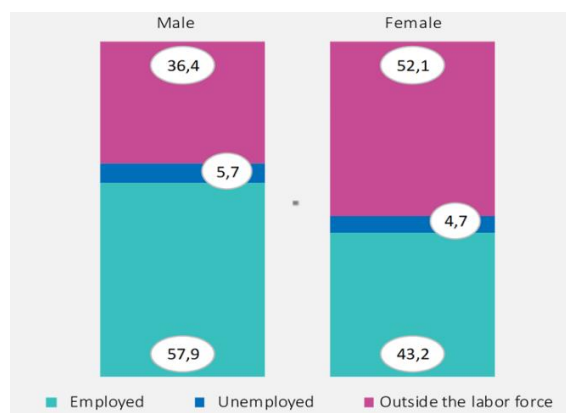


Note: EU Gender Equality Index: EIGE's calculations, data mostly from 2020; Western Balkan countries calculations: data mostly pertains to: Albania (2018), Montenegro (2017), North Macedonia (2019) and Serbia (2018).

When it comes to employment, women are worse off than men. Several factors contribute to gender gaps in the labor market, including discriminatory norms and attitudes, gender-based segregation in education and occupations, and the unequal distribution of care responsibilities in the household.

The employment and activity rates have constantly been higher among men, while unemployment and inactivity rates have been higher among women. The key labor market statistics for 2022 are presented in Figure 5. When it comes to people who work shorter than full-time, as the main reason for such arrangements women cited caring for children and other dependent persons (93.7%), while the most common reason among men was the inability to find a full-time job (63.7%).<sup>45</sup> Economic inequalities are also reflected in the gender pay gap, which amounted to 8.8% in 2018<sup>46</sup> and 14.4% in 2022<sup>47</sup>.

Figure 5. Key labor market statistics, 2022, Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, “Labour Force Survey in the Republic of Serbia, 2022”, 2023.



As research indicates, one of the main reasons for low employment rates recorded among women is the challenge of balancing work, family and private life. According to 2022 data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the

<sup>45</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, “Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia 2024,” (Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2024), p. 85.

<sup>46</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, “Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia 2020,” (Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020).

<sup>47</sup> Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, “Report on the Achievement of Gender Equality in the Republic of Serbia for the Year 2022”, available at <https://www.minijmpdd.gov.rs/doc/izvestaji/izvestaj-o-ostvarivanju-rodne-ravnopravnosti-uRSza2022.godinu.pdf>

majority of women who were willing but unable to work reported taking care of children or relatives as the reason for staying outside the labor force, while the most frequent reason stated by men was illness or disability.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, findings of a different survey conducted by the Statistical Office in 2021/2022 showed that women in Serbia, on average, spend twice as much time each day in unpaid work as men and work an hour and a half less than men in paid employment.<sup>49</sup> If a monetary value is given to the hours dedicated to the provision of unpaid care work, it would amount to 21.5% of Serbian GDP, of which 14.9% corresponds to unpaid work done by women and 6.6% to that done by men.<sup>50</sup>

In conclusion, gender equality in Serbia has shown progress in various areas, but challenges persist. Women's participation in the labor force has increased, and there have been efforts to promote gender equality in education and political representation. Women continue to face discrimination in the workplace, including lower wages and limited access to leadership positions. Additionally, traditional gender roles and stereotypes persist, influencing societal attitudes and perceptions. Efforts to address these challenges include legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, and initiatives to empower women economically and politically, the Project being one of them.

When it comes to civil society, CSOs are very active and play a key role in protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality. In the last couple of years, the legal framework for improving cooperation between the government and CSOs has been established, but certain challenges remain, including a lack of meaningful dialogue and cooperation, smear campaigns incited by high-level officials and different types of attacks on human rights defenders.<sup>51</sup> Women's CSOs struggle with securing stable funding for their work, especially rural women's organizations.<sup>52</sup>

## 3. Description of the Project and Theory of Change

**The project duration:** 36 months (01/03/2021-29/02/2024). Note that at the time of the evaluation, the Project was undergoing a no-cost extension.

**Project budget:** EUR 2 million

**Geographical scope:** The Republic of Serbia

**Implementing agency:** UN Women

### 3.1 Project Background

The project "Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II (GEF II)" (hereinafter the Project) is implemented in Serbia with financial support from the EU's pre-accession funds. The Project is implemented from March 2021 to March 2024, in partnership with the Government of Serbia, in particular, the CBGE and the MEI as key political partners, and represents a continuation of the GEF I project (2018-2021). The Project aims to further support Serbia's refined execution of the EU gender equality acquis, including via the National Strategy for Gender Equality. It supports all tiers of the Serbian gender machinery specifically dedicated to women's issues and gender equality, where an avenue is particularly directed to supporting the MEI and Serbian institutions involved in the programming of EU funds provided to Serbia to also include gender perspective in the planning, and programming activities thereby. As partnering with local women's civic groups is crucial for UN Women's projects globally and a usual strategy of choice, the Project also promotes gender equality by fostering inclusivity and sustainability at the community level via partnering with women's CSOs.

At the moment of the evaluation, there were no changes in the timeframe and/or implementation plans of the Project (i.e., to the original plans, strategies and logical frameworks). Following the evaluation, the Project was undertaking a no-cost

<sup>48</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, "Labour Force Survey in the Republic of Serbia, 2022," (Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2023).

<sup>49</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2023/Html/G20231018.html>

<sup>50</sup> UN Women, "Economic Value of the Unpaid Care Work in the Republic of Serbia," (Belgrade: UN Women, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> European Commission, "Commission Staff Working Document – Serbia 2023 Report," (Strasbourg: European Commission, 2023).

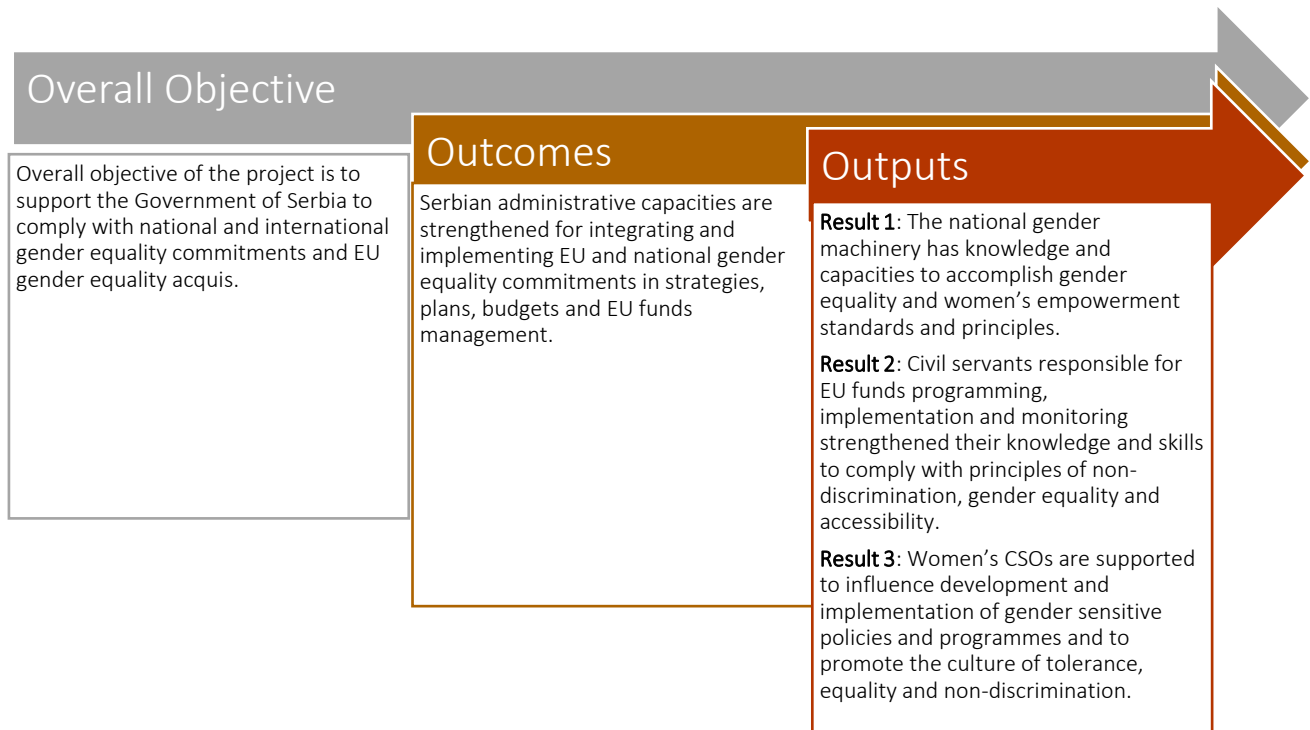
<sup>52</sup> FemPlatz, "Report on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Serbia for the Year 2023," (Pancevo: FemPlatz, 2024); UN Women, "EU Gender Country Profile for Serbia," available at <https://serbia.un.org/en/download/89887/160415>

extension. The minor observable deviations from the original plans included only activity adjustments (in terms of specific content, timing, attendance, etc.). The Project is in the mature stage of implementation. No significant changes are observed.

## 3.2 Project Objectives and Interventions

The Project results are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Impact (Overall Objective), Specific Objective (Outcome) and Results (Outputs) of the Project



Activities related to Result 1 focus on bolstering Serbia's institutional capacities through continuous support for the government and national gender machinery. Emphasizing the LGE and National Strategy for Gender Equality implementation, the goal is to integrate a gender perspective across policies, documents, and budgets. This approach aligns with national and international gender equality commitments, fostering a multi-disciplinary model for inter-institutional collaboration. The initiative extends to local levels, supporting civil servants, and enhancing gender equality mechanisms' capacities for effective gender mainstreaming in diverse sectors.

Performance indicators of the Result 1 include the following:

- National Strategy for Gender Equality with the following Action Plan is developed.
- Three Annual Meetings of Gender Focal Points and local Gender Equality Mechanisms are held.
- 100 civil servants are trained on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- 20 municipalities received grants to implement measures from their local Action Plans on Gender Equality.
- 5,000 women benefit from the support to gender equality mechanisms.

Activities associated with Result 1 are:

- Activity A1: Support the CBGE and other institutions involved in the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality, Budget System Law and Law on Planning System to provide recommendations and advocate for inclusion of gender equality considerations.

- Activity A2: Improve horizontal and vertical coordination in the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality and EU gender equality acquis between the CBGE, line ministries through gender focal points, and with the provincial and local gender equality bodies.
- Activity A3: Enhance capacities of local gender equality mechanisms and civil servants for gender-responsive governance: planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting, and for gender mainstreaming in their respective sectors and in line with their mandates and functions.

Result 2 of the Project outlines support efforts to the MEI in managing IPA funds, emphasizing gender equality, non-discrimination, and accessibility. Activities include capacity assessment, training, and building mechanisms to comply with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. It also highlights the importance of cooperation with CSOs, citizen participation, and dissemination of information for promoting equality principles in planning, monitoring, and implementing EU-funded programs. Technical assistance was provided to integrate gender equality, antidiscrimination, and accessibility principles into programming documents and procedures.

Performance indicators include the following:

- At least 10 IPA III programming documents are gender mainstreamed.
- At least one cohesion policy program is gender mainstreamed.
- At least 100 civil servants are trained to ensure the inclusion of gender equality, non-discrimination, and disability principles in the development of EU-funded programs.
- At least 5 consultation meetings are organized with CSOs representing gender equality, non-discrimination, and the interest of disadvantaged groups, to ensure the partnership principle in cohesion policy.

Activities associated with Result 2 are:

- Activity B1: Develop capacities of the public administration in the fields of gender equality, non-discrimination and disability-inclusive policies related to the programming, implementation and monitoring of EU funds, in accordance with the cohesion policy general enabling conditions and IPA III requirements.
- Activity B2: Support the national authorities in establishing an internal system for integration of gender equality, anti-discrimination and accessibility principles into the IPA III programming, IPA III procedures for programming and monitoring, as well as cohesion policy programming documents.

Result 3 aims to empower women and women's CSOs by actively involving them in identifying key gender equality issues, creating watchdog reports, and influencing national and local gender-related programs and policies. It seeks to raise public awareness about gender equality and women's participation in the labor market. The collaboration between women's CSOs and gender mechanisms at all levels is fostered through thematic meetings, facilitating knowledge exchange and policy development. Women's CSOs play a pivotal role in implementing specific measures, enhancing their capacity to contribute to community development initiatives.

Performance indicators within Result 3 are:

- Up to 18 women's CSOs are selected as the responsible parties and awarded projects.
- 20 watchdog reports on gender equality are developed.
- Public awareness on gender stereotypes is increased by 15%.
- 3,000 women are benefitting from the implemented projects.
- Cooperation between women's CSOs and gender equality mechanisms at all levels is established through organization of 9 thematic meetings and 2 conferences.

Associated activities with Result 3 are:

- Activity C1: Launch the Call for Proposals and select women's CSOs as the responsible parties for the implementation of projects.
- Activity C2: Support and monitor women's CSOs selected as the responsible parties in the implementation of awarded projects.

- Activity C3: Establish systematic cooperation between women's CSOs and gender mechanisms at all levels.

### 3.3 Theory of Change

The ToC for the Project is as follows:

- IF the national gender machinery has the knowledge and capacities to accomplish gender equality and women's empowerment standards and principles.
- IF the MEI and IPA units have the knowledge and skills to include the principles of non-discrimination, gender equality and accessibility in programming, implementation, monitoring and reporting for IPA programmes.
- IF women's CSOs are supported to influence the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programmes and to promote a culture of tolerance, equality and non-discrimination.
- THEN the national gender machinery, the MEI, and the key institutions mandated for gender equality, progress in the implementation of the key national strategic documents in the field of gender equality and the oversight of EU gender equality acquis.
- BECAUSE the Government of Serbia will consistently comply with national and international gender equality commitments and EU gender equality acquis.

For the purpose of this evaluation, the following ToC was reconstructed:





Figure 7. Project ToC reconstructed

## 4. Evaluation Findings

### 4.1 Relevance

In the evaluation of the relevance of the Project, the following questions were analyzed:

No	Evaluation questions on relevance	Judgement criteria	Situation found
1.	<p>What are the needs and priorities of the women in Serbia that this Project responded to?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your perspectives on the implementation of gender equality strategies and action plans in Serbia? To what extent was the design of the intervention, its choices of intervention and its results relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?</li> <li>• Was the choice of interventions relevant to the situation of the target group?</li> </ul>	<p>Documental evidence on needs and priorities consulted present in Description of the Action (DoA).</p> <p>Evidence on the consultation process in preparation of the Project.</p> <p>Perception of stakeholders of correlation with the national policy priorities and interventions and legal framework.</p>	<p>The evaluation found that the documental evidence on the needs and priorities of women in Serbia was extensively considered during the inception of the Project and implementation.</p> <p>While the implementation of the gender equality strategies and action plans is viewed as somewhat critical, overall, the design of the intervention and the choices are found to remain relevant for the target groups.</p>
2.	<p>To what extent were key partners involved in the Project's conceptualization and design process?</p>	<p>Documental evidence on adherence to national gender equality policies and other development policies.</p>	<p>There is clear evidence of extensive consultation processes in preparation of the Project.</p>
3.	<p>To what extent have gender equality and human rights principles and strategies been integrated into the Project design and implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the intervention aligned with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the EU gender equality acquis?</li> <li>• To what extent did the Project contribute to achieving nationalized SDGs?</li> </ul>	<p>Documental evidence on adherence to international commitments (CEDAW, Beijing, SDGs, EU gender equality acquis).</p>	<p>Non-alignment was not found between the Project and the international and national legal and normative framework.</p>

#### Key finding 1

**The Project demonstrates strong contextual relevance to Serbia's specific needs and priorities, effectively addressing diverse stakeholder priorities, needs, and gaps. Stakeholder input was successfully integrated into the project design.**

During the evaluation, alignment was found between the Project and the international legal and normative framework such as CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, the Istanbul Convention, the EU Gender Equality Strategy, the gender equality-related requirements under the EU accession process, Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, in particular those referring to GEEW-SDG 5.1.

The intervention adheres to international agreements and conventions on gender equality, it clearly contributes to EU gender equality acquis and also to advancing nationalized SDGs.

- The Project is in clear alignment with SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- The Project is aligned with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and particularly with H strategic area – Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.
- The Project can be seen as a full-scale response to Recommendation 16 of the CEDAW Committee, which urges Serbia, as a state party, to strengthen its gender machinery<sup>53</sup>.

The evaluation found that the intervention’s design and outcomes are in alignment with the beneficiaries’ needs and priorities and reflect a nuanced understanding of the context. Thus, the intervention has further strengthened the Serbian gender policy framework influencing policy and legal frameworks and institutional structures and the ways they approach gender-related matters at grassroots, local and national levels. Documental evidence on the needs and priorities of women in Serbia was extensively considered, during the inception of the Project and implementation, primarily the information gathered in the first phase of the Project (GEF I). The intervention was able to effectively adapt to the evolving context and address the specific challenges faced by the target groups/within the Project landscape. Also, the flexibility in the design allowed for a responsive approach, ensuring that the intervention remained aligned with the dynamic needs of the beneficiaries. The interventions were informed by robust evidence and data, ensuring that resources were allocated to areas with the greatest need and potential for impact.

The evaluators note the opinion of all involved in the evaluation, that the choice of interventions implemented by the UN Women Office in Serbia, was highly relevant to the situation of the target group. Overall, the choice of interventions demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the context and a strategic approach to addressing the needs of the target group. However, evaluators lack evidence of the extent of the recognition of the intersecting challenges faced by women in Serbia to address multiple dimensions of gender inequality.

#### Key finding 2

**The Project encompasses three dynamic streams of actions, each carrying significant relevance. The third stream, which focused on engaging with CSOs, holds particular importance for advancing the mission of UN Women and the broader gender machinery in Serbia. By addressing the vital role of CSOs, this stream of action also enhances the overall appeal of the Project for positive change and is perceived as the most prominent feature of the Project as a whole.**

The three dynamic streams of actions were identified, corresponding to the three Project results, and the perception of their relevance was explored with all parties involved in the evaluation. Evaluators explored the specific ways in which collaboration at both the design and implementation stages contributed to the Project's relevance, inquiring into assessing how stakeholder input influenced decision-making, how diverse perspectives were incorporated into Project activities, and how collaborative processes enhanced the Project's responsiveness to the needs and priorities of the target beneficiaries. By examining these aspects in more detail, we obtained a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between collaboration and the Project’s relevance.

Result 1 tackles the ‘national’ level of operation (‘National gender machinery has knowledge and capacities to accomplish gender equality and women’s empowerment standards and principles’); Result 2 targets, primarily, civil servants working with EU funds programming, implementation and monitoring (‘Civil servants responsible for EU funds programming, implementation and monitoring strengthened their knowledge and skills to comply with principles of non-discrimination, gender equality and accessibility’) and Result 3 primarily works with women’s CSOs (‘Women’s CSOs are supported to

<sup>53</sup> [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/SRB/CO/4&La](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/SRB/CO/4&La)

influence development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programs and to promote the culture of tolerance, equality and non-discrimination').

*'The role of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality is indisputable, but it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of this body because it does not have a sufficient number of permanent employees nor a budget - most of the activities are carried out through externally funded projects.', a quote from interviews with stakeholders from the Government*

*'For adequate work to improve gender equality, there must be cooperation between international partners, civil society organizations and the state.', a quote from interviews with stakeholders from the Government*

Given that candidate countries are required to fully embrace the EU's fundamental principle of gender equality, and that monitoring the transposition, implementation, and enforcement of EU legislation in this area remains a priority in EU enlargement processes, the relevance of the first stream of action becomes apparent. Serbia's aspiration to join the EU, in simple terms, necessitates alignment with EU standards and principles, including those related to gender equality and women's empowerment. Hence, the strengthening of the knowledge and capacities of the national gender machinery ensured that Serbia meets EU membership criteria better, thereby advancing its accession process. Adherence to the Copenhagen criteria for accession to the EU in the field of equal treatment between women and men, and transposition and enforcement of legislation and the necessary establishment of adequate administrative and judicial systems is, hence, of relevance. Within the scope of the first stream of action, the design of the intervention and the implementation thereof, focused on strengthening administrative structures and capacities (for example: work related to the enhancement of the CBGE's administrative structures and capacities; supporting the MHMRSD's internal capacities); supporting the coherence and consistency between national and EU policies (example: finalization and adoption of the Action Plan for the Strategy for Gender Equality, LGE); alongside fostering partnerships and conducting communication and advocacy campaigns for women's rights and gender equality assessment and supporting not only first but the also the second tier of government (municipalities).

Planning and programming of EU assistance to candidate and potential candidate countries, in the framework of the IPA, is of particular importance. Within the shift from IPA I to IPA II funds<sup>54</sup> it was expected that 'the gender perspectives of programming will need to be better highlighted' in IPA II, which signals the high relevance of the Project's second stream of action. Moreover, the IPA III program also highlights that the proposed actions 'shall be designed in a way to assess, address and mainstream gender equality and promote gender equality'.<sup>55</sup> Projects funded by the EU prioritize initiatives that contribute to the fulfilment of EU policy objectives and as gender equality and women's empowerment are one of the key priorities for the EU, supporting the development of capacities in this area is relevant for the overall absorption capacity of the EU funds in Serbia. Strengthening the knowledge and skills of civil servants responsible for EU funds programming and implementation ensured that projects funded by the EU in Serbia are compliant with these requirements as civil servants play a crucial role in the successful programming, implementation, and monitoring of projects funded by the EU. By strengthening their knowledge and skills in areas such as non-discrimination, gender equality, and accessibility, the Project

---

<sup>54</sup> 'Under IPA II, the gender perspective of programming documents will need to be better highlighted than under IPA I. A way of improving this will be to include this perspective in the very early stages of the programming process – i.e., analysis of issues and design of strategy. As far as possible, organisations with gender knowledge and expertise should be involved in the preparation phase, at least in the initial need identification and objective formulation steps. Sex and age disaggregated data should also be considered both in the analyses and baseline as well as in the result framework, i.e., gender sensitive process and result indicators – quantitative as well as qualitative. Equal opportunity for participation of men and women must be ensured in all aspects of programme preparation but also implementation. Ways in which this will be guaranteed must be clearly described in the Action Document and the Action Programme.' IPA II Quick Guide for Programming, [http://www.evropa.gov.rs/Documents/Home/DACU/12/78/248/ipa-quickguide\\_v0%202.pdf](http://www.evropa.gov.rs/Documents/Home/DACU/12/78/248/ipa-quickguide_v0%202.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> 'In line with the approach outlined in the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) 2021-2025, IPA III will mainstream gender equality and also continue ensuring girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity, promoting the economic and social rights and strengthening girls' and women's voice and participation with targeted actions.', Commission Implementing Decision of 10.12.2021 adopting the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) Programming Framework for the period 2021-2027.

ensured that civil servants are better equipped to effectively manage EU-funded projects, leading to improved project outcomes and the impact of the IPA funds. Examples of relevant work here include gendering of various action documents and programs within IPA funds, such as cross-border programs, and sectoral operational program. However, the evaluation also finds that, within this stream of action, targeting could have been expanded, to include IPA programming experts (private consultants), staff of the EU Delegation, and other parts of the 'EU programming, monitoring and implementation machinery' which all have a role to play in the overall usage of IPA funds in Serbia. Furthermore, the work could have been mimicked to also reflect onto not only external but also internal funds used for development. This extension would require an action of a much larger scale compared to the Project scale.

*'What else would UN Women do if not provide support to civil society on gender equality issues? These aspects of their work, grants for CSOs are the most important aspect of their overall mission in Serbia', a quote from interviews with stakeholders from civil society when asked what they think would occur if UN Women stopped funding women's CSOs*

Overall, the third stream of action is relevant for Serbia and women in Serbia as it contributes to advancing gender equality, promoting inclusive policies, fostering social cohesion, strengthening civil society, and also aligning with EU values and principles. The evaluators note that participating individuals believe that it holds particular importance for advancing the mission of UN Women and the broader gender machinery in Serbia. By addressing the vital role of CSOs, this stream of action also enhanced the overall appeal of the Project for positive change and is perceived as the most prominent feature of the Project as a whole. Women's CSOs play a vital role in advocating for gender equality and women's rights in Serbia. By supporting these organizations to influence policy development and implementation, the result contributes directly to advancing gender equality in Serbia. This is crucial for addressing existing disparities and promoting equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life. Furthermore, supporting women's CSOs strengthens the overall civil society landscape in Serbia, as UN Women funds are often the only source of funding available. These organizations often serve as watchdogs, ensuring accountability and transparency in governance processes, but also open the dialogue around neglected and relevant topics (femicide, inheritance issues). By empowering women's CSOs to engage in policy advocacy, this stream of action contributes to the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes in Serbia. As Serbia progresses on its path towards EU accession, demonstrating commitment to promoting the participation of women's CSOs in decision-making processes can enhance the country's credibility and alignment with EU standards and requirements.

*'Only full implementation of gender equality standards, further capacity building of institutions, create a sustainable system. Only comprehensive assistance, covering legal and strategic framework, institutional development and gender transformative initiatives can provide timely support and prove that supporting gender equality is equal as supporting sustainable economic and social development.', a quote from an interview with the UN Women Project team*

### Key finding 3

**The evaluation identifies instances of sub-optimal collaboration, with stakeholders indicating that the Project's relevance could have been improved by strategically integrating various capacity-building initiatives. This includes not only addressing gender mainstreaming within external development funds but also intensifying efforts to engage with and leverage domestic development funds. Strengthening collaboration with key stakeholders such as the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, EU Delegation staff, and IPA programming consultants could have enhanced the Project's relevance. Additionally, forging partnerships with additional CSOs could have further increased its pertinence. Prioritizing intersectionality could have ensured a more comprehensive approach to addressing beneficiaries' interconnected layers of identity and experience.**

There is evidence of inclusive participation across the Project design and implementation, which indicates that efforts were made to involve a diverse range of stakeholders representing various perspectives, interests, and demographics. This included representatives from government bodies and ministries, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders. Key partners, those in existence at the time of the Project design, were actively engaged in the Project's conceptualization, ensuring a collaborative approach. However, implementation arrangements could have included more stakeholders in a more intensive manner – the data obtained (documents reviewed, observations from civil society, local authorities, government officials, experts) suggest that most focus was given to bodies such as the CBGE, and the MEI, which have horizontal (cross-cutting) roles in governance, overall, while direct targeting of enforcement bodies tasked with sectoral policies (such as employment, social affairs, climate change, transport, health, safety, education) could also have yielded positive results. The MHMRSD was established well after the Projects' design, and the Project staff discussed ways how to best include them.<sup>56</sup> However, as they are now an important element of the gender machinery next phases of the actions will likely assume higher intensity support. Also, in the collaboration with CSOs, the focus was on those who received grants to implement activities, but not necessarily on a dialogue with civil society as a whole. While evidence is there of bilateral continued dialogues taking place with groups of stakeholders, the Project did not practice comprehensive all-encompassing joint dialogue with all stakeholders, where overall relevance could be reconfirmed and rediscussed. This finding suggests that while the Project engaged in bilateral dialogues with certain stakeholder groups, it lacked a comprehensive and inclusive approach to dialogue involving all relevant stakeholders.

The new LGE entered into force on 1 June 2021, and it regulates the institutional framework for gender equality, including the competencies of the CBGE and all gender mechanisms that have to be in place at all governmental levels. Also, article 16 of LGE recognizes gender equality as a horizontal and multidisciplinary issue that connects gender equality with all relevant sectors/areas of economic and social life and development. In this sense, the perception among stakeholders also underscores the potential for enhancing the Project's relevance through the strategic incorporation of various additional capacity-building initiatives, extending the stakeholder and target base to bodies tasked with sectoral policies.

There is a clear existing demand for the continuation of the Project by national stakeholders. They agree that the Project's goal of strengthening Serbian administrative capacities for integrating and implementing EU and national gender equality commitments remains relevant. Some of the arguments provided (by the government, CSOs, and experts) are that it supports Serbia's EU accession process, promotes gender equality, ensures policy coherence, improves governance and accountability, and contributes to sustainable development objectives. Furthermore, the Project's objectives will continue to be highly relevant even after the implementation, as stakeholders point out, due to only partial enforcement of gender equality policies in Serbia and critical understaffing of gender equality mechanisms. IPA programming, implementation and monitoring 'machinery' remains not fully equipped to champion gender equality, and this extends to any other parts of the overall 'development machinery'. Promoting gender equality is viewed not only as a matter of human rights but also critical for sustainable social and economic development, where CSOs play a very important role. Furthermore, UN Women funding remains the only available in the country for specific gender equality related CSOs' actions.

*'We believe that a large number of women, especially those from vulnerable groups, do not know enough about their social and economic rights, they do not know the essence of gender equality, and they should continue to be empowered on that path. We should also work on empowering members of commissions and other mechanisms for gender equality in local communities for issues of gender equality.'*, a quote from interviews with stakeholders from the Government

*'The help and support from UN Women are very important to us. First of all, in order to improve the position of women in Serbia, but also to strengthen the capacity of our organization. Especially, given the*

---

<sup>56</sup> The MHMRSD was established in October 2020, under Prime Minister's Brnabic's 2<sup>nd</sup> Government, and then in October 2022 within Prime Minister Brnabic's 3<sup>rd</sup> Government. The Project was approved internally by UN Women and then by the donor before the formation of the MHMRSD and the inclusion of gender equality in their mandate. Following the formation of the MHMRSD, the representatives were included in the Steering Committee of the Project and in the activities.

*situation that associations dealing with gender equality do not have too many opportunities and sources of funding in Serbia.’, a quote from an interview with a CSO*

The finding suggests that enhancing the skills, knowledge, and operational effectiveness of all involved stakeholders could have improved the Project's impact and alignment with its goals.

### Capacity Building for Different Stakeholders

1. **Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue:**
  - **Policy Development and Implementation:** Training and support in developing and implementing comprehensive gender equality policies.
  - **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Enhancing skills in designing and executing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of gender mainstreaming initiatives.
  - **Resource Allocation:** Guidance on effectively allocating and managing resources to support gender equality programs.
  - **Stakeholder Engagement:** Building capacities to engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society, to foster collaborative efforts in promoting gender equality.
2. **EU Delegation Staff:**
  - **Gender Mainstreaming in Funding Mechanisms:** Training on integrating gender perspectives into external development funds and ensuring these funds are used to support gender equality objectives.
  - **Program Design and Evaluation:** Enhancing abilities to design, implement, and evaluate programs that incorporate gender considerations, ensuring that EU-funded initiatives align with gender equality goals.
  - **Collaboration Skills:** Improving skills for collaborating effectively with local institutions, CSOs, and other stakeholders to ensure coordinated efforts in gender mainstreaming.
  - **Intersectionality Awareness:** Building awareness and understanding of intersectionality to ensure that programs address the interconnected layers of identity and experience among beneficiaries.
3. **IPA Programming Consultants:**
  - **Inclusive Policy Formulation:** Training in developing inclusive policies that reflect contemporary gender perspectives and address the needs of diverse populations.
  - **Stakeholder Coordination:** Strengthening skills in coordinating with various stakeholders, including government bodies and CSOs, to ensure cohesive policy implementation.
  - **Data Analysis and Reporting:** Enhancing capacities in collecting, analyzing, and reporting data on gender equality indicators to inform policy adjustments and improvements.

By strategically integrating these capacity-building initiatives, the Project could have strengthened its relevance and impact, ensuring that all stakeholders are equipped to effectively promote and implement gender equality objectives.

## 4.2 Coherence

In the evaluation of the coherence criterion, this quality area of the Project was analyzed through the following questions, encompassing internal and external coherence<sup>57</sup>.

---

<sup>57</sup> Note that minor revisions took place in terms of judgement criteria compared to the Inception report.

No	Evaluation questions on coherence	Judgement criteria	Situation found
1.	<p>Internal coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent does the Project fit within the UN Women’s Strategic Plan and interrelated threefold mandate?</li> <li>• Are there any synergies and inter-linkages between the Project and other interventions of UN Women?</li> <li>• To what extent has UN Women in Serbia capitalized from GEF implementation in other countries and how has UN Women established synergies in terms of GEF implementation in the region?</li> </ul>	<p>Level of alignment of the Project with UN Women strategic priorities.</p> <p>Evidence on similarities among objectives with other projects of UN Women Office.</p> <p>Evidence of synergies and regional reach.</p>	<p>The Project demonstrates alignment with UN Women’s strategic priorities.</p> <p>There are synergies identified.</p> <p>A limited extent of capitalization from other countries is observed.</p>
2.	<p>External coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national development strategies in the area of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment, and reflect national priorities and commitments on gender equality?</li> <li>• To what extent is the Project in complementarity, harmonized and coordinated with the interventions of other actors’ interventions in the same context?</li> <li>• To what extent does the implementation of the Project ensure synergies and coordination with the Government’s and key partners’ relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?</li> <li>• To what extent are the interventions achieving synergies with the work of the UN Country Team (UNCT)?</li> <li>• What is UN Women’s comparative advantage in Serbia to implement this project?</li> <li>• To what extent is the Project aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and nationalized SDGs?</li> </ul>	<p>Extent of alignment with relevant national development strategies.</p> <p>Evidence of complementarity with other actors’ interventions.</p> <p>Scope of coordination with the Government.</p> <p>Scope of collaboration with the UNCT.</p> <p>Perception of UN Women comparative advantage among stakeholders.</p> <p>Level of alignment with nationalized SDGs.</p>	<p>The Project developed relevant national development strategies.</p> <p>By collaborating on IPA programming with various other line Ministries the Project achieved strong complementarity with other actors.</p> <p>Project Steering Committee members consisted of national partners and donor.</p> <p>There is an overall positive perception of UN Women and comparative advantages were identified.</p> <p>There is a strong alignment with nationalized SDGs.</p>

The Project demonstrates alignment with UN Women’s strategic priorities as well as other national and regional (in a limited sense) UN Women initiatives. Furthermore, the action is deemed complementary to interventions carried out by other UN agencies and is consistent with national policies. While direct alignment with projects of other bilateral donors was not identified, there is observable synergy and coordination with key partners. Additionally, there is clear evidence that UN Women consistently reviewed project documents and plans to ensure adaptability to changing circumstances and alignment with the overarching UN Women’s mission and mandate.

**Key finding 4**

The Project demonstrates alignment with UN Women’s strategic priorities and there are internal UN-related synergies identified, however, only a limited extent of capitalization from other countries is observed. Direct alignment with projects of other bilateral donors was not identified.



As evidenced by discussions with the UN Women Office in Serbia, CSOs, donor and by exploring outputs produced, the Project is found to fit within the UN Women's strategic plan and mandate. It aligns exceptionally well with the UN Women's Strategic Plan 'Governance and participation in public life' thematic area, as it has supported changes in policies and procedures to increase women's influence in political institutions and processes. By addressing policy and legal changes and increasing the capacities of the gender machinery the Project directly contributed to achieving UN Women's overarching mentioned thematic priority. Overall, the Project's activities and outcomes are closely aligned with UN Women's mandate to support gender mainstreaming efforts and to advocate for policy changes that promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Project has contributed to UN Women's mandate in several ways:

- **Normative and Policy Support:** The Project contributed to normative support by promoting the adoption and implementation of internationally recognized norms, standards, and conventions related to gender equality and women's rights within the Serbian local normative context, in particular via the support provided for the LGE drafting and later adoption. This work also involved advocating for the enactment of other gender-sensitive legislation and practices (gender test, for example), supporting policy development processes (development of the gender equality strategy, for example), and providing technical assistance to the government to integrate gender perspective into laws and policies (including within the scope of the horizontal body tasked with gender equality, but also within various line ministries tasked with programming, implementation and monitoring of the EU funds).
- **Operational Activities:** The Project has engaged in operational activities that directly advance gender equality and women's empowerment on the ground. This included various CSO-led and municipality-led initiatives that addressed specific gender-related challenges, such as promoting women's economic empowerment, increasing women's civic participation, and improving access to assets, education and healthcare. By delivering these very tangible results and outcomes, the Project translated policy commitments into action and impact.
- **Convening :** The Project has also made attempts to convene stakeholders to address gender equality issues collectively (through local community dialogues on gender-sensitive language, for example). This involved various attempts to foster dialogue and collaboration among government agencies, CSOs, the private sector, and other actors, and organizing events, conferences, and workshops to promote networking. It has also attracted sizable public attention to address gender inequalities more effectively. Regardless, interviewed stakeholders also expressed a pressing need for increased peer-to-peer information exchange, particularly between local authorities and CSOs.
- **Promoting and coordinating GEEW efforts within the UN system:** The Project effectively implemented UN Women's coordination mandate by serving as a central hub for promoting and coordinating GEEW efforts within the UN system. Through strategic partnerships and joint initiatives, the Project leveraged the expertise and resources of different UN entities to maximize impact and address key challenges.<sup>58</sup>

The Project demonstrates strong synergies and interlinkages with other interventions carried out by UN Women in Serbia and, in limited terms, in the region (fruitful collaboration was established with a project tackling gender-responsive budgeting (GRB)). Through coordinated efforts and collaboration, the Project leveraged resources, expertise, and networks to amplify its impact and reach. This collaborative approach enhanced coherence, maximizing the benefits for beneficiaries and stakeholders. The work on gender mainstreaming of the other IPA-funded project ideas and proposals was also extended in sizable terms. UN Women project on GRB was a partner with the Project on gender mainstreaming of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina Development Plan. As already noted in the GEF I final evaluation, both interventions include enhancing the capacities of public administration staff, particularly gender focal points within the line ministries, in conducting gender analysis. Also, several campaigns for International Women's Day and 16 days of activism were developed with UN Women's other contextually similar projects.

---

<sup>58</sup> However, there is also a sentiment among some stakeholders that the UN Women should reassess its strategy of collaboration with Serbian authorities and advocate for essential changes with a more critical and assertive voice, as some interviewed stakeholders considered that UN Women's actions can at times be interpreted as policies of appeasement towards inaction.

The Project achieved synergies with the work of the UNCT through coordinated efforts and collaboration. By participating in the UNCT coordination mechanisms and joint programming initiatives (such as UN Gender Thematic Group coordination meetings<sup>59</sup>), the Project aligned its activities with the broader UN agenda in Serbia. Also, the Project collaborated with other UN agencies on joint advocacy campaigns and capacity-building initiatives, leveraging each agency's expertise and resources to maximize impact. The Project is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and nationalized SDGs, contributing to the achievement of specific SDG targets related to gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, the Project's focus on increasing women's economic empowerment contributes to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), aligning with Serbia's priorities and commitments under the SDGs.

Stakeholders largely have a positive view of UN Women's comparative advantage in Serbia and believe it lies in its expertise in gender equality and women's empowerment programming and its ability to leverage resources and mobilize stakeholders. Additionally, one can also argue that UN Women's global network and experience may enable it to provide technical assistance and best practices from other contexts, enhancing the effectiveness of interventions in Serbia, which has not yet been capitalized on.

*'The project helped us to understand why 'gendering' is necessary when planning projects and defining indicators, and we will be able to apply the acquired knowledge to future projects and activities of the ministry.' a quote from a focus group discussion with IPA units*

Synergies were identified between the GEF and other UN Women's interventions, amplifying the collective impact and showcasing a strategic approach. There is also a measured achievement of synergies with the UNCT (e.g., collaboration with the GRB project).

During the implementation, as per standard practices, regular communication and cooperation of the Project team and country office took place (they took the form of weekly meetings, ad hoc planning of joint activities and overall cooperation) while Gender Thematic Group meetings and other means (including regular UN country teams meeting facilitated by the Resident Coordinator office) were used to ensure synergy with other country offices. The Project also focused on aligning its activities with key international events and observances. This included participating in the "16 Days of Activism" campaign. These efforts were a part of the Project's contribution to global initiatives addressing specific gender-related issues.

A limited extent of capitalizing on GEF implementation in other countries and establishing regional synergies was detected. However, there is evidence that the approach promoted cross-border cooperation (within Result 2, the two cross-border programs were supported in gender mainstreaming) which in turn may lead to some collective action to address common challenges related to gender equality and environmental sustainability within Serbia, North Macedonia, and Montenegro). Also, a study visit to Portugal was organized to strengthen the capacities of the MEI to effectively lead and coordinate Serbia's EU negotiation process in the area related to the management of the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund. Overall, these efforts contribute to maximizing the impact and sustainability of GEF-funded interventions in the region and beyond to, what this evaluation considers, a sufficient level as any further resort to other countries' practices may not fit the unique and particular Serbian context and replicating those may have led the Project to lose of its very nuanced understanding of it, which is one of its strongest points, overall. The Project also supported the attendance of 160 women entrepreneurs from Serbia and neighboring countries (Bosnia and Hercegovina and North Macedonia) at the Serbia EXPO Satellite Summit in Belgrade 'Women Entrepreneurship – Connect to Create and Accelerate Your Business' which enhanced women to women contacts across the region.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Gender Thematic Group meetings are coordinated by the UN Women Country Team on Gender, where each UN agency project and interventions are discussed and are used to prepare quarterly Gender briefs that include all the relevant activities of various agencies concerning gender, but also to avoid duplication and ensure synergies and complementarity within the UN family.

<sup>60</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Serbia (covering the 2021-2025 period), in its Strategic Priority 3: 'Building trust and mutual accountability through the rule of law, rights and duties agenda', defines the Outcome 3.1: 'All people, especially the more vulnerable, benefit from the realization of human rights, gender equality, social cohesion, and enhanced rule of law in line with international

*'The project demonstrates a commendable level of internal and external coherence, as evidenced by the narrative reports. Internally, the project components, including capacity-building initiatives, policy advocacy, and support for civil society organizations, are well-aligned with the overarching goal of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Serbia. The strategic partnership between UN Women, the government, and civil society organizations ensures a cohesive approach to addressing gender disparities. Efforts such as strengthening the national gender machinery and enhancing civil servants' capacity for gender mainstreaming reflect a coordinated strategy aimed at institutionalizing gender-responsive policies and practices.'*, a quote from the interview with the UN Women Project team

#### Key finding 5

**The Project developed pertinent national development strategies and achieved strong complementarity with other actors through collaborative IPA programming with various line ministries. Additionally, there's a robust alignment with nationalized SDGs.**

The intervention demonstrates not only strong consistency with national development strategies in gender equality but has also worked to develop it. The Project also exhibits complementarity, harmonization, and coordination with interventions of other actors in the same context. Through partnerships with government agencies, CSOs, and other stakeholders, the Project leveraged existing initiatives and resources to avoid duplication and maximize impact. For example, the Project collaborated with local CSOs to implement community-based initiatives, ensuring that interventions are complementary and coordinated to address shared objectives, it worked on the programming of other IPA-funded intervention introducing gender perspectives in such programming, and it also worked with local gender equality mechanisms and focal points. The implementation of the Project ensured synergies and coordination with the government's and key partners' relevant efforts while avoiding duplications. Through regular communication, consultation, and joint planning sessions with government counterparts and key stakeholders, the Project aligned its activities with national priorities and avoided overlapping initiatives. For instance, the Project collaborated with the MHMRSD to integrate gender considerations into policy development processes, ensuring coherence and alignment with government efforts, they worked with the Public Policy Secretariat to develop the gender test, supported research on women-centered entrepreneurship, etc.

*'The cooperation with UN Women has been phenomenal - they are responsive, accept the suggestions of those of us who work in the field and behave more like partners than donors. They are the only donor organization that thought about civil society organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic and did not interrupt the implementation of projects.'*, a quote from a CSO (online survey)

The Project's strong point may be seen in its ability to ensure the spill over effects<sup>61</sup> across topics. The Project, for example, provided expert support to Ministry of Economy to assess the position of women entrepreneurs, which in turn provided inputs for the new national strategic framework on entrepreneurship development in Serbia and led to additional funding for women entrepreneurship being secured in the state budget. The established partnership with the Ministry for Energy led to inclusion of gender considerations and gender specific chapter to the National Plan for Climate and Energy. Also, cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs led to the development of gender

---

commitments' and Outcome 3.2 'All people benefit from effective governance and meaningful civic engagement'. The Project contributes to both of these, as it supports both normative and policy development and uptake and as it also supports civic engagement.

<sup>61</sup> The ability to ensure spill-over effects refers to the project's capacity to generate positive impacts that extend beyond its primary focus area or target group. This means that the project's interventions have the potential to create broader benefits, influencing related topics or benefiting additional stakeholders beyond those directly involved in the project. In essence, spill-over effects demonstrate the project's effectiveness in catalyzing systemic change and maximizing its overall impact.

responsive labor market measures and facilitation of the work life balance and employability of young women not included in employment, education, or training.

The Project also demonstrated an alignment with national development strategies and efforts were made to complement and coordinate with the Government and key partners, thus minimizing duplications.

*'The UN Women project team was professional, efficient and, most importantly, responsive to the Ministry's needs, which is not the case with many donors/implementing agencies.' a quote from the focus group discussion with IPA units*

On a more critical side, it should be highlighted that interviewed stakeholders have shown a lack of any meaningful perception of the Project as a whole. Typically, interviewed stakeholders and Project beneficiaries (apart from the UN Women and the donor) were not in the position to give views of the totality of the Project as they were unaware of activities that did not concern them directly, did not have any information on all Project components, its budget, trajectories, dynamics, etc.

*'It would be good if the recipients of funds visit each other or in some other way exchange information about the projects they are implementing. Networking also means a lot for technical aspects. For example, we had doubts regarding financial reporting, which were resolved by a colleague from another municipality, and now we will know how we should act in the future.', a quote from a focus group discussion with local government representatives*

#### Key finding 6

**The Project encountered challenges while collaborating with understaffed bodies and agencies undergoing leadership and institutional changes, hindering efforts to enhance gender mainstreaming processes or introduce new initiatives, such as gender testing. The local enforcement and administrative context emerged as critical factors necessitating careful consideration for the coherent implementation of future gender equality initiatives at national or local levels.**

Whereas the Project is formally aligned with the development plans, it should also be highlighted that it has operated within a challenging environment characterized by understaffed bodies and agencies undergoing frequent leadership and institutional changes (e.g., CBGE remains understaffed, without an earmarked national budget, local contact points in the public agencies and enterprises tasked with gender equality are likely unaware of the gender perspectives of the operation, etc.). These circumstances posed, as observed by participating parties, significant obstacles to efforts aimed at improving gender mainstreaming processes or introducing new initiatives, such as gender testing. The evaluation finding highlights significant challenges faced by the Project in its collaboration efforts with various bodies and agencies. These challenges were primarily due to understaffing and leadership or institutional changes within these entities, and can be summarized as follows:

- **Resource Constraints:** The lack of adequate staffing in key bodies and agencies meant there were insufficient resources to dedicate to the Project. This led to delays and a lack of focus on gender mainstreaming initiatives, as the limited staff available were overburdened with existing responsibilities.
- **Reduced Capacity for Collaboration:** With fewer personnel, the ability of these organizations to engage effectively with the Project was compromised. Understaffed bodies struggled to allocate time and effort to new initiatives, hindering at times the Project's progress and the implementation of planned activities.

- **Instability and Uncertainty:** Frequent changes in leadership created an environment of some instability. New leaders needed time to establish priorities, which somewhat disrupted ongoing initiatives. This instability made it difficult to maintain a consistent approach to gender mainstreaming efforts.
- **Difficulty in Sustaining Momentum:** The combined effect of understaffing and leadership changes made it challenging to sustain momentum in gender mainstreaming efforts. For example, initiatives such as gender testing require continuous support and a stable environment to be effectively implemented and assessed.

The local enforcement and administrative context in which the Project operates are crucial considerations. Despite encountering these challenges, the Project has exhibited resilience and dedication to advancing gender equality. The evaluation reveals the necessity of navigating the intricacies of the local context and advocating for systemic changes that support gender mainstreaming and sustainable progress as essential aspects for ongoing efforts.

*‘The public authorities do not prioritize the test of gender equality and do not recognize the importance of gender equality, which, along with other circumstances, such as short deadlines for the preparation of regulations and a lot of other work, makes it difficult to work on introducing a gender perspective into public policies.’, a quote from interviews with stakeholders from the Government*

### 4.3 Effectiveness

In the evaluation of the effectiveness, this quality area of the Project was analyzed through the following questions.

No	Evaluation questions on effectiveness	Judgement criteria	Situation found
1.	To what extent has the Project delivered its outputs and contributed towards expected outcomes? Has the Project achieved any unforeseen results, either positive or negative? For whom?	Evidence of contributions to the different levels of the ToC. Evidence of progress towards identified targets. Evidence of unexpected achievements (not envisaged by the project document and intervention logic) and target groups and beneficiaries affected. Stakeholders' positive/negative reporting on achievements.	The Project has delivered its outputs and significantly contributed towards expected outcomes. The Project has achieved unforeseen positive results.
2.	What are the reasons for the achievement or non-achievement of the Project results? What are the good practices and the obstacles or shortcomings encountered? How were they overcome?	Scope of internal and external enabling/impeding factors to successful Project implementation and achievement of results. Evidence of mitigation actions initiated to overcome the challenges.	The achievement of Project results can be attributed to strong partnerships, clear objectives, and dedicated project staff, while proactive problem-solving, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive management helped overcome obstacles and shortcomings encountered.
3.	How effective have the selected strategies and approaches been in achieving Project results? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an effective understanding of roles and</li> </ul>	Level of contribution of different project strategies towards project results. The extent to which innovative approaches are integrated into the project design and	

	<p>responsibilities by all parties involved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well did the intervention succeed in building the capacities of the Project partners?</li> <li>• To what extent are the Project approaches and strategies innovative for achieving gender equality in Serbia?</li> <li>• What -if any- types of innovative good practices have been introduced in the Project for the achievement of GEEW results?</li> <li>• To what extent did the Project improve communication, coordination and information exchange within the gender machineries at all levels?</li> </ul>	<p>implementation and the evidence of their contribution to project results.</p> <p>Perception of stakeholders on contributions.</p>	
--	---	--	--

**Key finding 7**

**The Project has demonstrated a high level of achievement in reaching its intended goals and objectives yielding tangible and sustainable results. A notable milestone was the adoption of the new Action Plan for implementing the National Strategy for Gender Equality until 2030, marking a significant achievement in advancing the Project’s objectives. Some key achievements include developing and enacting several key policies promoting gender equality, which provided a foundational framework for future initiatives. The Project also facilitated capacity-building workshops, enhancing the skills and knowledge of local stakeholders it established effective partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, creating a collaborative environment for gender mainstreaming.**

As mentioned in the interviews with CSOs, experts and the local authorities, as well as IPA units, the Project has demonstrated a commendable track record in delivering its outputs and significantly contributing to expected outcomes. Through diligent implementation and strategic planning, the Project has successfully achieved key milestones and targets outlined in its objectives. For instance, it has effectively conducted capacity-building workshops, facilitated stakeholder consultations, and implemented awareness campaigns, all aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. These efforts have led to tangible improvements in gender mainstreaming practices within target institutions, communities and nationwide. Moreover, the Project's monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have enabled continuous assessment of progress, ensuring accountability and transparency in delivering outputs. Overall, the Project's dedication to achieving its goals has resulted in substantial progress towards advancing gender equality and fulfilling its expected outcomes. Some constraints and challenges, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic, were also successfully overcome, and even more, the Project showed great flexibility in reacting to the pandemic.

*'While occasional adjustments were necessary to accommodate unforeseen circumstances, these adaptations contributed to the Project's resilience and adaptability in the face of evolving challenges. Furthermore, these adjustments often led to unexpected positive outcomes, such as heightened community engagement, strengthened partnerships, and increased awareness of gender equality issues. This flexibility and responsiveness underscore the Project's capacity to leverage emerging opportunities and optimize its impact within shifting contexts.'*, a quote from the UN Women Project team (questionnaire)

Stakeholders' reporting largely highlights successful Project milestones, commendable results, and their impact on beneficiaries and showcases effective planning and execution, fostering confidence in project management. Negative reporting, on the other hand, mainly emphasizes some setbacks (reporting procedures, some lack of clarity in procedures, timeframe-related challenges) while there is no record of unmet objectives. Overall, the ultimate picture is characterized by effective project management and stakeholder satisfaction.

Evidence of mitigation actions initiated to overcome challenges is demonstrated through concrete steps taken to address and resolve identified issues. These actions include revised target scope (inclusion of the MHMRSD) and project timelines (that are still in need of revision), and reallocated resources (still valid). Evidence of replanning efforts and problem-solving all indicate mitigation efforts. Progress reports show how the response to challenges was planned and implemented, and successful outcomes that were achieved after mitigation measures provide tangible evidence of the Project's adaptability and resilience in the face of obstacles.

The overall evidence suggests that the Project has demonstrated a commendable delivery of planned outputs, contributing positively towards expected outcomes. There is very little evidence of underachievement, partially due to iterative planning across all three streams of action. Selected strategies have proven effective in achieving results, and the intervention has successfully built the capacities of Project partners. However, there is also room for further consolidation of the outputs produced – various grants have indeed produced models, practices and changes that shall be shared collectively among the Project stakeholders and in a wider context (this was also confirmed at the focus group with the CSOs).

*'It is commendable that the Project was defined in such a way that there was room to adapt to new situations - if a topic arose or circumstances changed we could adequately respond to the situation and not stick to what was on paper at all costs.'*, a quote from a focus group discussion with CSOs

The Project exhibited agile planning, streamlined execution, and adaptability in the face of unforeseen challenges, which is very commendable. It also effectively engaged stakeholders, most via granting and regranting processes, maintaining clear communication, and prioritizing quality control. While UN Women demonstrated its capacity to proactively address and manage risks within this Project, not all resources were allocated judiciously over the original timeline (at least not at the initial stage) as an extension of actions was required.


In most parts, an effective understanding of roles and responsibilities among the parties has facilitated smooth progress. Further encouragement of inter-sectoral work could have led to more impactful capacity building of the CSOs, particularly around advocacy and policy (e.g., linking research/think tank CSOs with membership-based/grassroots organizations), but also other parties, as perceived by the interviewed stakeholders.

The Project also introduced innovative approaches for gender equality in Serbia, showcasing pioneering practices/previously uncovered topics (e.g., inheritance practices).

Unforeseen results, both positive and negative, have been noted, prompting adaptive measures. The Project has indeed achieved unforeseen results, both positive and negative, which have impacted various stakeholders. On the positive side, the Project's initiatives have sparked increased awareness and engagement among community members, leading to a

cultural shift towards gender equality norms. Additionally, unexpected collaborations and partnerships have emerged, amplifying the Project's reach and impact beyond initial expectations. However, there have also been unforeseen challenges, particularly concerning resistance to change from certain stakeholders and bureaucratic hurdles within implementing agencies. These obstacles have slowed progress in some areas and necessitated adjustments to the Project's approach. Nevertheless, the Project has demonstrated resilience in overcoming these challenges and leveraging unforeseen opportunities to maximize its effectiveness in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Outcome implementation is on track as presented below.

Effectiveness at outcome level			
Outcomes	Indicators and targets for end Project	Finding	
<b>Specific Objective/Outcome1</b> Serbian administrative capacities are strengthened for integrating and implementing EU and national gender equality commitments in strategies, plans, budgets and EU funds management.	<b>Outcome Indicator 1:</b> Number of sector strategies, budgets and EU programming documents that include gender equality considerations: a) sex-disaggregated data and indicators, and/or b) section on gender analysis and/or c) specific activities or result(s) on gender equality and women's empowerment. Baseline: 7 strategies; 33 budgets (2019) Target: 15 strategies and plans, 56 budgets by the end of 2024.	25 EU Action Documents (programming documents) include gender equality; Gender mainstreaming was integrated into 7 IPA Programming cycles; the National Plan on Climate and Energy is also gendered, as well as the Draft National Small and Medium Enterprises Strategy. According to the most recent evidence, 42 national budget beneficiaries and 26 at the provincial level are applying GRB. (68 in total).	
	<b>Outcome Indicator 2:</b> All elements required under the Cohesion Policy (Chapter 22) thematic enabling condition for gender equality embedded into the new National Strategy for Gender Equality and corresponding Action Plan Baseline: NA Target: Fulfilled by the end of 2024.	The Government adopted the Action Plan for Chapter 22 – Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments. National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2021-2030 is approved and so is the Action Plan.	

Several positive aspects demonstrate the effectiveness of the outcome "Serbian administrative capacities are strengthened for integrating and implementing EU and national gender equality commitments in strategies, plans, budgets, and EU funds management":

1. **Enhanced Institutional Capacity:** Strengthening administrative capacities signifies an improvement in the skills, knowledge, and resources available within Serbian administrative bodies. This increased capacity enables them to effectively integrate and implement gender equality commitments in various aspects of governance, including strategic planning, budgeting, and management of EU funds.
2. **Improved Policy Coherence:** As administrative capacities are strengthened, there is a greater likelihood of achieving policy coherence in gender equality initiatives. This means that gender considerations can become more systematically integrated into national and EU-funded policies, plans, and budgets, leading to more comprehensive and effective strategies for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.
3. **Increased Accountability and Transparency:** Strengthening administrative capacities promotes accountability and transparency in the management of EU funds and national budgets. With improved skills in financial management



and monitoring, administrative bodies can ensure that resources allocated for gender equality initiatives are used efficiently and effectively, reducing the risk of mismanagement or corruption.

4. **Alignment with EU Standards:** By strengthening administrative capacities, Serbia can better align with EU standards and requirements regarding gender equality. This alignment enhances Serbia's credibility and compliance with EU accession criteria, fostering closer integration with European institutions and promoting gender equality as a shared European value.
5. **Promotion of Gender-Responsive Budgeting:** Strengthened administrative capacities facilitate the implementation of GRB practices, ensuring that financial resources are allocated in a way that promotes gender equality outcomes. This may lead to more targeted investments in areas such as education, healthcare, and economic empowerment, which benefit women and girls.







There are various positive trends observed in the strategic uptake of gender considerations in Serbian sectoral policies. For example,<sup>62</sup> a new Employment Strategy for the period from 2021 to 2026 and accompanying Action plan 2021-2023 were adopted in February and March 2021, respectively. The Strategy recognizes that women are in a significantly more unfavorable situation compared to men and that a gender gap is still present in all indicators of the Serbian labor market. While there is no strategy in Serbia exclusively on the development of women's entrepreneurship it is included within Pillar 6 of the Strategy for the support to development of small and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurship, and competitiveness (2015 to 2020). Serbia has adopted the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2024 in which the promotion of entrepreneurship of women and youth in rural areas is one of the development objectives. The National Strategy for Youth for the period from 2015 to 2025 includes objectives relating to improving the employment of young women and men. The Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2024 has also mainstreamed a gender perspective. While not all are attainable to the Project, its operation (and of GEF I) has certainly assisted the trend. It is highly commendable that gender is also taken into account in the National Climate and Energy Plan (fully attainable to the Project) where in particular the links between energy poverty and gender are considered.

The Project has also helped ensure that the new National Strategy for Gender Equality and Action Plan are fully aligned with the objectives and priorities of the EU's Cohesion Policy, particularly regarding gender mainstreaming and promoting women's empowerment in all EU-funded programs and projects. Extensive support was provided to the MEI to include a gender perspective in the programming, implementation, monitoring and reporting of IPA programs. The Project conducted reviews of the IPA action documents, assisted in the development of annexes/inputs concerning gender in these documents, and also worked on gender mainstreaming of Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) operational programs between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia. Gender mainstreaming of operational program for employment, education, inclusion and health under IPA III is of particular relevance here, as Serbia has not previously used sectoral operational programs in this thematic area (individual actions were developed instead, within IPA I and II). Specifically, for example, based on the request of MEI and EU Delegation expert support was provided for the development of a gender-responsive healthcare and prevention project proposal, and Horizontal Program Action Fiches in the fields of anti-discrimination, police and law enforcement, education, media, human rights and fighting against human trafficking in 2023. Also, support was provided by the UN Women Office in Serbia to the EU Delegation in Serbia to develop the Gender Country Profile in line with the GAP III requirements. Gender Analysis of Women's Entrepreneurship, Energy Poverty, Transport Sector, Urban Planning, Property and Inheritance Rights produced in the framework of the GEF programs have all helped in this course of action.

*"The workshops on gender mainstreaming were well organized and influenced us to see that it is possible to make any project responsive to gender aspects.", a quote from the focus group discussion with IPA units*

---

<sup>62</sup> Quoted from the "EU Gender Country Profile for Serbia" produced within the Project, available at: <https://serbia.un.org/en/download/89887/160415>

Effectiveness at output (results) levels			
Outputs	Indicators and targets for end Project	Finding	
<b>Result 1/Output 1:</b> The national gender machinery system has knowledge and capacities for the accomplishment of gender equality and women's empowerment standards and principles.	O1.1: Number of civil servants trained to perform gender mainstreaming in their sectors. Baseline: 0 Target: 100 civil servants trained	Achieved	
	O1.2: National Strategy for Gender Equality with the following Action Plan developed. Baseline: No Target: Yes	Achieved	
<b>Result 2/ Output 2:</b> Civil servants responsible for EU funds programming, implementation and monitoring strengthened their knowledge and skills to comply with principles of non-discrimination, gender equality and accessibility.	O2.1: Number of civil servants trained on the inclusion of gender equality, non-discrimination and disability principles in the management of EU funded programs. Baseline: 50 Target: 100 civil servants trained	Achieved	
	O2.2: Number of IPA programming documents that include a) sex-disaggregated data and indicators; and/or b) section on gender; and/or c) specific activities or result(s) on gender equality and women's empowerment. Baseline: 5 IPA programming documents in 2019/2020 are gender sensitive. Target: At least 10 IPA programming documents are gender sensitive.	Achieved	
<b>Result 3/Output 3:</b> Women's CSOs are supported to influence the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and projects and to promote a culture of tolerance, equality and non-discrimination.	O3.1: Number of partner agreements signed with women's CSOs implementing activities related to public awareness of the significance of gender equality and the importance of active involvement of women in the labour market. Baseline: 3 Target: Up to 21 partner agreements signed with women's CSOs.	Achieved	
	O3.2: Number of women benefitting from the empowerment projects provided within the Project. Baseline: 3,000 at the beginning of the Project. Target: 6,000 women benefitting from the Project.	Achieved	

Under the scope of the Project, the UN Women Office in Serbia supported the Government's efforts and provided technical guidance and expert support in drafting the new National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2021-2030, in line with

the Law on Planning System. The Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2021-2030 was adopted by the Government of Serbia on 14 October 2021. After the adoption of the Strategy for Gender Equality, the gender experts group started working on the National Action Plan for 2021-2023 which was also adopted. Various capacity-building activities were organized in the scope of the Project. Gender focal points were trained to improve planning and budgeting processes, training sessions were organized to cover the topic of gender testing for civil servants, training on gender equality for National Minority Councils was organized and study visits to Sweden and Portugal. Training courses for gender mainstreaming of programming, implementation and monitoring of annual IPA programs were also held. The Project actions trained 300 civil servants in total. Also, via the Project, 19 municipalities received grants to implement measures from the Local Gender Action Plans and 16 women's CSOs were supported. Impressive results were achieved in the area of communication and visibility, followed by public events such as Annual conferences.

Various individual results were achieved through regranting. More than 2,500 women improved their knowledge and skills in different fields and received direct support for the development of their businesses, including women from rural areas, Roma women and/or unemployed women. 1,000 rural women and women from marginalized groups from the territory of several municipalities from different parts of Serbia were empowered through skills development and the acquisition of practical knowledge programs. Also, at least 1,000 women were empowered to actively participate in the development and implementation of public policies and programs developing recommendations and advocating for the improvement of the position of women in the countryside, further development of rural tourism led by women, the development and improvement of existing social protection services for vulnerable groups of women, as well as the improvement of procedures and treatment of female patients undergoing induced abortion in Serbia. Through the supported grants, over 320 women participated in educational activities (workshops, trainings, etc.) on topics in the field of gender equality, the importance and advantages of women's association and similar. Local action plans for gender equality were also developed and adopted in three local governments, as part of the granting program.

*'Based on a comprehensive analysis of national and international procedures, regulations and practices for induced abortion, especially in the context of treating female patients, the Belgrade Center for Human Rights will formulate a policy of advocacy towards public institutions in order to ensure full respect for the human rights of women and girls. Raising the knowledge and awareness of at least 500 women and girls about this important topic will be realized through the human rights caravan. Additionally, various educational activities will be organized for women to better familiarize themselves with their rights. Awareness-raising activities will continue both on social networks and through traditional media. Collaboration with well-known influencers and bloggers is also planned.'*, an excerpt from the CSO's awarded proposal<sup>63</sup>

#### Key finding 8

There are various unforeseen results, some of which had a catalytic effect, including the local social dialogues around gender-sensitive language, that gained public popularity, putting the inheritance topics on the public agenda which further developed into a stand-alone civil society initiative, and particularly effective communication activities, gaining a large audience and involving prominent public figures as message conveyers.

<sup>63</sup>. The CSO has, within the implementation of the grant, published a comprehensive report on induced abortion available here [https://www.bgcentar.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ANALIZA\\_Prava-zena-i-devojica-prilikom-procedure-indukovanog-pobacaja.pdf](https://www.bgcentar.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ANALIZA_Prava-zena-i-devojica-prilikom-procedure-indukovanog-pobacaja.pdf). The Human Rights Caravan was strategically organized across six cities in Serbia to discuss with patients' rights local residents and women's experiences during gynecological and obstetric procedures. A video highlighting the Caravan's activities is available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lGIVboj4VE&t=33s> Considerable support was received from influencers and actors such as Branislav Jevtić, Jelena Stupljanin, Nina Janković, Ana Mihajlovski, Staša Koprivica, Seka Aleksić, and many others.

Evidence of unexpected achievements in the Project, not foreseen in the initial project document or intervention logic, is identified, and is manifesting as unanticipated positive outcomes/impacts for the benefit of target groups and beneficiaries. These include improved community cohesion, increased local income generation, and advocacy for improved practices around induced abortion, to name a few. It can be assumed that women's empowerment actions may have inadvertently led to improved community living, positively affecting not only the intended women beneficiaries but also their families and neighbors. The fact that such unexpected achievements were obtained, leveraged and identified by evaluators, speaks of enhanced Project effectiveness, widened reach, and a broader and more sustainable impact on the community as a whole.

Several unforeseen results have emerged from the Project, some of which have had a catalytic effect on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment:

- **Local Social Dialogues on Gender-Sensitive Language:** The Project inadvertently sparked local social dialogues on gender-sensitive language, which gained public popularity. Communities engaged in discussions about the importance of inclusive language, leading to increased awareness and sensitivity towards gender issues in everyday communication.
- **Inheritance Topics on the Public Agenda:** The Project's efforts to address gender disparities in inheritance regulations and practices inadvertently put inheritance topics on the public agenda. This led to increased public discourse and awareness about the importance of equitable inheritance rights for women. Subsequently, this issue developed into a stand-alone civil society initiative, with advocacy efforts aimed at reforming inheritance practices to ensure gender equality. For instance, public forums, media coverage, and advocacy actions were organized to raise awareness and mobilize support.
- **Effective Communication Activities with Prominent Public Figures:** The Project's communication activities proved particularly effective, gaining a large audience and involving prominent public figures as message conveyors. Through social media campaigns, public events, and celebrity endorsements, the Project successfully amplified its messages on gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, high-profile endorsements from celebrities and influential figures helped garner public attention and support for gender equality initiatives, leading to increased engagement and advocacy efforts across various sectors of society.

These unforeseen results highlight the Project's broader impact beyond its intended outcomes, demonstrating its ability to catalyze social change and mobilize communities around gender equality issues. By seizing opportunities and leveraging unexpected outcomes, the Project has effectively contributed to advancing gender equality and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

The achievement of project results can be attributed to several factors, including strong project management, effective coordination among stakeholders, and robust implementation strategies. Clear objectives, adequate resources, and timely monitoring and evaluation have also contributed to success. In cases where results were not fully achieved, challenges such as resource constraints, institutional barriers, or unforeseen circumstances may have played a role. However, proactive problem-solving, flexibility in adapting approaches, and continuous communication and collaboration have helped mitigate these challenges and minimize their impact on overall project outcomes.

#### Key finding 9

Identified factors contributing to the Project's dynamics include engaged civil society and media/public figures, along with, some, stakeholder commitment. Conversely, challenges stem from leadership changes in key governmental institutions, new mandates from local authorities due to legal system alterations, and limitations in funding and resources at both national and local levels, including within national agencies and ministries.

Table 5. List of key enablers and challenges in the Project implementation

Enablers	Challenges
Engaged civil society and media/public figures	Leadership changes in key governmental institutions
Stakeholder commitment	New mandates of local authorities due to legal system alterations
Dedicated Project staff	Limitations in funding and resources of relevant bodies
Supportive government policies	Entrenched gender norms

The dynamics of the Project have been influenced by several factors, both positive and challenging, where most prominent are:

1. **Engaged Civil Society and Media/Public Figures:** Active engagement of CSOs and media/public figures has played a crucial role in driving dynamics. Civil society actors have advocated for gender equality, mobilized communities, and amplified Project messages through various advocacy efforts, such as awareness campaigns, public events, and policy advocacy. Media coverage and endorsements from influential public figures have further bolstered the Project's visibility and impact. For example, CSOs organized rallies, petitions, and awareness-raising events to promote gender equality, while media coverage featuring prominent public figures helped raise public awareness and garner support for Project initiatives. Support to and active partnership with women's rights organizations, through direct service provisions, advocacy, communications, and awareness-raising activities has so far proved to strongly contribute to the Project's goals. They have been agents of change in their local communities. This Project proves that engaged CSOs, women's rights advocates and media play a vital role in raising awareness and holding institutions accountable.
2. **Stakeholder Commitment:** Stakeholders have demonstrated a strong commitment to the Project, contributing to its success. UN Women's mandate, as well as already established strong networks, aided successful project implementation.

In addition, positive factors included dedicated Project staff who demonstrated commitment, resilience, and creativity in overcoming challenges, ensuring the successful implementation of Project activities. Moreover, supportive government policies promoting gender equality provided an enabling environment for Project interventions. Legislative reforms, gender mainstreaming initiatives, and institutional capacity-building efforts signalled a commitment to advancing gender equality at the national level. These policy frameworks provided a solid foundation for Project implementation, fostering collaboration and coordination among stakeholders across sectors.

On the other hand, the Project has faced several challenges:

1. **Leadership Changes in Key Governmental Institutions:** Leadership changes in key governmental institutions (e.g., CBGE) have posed challenges to project continuity and implementation. Shifting priorities, changes in personnel, and institutional restructuring have led to disruptions in Project activities and decision-making processes.
2. **New Mandates from Local Authorities Due to Legal System Alterations:** New mandates from local authorities, stemming from alterations in the legal system, have introduced complexities and uncertainties into Project dynamics.
3. **Limitations in Funding and Resources:** Funding and resource constraints at both national and local levels, including within national agencies and ministries, have posed significant challenges to Project implementation. Limited financial resources, staffing capacity, and infrastructure support hindered Project scalability, sustainability, and impact.

Despite these challenges, the Project demonstrated resilience and adaptability in navigating complex socio-political landscapes. By recognizing and addressing these factors through strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and risk management strategies, the Project was able to mitigate risks, capitalize on opportunities, and adapt its approaches to achieve meaningful outcomes. For example, targeted advocacy campaigns, community mobilization efforts, and capacity-building initiatives helped challenge gender norms and foster greater gender equality awareness at the grassroots level.

Ultimately, the Project's ability to navigate and overcome these multifaceted challenges underscores its effectiveness in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the face of adversity.

*'Participation in the Project had a significant impact on the establishment of deeper cooperation with rural women's associations in the area of southwestern Serbia, but also on cooperation with mechanisms for gender equality. In this way, we raised not only our credibility in the community but also the credibility of the village women's associations that were involved in the Project.'*, a quote from the focus group discussion with CSOs

Evaluation evidence points out that enablers are mainly related to the expertise of the UN Women team and experts engaged, and some highly motivated and enthusiastic beneficiaries. On the other hand, challenges are mainly related to external factors, such as political instability and structural long-lasting factors.

An important feature of the Project has been its ability to proactively identify, assess and mitigate the risks. Not only have the systems for assuring the quality of Project deliverables and monitoring of risks been in place but also the Project has shown adaptability to changing circumstances while keeping a consistent focus on achieving the overall goals and objectives and with some thinking 'out of the box'. In addition, thorough record-keeping to support decision-making was also in place. Even though this has not been (probably) formally recognized, the team practiced some agile project management techniques, taking an iterative and flexible approach revealing a strong ability to adapt to changing requirements and circumstances. The Project embraced change and adapted to evolving requirements, and planning was, due to these situations, done at times incrementally, while focusing on the most immediate priorities.

The selected strategies and approaches have demonstrated solid effectiveness in achieving project results. While there is generally an effective understanding of roles and responsibilities among all parties involved, occasional instances of miscommunication or ambiguity have been encountered, requiring clarification and reinforcement of expectations (e.g., some government representatives stated they expected more involvement, some CSOs reported not feeling their voices were sufficiently heard). The intervention has succeeded in building the capacities of Project partners to some extent, with training workshops, knowledge-sharing sessions, and technical assistance contributing to skill enhancement and knowledge transfer. However, further investments in capacity-building initiatives are still needed to enhance partner capabilities and maximize project impact.

Analysis of the situation found in relation to Project strategies:

Project strategies	Details	Effectiveness of the strategies
Waterfall Strategy	Follows a linear, sequential approach with clearly defined phases. It's suited for projects with well-understood requirements and limited changes.	The Project was designed and formally implemented in a Waterfall strategy, with a linear, sequential approach. While stakeholders were mostly not aware of the totality of the Project and could not present their related views, the strategy worked in the segments of the activities they were involved in.
Agile Strategy	Emphasizes flexibility, collaboration, and incremental progress.	When faced with risks and challenges, agile strategies were applied, even though this is not clearly articulated.
Risk Management Strategy	Focuses on identifying, assessing, and mitigating project risks to minimize	Risk management strategy particularly helped to mitigate the challenging situation and ensure eventual success. UN Women is particularly aware of its importance. Project participants, such as grant

	potential disruptions.	beneficiaries are also aware of the importance of this strategy and compliment the fact that, at times of pandemics, resources and activities were readjusted to enable the smooth continuation of the processes.
Feedback Strategy	Collects input and feedback from project team members, beneficiaries, and stakeholders for continuous improvement.	It is not fully clear if such a strategy was articulated and developed within the Project. While feedback was collected at times there is not much evidence that Project participants were in a position to deliver feedback that could influence Project implementation or arrangements.
Quality Management Strategy	Ensures that project deliverables meet predefined quality standards and that quality is maintained throughout the project.	Perhaps this strategy was not fully articulated, but across the board, interviewed participants have commended the responsiveness of the UN Women and their insistence on keeping the set standards and quality of work.
Communication Strategy	Addresses the impact of changes on project stakeholders and focuses on effective communication and transition.	While excellent results and the most impressive effectiveness were achieved here, there is no evidence of a set Communication Strategy. However, a Communication Plan was developed and dedicated staff was made available.

It is worth noting that most interviewed stakeholders perceive the need to continue with the initiated streams of action, for several compelling reasons:

1. **Sustaining Progress:** A gender equality facility funding is crucial for sustaining the progress made towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Serbia. Continued investment in this area will ensure that the momentum gained from previous efforts is not lost and that long-term sustainable change can be achieved.
2. **Addressing Persistent Challenges:** Despite progress, Serbia still faces persistent challenges in achieving gender equality, including gender-based violence, economic disparities, and underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions. A dedicated funding facility provides the necessary resources to address these challenges effectively and implement targeted interventions to promote gender equality across all sectors of society.
3. **Promoting Innovation:** Continued funding for gender equality initiatives encourages innovation and experimentation in addressing emerging challenges and gaps in gender equality programming. It allows stakeholders to pilot new approaches, test innovative solutions, and scale up successful interventions to achieve greater impact and sustainability.

Provision of financial and human resources and expertise to partners, particularly CBGE, MEI and CSOs, but also other institutions and organizations supported, continues to be recognized as the most effective strategy used. In a situation where institutions lack human or financial resources or in the case of CBGE both, it was assessed as the only possible way to support needed change.

## 4.4 Efficiency

In the evaluation of the efficiency of the Project, the following questions were analyzed:

No	Evaluation questions on efficiency	Judgement criteria	Situation found
1.	<p>Have resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the Project's outcomes?</p> <p>To what extent are the Project monitoring mechanisms in place effective for measuring and informing management of the Project's performance and progress towards targets? To what extent was the monitoring data objectively used for management action and decision-making?</p> <p>Has there been effective leadership and management of the Project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results? Where does accountability lie? Have the outputs been delivered in a timely manner?</p>	<p>Relative assessment of the investment of resources and complexity and achievements of Project components.</p> <p>Adequacy of organizational assets, structures and capabilities (in terms of financial and human resources).</p> <p>Effectiveness of internal coordination/communication (vertical/horizontal) mechanisms.</p> <p>Effectiveness of external coordination/communication mechanisms with partners and beneficiaries.</p> <p>The extent to which project monitoring and reporting is results-based.</p> <p>Ability of Project staff to effectively capture, measure and monitor progress (using baseline data).</p> <p>Evidence of learning from the collected data being used to assess progress and adjust implementation.</p> <p>Degree of donor's and partners' satisfaction with results-based reports.</p>	<p>Resources have been, in most aspects, strategically allocated to achieve project outcomes, ensuring optimal utilization of financial, human, and technical support.</p> <p>The Project monitoring mechanisms are effective for measuring and informing management of the Project's performance and progress towards targets, with monitoring data objectively used for management action and decision-making. However, the Project achieved more than it measures.</p> <p>Effective leadership and management of the Project, including structured management and administration roles, have maximized results, with clear accountability and timely delivery of outputs.</p>
2.	<p>Were there any constraints (e.g., political, practical, bureaucratic) identified in the implementation of the different actions and what level of effort was made to overcome these challenges?</p>	<p>Perception of stakeholders' views on constraints. Scope and types of constraints identified, categorized by political, practical and bureaucratic.</p>	<p>Constraints such as political, practical, and bureaucratic challenges were identified during implementation. Efforts were made to overcome these challenges.</p>

Mainly due to careful resource monitoring and planning on behalf of the UN Women, there were enough resources to implement the Project in terms of staff, equipment, finance, etc. and also to implement a no-cost extension. The organizational structure within UN Women was effective in terms of achieving objectives. No delays were observed in the implementation of the Project. The Project was well-planned overall. The Project structure enabled the successful and efficient implementation of the planned activities, leading to an effective realization of the objectives and results of the Project. The established processes can be described as efficient, and mostly flexible, which was also confirmed by Project partners and evaluation respondents. However, there are also areas where more optimal solutions could have been implemented – in particular in the area of grants management as some evaluation participants stated that the Project could have made more attempts to optimize its operations and minimize unnecessary complexities, which is especially related to grants administration.



#### Key finding 10

The Project's management and leadership exhibit efficiency, demonstrating strong capacities in planning, organizing, and monitoring implementation. They adeptly coordinate diverse stakeholders, fostering very good collaboration throughout the Project. The grant administration mechanism, however, can be further optimized.

*'Administering the project itself is not that demanding, but there are many reporting periods and processes (regular quarterly, ad hoc reports), so sometimes most of the Project Coordinator's resources are focused on administration and reporting, not on program development. This is a smaller project lasting a year, it is not necessary for us to have so many reports.'*; a quote from a CSO (online survey)

Monitoring of the Project was carried out primarily through reports to the donor, which seem to have been adopted by the donor without objections. The visibility of the Project, according to the donor, was excellent. A lot of resources, both from UN Women and the partners, have been invested in promoting the Project results. The Project's communication and visibility results are impressive.

The relative assessment of the investment of resources and complexity versus achievements of Project components reveals a moderate to positive outlook. While the Project has faced some challenges inherent in its complexity, such as navigating bureaucratic procedures and adapting to changing socio-political landscapes, significant achievements have been made across various components. For example, in the implementation of capacity-building workshops, the investment of resources in training sessions and technical support has yielded tangible outcomes, evidenced by increased knowledge and skills among participants. Similarly, investments in advocacy campaigns and community engagement initiatives are believed to have resulted in measurable changes in attitudes and behaviors towards gender equality, as reported in CSOs' grants progress reports.

In terms of organizational assets, structures, and capabilities, the Project demonstrates adequacy in both financial and human resources. Adequate funding allocations have enabled the Project to maintain essential operations and implement activities effectively. Moreover, the Project benefits from a very dedicated team of skilled professionals who contribute their expertise towards achieving Project objectives. Also, the recruitment of gender and other experts has enhanced the Project's capacity to address complex gender issues and tailor interventions to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders.

Regarding internal coordination and communication mechanisms, the Project has established effective vertical and horizontal channels for sharing information and decision-making. Regular team meetings, progress reviews, and feedback sessions facilitate collaboration and ensure alignment with Project goals. Additionally, clear lines of communication between Project staff and management enabled timely resolution of issues and proactive management of risks. However, as already noted, more intensive collaboration with a wider range of stakeholders could have increased efficiency. Externally, the Project has fostered coordination and communication mechanisms with partners and beneficiaries.

Robust activity and output monitoring mechanisms are in place, effectively measuring and informing the Project's output performance and overall progress. The monitoring data is collected periodically and used for informed management actions and decision-making. Project monitoring and reporting are results-based, with a focus on capturing progress towards predefined indicators and targets. Baseline data collected at the outset of the Project serves as a reference point for measuring change over time and assessing the effectiveness of interventions. Regular monitoring activities, including site visits, data collection exercises, and progress reviews, enabled Project staff to track performance and identify areas for improvement. Yet, there are various results (in particular in the area of communications) that are not a part of the results framework.

Moreover, the Project demonstrates a commitment to learning from collected data and using insights to inform decision-making and adjust implementation strategies. However, periodic evaluations and learning workshops could have also been organized, to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion on Project achievements, challenges, and lessons learned.

Overall, the degree of donor and partners' satisfaction with results-based reports is high, reflecting confidence in the Project's ability to deliver tangible results and make meaningful contributions towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Serbia. Regular updates, progress reports, and impact assessments provide stakeholders with transparent and comprehensive insights into the Project's performance and outcomes, fostering trust and accountability among all parties involved.

From a human resource perspective, the UN Women's Project team was well-capacitated. Team members include three Project Officers (each responsible for one result area), a Finance Officer, a Project Assistant and a Communication Officer. The Head of the UN Women Office in Serbia is actively involved in the strategic management of the Project. The team has functioned well and communicated and exchanged between result areas. The Project appears to be effectively led and managed, optimizing the roles of the three Project Officers and one Assistant, for maximum results and clear accountability. One particularly efficient mechanism has been the pool of gender mainstreaming experts, which acted as an ad hoc needs-based facility, supporting gender mainstreaming of the IPA programming.

*'Perhaps it is time to look at the CSOs differently, to negotiate directly with them on the implementation of concrete support for various groups of women. One of the possible types of support for CSOs, confirmed by their results in the earlier period, is some type of institutional support in order for organizations to devote themselves to program activities in the area of improving gender policies and the position of women.'; a quote from a CSO (online survey)*

Although this evaluation is not a financial audit nor a cost-benefit analysis, basic observations of resource allocations indicate positive results. The funds were allocated to the planned activities, no major budget reallocations were made during the implementation, and contingency plans were developed along with a risk mitigation strategy. The initial design seems to have been overambitious, and the Project requires an extension, but this is mainly due to processes that went alongside the Project and were not under the direct control of UN Women.

The main area, where optimization possibilities were observed, relates to grant management. Below are some examples of grant administration optimization (focusing on working with civil society).

1. **Streamlined Application Processes:** UN Women in Serbia should consider more streamlined application processes for CSOs seeking grants. This includes simplifying application forms, considering larger scale grants, considering funding project undertaking regranting, and considering institutions grants.
2. **Flexible Grant Modalities:** UN Women should consider more flexible grant modalities tailored to the needs of CSOs, including small grants for short-term projects and larger grants for longer-term initiatives. This flexibility would allow CSOs to choose the most appropriate funding option based on their organizational capacity and project objectives.
3. **Regular Monitoring and Support:** UN Women provides regular monitoring and support to grantee CSOs throughout the project lifecycle. This includes site visits, progress reviews, and technical assistance to address challenges and ensure projects are implemented effectively and in line with grant requirements. However, some organizations believe that the focus is much more on administrative/financial requirements than on the production of results.
4. **Knowledge Sharing and Networking Events:** UN Women may consider more knowledge-sharing and networking events for grantee CSOs to exchange experiences, best practices, and lessons learned. These events create opportunities for peer learning, collaboration, and synergy among CSOs working towards common goals in gender equality and women's empowerment.

Budget management, financial management, procurement and expenditures reporting, including monitoring and evaluation, were all in line with UN Women's rules and regulations, as defined by the UN Women Financial Regulations and Rules, Procurement manual and financial manual, and all other relevant UN procedures and manuals. As the Project also supported women's CSOs, UN Women's grant-making procedures, including evaluation of received proposals, administrative-procedural review, grant reporting and payments were all followed. The evaluators did not find any evidence of the eventually implemented activities not being realistic, attainable, reasonable, necessary, and appropriate.

The Project budget was executed in line with the annual work plans as approved by UN Women and donor, and the funds allocated were sufficient, as per the view of the UN Women representatives interviewed. Overall, the Project had very good delivery rates and demonstrated readiness to adjust. The budget planning was done accurately, redesigned when needed and is based on existing market prices.

The overall management responsibility and administration of the Project rest with the UN Women Office in Serbia project presence, supported technically by the RO ECA.

#### Key finding 11

**It appears that deliverables have been consistently achieved, on time. Despite various constraints, the Project has shown resilience and has overcome challenges, including political, practical, and bureaucratic obstacles, showcasing a proactive approach to ensuring success.**

Several constraints were encountered during the implementation of various actions, including political, practical, and bureaucratic challenges.

- **Political constraints** arose due to shifting priorities, changes in government leadership, and political instability, which affected the policy environment and posed obstacles to the implementation of gender equality initiatives. For example, changes in government administrations led to delays in the approval of policy documents and the allocation of resources for gender equality programs is still relatively low.
- **Practical constraints** included resource limitations, logistical challenges, and capacity gaps within implementing agencies and partner organizations. Limited funding availability, especially during economic downturns or budgetary constraints, hindered the scale and scope of Project activities. Additionally, logistical challenges at times impacted the delivery and the reach of interventions.
- **Bureaucratic constraints** stemmed from complex administrative procedures, lengthy approval processes, and regulatory barriers that slowed down Project implementation. For instance, internal UN Women's rules and procedures in the area of grants often involved navigating cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, leading to increased administrative burden. Strong relationships were built with relevant authorities, paperwork streamlined, and networks leveraged to navigate bureaucratic challenges, to the extent possible. Still, however, some partners consider the constraints as high.
- **Geographical constraints** related to remote Project locations. Within UN Women, virtual project management techniques were used to alleviate the constraint.
- **Environmental constraints** relate to environmental factors affecting Project implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the Project implementation and UN Women incorporated adaptations into the project planning.
- **Cultural and social constraints** relate to resistance to change and local customs that impact Project implementation and UN Women's mission. Significant work was done on community engagement, awareness raising, and adapting Project strategies to align with cultural norms. However, some areas tackled through the work, in particular gender-sensitive language, are largely opposed by a large part of the Serbian population.

Despite these challenges, concerted efforts were made to overcome them at various levels. For political constraints, advocacy and engagement with government stakeholders were intensified. To address practical constraints, innovative solutions and adaptive strategies were employed to optimize resource utilization and overcome logistical hurdles. In dealing with bureaucratic constraints, efforts were made to streamline administrative processes. Overall, while constraints were

encountered during the Project implementation, proactive measures, strategic interventions, and collaborative efforts were instrumental in mitigating their impact and ensuring the successful advancement of gender equality objectives.

*'It might be possible to include partner organizations in the call preparation phase because the experience of people in partner organizations is great and it is a shame that it is not used to improve procedures or interpretation of procedures because in our experience interpretation of procedures is a more common problem than the procedures themselves.'*, a quote from an interview with a gender equality expert

Whilst there is evidence that best value for money is achieved, as no cost-benefit analysis nor Return on Investment had been done and as evaluation surveys or interviews aiming to gather perspectives on whether the Project provides value for the resources invested have not yielded many meaningful findings (as partners mainly were unaware of the totality of the Project, its overall budget, etc.), evaluators relied on the following indications:

- **Financial Audits:** Financial audits were implemented, with no reported findings related to efficient resource utilization and cost control.
- **Competitive Bidding:** Procurement processes adhered to competitive bidding procedures and are assumed to yield competitive pricing.
- **Resource Allocation:** Evidence reveals that resources, including financial and human, are allocated optimally to maximize value.

As per the activities of the Project, the following details are listed:

Activities	Stage
<b>Activity A1:</b> Support to the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and other institutions involved in the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality, Budget System Law and Law on Planning System to provide recommendations and advocate for inclusion of gender equality considerations.	Implemented
<b>Activity A2:</b> Efficient horizontal and vertical coordination in the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality and the EU gender equality acquis between the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, line ministries through gender focal points, and with the provincial and local gender equality bodies.	Implemented
<b>Activity A3:</b> Local gender equality mechanism and civil servants enhance capacities for gender-responsive governance: planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting, and for gender mainstreaming in their respective sectors and in line with their mandates and functions.	Implemented
<b>Activity B1:</b> Capacity development of the public administration in the fields of gender equality, non-discrimination and disability-inclusive policies related to the programming, implementation and monitoring of EU funds, in accordance with the cohesion policy general enabling conditions and IPA III requirements.	Implemented
<b>Activity B2:</b> Support the national authorities in establishing an internal system for integration of gender equality, anti-discrimination and accessibility principles into the IPA III programming, IPA III procedures for programming and monitoring, as well as cohesion policy programming documents.	Implemented
<b>Activity C1:</b> Launch the Call for Proposals and select women`s CSOs as the responsible parties for the implementation of projects.	Implemented
<b>Activity C2:</b> Support and monitor women's CSOs selected as the responsible parties in the implementation of awarded projects.	Implemented
<b>Activity C3:</b> Establish systematic cooperation between women`s CSOs and gender mechanisms at all levels.	Implemented

In the broader framework of Project execution, resources have been meticulously allocated to ensure optimal outcomes, harnessing the full potential of financial, human, and technical support. The Project's monitoring mechanisms stand out as diligently measuring the path of progress towards predefined targets. Within this framework, structured management and administration roles have served as pillars of strength, channelling collective efforts towards the realization of ambitious goals with efficiency, leaving an indelible mark on the landscape of gender equality and empowerment in Serbia.

## 4.5 Impact

In the evaluation of the impact of the Project, the following questions were analyzed:

No	Evaluation questions on impact	Judgement criteria	Situation found
1.	What are the areas achieved or potential measurable impact of the Project? What is the impact on the target groups and beneficiaries at individual, community, and institutional/system levels?	Evidence on long-term and sustainable changes or positive trends that benefit target groups and end users (at individual, community, institutional/systemic level).	The areas achieved or with the potential measurable impact of the Project include advancements in gender equality policies, increased awareness and advocacy for women's rights, enhanced capacity of civil society organizations, and improved access to resources and services for marginalized groups.  The impact on target groups and beneficiaries spans individual empowerment, community cohesion, and institutional/systemic transformation, fostering positive changes in attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices towards gender equality and women's empowerment.
2.	How Project impacts are likely to impact women end beneficiaries and the most vulnerable groups?	Evidence on long-term and sustainable changes or positive trends on benefits to end beneficiaries.	The Project positively impacts women by enhancing their access to resources, opportunities, and support systems. It empowers them to advocate for their rights, access essential services, and participate in decision-making processes, leading to improved socio-economic outcomes and greater resilience.

Although it is too early to estimate the full impact of the Project, the evaluation evidence points to the initial achievement of the results and to the processes that create prerequisites for the full desired impact at technical, economic, social, and policy levels.

As per the results framework of the Project Impact is defined as 'The Government of Serbia consistently complies with national and international gender equality commitments and EU Gender Equality Acquis.' The success is to be measured with the following indicator: 'Positive review of annual progress on gender in Serbia in relation to the implementation of EU Gender Equality Acquis'. The most recent report by the European Commission<sup>64</sup> finds that 'Serbia's legislative and institutional framework for upholding fundamental rights is broadly in place.' It also notes that the implementation of the new strategies and action plans on gender equality started. The report finds that the gender structure within the overall public administration is balanced. The report also notes that the CBGE was re-established in October 2022 and that the Council for Gender Equality was established in April 2023. Further, the report notes that several provisions of the LGE, including those on reporting and data collection obligations and on funding of specialized services, will enter into force only in 2024. No progress, according to the report, has yet been demonstrated in enforcing the LGE as regards the obligations of education institutions to include the gender perspective and remove gender stereotypes from curricula, textbooks and learning materials. Further work is also noted as needed in terms of gender equality in boards of directors.

<sup>64</sup> European Commission, "Commission Staff Working Document – Serbia 2023 Report," (Strasbourg: European Commission, 2023), available at: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD\\_2023\\_695\\_Serbia.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_695_Serbia.pdf)

Impact	Indicators and Targets	Current situation
<p><b>The Overall Objective/Impact:</b></p> <p>The Government of Serbia consistently complies with national and international gender equality commitments and EU gender equality acquis.</p>	<p><b>Objectively verifiable indicators:</b></p> <p>Indicator 1: Positive review of annual progress on gender in Serbia in relation to the implementation of EU gender equality acquis.</p> <p>Baseline: No</p> <p>Target: Yes</p>	<p>European Commission's Progress report for 2023 notes positive changes compared to previous years, however, it also expresses remaining concerns.</p>

The evaluation mission found evidence of impacts being made across the span of technical, economic, social, policy and institutional levels. The observed impacts are as follows:

Impact domain	Evidence found
<b>Policy Impact</b>	The Project has influenced the development and implementation of gender equality policies in Serbia, leading to the adoption of inclusive and gender-responsive legislation and action plans. This has resulted in a more conducive legal framework for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.
<b>Institutional Impact</b>	By strengthening the capacity of gender equality institutions such as the CBGE, the Project has enhanced their ability to lead and coordinate gender mainstreaming efforts across government agencies. This has resulted in more effective institutional mechanisms for addressing gender disparities and promoting gender equality.
<b>Awareness Impact</b>	Through advocacy campaigns, public outreach activities, and media engagement, the Project has raised awareness about gender equality issues among the general public. This has contributed to changing societal attitudes and norms towards gender equality and challenging stereotypes and discriminatory practices.
<b>Participation Impact</b>	The Project has facilitated the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes at various levels, but particularly via grants to CSOs. This has empowered women to voice their concerns, advocate for their rights, and contribute to shaping policies and programs that affect their lives.

*'The project has made significant concrete impacts in several key areas. Firstly, the adoption of the new Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality until 2030 marks a crucial milestone, indicating a commitment to long-term gender equality objectives. Moreover, the Gender Equality Impact Test on draft legislations represents a systemic change, embedding gender considerations into the legislative process to ensure equity. The capacity-building efforts resulted in civil servants gaining new knowledge and skills in gender mainstreaming and governance signify a shift towards more inclusive policy implementation. Additionally, the support provided to local self-governments and women's civil society organizations has directly benefited women, fostering skill development, employment opportunities, and business growth. Overall, these changes reflect tangible progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Serbia, demonstrating the Project's substantive impact on policy, governance, and grassroots initiatives.'* a quote from the interview with UN Women Project team

## Key finding 12

Impacts were observed at the individual level, within communities, institutionally and systemically.

Grants have proven to be particularly impactful, offering a platform for the exploration of new and innovative themes. They have facilitated meaningful local collaborations, fostering partnerships that extend the Project's reach and effectiveness. Moreover, the grants have played a pivotal role in skills/knowledge/attitude development, empowering individual women and girls (and women's organizations) with the resources and tools necessary for sustained impact. The direct support provided to vulnerable women through some of these grants has not only addressed immediate needs but has also contributed to their long-term resilience and empowerment.

Grants for CSOs and local self-government units are found particularly impactful due to several key reasons:

- **Empowering Local Actors:** By providing grants to CSOs and local self-government units the Project empowered local actors to take ownership of gender equality initiatives and tailor interventions to the specific needs and priorities of their communities. This decentralization of resources and decision-making processes ensures that interventions are contextually relevant and responsive to local realities.
- **Fostering Innovation and Creativity:** Grants offer CSOs and local self-government units the flexibility to design innovative and creative solutions to address gender equality challenges. This encourages experimentation, risk-taking, and the exploration of new approaches that may not be feasible under more rigid funding modalities.
- **Building Capacity and Sustainability:** Grants provide an opportunity for capacity-building and institutional strengthening among CSOs and local self-government units. Through the process of applying for and managing grants, organizations and institutions develop skills in project management, financial stewardship, and monitoring and evaluation, which contribute to their long-term sustainability and effectiveness.
- **Promoting Collaboration and Partnership:** Grants encourage collaboration and partnership between CSOs, local governments, and other stakeholders. By co-designing and implementing projects together, organizations can leverage each other's strengths, resources, and expertise, leading to more comprehensive and impactful interventions.
- **Catalyzing Local Development:** Grants for local self-government units support the implementation of gender equality initiatives at the grassroots level, contributing to local development and inclusive growth. By investing in projects that address the needs of marginalized communities and promote women's participation in decision-making processes, grants play a crucial role in fostering sustainable development and social cohesion.

*'The Project indeed has the potential to catalyze broader changes in gender equality and women's empowerment in Serbia. The partnership between UN Women and various government bodies led to the development of crucial national documents, such as the Law on Gender Equality, amendments to the Anti-discrimination Law, and the National Strategy for Gender Equality with the following Action Plans. The engagement with local self-governments and civil society organizations, coupled with the development of Local Action Plans for Gender Equality, demonstrates a bottom-up approach to gender mainstreaming, likely to inspire similar initiatives nationwide. Overall, these examples suggest that the Project's efforts have the potential to stimulate systemic changes and foster a culture of gender equality across various levels of governance and society in Serbia.'*, a quote from the UN Women Project team (questionnaire)

The following presents observed longer-term and hopefully sustainable changes the Project had on an individual, community, institutional level, and society as a whole.

Impact level	Details observed
Individual level	The Project has empowered individual women by providing them with access to skills training, cultural content, economic opportunities, and support services, mainly via grants. This empowerment has enabled women to assert their rights, make informed decisions about their lives, and participate more actively in social, economic, and political spheres. At the individual level, there is heightened awareness and understanding of gender equality, evidenced by increased participation of women in income generation, economy, family inheritance, culture, business and farming networking. Evidence of these can be found in grant reports, details of the communication activities, and interviews with final beneficiaries.
Community level	The Project has fostered greater social cohesion within communities where it worked by promoting gender equality, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. Through community-based initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns, and dialogue platforms the Project has facilitated constructive discussions and collaborations that strengthen social bonds between women, as reported by CSO representatives and observed by studying Project outputs, such as conference proceedings, training satisfaction surveys, etc.
Institutional level	At the institutional level, the Project has contributed to the formulation and implementation of gender-sensitive policies, laws, and regulations. By advocating for policy reforms and building the capacity of government institutions, the Project has helped institutionalize gender equality principles and mainstream gender perspectives into decision-making processes and programming of external funds, as confirmed by the adoption of various documents, such as strategies, project proposals, official tools such as gender testing tool, and also verbally confirmed during interviews with government representatives and experts. Civil society action and civic participation have been strengthened.
Systemic level	The Project has facilitated the strengthening of gender equality institutions and mechanisms at the systemic level. By providing technical assistance, training, and resources to government agencies, CSOs, and other stakeholders, the Project has enhanced their capacity to promote gender equality, monitor progress, and hold duty-bearers accountable, as confirmed at interviews with Ministries and focus groups with IPA units. Systemically, the Project has contributed to institutionalizing gender considerations, with policy revisions reflecting a more inclusive framework. Pre-accession processes of Serbia have also championed gender, as confirmed by the donor.
Society as a whole	At the societal level, the Project is believed to have contributed to a gradual shift in cultural norms, attitudes, and behaviors towards gender equality, as confirmed in interviews with CSOs. Through awareness-raising campaigns, media engagement, and community mobilization efforts, the Project has also challenged stereotypes, addressed harmful gender norms, and thereby indirectly promoted more equitable and inclusive social norms and values. The Project has also paved the way for social entrepreneurship among women.

Below are some examples of the impacts on women end beneficiaries and the most vulnerable groups:

1. **Access to Education:** The Project provided vocational training opportunities, via grants, specifically targeted at women and girls from marginalized backgrounds, enabling them to access quality education and acquire skills for better employment prospects.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Women from disadvantaged communities received, via grants, entrepreneurship training and support for income-generating activities, leading to increased economic independence, financial security, and improved livelihoods for themselves and their families.
3. **Healthcare Services:** The Project supported the improvement of practices in reproductive health services, via grants, i.e., through collaboration with a CSO who took the initiative further.



4. **Political Participation:** The Project conducted capacity-building workshops and awareness campaigns, via grants but also via communication activities, to encourage women's participation in political processes, decision-making bodies, and local governance structures, empowering them to advocate for their rights and interests at all levels of society.
5. **Social Support Networks:** The Project facilitated the formation and strengthening of women's CSOs and peer mentorship programs, providing a platform for mutual solidarity, sharing of experiences, and collective action to address common challenges and advance gender equality goals. This was mainly implemented via grants, too.
6. **Empowerment and Agency:** This is, for example, visible around the promotion of equitable inheritance practices, implemented by CSO via grant support, that can empower women to exercise greater agency and autonomy over their lives. When women have control over property and assets, they have the freedom to make choices about their futures, such as where to live, whom to marry, and how to pursue their goals and aspirations. This fosters a sense of empowerment and self-determination among women, enabling them to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives.

## 4.6 Sustainability

In the evaluation of the sustainability of the Project, the following questions were analyzed:

No	Evaluation questions on sustainability	Judgement criteria	Situation found
1.	<p>What is the likelihood that the benefits from the Project will be maintained for a reasonably long period after the Project phases out?</p> <p>To what extent did the Project succeed in building individual and institutional capacities of rights-holders and duty-bearers to ensure the sustainability of benefits and more inclusive practices for local development and good governance?</p> <p>How effectively has the Project generated national ownership of the results achieved, the establishment of partnerships with relevant stakeholders and the development of national capacities to ensure the sustainability of efforts and benefits?</p> <p>How effectively has the Project contributed to the establishment of effective partnerships and the</p>	<p>The elements that hampered sustainability have been identified so as to be taken into consideration in future actions.</p> <p>The financed projects have led to results that have the potential to last after the end of the funding and that contributed to financial, institutional, service, and policy sustainability.</p> <p>Evidence of changes in knowledge/behaviors/skills in partners and target groups to sustain the results.</p> <p>Evidence of knowledge/skills being applied.</p> <p>Evidence of accountability and oversight systems.</p> <p>Identification of the scope of changes in operating capacities.</p> <p>Number and type of changes (including potential policy changes) that are likely to continue after the Project ends without additional financing.</p> <p>Evidence of rights holders articulating their priorities and needs; accessing services; and contributing to national/local planning and development.</p>	<p>While challenges remain, there is moderate confidence in the Project's ability to maintain benefits for a reasonably long period post-phase-out, with notable success in building individual and institutional capacities among rights-holders and duty-bearers, generating national ownership of results, fostering partnerships, and developing national capacities for sustainability, with ongoing efforts to reinforce the operating capacities of national partners.</p>

	development of national capacities? What steps were taken to develop and/or reinforce the operating capacities of national partners during the implementation of the Project?		
2.	To what extent has the Project been able to promote replication and/or up-scaling of successful practices?	Evidence of replicated and up-scaled practices. Perception of stakeholders on the effectiveness of these practices and contribution to sustainability.	There is evidence of replication and upscaling of successful practices.
3.	To what extent has the exit strategy been well planned and successfully implemented?	There is a sustainability strategy, and it is followed. Documental evidence on sustainability plans.	The exit strategy needs further careful operationalization.

There is a reasonably positive outlook for the maintenance of Project benefits over the long term post-phase-out. The Project has laid a solid foundation through its comprehensive approach, which includes capacity-building initiatives, grants, technical assistance, and stakeholder engagement. By empowering local actors, fostering ownership, and strengthening institutional capacities, the Project has somewhat contributed to a conducive environment for sustained impact. Additionally, it is hoped that the ongoing established mechanisms will help track progress and address emerging challenges, ensuring that the gains achieved during the Project continue to resonate within the community long after its conclusion.

**Key finding 13**  
**The Project proactively initiated dialogues encompassing pivotal themes, including but not limited to women’s inheritance rights, gender mainstreaming in donor funding, and the incorporation of gender perspectives into critical domains such as climate change, energy, and the construction sector. Notably, the Project engaged in a strategic and innovative collaboration with the media to amplify these discussions, thereby enhancing public awareness and discourse on these crucial gender-related issues.**

The Project has also made significant strides in building both individual and institutional capacities among rights-holders and duty-bearers, thereby fostering sustainability of benefits and promoting more inclusive practices in local development and governance. Through grants, which included tailored training programs, workshops, and similar initiatives, women and girls have been equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to advocate for gender equality and effectively engage in decision-making processes. Moreover, institutional capacities have been strengthened across the tiers of government through the establishment of frameworks and mechanisms that promote gender mainstreaming and ensure the integration of gender perspectives into policies and programs. These efforts are believed to have contributed to creating an enabling environment for sustainable progress towards gender equality and inclusive governance practices in Serbia.

The Project has, on the other hand, demonstrated moderately positive effectiveness in fostering national ownership of achieved results and establishing partnerships with relevant stakeholders to enhance the gender equality machinery in Serbia. Through proactive engagement with government agencies, CSOs, and other key actors, the Project has promoted a sense of ownership and commitment to advancing gender equality agendas at the national level. Furthermore, strategic partnerships have been forged to leverage resources, expertise, and support, thereby enhancing the sustainability of efforts beyond the Project's lifespan. Additionally, the Project has also played a pivotal role in developing national capacities by providing technical assistance, training, and knowledge-sharing opportunities to strengthen institutional frameworks and promote gender mainstreaming practices. These efforts have contributed to building a resilient foundation for sustained progress in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Serbia. However, the full sustainability of this Project will not be achieved unless Government funding is in place for the functioning of the CBGE.

The Project's effectiveness in establishing partnerships and developing national capacities has been mixed, marked by both successes and challenges. While the Project has managed to forge partnerships with key stakeholders, particularly within the government and civil sector and local authorities, there have been limitations in the depth and breadth of these collaborations. Additionally, the development of national capacities has been hindered by resource constraints, bureaucratic hurdles, and limited institutional buy-in. Despite efforts to provide training and technical assistance, the impact on institutional capacity-building has been limited, with existing structures often struggling to absorb and implement the Project's recommendations effectively. Moving forward, there is a need for greater emphasis on addressing systemic barriers to capacity/capability development to ensure more impactful and sustainable outcomes.

During the implementation of the Project, several steps were taken to develop and reinforce the operating capacities of national partners. These steps included:

1. **Training and Capacity Building:** The Project organized workshops, seminars, study tours and training sessions aimed at enhancing the technical skills and knowledge of national partners on gender equality issues. Topics covered have included gender mainstreaming, GRB, and human rights-based approaches to gender equality, and they also stretched to the incorporation of gender concerns in the programming of development funds and national strategic plans. Individual capacities of governmental stakeholders working in the gender equality mechanisms, gender focal points in the line ministries, employees in the MEI, members of the sectoral working group, and staff of IPA programming units, were developed through various capacity-building activities, equipping them with knowledge on gender mainstreaming in different topic areas and policy processes, skills to conduct and use gender analyses for policy planning and programming, or to mainstream gender equality in local policies.
2. **Technical Assistance:** National partners received tailored technical assistance and expertise to strengthen their institutional capacities. This assistance has involved providing guidance on policy development, program implementation, legal matters, etc.
3. **Knowledge Sharing:** The Project facilitated knowledge sharing and exchange among national partners, enabling them to learn from each other's experiences and best practices. This has been achieved through, inter alia, study visits, conferences and networking events. Also, various briefs and issue-specific gender analyses were offered.
4. **Institutional Support:** The Project provided institutional support to different national partners, assisting them in strengthening the role of the gender equality focal points within their organizations. This support included developing strategic plans, guidelines, and tools for mainstreaming gender equality across various sectors.
5. **Advocacy and Awareness:** National partners were supported in advocating for gender equality and raising awareness about the importance of gender mainstreaming within their organizations and beyond. This included conducting awareness campaigns and engaging with policymakers and stakeholders otherwise.

**Key finding 14**

Overall, identified key elements that hamper sustainability primarily include:

- **Insufficient financial resources** allocated to sustain Project activities beyond the funding period can hinder sustainability.
- **Weak institutional capacity** within partner organizations still impedes their ability to continue Project initiatives independently.
- There is **over-reliance on external support** and expertise without building local ownership and capacity which can hinder sustainability.

**Overall, the evaluation finds that frequent institutional changes, unclear and overlapping mandates, competition between different governmental bodies, as well as high fluctuation of the personnel in the public administration are major risk factors for sustainability.**

Evaluators distinguished between the four types of sustainability, as follows:

Types of sustainability	Details	Findings
Financial sustainability	Financing of follow-up activities, sources of revenue for covering all future operating and maintenance costs.	The financial sustainability of the Project faces several challenges, indicating, currently, not very good prospects for long-term viability. One major issue is the lack of consistent and sufficient funding sources. Dependency on external funding makes the Project goals vulnerable to fluctuations in funding availability and donor priorities. Moreover, there are limited/no domestic resources allocated to sustain gender equality initiatives, reflecting a broader pattern of underinvestment in gender equality within national budgets. Furthermore, political instability or changes in government priorities could further jeopardize financial sustainability.
Institutional/Service sustainability	Structures that would allow the results of the action to continue to be in place after the end of the action, capacity building, agreements and local 'ownership' of the results of the action.	Institutional and service sustainability presents moderate prospects, where the positive side is that the structures and mechanisms are in place to support the continuity of the Project's results beyond its duration. One key factor contributing to this moderate sustainability is the establishment of gender equality mechanisms at various levels, such as the CBGE and gender focal points within government institutions. These structures serve as focal points for gender mainstreaming efforts and can continue to drive gender equality initiatives post-project.
Policy level sustainability	Structural impact (improved legislation, consistency with existing frameworks, codes of conduct, or methods).	The positive prospects for policy-level sustainability of the Project are underpinned by significant structural impacts, particularly in the realm of legislative and policy improvements. One notable achievement is the enhancement of legislation related to gender equality. These legislative changes serve as enduring pillars of support for gender equality efforts, providing a legal framework for addressing discrimination, promoting equal opportunities, and protecting women's rights in various spheres of life.
Environmental sustainability	What positive/negative impact will the action have on the environment — have conditions been put in place to avoid negative effects on the natural resources on which the action depends and on the broader natural environment.	Some aspects of the Project tackled agriculture and presumably may influence the environment. Improved awareness of the interlinkages between climate change and gender is also observed. However, overall, the Project is considered environmentally neutral.

Limited funding allocated to sustain Project activities beyond the funding period poses a significant barrier to sustainability. Without adequate financial support, partner organizations may struggle to maintain Project initiatives, leading to their discontinuation or scaling back of essential activities. Sustainability requires long-term financial planning and investment to ensure the continued implementation of gender equality initiatives beyond the Project's duration.

Partner organizations may still face challenges in developing their institutional capacity to sustain Project activities independently. This weakness in capacity hampers their ability to effectively continue Project initiatives once external support is withdrawn.

Dependence on external support and expertise without adequately building local ownership and capacity hinders sustainability. Project activities are primarily driven by external actors and there is a risk that local stakeholders may not fully internalize the Project's objectives, methodologies, and outcomes. To foster sustainability, it is essential to empower local partners, enhance their ownership of Project initiatives, and transfer skills and knowledge to ensure they can independently drive gender equality efforts in the long term.

The implementation of a Gender Equality Test is viewed as not yet fully consolidated intervention. It represents a proactive approach to assessing the gender impacts of policies, programs, and projects. By incorporating a gender perspective into decision-making processes, the Gender Equality Test may help identify potential gender biases or inequalities and ensure that interventions are designed and implemented in a manner that promotes gender equality. This systematic assessment process may not only enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions but also foster a culture of gender-responsive policymaking and programming, leading to lasting changes in attitudes and practices. While the implementation of the test is in the very early stages and will require further support, this remains an element of possible further progress. However, respondents do not feel the local administrative context is equipped to meaningfully implement these tests. Regardless, the Project has led to results with the potential for lasting impact beyond the funding period, contributing to financial, institutional, service, and policy sustainability. Moreover, there is evidence of changes in knowledge, behaviors, and skills among partners and target groups, reported by CSOs who implemented grants with direct beneficiaries, with tangible examples of these knowledge and skills being applied in practice. Furthermore, there is evidence of changes in operating capacities, including potential policy changes, which are likely to continue post-project without additional financing. Lastly, rights holders have been actively engaged in articulating their priorities and needs, accessing services, and contributing to national and local planning and development processes, further enhancing the Project's sustainability.

Accountability and oversight systems have been established, which in principle should ensure ongoing monitoring and evaluation of Project outcomes. Accountability and oversight systems identified include regular progress reports, financial audit, and shared decision-making processes. Most interviewed respondents also mentioned reporting systems that were made operational.

**Key finding 15**

**The Project has demonstrated positive sustainability efforts in promoting replication and up-scaling of successful practices (examples include obstetric violence issue addressing, strategically embedded gender perspectives into critical domains like climate change, energy, and the construction sector, etc.).**

Initiatives that have effectively promoted gender mainstreaming in local governance structures or empowered women through economic initiatives have been documented and shared.

In particular, two supported initiatives demonstrate good practices in promoting gender equality and women's rights within the context of the Project:

1. **Support for Women's Rights to Inheritance and Property:** The Project's collaboration with women CSOs to advocate for women's rights to inheritance and property is commendable. By addressing this issue through lobbying, campaigns, and capacity-building initiatives, the Project has effectively raised awareness and empowered women to assert their rights. The creation of the Coalition of Equal Inheritance underscores the Project's success in mobilizing collective action and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to address systemic barriers to women's inheritance rights. This holistic approach not only addresses immediate challenges but also lays the groundwork for sustained advocacy efforts and systemic change in the region.
2. **Campaign against Obstetric Violence:** The #mojepravodaznam campaign exemplifies a successful advocacy initiative that has generated significant public interest and mobilized support for addressing obstetric violence. By

raising awareness about this issue and providing a platform for women to share their experiences, the campaign has empowered survivors and catalyzed social change. Moreover, the partnerships forged with CSOs and independent institutions such as the CPE and Ombudsman highlight the Project's ability to leverage multi-stakeholder collaborations for systemic impact. Through these partnerships, the Project has strengthened accountability mechanisms and facilitated dialogue between civil society and governmental institutions, thereby advancing the rights and well-being of women in Serbia.

The most promising sources of sustainability are developed legal and strategic frameworks, the establishment of gender focal points, gender equality mechanisms and the adoption of a Gender Equality Test, and they represent crucial processes and systems that can sustain the results. By developing and implementing gender-responsive legal and strategic frameworks, the Project ensures that gender equality principles are integrated into national policies, laws, and development plans. These frameworks provide a solid foundation for promoting gender equality across various sectors and institutions, ensuring that gender considerations are systematically addressed in decision-making processes. The establishment of gender focal points within government institutions signifies a commitment to mainstreaming gender considerations in all aspects of policymaking and implementation. These designated focal points should, theoretically, serve as champions for gender equality within their respective institutions, advocating for gender-sensitive approaches and ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into institutional practices and procedures. The establishment of a gender equality mechanism at all levels of governance also provides a structured framework for coordinating and monitoring gender equality initiatives.

It should be noted that the Project has also strategically embedded gender perspectives into critical domains like climate change, energy, and the construction sector, recognizing their significance in shaping gender dynamics and opportunities for women's empowerment, which is very innovative for the Serbian context. Through innovative collaborations with the media, it also amplified discussions on these crucial gender-related issues, elevating public awareness and discourse.

The exit strategy is not very much planned currently and the trajectory there lacks comprehensiveness in addressing all aspects necessary for sustainability. There are possibly high risks in ensuring a smooth transition of responsibilities. Primarily this is due to the third phase of the intervention being currently planned and earmarked in the respective donor's budget. This exit strategy will need to become the focus of the next phase of the Project – it is crucial for ensuring the successful conclusion of a project while minimizing negative impacts and maximizing its long-term sustainability. There will need to be a clear roadmap for winding down project activities, transferring responsibilities, and transitioning resources to relevant stakeholders or institutions.

<b>Key finding 16</b>
<b>Stopping grant support for women's CSOs poses a significant risk, as UN Women stands as the primary and, in many cases, sole financial supporter for these organizations, crucial for the realization of their missions. Ensuring sustained grant assistance is not only imperative for the continuity of their operations but also strategically aligns with UN Women's pivotal role in advancing the empowerment and objectives of women's civil society organizations.</b>

One finding is important – halting grant support for women's CSOs represents a considerable risk, given UN Women's predominant and sometimes exclusive financial backing for these organizations, which are integral to fulfilling their mandates. Consistent grant assistance is not only essential for their day-to-day functioning but also aligns strategically with UN Women's pivotal role in promoting women's CSOs' empowerment and objectives. This strategic imperative emphasizes the need for ongoing and substantial financial support to enhance the impact and efficacy of these CSOs in advancing gender-related objectives and societal change. Moreover, there's a sentiment among some CSOs that UN Women could intensify efforts to sustain previous accomplishments by ensuring continued grant support within multi-annual frameworks. This approach could facilitate the replication or scaling up of successful practices, fostering greater sustainability and amplifying the projects' overall impact on gender equality initiatives.

In summary, the sustainability outlook presents a mixed picture, characterized by moderate institutional capacity and fluctuating resources, alongside a discernible gap between policy intent and implementation. While the Project has achieved some level of ongoing sustainability, there remains a critical need to bolster the capacity of both national and local institutions. Policy and practice changes have only been partially entrenched within institutional frameworks, indicating a

lingering dependence on external support, particularly concerning policy formulation and mainstreaming gender considerations in EU accession efforts. This lingering gap underscores the necessity for continued intervention to foster sustainable institutional development. Addressing this challenge is paramount for cultivating a self-reliant and resilient framework within both national and local gender equality machinery, crucial for the long-term success of EU accession processes.

The activities of partnership and capacity building with institutions such as CBGE, MEI, MHMRSD, and civil servants play a crucial role in ensuring sustainability. By further strengthening the capacities of these institutions, they will become better equipped to continue the work initiated by the Project even after its conclusion. This includes implementing gender equality policies, managing funds effectively, and providing oversight of local mechanisms for gender equality. Additionally, supporting these (and other) institutions to allocate funding to CSOs focused on gender equality will ensure that these vital actors can continue their work beyond the Project's lifespan. Overall, these activities pave the way for the long-term sustainability of gender equality efforts by fostering institutional resilience and continuity in promoting gender equality agendas.

*'This kind of help will be needed in the future if we want to sustain the existing village associations.', a quote from a CSO (online survey)*

## 4.7 Gender Equality and Human Rights

In the evaluation of the gender equality and human rights aspect of the Project, the following questions were analyzed:

No	Evaluation questions on gender equality and human rights	Judgement criteria	Situation found
1.	<p>To what extent have gender and human rights principles and strategies been integrated into the Project design and implementation?</p> <p>To what extent participation and inclusiveness (with respect to rights holders and duty bearers) was maximized in the Project's planning, design, implementation and decision?</p>	<p>Evidence of the extent to which interventions consider/address the needs of women, including women from marginalized groups.</p> <p>Alignment of partner's mandates with the areas and strategies of intervention.</p> <p>Perception and evidence of influence of partners on the thematic areas of the Project.</p> <p>The ability of partners to reach the target groups and beneficiaries (capacity, sector-wise, geographically).</p>	<p>Sufficient evidence was gathered to demonstrate the Project's commitment to gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized women in the Project.</p> <p>Gender and human rights principles and strategies are at the core of the Project, which is reflected in the initial design of the Project and all the way through its implementation.</p>
	<p>To what extent disability inclusion was integrated into</p>	<p>Evidence on disability inclusion.</p>	<p>The Project generally follows the UN Women strategic commitments to fully dedicate to</p>

	Project planning and implementation?	Budget allocation for disability inclusion.	mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout its work, in line with disability inclusion strategy and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, the evaluation evidence has not identified any structured corresponding measures of disability inclusion/dedicated budget allocation.
--	--------------------------------------	---	--

**Key finding 17**

**Gender and human rights principles and strategies are at the core of the Project (apart from multiplicative intersectionality), which is reflected in the initial design of the Project, all the way through its implementation.**

The changes generated by the Project, especially in Result 3, are very much ‘people-centred’ and designed to address and resolve the root causes of gender inequalities and tackle gender stereotypes. The integration of gender and human rights principles and strategies into the Project design and implementation is evident throughout various facets of the Project. From the initial planning stages to the implementation phase, there is a clear and deliberate effort to embed these principles into every aspect of the Project. This comprehensive integration is reflected in the Project’s objectives, activities, and outcomes, which are all aligned with promoting equality, dignity, and social justice for all individuals, regardless of gender or other identity factors. By prioritizing gender and human rights considerations, the Project demonstrates a commitment to addressing systemic inequalities and advancing the rights and well-being of marginalized populations. Overall, this holistic approach underscores the Project’s dedication to promoting inclusive development and fostering a more equitable and just society. Evaluation evidence indicates that the human rights-based approach has been consistently applied and integrated into the Project’s implementing modalities. Project partners, in particular CSOs and local authorities, demonstrated a commendable ability to effectively reach target groups and beneficiaries across sectors and geographic regions. Key stakeholders are institutions whose reach is regulated by their legal mandates.

Not much evidence was found on UN Women acknowledging, in an operational sense, the intersectionality issues, i.e., that individuals experience multiple forms of discrimination based on intersecting identities such as gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and more. By recognizing these intersecting identities, a gender equality project can better understand and address the diverse experiences and needs of different groups within society. Intersectionality conceptual framework reveals how systems of power and oppression intersect to create and perpetuate inequalities. This evaluation encourages UN Women to consider these frameworks with more intensity. Also, more structured feedback mechanisms that would directly allow individual women from marginalized groups to provide input, express concerns, and make suggestions for improvement to project hierarchy could be considered for the future.

**Key finding 18**

**The Project generally follows the UN Women’s strategic commitment to fully dedicate to mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout its work, in line with disability inclusion strategy and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, the evaluation evidence has not identified any structured corresponding measures of it within the Project’s execution so far. For example, the Project has not demonstrated a commitment to disability inclusion through accessible communication materials, adaptive technologies, and tailored interventions that accommodate diverse abilities and also such actions were not budgeted.**

The Project has applied the common UN approach to gender equality and human rights, as an intersectional principle in the UN Women policies and a core component of the human rights-based approach, including its disability inclusion dimension. Nevertheless, disability inclusion, per se, was not a specific objective of the Project. The only evidence points to the inclusion of women with disabilities sporadically in activities related to the logistics of the organization of the events.



Hence, while there is evidence that specific needs, challenges, and aspirations of people with disabilities in the Project area were considered in the Project design, their operationalisation in the Project's intervention is not very visible. There were no attempts to ensure that the overall Project infrastructure and facilities were designed to be accessible. There is no evidence of systemically introduced standards of operation, such as obligatory usage of assistive technologies and tools that facilitate participation, communication, and access to Project resources for people with disabilities, noting that their use may have increased funds required to implement events such as trainings, conferences and similar. Widespread use of accessible formats for Project materials, such as Braille, large print, audio, and sign language interpreters was not observed. It should be noted that disability inclusion requires earmarked costs that cannot be provided if funds are limited. Perhaps that practice may be improved so that, for example, a percentage of the budget is set aside for disability inclusion.

## 5. Conclusions

### **Conclusion 1 (Relevance, key findings 1, 2, 3):**

Stakeholder interviews and feedback from Project beneficiaries affirm the Project's significant relevance in the context of gender equality in Serbia. Despite ambitious goals and various potential complexities, that mainly dealt with understaffed line agencies and frequent leadership changes in governmental counterparts, the Project has demonstrated consistency with its original intentions, ensuring also continued alignment with the evolving needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. The Project's overarching objective remains consistent with its original or adapted intentions and the detailed outcomes outlined in the Project plan further spell out its anticipated trajectory.

### **Conclusion 2 (Relevance, key findings 1, 2, 3):**

Given that this Project is focused on policy, contextual information on policies is closely linked with the Project's relevance. The evaluation concludes that the implementation of gender equality strategies and action plans in Serbia is viewed among stakeholders as showing some progress yet remaining uneven and facing challenges. While efforts have been made to develop and enact policies promoting gender equality, there remains a noticeable gap between policy formulation and effective implementation on the ground. Key issues such as insufficient budget allocation, limited institutional capacity, and a lack of systematic and meaningful monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are highlighted as hindering the full realization of gender equality objectives. Thus, while the Project's efforts are acknowledged, there is a critical need for stronger commitment, improved coordination, and enhanced accountability mechanisms to ensure meaningful progress in advancing gender equality in Serbia and strengthening its institutional framework.

### **Conclusion 3 (Relevance, key findings 1, 2, 3):**

Comprehensive joint dialogues provide a platform for all stakeholders to contribute their perspectives, needs, and priorities. By not engaging in such inclusive dialogues, the Project may have missed opportunities to validate and refine its relevance based on a broader range of inputs. This could result in a limited understanding of the diverse needs and priorities of the target beneficiaries and stakeholders, potentially leading to gaps in the Project's design and implementation. Therefore, the absence of comprehensive joint dialogues may have impacted the Project's relevance by limiting its ability to fully align with the collective interests and concerns of all stakeholders involved.

### **Conclusion 4 (Coherence, key findings 4, 5, 6):**

The Project aligns with UN Women's strategic framework and clearly showcases the collective impact of UN Women's interventions, while alignment with national strategies is evident. However, under-capacitated gender machinery hinders implementation. This is highly relevant to the Project's coherence because it directly impacts the alignment, synergy, sustainability, and collaborative effectiveness that coherence aims to ensure. An under-capacitated gender machinery suggests that, while strategic alignment exists, the practical alignment with the operational capacity of key stakeholders is lacking. Under-capacitated machinery indicates a gap between the strategic intent and practical execution, highlighting a lack of coherence in operational capacities.

### **Conclusion 5 (Effectiveness, key findings 7, 8, 9):**

In summary, the Project's overall effectiveness is evidenced by the successful completion of targeted changes, some of which have the potential to generate lasting value and positive impact. Across the board, the undertaken activities are in alignment with the Project's purpose, and there is observable satisfaction among stakeholders and beneficiaries with the progress that the Project has generated.

**Conclusion 6 (Effectiveness, key findings 7, 8, 9):**

Negative factors such as political instability, economic downturns, and entrenched gender norms posed significant challenges to the Project's progress. Political transitions, changes in government priorities, and bureaucratic red tape hindered the smooth implementation of Project activities, leading to delays and resource constraints. Moreover, deeply ingrained gender stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and cultural barriers impeded efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

**Conclusion 7 (Efficiency, key findings 10, 11):**

The Project has demonstrated solid efficiency in resource allocation, strategically deploying financial, human, and technical support to achieve outcomes, albeit it will still require a no-cost extension (which was being dealt with at the time of this evaluation). The overall conclusion is that the Project maximized the use of available resources, such as time, budget, and personnel, to achieve its objectives and desired outcomes with minimal waste or redundancies. Tasks were successfully completed and there is evidence of cost-effectiveness.

**Conclusion 8 (Impact, key finding 12):**

There are long-term effects and changes resulting from the Project that go beyond the immediate and short-term results, some of which are broader, sustainable and transformative.

- At the individual level, there is heightened awareness and understanding of gender equality, evidenced by increased participation of women in income generation, economy, family inheritance, culture, business and farming networking.
- Communities have experienced improved social cohesion through enhanced dialogue on gender-related issues.
- Institutionally, the adoption of a new Action Plan for the National Strategy for Gender Equality until 2030 marks a significant achievement, aligning policies with contemporary gender perspectives.
- Pre-accession processes of Serbia have also championed gender.
- Systemically, the Project has contributed to institutionalizing gender considerations, with policy revisions reflecting a more inclusive framework.
- Civil society action and civic participation have been strengthened.
- The Project has also paved the way for social entrepreneurship among women.

These accomplishments collectively underscore the Project's substantial and multi-level impact on its target groups and beneficiaries.

**Conclusion 9 (Sustainability, key findings 13, 14, 15, 16):**

Concerning sustainability, a modest horizon unfolds, with moderate institutional capacity, resources that fluctuate or vary over time, and a visible void where policy aspirations await full implementation. While the Project has secured certain ongoing sustainability, the imperative is also highlighted for additional efforts in strengthening both national and local institutions. The current scenario reveals that policy and practice changes have only been partially institutionalized, suggesting a strong residual overreliance on external support, especially around policy and IPA gender mainstreaming (or any other developmental effort). This observation underscores a crucial remaining gap that warrants further attention and intervention and addressing this gap continues to be essential for fostering sustainable institutional development and ensuring a more self-reliant and resilient framework within national and local gender equality machinery, within the EU accession processes.

**Conclusion 10 (Human rights and gender equality, key findings 17, 18):**

The Project's design explicitly incorporates gender and human rights principles by prioritizing equal opportunities, challenging stereotypes, and promoting non-discrimination. Evidence suggests that the Project largely ensured equal opportunities for all, challenged area-based and gender discrimination, and promoted rights and dignity. Further improvements could have taken place around disability inclusion and overall, around inclusive consultations including within the intersectionality approaches.

## 6. Lessons learnt

### Lesson learnt 1:

#### Grants and Regranting Programs Enhance Project Effectiveness and Sustainability

Grants and regranting programs significantly enhance Project effectiveness and bolster sustainability. By channelling funds to diverse stakeholders, these programs foster innovation, empower local initiatives, and fortify Project impact.

Key benefits:

1. **Diverse Stakeholder Engagement:** Grants and regranting programs facilitate the engagement of diverse stakeholders, including CSOs, community groups, and local initiatives. This engagement enriches the Project by bringing in varied perspectives, expertise, and resources, ultimately enhancing its effectiveness.
2. **Innovation Catalyst:** By channelling funds to a wide range of stakeholders, grants and regranting programs serve as a catalyst for innovation within the Project. These programs enable grassroots organizations and community groups to experiment with new ideas, approaches, and solutions to address gender equality challenges in innovative ways.
3. **Empowerment of Local Initiatives:** Grants and regranting programs empower local initiatives and grassroots organizations to take ownership of gender equality initiatives. By providing direct funding and support, these programs enable local actors to lead projects that are tailored to the specific needs and priorities of their communities, thereby fostering sustainability.
4. **Fortification of Project Impact:** The involvement of diverse stakeholders through grants and regranting programs strengthens the impact of the Project. By empowering local actors to implement gender equality initiatives, these programs ensure that interventions are contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the needs of beneficiaries, thereby maximizing Project outcomes.
5. **Promotion of Sustainability:** Grants and regranting programs contribute to the sustainability of the Project by building the capacity of local organizations and initiatives. By providing financial support, technical assistance, and capacity-building opportunities, these programs equip local actors with the resources and skills needed to continue advancing gender equality beyond the duration of the Project.

In conclusion, the utilization of grants and regranting programs significantly enhances Project effectiveness and sustainability by fostering innovation, empowering local initiatives, and fortifying Project impact through diverse stakeholder engagement. This lesson underscores the importance of integrating such mechanisms into project design and implementation strategies to maximize the reach and long-term sustainability of gender equality initiatives.

### Lesson learnt 2:

#### Strengthening the Gender Machinery Requires Strategic Repositioning and Resource Mobilization

Strengthening of the gender machinery demands not only resource mobilization and capacity building but also a strategic repositioning within the political landscape, as this machinery suffers from a chronic lack of resources, severe understaffing, and a complex political climate where gender equality lacks prioritization. To 'fortify this machinery', strategic alliances, innovative funding models, and targeted advocacy efforts are imperative. Addressing the dearth of 'fuel for this machinery' necessitates engaging both domestic and international partners to infuse vital resources and elevate gender equality on the political agenda.

Below are some of the key points:

1. **Chronic Resource Constraints:** The gender machinery faces persistent challenges of resource scarcity, severe understaffing, and limited capacity, which hinder its effectiveness in promoting gender equality initiatives. This underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to address these constraints and enhance the machinery's capacity to fulfil its mandate.
2. **Complex Political Landscape:** Within a complex political climate where gender equality may lack prioritization, strategic repositioning of the gender machinery is essential. This involves navigating political dynamics, advocating for gender mainstreaming across policy domains, and fostering strategic alliances to advance gender equality objectives.
3. **Strategic Alliances and Partnerships:** To fortify the gender machinery, forging strategic alliances with diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, CSOs, and international partners, is imperative. Collaborative efforts can leverage complementary expertise, resources, and influence to drive systemic change and institutionalize gender-responsive policies.
4. **Innovative Funding Models:** Innovative funding models are crucial for addressing the chronic resource constraints facing the gender machinery. This may involve exploring alternative financing mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships, grant programs, and innovative financing instruments, to mobilize additional resources and sustain gender equality initiatives.
5. **Targeted Advocacy Efforts:** Targeted advocacy efforts are essential for elevating gender equality on the political agenda and garnering support for strengthening the gender machinery. Advocacy initiatives should aim to raise awareness, mobilize political will, and foster policy dialogue to prioritize gender equality as a fundamental aspect of sustainable development.
6. **Engagement of Domestic and International Partners:** Addressing the dearth of resources requires proactive engagement with both domestic and international partners. Collaborating with donors, development agencies, and multilateral organizations can facilitate resource mobilization efforts and amplify the impact of gender equality interventions at the national and international levels.

In conclusion, the lesson learned emphasizes that strengthening of the gender machinery necessitates not only resource mobilization and capacity building but also strategic repositioning within the political landscape. By forging strategic alliances, leveraging innovative funding models, and engaging in targeted advocacy efforts, it is possible to fortify the gender machinery and advance gender equality objectives in a complex and dynamic Serbian environment.

## 7. Recommendations

General recommendations are provided below and were validated by key stakeholders, namely the members of ERG.

### Recommendation 1

Priority: High urgency

Recognizing the role of the UN Women Office in Serbia and position in ECA RO, and the fact that this recommendation requires additional funding, this is to suggest to UN Women and donors, including EU Delegation/EU, to continue providing support to UN Women with an aim to keep on building capacity of the CSOs.

Hence, it is recommended to ensure stronger consistency and continuity of engagement with civil society in Serbia including via a) maintaining open and regular communication through consultations and feedback loops that can ensure responsiveness to the dynamic context, b) creating forums for knowledge sharing and mutual learning, c) investing in the in-kind capacity-building of CSOs to enhance their sustainability, d) establishing long-term collaboration frameworks with CSOs that can provide a stable framework for sustained collaboration.

The recommendation to UN Women and the donor community to ensure stronger consistency and continuity of engagement with civil society in Serbia is of high urgency given the dynamic context and the critical role of civil society in advancing gender equality.

To address this, UN Women may decide to take the following possible actions:

a) **Maintaining Open Communication:** UN Women should (re)establish open and regular communication channels with CSOs through consultations, dialogue sessions, and feedback loops. This will enable UN Women to stay informed about the evolving needs and priorities of CSOs and ensure responsiveness to their concerns and challenges.

b) **Creating Forums for Knowledge Sharing:** UN Women should create platforms and forums for knowledge sharing and mutual learning among CSOs. These forums can facilitate the exchange of best practices, lessons learned, and innovative approaches to gender equality programming, strengthening the collective capacity of CSOs to advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment.

c) **Investing in Capacity-Building:** UN Women should invest in the capacity-building of CSOs to enhance their organizational sustainability and effectiveness. This can include providing training, technical assistance, and resources to build the skills and expertise of CSOs. Evaluators are aware that this requires funding, and hence invite the donor community to consider similar actions.

d) **Establishing Long-Term Cooperation Frameworks:** UN Women, globally, should consider options for establishing long-term collaboration agreements with CSOs that provide a stable framework for sustained cooperation.

Responsibility for implementing these actions lies with the UN Women Office in Serbia, in collaboration with relevant partners, including government agencies, donors, and CSOs. UN Women should prioritize the establishment of dedicated project teams, subject to the availability of funds, responsible for civil society engagement and ensure that sufficient resources and support are allocated to effectively implement these recommendations, again subject to available funding.

Links with Conclusions and Findings:

Recommendation 1 is linked to Conclusion 1 (Relevance). Conclusion 1 is linked with key findings 1, 2 and 3.

## Recommendation 2

Priority: Utmost urgency

Enhance stakeholder involvement to ensure inclusivity, collaboration, and a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives, via regular consultations with a wider array of actors (employment agency, line ministries tasked with labor, health, education, safety, etc., CSOs not associated with grant funding, sector development experts, etc.) to gather feedback, insights, and recommendations, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process and by including groups such as EU Delegation staff, IPA programming consultants, and sector development experts in the gender mainstreaming teaching and technical assistance programs and other capacity building interventions.

The recommendation to UN Women to enhance stakeholder involvement for inclusivity, collaboration, and a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives is of utmost urgency given the complexity of gender issues and the need for inclusive decision-making processes.

To address this, UN Women may take the following possible actions:

a) **Regular Consultations with a Wide Array of Actors:** UN Women should initiate regular consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders, including employment agencies, line ministries responsible for labor, health, education, and safety, as well as CSOs not associated with grant funding and sector development experts. These consultations should be structured to gather feedback, insights, and recommendations on gender equality initiatives, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process.

b) **Inclusion of Additional Stakeholders in Capacity Building Programs:** UN Women should expand the scope of its capacity-building programs to include groups such as EU Delegation staff, IPA programming consultants, and sector development experts. These stakeholders should be invited to participate in gender mainstreaming training and technical assistance programs to enhance their understanding of gender issues and their capacity to integrate gender perspectives into their work.

Responsibility for implementing these actions lies with the UN Women Office in Serbia, in collaboration with relevant partners, including government agencies, donors, CSOs, and sector development experts. UN Women should prioritize the establishment of a dedicated project-related stakeholder engagement team, subject to the availability of funds responsible for coordinating consultations and capacity-building activities. Additionally, UN Women should allocate resources for outreach efforts, including organizing meetings, workshops, and training sessions, to ensure the active participation of a wide range of stakeholders in the gender equality agenda, again subject to available funds.

Links with Conclusions and Findings:

Recommendation 2 corresponds to Conclusion 4 (Coherence). Conclusion 4 is linked with key findings 4, 5 and 6. It is also linked with Conclusion 1 (Relevance). Conclusion 1 is linked with key findings 1, 2 and 3.

### Recommendation 3

Priority: High urgency

It is strongly recommended that grant programs to women's CSOs be sustained and prioritized through continued support or alternative funding mechanisms. This will ensure the ongoing empowerment of women's organizations, fostering their vital contributions to gender equality initiatives and wider community development.

The recommendation to sustain and prioritize grant programs for women's CSOs is of high urgency due to the crucial role these organizations play in advancing gender equality and community development.

To address this recommendation, UN Women may take the following possible actions:

a) **Continued Support for Grant Programs:** UN Women should prioritize the allocation of funds to sustain existing grant programs for women's CSOs. This includes providing financial support for capacity-building initiatives, advocacy campaigns, and community-based projects implemented by women's organizations. Evaluators recognize that the funds that UN Women Office in Serbia has are defined by project documents and donors and hence invite them to advocate with the donors for these funds.

b) **Exploration of Alternative Funding Mechanisms:** UN Women should explore alternative funding mechanisms to ensure the continued empowerment of women's CSOs. This may involve seeking partnerships with other donors, philanthropic organizations, and private sector entities to diversify funding sources and expand support for women-led initiatives.

c) **Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance:** UN Women should provide ongoing capacity-building and technical assistance to women's CSOs to enhance their organizational effectiveness, sustainability, and impact, subject to the availability of funds. This can include training workshops, mentoring programs, and access to resources and expertise to strengthen the capacity of women's organizations to implement gender equality initiatives.

d) **Monitoring and Evaluation:** UN Women should establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness and impact of its grant programs for women's CSOs. This includes tracking progress towards objectives, measuring outcomes and results, and capturing lessons learned to inform future programming and resource allocation.

Responsibility for implementing these actions lies with the UN Women Office in Serbia, in collaboration with relevant partners, including government agencies, donors, and women's CSOs. UN Women should prioritize the establishment of a dedicated project team responsible for managing grant programs and providing support to women's organizations, subject to the availability of funds. Additionally, UN Women should advocate for the continued prioritization of women's empowerment and gender equality in national development agendas to ensure sustained support for women's CSOs.

Recommendation 3 relates to Conclusions 5 and 6 (Effectiveness). Conclusions 5 and 6 on effectiveness relate to key findings 7, 8 and 9. It also relates to Conclusion 8 (Impact). Conclusion 8 relates to key finding 12.

### Recommendation 4

Priority: Critical urgency

Conduct a thorough needs assessment of governmental counterparts, including those that address gender equality horizontally, but also those whose sectoral policies are important for ensuring gender equality (e.g., employment, social affairs, climate change, transport, health, safety, education, etc.), to identify specific areas of gaps, underperformance, deficiency, and understaffing. Tailor the support program accordingly, addressing the identified gaps and building upon existing strengths. Consider developing performance improvement plans in collaboration with a wide array of national institutions, outlining specific steps and benchmarks for addressing deficiencies and enhancing performance over time within horizontal and sectoral, as well as national and local parts of gender equality machinery.

The recommendation to conduct a thorough needs assessment of governmental counterparts is of critical urgency to ensure effective collaboration and alignment of efforts towards gender equality.

To address this recommendation, UN Women may take the following possible actions:

a) **Conducting Needs Assessment:** UN Women should initiate a comprehensive needs assessment of governmental counterparts responsible for gender equality, as well as those with sectoral policies impacting gender equality. This assessment should identify specific areas of gaps, underperformance, deficiency, and understaffing within each institution.

b) **Tailoring Support Programs:** Based on the findings of the needs assessment, UN Women should tailor support programs to address the identified gaps and build upon the existing strengths of governmental counterparts. This may include capacity-building initiatives, technical assistance, and targeted interventions to enhance the effectiveness of gender equality policies and programs.

c) **Developing Performance Improvement Plans:** UN Women should collaborate with a wide array of national institutions to develop performance improvement plans that outline specific steps and benchmarks for addressing deficiencies and enhancing performance over time. These plans should be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and should encompass both horizontal and sectoral aspects of gender equality machinery at national and local levels.

Responsibility for implementing these actions lies with the UN Women Office in Serbia, in collaboration with relevant government agencies, CSOs, and other stakeholders. UN Women should prioritize the establishment of a dedicated project team responsible for conducting the needs assessment, designing support programs, and facilitating the development of performance improvement plans, subject to the availability of funds. Additionally, UN Women should advocate for the allocation of resources and support from government counterparts to ensure the successful implementation of these initiatives.

Recommendation 4 relates to Conclusions 5 and 6 (Effectiveness). Conclusion 5 and 6 on effectiveness relate to key findings 7, 8 and 9. It also relates to Conclusion 7 (Efficiency). Conclusion 7 on efficiency is related to key findings 10 and 11. It also relates to Conclusion 9 on Sustainability. Conclusion 9 is linked with key findings 13, 14, 15 and 16.

## Recommendation 5

Priority: Moderate

The recommendation to ensure the Project's visual identity, in the future similar actions, reflects national ownership to foster a sense of shared responsibility and commitment among stakeholders is of moderate urgency.

To address this, UN Women may take the following possible actions:

a) **Review and Revise Visual Identity:** UN Women should review the project's visual identity to ensure it aligns with national ownership, implementation arrangements, and funding. This may involve revising logos, branding materials, and communication channels to incorporate national elements and reflect collaborative partnerships.

b) **Develop Joint Communication Strategy:** UN Women should collaborate with national counterparts and donors to develop a joint communication strategy that emphasizes the collaborative nature of the project's visual identity. This strategy can include joint statements, press releases, and promotional materials highlighting national ownership and partnerships.

c) **Disseminate Communication Materials:** Once developed, UN Women should disseminate the communication materials widely to stakeholders, including government agencies, CSOs, donors, and the general public. This will help raise awareness about the project's collaborative approach and foster a sense of shared responsibility and commitment among all stakeholders.

Responsibility for implementing these actions lies with the UN Women Office in Serbia, in collaboration with national counterparts and donors. UN Women should prioritize the establishment of a dedicated project team responsible for reviewing and revising the project's visual identity and developing the joint communication strategy, subject to availability of funds. Additionally, UN Women should ensure ongoing coordination and consultation with national counterparts and donors throughout the implementation process to maintain alignment with national priorities and ownership.

Recommendation 5 is relevant to Conclusion 8 (Impact) and Conclusion 9 (Sustainability). Conclusion 8 on impact relates to key finding 12. Conclusion 9 on sustainability relates to key findings 13, 14, 15 and 16.



## 8. Annexes

### Annex 1: Evaluation Questions

The evaluation applied the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. This chapter presents the evaluation criteria and outlines key evaluation questions.

Evaluation Questions	
<b>Relevance – to what extent are the objectives of the project implemented consistent with needs, priorities and policies</b>	
	<p>What are the needs and priorities of women in Serbia that this Project responded to?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you see the implementation of the gender equality strategies and action plans in Serbia?</li> <li>• To what extent was the design of the intervention and its results relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?</li> <li>• Was the choice of interventions relevant to the situation of the target group?</li> </ul>
	To what extent key partners were involved in the Project’s conceptualization and design process?
	<p>To what extent have gender and human rights principles and strategies been integrated into the Project design and implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the intervention aligned with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the context of EU gender equality acquis?</li> <li>• To what extent did the Project contribute to achieving nationalized Sustainable Development Goals?</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness – how far were the project’s results attained and the project’s specific objectives achieved</b>	
4.	<p>To what extent has the Project delivered its outputs and contributed towards the expected outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the Project achieved any unforeseen results, either positive or negative? For whom?</li> </ul>
5.	<p>What are the reasons for the achievement or non-achievement of the Project results?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the good practices and the obstacles/shortcomings encountered? How were they overcome?</li> </ul>
6.	<p>How effective have the selected strategies and approaches been in achieving Project results?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an effective understanding of roles and responsibilities by all parties involved?</li> <li>• How well did the intervention succeed in building the capacities of the Project partners?</li> <li>• To what extent are the Project approaches and strategies innovative for achieving gender equality in Serbia?</li> <li>• What, if any, types of innovative good practices have been introduced in the Project for the achievement of GEEW results?</li> <li>• To what extent has the Project improved communication, coordination, and information exchange within the gender mechanisms at all levels?</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency – how well did the various activities transform the available resources into the intended results, in terms of quantity, quality and timeliness?</b>	

7.	<p>Have resources (e.g., financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the Project outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are the Project monitoring mechanisms in place effective for measuring and informing management of Project performance and progress towards targets? To what extent was the monitoring data objectively used for management action and decision-making?</li> <li>• Has there been effective leadership and management of the Project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results? Where does accountability lie? Have the outputs been delivered on time?</li> </ul>
8.	<p>Were there any constraints (e.g., political, practical, bureaucratic, etc.) identified in the implementation of the different actions and what level of effort was made to overcome these challenges?</p>
<p><b>Sustainability – are the positive outcomes of the projects and the flow of benefits likely to continue after external funding ends or without funding support interventions?</b></p>	
9.	<p>What is the likelihood that the benefits from the Project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the Project phases out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent did the Project succeed in building individual and institutional capacities of rights-holders and duty-bearers to ensure the sustainability of benefits and more inclusive practices for local development and good governance?</li> <li>• How effectively has the Project generated national ownership of the results achieved, the establishment of partnerships with relevant stakeholders and the development of national capacities to ensure the sustainability of efforts and benefits?</li> <li>• How effectively has the Project contributed to the establishment of effective partnerships and the development of national capacities?</li> <li>• What steps were taken to develop and/or reinforce the operating capacities of national partners during the implementation of the Project?</li> </ul>
10.	<p>To what extent has the Project been able to promote replication and/or up-scaling of successful practices?</p>
11.	<p>To what extent has the exit strategy been well planned and successfully implemented?</p>
<p><b>Coherence – is the project compatible with other relevant interventions?</b></p>	
12.	<p>Internal coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent does the Project fit within the UN Women’s Strategic Plan and interrelated threefold mandate?</li> <li>• Are there any synergies and interlinkages between the Project and other interventions of UN Women?</li> <li>• To what extent UN Women in Serbia has capitalized from GEF implementation in other countries and how UN Women has established synergies in terms of GEF implementation in the region?</li> </ul>
13.	<p>External coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national development strategies in the area of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment, and reflect national priorities and commitments on gender equality?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the Project complementary, harmonized and coordinated with the interventions of other actors in the same context?</li> <li>• To what extent does the implementation of the Project ensure synergies and coordination with the efforts of the Government and key partners while avoiding duplications?</li> <li>• To what extent are the interventions achieving synergies with the work of the UN Country Team?</li> <li>• What are UN Women’s comparative advantages in Serbia to implement this Project?</li> <li>• To what extent is the Project aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and nationalized SDGs?</li> </ul>
<b>Gender Equality and Human Rights</b>	
14.	<p>To what extent have gender and human rights principles and strategies been integrated into the Project design and implementation?</p> <p>To what extent participation and inclusiveness (concerning rights holders and duty bearers) were maximized in the Project’s planning, design, implementation and decision?</p>
15.	To what extent was disability inclusion integrated into Project planning and implementation?
<b>Impact</b>	
16.	What are the areas achieved or potential measurable impact of the Project? What is the impact on the target groups and beneficiaries at individual, community and institutional/system levels?
17.	How Project impacts, or is likely to impact, women, end beneficiaries and the most vulnerable groups?

## Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Questions	Indicators and Judgement Criteria	Data collection methods	Sampling/sources	
RELEVANCE				
1.	<p>What are the needs and priorities of the women in Serbia that this Project responded to?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you see the implementation of the gender equality strategies and action plans in Serbia?</li> <li>To what extent was the design of the intervention and its results relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?</li> <li>Was the choice of interventions relevant to the situation of the target group?</li> </ul>	<p>Documental evidence on needs and priorities consulted present in DoA.</p> <p>Evidence on the consultation process in preparation of the Project.</p> <p>Perception of stakeholders of correlation with the national policy priorities and interventions and legal framework.</p>	<p>Interviews, online survey, focus groups, outputs analysis, DoA analysis</p>	<p>Project outputs analysis</p> <p>Interviews or similar with UN Women, CBGE, donor, beneficiaries</p> <p>Sampling: IPA units, LSGs, GBs</p>
2.	<p>To what extent key partners were involved in the Project's conceptualization and design process?</p>	<p>Documental evidence on adherence to national gender equality policies and other development policies.</p>		
3.	<p>To what extent have gender and human rights principles and strategies been integrated into the Project design and implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is the intervention aligned with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of EU gender equality acquis?</li> <li>To what extent the Project contributed to achieving nationalized SDGs?</li> </ul>	<p>Documental evidence on adherence to international commitments (CEDAW, Beijing, SDGs), EU gender equality acquis.</p>		
EFFECTIVENESS				
4.	<p>To what extent has the Project delivered its outputs and contributed towards expected outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has the Project achieved any unforeseen results, either</li> </ul>	<p>Evidence of contributions to the different levels of the ToC.</p> <p>Evidence of progress towards identified targets.</p>	<p>Interviews, online survey, focus groups, outputs analysis,</p>	<p>Project outputs analysis</p> <p>Interviews or similar with UN Women,</p>

	<p>positive or negative? For whom?</p>	<p>Evidence of unexpected achievements (not envisaged by the Project document and intervention logic) and target groups and beneficiaries affected.</p> <p>Stakeholders' positive/negative reporting on achievements.</p>	<p>DoA analysis, reports analysis</p>	<p>CBGE, donor, beneficiaries</p> <p>Sampling: IPA units, LSGs, GBs</p>
5.	<p>What are the reasons for the achievement or non-achievement of the Project results?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the good practices and the obstacles or shortcomings encountered? How were they overcome?</li> </ul>	<p>Scope of internal and external enabling/impeding factors to successful Project implementation and achievement of results.</p> <p>Evidence of mitigation actions initiated to overcome the challenges.</p>		
6.	<p>How effective have the selected strategies and approaches been in achieving Project results?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an effective understanding of roles and responsibilities by all parties involved?</li> <li>• How well did the intervention succeed in building the capacities of the Project partners?</li> <li>• To what extent are the Project approaches and strategies innovative for achieving gender equality in Serbia?</li> <li>• What -if any- types of innovative good practices have been introduced in the Project for the achievement of GEEW results?</li> <li>• To what extent did the Project improve communication, coordination, and information exchange within the national gender machineries at all levels?</li> </ul>	<p>Level of contribution of different project strategies towards Project results.</p> <p>The extent to which innovative approaches are integrated into the Project design and implementation and the evidence of their contribution to Project results.</p> <p>Perception of stakeholders on contributions.</p>		
EFFICIENCY				

7.	<p>Have resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the Project outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent are the Project monitoring mechanisms in place effective for measuring and informing management of Project performance and progress towards targets? To what extent was the monitoring data objectively used for management action and decision-making?</li> <li>Has there been effective leadership and management of the Project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results? Where does accountability lie? Have the outputs been delivered in a timely manner?</li> </ul>	<p>Relative assessment of the investment of resources and complexity and achievements of Project components.</p> <p>Adequacy of organizational assets, structures and capabilities (in terms of financial and human resources).</p> <p>Effectiveness of internal coordination/communication (vertical/horizontal) mechanisms.</p> <p>Effectiveness of external coordination/communication mechanisms with partners and beneficiaries.</p> <p>The extent to which Project monitoring and reporting is results-based.</p> <p>Ability of Project staff to effectively capture, measure and monitor progress (using baseline data).</p> <p>Evidence of learning from the collected data being used to assess progress and adjust implementation.</p> <p>Degree of donor and partners' satisfaction with results-based reports.</p>	Interviews, online survey, focus groups, outputs analysis, DoA analysis	<p>Project outputs analysis</p> <p>Interviews or similar with UN Women, CBGE, donor, beneficiaries</p> <p>Sampling: IPA units, LSGs, GBs</p>
8.	<p>Were there any constraints (e.g., political, practical, bureaucratic) identified in the implementation of the different actions and what level of effort was made to overcome these challenges?</p>	<p>Perception of stakeholders' views on constraints. Scope and types of constraints identified, categorized by political, practical and bureaucratic.</p>		
SUSTAINABILITY				
9.	<p>What is the likelihood that the benefits from the Project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the Project phases out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent did the Project succeed in building individual</li> </ul>	<p>The elements that hampered sustainability have been identified to be taken into consideration in future actions.</p> <p>The financed projects have led to results that have the</p>	Interviews, online survey, focus groups, outputs analysis, DoA analysis	<p>Project outputs analysis</p> <p>Interviews or similar with UN Women, CBGE, donor, beneficiaries</p>

	<p>and institutional capacities of rights-holders and duty-bearers to ensure sustainability of benefits and more inclusive practices for local development and good governance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effectively has the Project generated national ownership of the results achieved, the establishment of partnerships with relevant stakeholders and the development of national capacities to ensure the sustainability of efforts and benefits?</li> <li>• How effectively has the Project contributed to the establishment of effective partnerships and the development of national capacities?</li> <li>• What steps were taken to develop and/or reinforce the operating capacities of national partners during the implementation of the Project?</li> </ul>	<p>potential to last after the end of the funding and that contributed to financial, institutional, service, policy sustainability.</p> <p>Evidence of changes in knowledge/behaviors/skills in partners and target groups to sustain the results.</p> <p>Evidence of knowledge/skills being applied.</p> <p>Evidence of accountability and oversight systems.</p> <p>Identification of the scope of changes in operating capacities. Number and type of changes (including potential policy changes) that are likely to continue after the Project ends without additional financing.</p> <p>Evidence of rights holders articulating their priorities and needs; accessing services; and contributing to national/ local planning and development.</p>		<p>Sampling: IPA units, LSGs, GBs</p>
10.	To what extent has the Project been able to promote replication and/or up-scaling of successful practices?	<p>Evidence of replicated and up-scaled practices.</p> <p>Perception of stakeholders on the effectiveness of these practices and contribution to sustainability.</p>		
11.	To what extent has the exit strategy been well planned and successfully implemented?	<p>There is a sustainability strategy, and it is followed.</p> <p>Documental evidence on sustainability plans.</p>		
COHERENCE				
12.	<p>Internal coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent does the Project fit within the UN Women's Strategic Plan and</li> </ul>	<p>There is an internal coherence, consistency between activities, outputs and outcomes, consistency between indicators and outputs/outcomes.</p>	<p>Interviews, online survey, focus groups, outputs analysis, DoA analysis</p>	<p>Project outputs analysis</p> <p>Interviews or similar with UN Women,</p>

	<p>interrelated threefold mandate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any synergies and interlinkages between the Project and other interventions of UN Women?</li> <li>• To what extent UN Women in Serbia has capitalized from GEF implementation in other countries and how UN Women has established synergies in terms of GEF implementation in the region?</li> </ul>	<p>Level of alignment of the Project with UN Women strategic priorities.</p> <p>Evidence on similarities among objectives with other projects of UN Women Office in Serbia.</p> <p>The existence of mechanisms of internal coordination in planning, implementation, and reporting.</p> <p>Perception of comparative advantages.</p>		<p>CBGE, donor, beneficiaries</p> <p>Sampling: IPA units, LSGs, GBs</p>
13.	<p>External coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national development strategies in the area of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment, and reflect national priorities and commitments on gender equality?</li> <li>• To what extent the Project is in complementarity, harmonized and coordinated with the interventions of other actors’ interventions in the same context?</li> <li>• To what extent does the implementation of the Project ensures synergies and coordination with the Government’s and key partners’ relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?</li> <li>• To what extent are the interventions achieving synergies with the work of the UN Country Team?</li> <li>• What are UN Women’s comparative advantages in Serbia to implement this Project?</li> </ul>	<p>Synergies are built and duplications are avoided.</p> <p>Documental evidence on adherence to national gender equality policies and other relevant policies.</p> <p>Perception of stakeholders of correlation with the national policy priorities and interventions and legal framework.</p>		



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is the Project aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and nationalized SDGs?</li> </ul>			
GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS				
14.	<p>To what extent have gender and human rights principles and strategies been integrated into the Project design and implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent participation and inclusiveness (with respect to rights holders and duty bearers) was maximized in the Project's planning, design, implementation and decision?</li> </ul>	<p>Evidence of the extent to which interventions consider/address the needs of women, including women from marginalized groups.</p> <p>Alignment of partner's mandates with the areas and strategies of intervention.</p> <p>Perception and evidence of the influence of partners on the thematic areas of the Project.</p> <p>The ability of partners to reach the target groups and beneficiaries (capacity, sector-wise, geographically).</p>	Interviews, online survey, focus groups, outputs analysis, DoA analysis	<p>Project outputs analysis</p> <p>Interviews or similar with UN Women, CBGE, donor, beneficiaries</p> <p>Sampling: IPA units, LSGs, GBs</p>
15.	To what extent was disability inclusion integrated in project planning and implementation?	<p>Evidence on disability inclusion.</p> <p>Budget allocation for disability inclusion.</p>		
IMPACT				
16.	What are the areas achieved or potential measurable impact of the Project? What is the impact on the target groups and beneficiaries at individual, community, and institutional/system levels?	Evidence on long-term and sustainable changes or positive trends that benefit target groups and end users (at individual, collective, institutional/systemic level and the societal level).	Interviews, online survey, focus groups, outputs analysis, DoA analysis	<p>Project outputs analysis</p> <p>Interviews or similar with UN Women, CBGE, donor, beneficiaries</p>
17.	How Project impacts, or is likely to impact, women end beneficiaries and the most vulnerable groups?	Evidence on long-term and sustainable changes or positive trends on benefits to end beneficiaries.		<p>Sampling: IPA units, LSGs, GBs</p>

## Annex 3: Result Framework

<p>The Overall Objective/Impact:</p> <p>The Government of Serbia consistently complies with national and international gender equality commitments and EU Gender Equality Acquis.</p>		<p>Objectively verifiable indicators:</p> <p>Indicator 1: Positive review of annual progress on gender in Serbia concerning the implementation of EU Gender Equality Acquis.<sup>65</sup></p> <p>Baseline: No</p> <p>Target: Yes</p> <p>Means of Verification: Serbia Annual Report</p> <p>Data collection method: Review of the Annual EU Progress Report for Serbia</p>	
<p>Specific Objective/Outcome:</p> <p>Serbian administrative capacities are strengthened for integrating and implementing EU and national gender equality commitments in strategies, plans, budgets and EU funds management.</p>		<p>Objectively verifiable indicators:</p> <p>Outcome Indicator 1: <i>Number of sector strategies, budgets and EU programming documents that include gender equality considerations: a) sex-disaggregated data and indicators, and/or b) section on gender analysis and/or c) specific activities or result(s) on gender equality and women's empowerment.</i></p> <p>Baseline: 7 strategies; 33 budgets (2019)</p> <p>Target: 15 strategies and plans, 56 budgets by the end of 2024.</p> <p>Means of Verification: Sector strategies, Annual GRB report, IPA gender Annexes</p> <p>Data collection method: Review of the Documents</p>	
		<p>Outcome Indicator 2: <i>All elements required under the Cohesion Policy (Chapter 22) thematic enabling condition for gender equality embedded into the new National Strategy for Gender Equality and corresponding Action Plan.</i></p> <p>Baseline: NA</p> <p>Target: Fulfilled by the end of 2024</p> <p>Means of Verification: Review of the Document</p> <p>Data collection method: Review of the Document/Agreement</p>	
<i>Results</i>	<i>Objectively Verifiable Indicators</i>	<i>Sources of Verification</i>	<i>Assumptions and Risks</i>

<sup>65</sup> The European Commission issues Annual Report to accession countries on the annual basis, and identifies and measures progress in each negotiation chapter.

<p>Result 1/Output 1:</p> <p>The National Gender Machinery system has knowledge and capacities for the accomplishment of gender equality and women’s empowerment standards and principles.</p>	<p>O1.1: Number of civil servants trained to perform gender mainstreaming in their sectors.</p> <p>Baseline: 0</p> <p>Target: 100 civil servants trained</p>	<p>MV1.1: Assessment reports, training reports</p> <p>Data collection method: Standardized pre and post-test assessments</p>	<p><i>Assumptions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political commitment of the Government of Serbia to develop and implement Gender Equality related policies.</li> <li>Commitment and adequate capacities of beneficiary institutions to absorb assistance and to implement Project activities.</li> </ul> <p><i>Risks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weak interest and resistance of key stakeholders to get involved and participate in the implementation of Project activities.</li> <li>The establishment of the permanent Government structure on gender equality delayed.</li> <li>Escalation of a health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>
	<p>O1.2: National Strategy for Gender Equality with the following Action Plan developed.</p> <p>Baseline: No</p> <p>Target: Yes</p>	<p>MV1.2: Project reports, reports from public hearings, reports from consultations, draft National Strategy and NAP</p> <p>Data collection methods: Review of Project reports</p>	
<i>Activities</i>			
<p><b>Activity A1:</b> Support to the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and other institutions involved in the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality, Budget System Law and Law on Planning System to provide recommendations and advocate for inclusion of gender equality considerations.</p>			
<p><b>Activity A2:</b> Efficient horizontal and vertical coordination in the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality, and EU Gender Equality Acquis, between the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, line ministries through gender focal points, and with the provincial and local gender equality bodies.</p>			
<p><b>Activity A3:</b> Local gender equality mechanism and civil servants enhance capacities for gender-responsive governance: planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting; and for gender mainstreaming in their respective sectors and in line with their mandates and functions.</p>			
<i>Results</i>	<i>Objectively Verifiable Indicators</i>	<i>Sources of Verification</i>	<i>Assumptions and Risks</i>
Result 2/ Output 2:	O2.1: Number of civil servants trained on the inclusion of gender equality, non-	MV2.1: Assessment reports, training reports.	<i>Assumption</i>

Civil servants responsible for EU funds programming, implementation and monitoring strengthened their knowledge and skills to comply with principles of non-discrimination, gender equality and accessibility.	discrimination and disability principles in the management of EU-funded programs.  Baseline: 50  Target: 100 civil servants trained	Data collection: Standardized pre and post-test assessments, participants list.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political commitment of the Government of Serbia to implement Gender Equality commitments.</li> <li>Adequate capacities of beneficiary institutions to absorb assistance and to implement Project activities.</li> </ul> <i>Risks</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some implementing partners experience difficulties or lack of capacity to implement some of the Project activities.</li> <li>Escalation of a health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>
	O2.2: Number of IPA programming documents that include a) sex-disaggregated data and indicators; and/or b) section on gender; and/or c) specific activities or result(s) on gender equality and women's empowerment.  Baseline: Five IPA programming documents in 2019/2020 are gender sensitive.  Target: At least ten IPA programming documents are gender sensitive.	MV2.2: IPA Action documents (action fiches)  Data collection: Review of IPA Action documents	
<i>Activities</i>			
<b>Activity B1:</b> Capacity development of the public administration in the fields of gender equality, non-discrimination and persons with disabilities policies related to the programming, implementation and monitoring of EU funds, in accordance with the cohesion policy general enabling conditions and IPA III requirements.			
<b>Activity B2:</b> Support the national authorities in establishing an internal system for integration of gender equality, anti-discrimination and accessibility principles into the IPA III programming, IPA III procedures for programming and monitoring, as well as cohesion policy programming documents.			
<i>Results</i>	<i>Objectively Verifiable Indicators</i>	<i>Sources of Verification</i>	<i>Assumptions and Risks</i>
Result 3/Output 3:  Women's CSOs are supported to influence the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and projects and to promote a culture of tolerance, equality and non-discrimination.	O3.1: Number of partner agreements signed with women civil society organizations implementing activities related to public awareness of the significance of gender equality and the importance of active involvement of women in the labour market.  Baseline: 3  Target: Up to 21 partners agreements signed with	MV3.1: Project reports  Data collection methods: Review of grantees' reports	<i>Assumptions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political commitment of the Government of Serbia to implement the National Strategy for Gender Equality and ensure implementation of the NAP.</li> <li>Active participation and adequate capacities of women's CSOs to engage in project interventions.</li> </ul>

	women’s civil society organizations.		<i>Risks</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient commitment of decision makers to gender equality and to involve women’s CSOs, resulting in inadequate support.</li> <li>• Escalation of a health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>
	O3.2: Number of women benefitting from the empowerment projects provided within the Project.  Baseline: 3,000 at the beginning of the Project.  Target: 6,000 women benefitting from the Project.	MV3.2: Project reports  Data collection methods: Review of Project reports	
<i>Activities</i>			
<b>Activity C1:</b> Launch the Call for Proposals and select women’s CSOs as the responsible parties for the implementation of projects.			
<b>Activity C2:</b> Support and monitor women’s CSOs selected as the responsible parties in the implementation of awarded projects.			
<b>Activity C3:</b> Establish systematic cooperation between women’s CSOs and gender mechanisms at all levels.			

## Annex 4: Documents Reviewed

<b>Project documents</b>	
1.	DoA
2.	Donor Reports and annexes
3.	Steering Committee meeting minutes
4.	Communications and Visibility Strategy
5.	Previous Evaluation Report (GEF I)
<b>Project products and other related documents</b>	
1.	2022 and 2023 Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality until 2030
2.	Gender Equality Impact Test with accompanying Guidelines for implementing Gender Equality Impact Test; Gender Equality Impact Test for the Draft Law on Public Information and Media, Social Protection Law, and Draft Law on the Management of Companies Owned by the Republic of Serbia
3.	Reports and records related to the support provided to IPA units (i.e., materials related to three trainings, action documents and operational programme, a report from the study visit to Portugal on the management of the structural funds and cohesion fund)
4.	The document on IPA III Cross Border Cooperation Programme 2021-2027 with gender-sensitive recommendations
5.	Documents concerning the Horizontal Facility programme with gender-sensitive recommendations
6.	Draft Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan of the Republic of Serbia with gender-sensitive input
7.	Reports and records of supporting LSGs (justification note, overview of supported projects)
8.	Documentation concerning conducted calls for proposals for civil society organizations and overview of supported projects
9.	Report on the development of a functional specification of the IT system for reporting and monitoring the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality
10.	Report: EU Gender Country Profile for Serbia
11.	Report: Women's Entrepreneurship in Serbia – 10 years later
<b>Other</b>	
1.	UNEG, "Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation – Towards UNEG Guidance"; UNEG, "Handbook for Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality Perspectives in Evaluations in the UN System"
2.	OECD-DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance: <a href="https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm">https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm</a>
3.	UN Women, "How to Manage Gender-responsive Evaluation – Evaluation Handbook"
4.	EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) 2021–2025
5.	World Bank, "Serbia Policy Notes"

6	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, "Serbian Economy Macroeconomic Overview 2022"
7	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, "Demographic Yearbook, 2022"
8	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, "Labour Force Survey 2022"
9	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, "Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia 2024"
10	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, "Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia 2020"
11	UNDP, "Human Development Report 2021/2022"
12	Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, "Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia 2021 – Digitalization, future of work and gender equality"
13	Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, "Report on the Achievement of Gender Equality in the Republic of Serbia for the Year 2022"
14	FemPlatz, "Report on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Serbia for the Year 2020"
15	Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, "Report Following Her Visit to Serbia from 13 to 17 March 2023"
16	European Commission, "Commission Staff Working Document – Serbia 2023 Report"
17	UN Women, "Economic Value of the Unpaid Care Work in the Republic of Serbia"
18	FemPlatz, "Report on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Serbia for the Year 2023"

## Annex 5: List of Consulted Stakeholders

No.	Name and Surname	Institution/Organization	Position	Type	Date
1.	Jelena Sekulić Nedeljković	UN Women Office in Serbia	Project Officer	Survey and group interview	18/12/23
2.	Aleksandra Miletić	UN Women Office in Serbia	Project Officer	Survey and group interview	18/12/23
3.	Nevena Marčeta	UN Women Office in Serbia	Project Officer	Survey and group interview	18/12/23
4.	Jovan Grubić	UN Women Office in Serbia	Project Assistant	Survey and group interview	18/12/23
5.	Olja Janković Leković	UN Women Office in Serbia	Gender Responsive Budgeting Programme Coordinator	Individual interview	22/12/23
6.	Bojana Barlovac	UN Women Office Serbia	Communications Officer	Individual interview	22/12/23
7.	Ana Milenić	Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia	Task manager/Gender focal point	Individual interview	27/12/23
8.	Stana Božović	Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography	State Secretary and Chairperson of the expert group of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality	Group interview	27/12/23
9.	Dragan Knežević	Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography	Advisor	Group interview	27/12/23
10.	Gordana Gavrilović	Coordination Body for Gender Equality	Advisor to the President of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality	Group interview	28/12/23
11.	Marijana Atanacković	Coordination Body for Gender Equality	Consultant	Group interview	28/12/23
12.	Nikola Radojlović	Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue	Head of the Department for Anti-Discrimination Policy, Independent Advisor	Individual interview	29/1/24
13.	Milica Radovanović Dumonjić	Ministry of European Integration	Head of Group for monitoring of EU funds and development assistance of Social Development Sector	Group interview	26/12/23



14.	Maja Majić	Ministry of European Integration	Independent Advisor, Group for planning and programming EU (IPA) funds and development assistance	Group interview	26/12/23
15.	Sanja Gavranović	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs	Head of the Group for administrative and administrative-supervisory tasks in the field of employment	Individual interview	28/12/23
16.	Ognjen Bogdanović	Public Policy Secretariat of the Republic of Serbia	Head of the Department for Regulatory Quality and Impact Assessment	Group interview	25/12/23
17.	Suzana Stojadinović	Public Policy Secretariat of the Republic of Serbia	Senior Advisor	Group interview	25/12/23
18.	Dragana Đoković Papić	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia	Head of Department for Sustainable Development Goals, Socio-Economic Indicators and Judicial Statistics	Individual interview	25/12/23
19.	Jelena Bešlin	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs	IPA unit	Focus group discussion	26/12/23
20.	Dejan Gojković	Ministry of European Integration	IPA unit	Focus group discussion	26/12/23
21.	Stana Babić	Ministry of European Integration	IPA unit	Focus group discussion	26/12/23
22.	Milena Vukčević	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government	IPA unit	Focus group discussion	26/12/23
23.	Đorđe Višić	Ministry of Construction, Transportation and Infrastructure	IPA unit	Focus group discussion	26/12/23
24.	Jovan Aksentijević	Council for Gender Equality, Aranđelovac	Member	Group interview	26/1/24
25.	Tijana Kostić	Council for Gender Equality, Užice	Member	Group interview	26/1/24
26.	Milica Ilić	Council for Gender Equality, Petrovac na Mlavi	Member	Group interview	26/1/24
27.	Danijela Pavlović	Commission for Gender Equality, Aleksinac	Member	Group interview	10/1/24

28.	Gordana Milovanović	Office for Local Economic Development, Aleksinac	Head	Group interview	10/1/24
29.	Snežana Živadinović	Association for Development of Creativity	President of the Board of Directors and Programme Manager	Field visit (group interview) and survey	FV: 10/1/24 S: 2/2/24
30.	Slađana Božilović	Association for Development of Creativity	Member of the Association	Field visit (group interview)	10/1/24
31.	Ljiljana Petrović	Association of Citizens Laris	President	Focus group discussion and survey	FGD: 26/1/24 S: 4/2/24
32.	Radoslava Aralica	Zrenjanin Educational Center	President	Focus group discussion and survey	FGD: 26/1/24 S: 12/2/24
33.	Jelena Ružić	Women's Association of Kolubara District	President	Focus group discussion and survey	FGD: 26/1/24 S: 1/2/24
34.	Ljubinka Ljujić Tomašević	Women's Forum Prijepolje	Projects Coordinator	Focus group discussion and survey	FGD: 26/1/24 S: 2/2/24
35.	Milena Bogavac	Center E8	Creative Director	Focus group discussion and survey	FGD: 26/1/24 S: 1/2/24
36.	Malina Stanojević	Save the Village Priboj	President	Focus group discussion and survey	FGD: 26/1/24 S: 2/2/24
37.	Radmila Gujaničić	Women's Center Uzice	Member	Focus group discussion	26/1/24
38.	Marina Tucović	Women's Center Uzice	President	Survey	8/2/24
39.	Karolina Stamenković	Handicrafts of Luznica WEC	Coordinator	Survey	2/2/24
40.	Dragana Panajotović	Association of Business Women	Executive Director	Survey	9/2/24

41.	Jana Zabunov	Women's Entrepreneurship Academy	Director	Survey	6/2/24
42.	Aleksandar Macura	RES Foundation	Co-founder and Programme Director	Survey	8/2/24
43.	Biljana Janjić	FemPlatz	Executive Director	Survey	20/2/24
44.	Jelena Konstantinović	Association Amity	Project Coordinator	Survey	6/2/24
45.	Jelena Jelić	Belgrade Centre for Human Rights	Projects Coordinator of the Criminal Justice Program	Survey	2/2/24
46.	Milanka Furtula	Association Big Heart	President	Individual Interview	31/1/24
47.	Anica Bratić	Association Big Heart	Member	Individual Interview	31/1/24
48.	Rada Jeremić	Association Big Heart	Member	Individual Interview	31/1/24
49.	Marija Babović	SeConS – Development Initiative Group	Gender equality expert	Individual interview	18/12/23
50.	Zorana Antonijević	/	Gender equality expert	Individual interview	22/12/23
51.	Kosana Beker	FemPlatz	Gender equality expert	Individual interview	30/1/24

## Annex 6: Data Collection Instruments

### Annex 6.1 Questionnaire for UN Women Project Team

Evaluation Criteria	Questions
Relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why was your project relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries and the needs of the targeted areas?</li> <li>2. What sources of information and resources have been used in the design of the projects and is this found appropriate?</li> <li>3. Have any changes occurred in the external environment that undermine or enhance the relevance of the project?</li> <li>4. Have you carried out an assessment of needs when deciding on implementation modalities?</li> <li>5. To what extent are the objectives, in your opinion, still valid?</li> <li>6. Do you believe that there is a continued need for this kind of assistance in the future, if yes/no. why?</li> </ol>
Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? If an objective could not be achieved, what was the reason? (specify per defined project results – impact, outcomes, outputs)</li> <li>2. To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged, given the resources, timing and activity arrangements? If not, why not? Are there unintended results?</li> <li>3. Were you confronted with any constraints and challenges and how did you address them?</li> <li>4. Were the chosen implementation modalities, partnerships, etc. conducive for achieving the stated objectives?</li> <li>5. What are the factors (positive/negative) that influenced projects' (non) achievements?</li> </ol>
Efficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Did you have sufficient resources (staff, equipment, finance, etc.)?</li> <li>2. Did the administrative and organisational structures ensure efficient implementation, cost-effectiveness and accountability?</li> <li>3. Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?</li> <li>4. Were the project activities implemented in a timely manner?</li> <li>5. What measures have been taken to ensure efficient use of resources?</li> <li>6. To what extent does the project structure, per your opinion, enable efficient and effective implementation of activities and realization of the project's outputs and expected results?</li> <li>7. Were there any changes in procedures since the start of the project and if yes, why?</li> <li>8. What procedures are in place to ensure efficient implementation of activities and achievement of results?</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Were there any changes introduced as a result of monitoring? If yes, which ones and why?</li> <li>10. What mechanisms are in place to ensure coordination between the UN project team and beneficiaries, project partners and other donors/stakeholders?</li> <li>11. What procedures, rules and measures are taken to ensure visibility of the project and donors?</li> </ol>
Sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to sustain results?</li> <li>2. How can the sustainability of the project be improved?</li> <li>3. Are there good practices inherent to the project which could be useful to share beyond the project context?</li> <li>4. Has the UN project team actively engaged with final beneficiaries/grantees to ensure the sustainability of the project? If affirmative, please elaborate on the specific measures undertaken, such as capacity-building initiatives, knowledge transfer, or collaborative planning. If negative, kindly provide insights into the reasons behind the limited engagement and any identified challenges or constraints."Are there any risks to the sustainability of supported grants? If yes, what are they?</li> <li>5. Are there any political, legal and financial obstacles from the beneficiary side to the sustainability of project outputs?</li> <li>6. Is there a sustainability strategy? Are there activities related to ensuring sustainability?</li> </ol>
Added Value	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your project's unique contribution to the relevant sectors covered?</li> <li>2. What is the additional value of UN Women as an implementing party?</li> <li>3. What is the EU-added value of the Project?</li> </ol>
Impact	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What concrete impact has the project made? What has changed?</li> <li>2. Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? Examples?</li> </ol>
Coherence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Could you provide specific comments and observations regarding the internal coherence (within project components and team) and external coherence (alignment with broader organizational goals, stakeholder collaboration) of the project? Please highlight instances of effective coordination or challenges faced in achieving a cohesive project strategy.</li> <li>2. To what extent does the project fit within the UN Women's Strategic Plan and interrelated threefold mandate?</li> <li>3. Are there any synergies and interlinkages between the project and other interventions of UN Women?</li> <li>4. To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national development strategies in the area of gender equality and elimination of violence against women and girls, and reflect Serbian and Montenegrin national priorities and commitments on GE and EVAWG?</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. How does the project reflect and align with Serbian national strategic plans and normative frameworks and Serbia’s international obligations and commitments in the field of women’s rights and elimination of violence against women and girls?</li> <li>6. To what extent the project is in complementarity, harmonized and coordinated with the interventions of other actors’ interventions in the same context?</li> <li>7. To what extent does the implementation of the project ensure synergies and coordination with key partners' relevant efforts while avoiding duplications?</li> <li>8. To what extent are the interventions achieving synergies with the work of the UN Country Team?</li> <li>9. What are UN Women’s comparative advantage in Serbia to implement this project?</li> </ol>
GEWE and disability inclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what extent have gender and human rights principles and strategies been integrated into the project design and implementation?</li> <li>2. To what extent participation and inclusiveness (with respect to rights holders and duty bearers) was maximized in the Project’s planning, design, implementation and decision?</li> <li>3. To what extent disability inclusion was integrated into project planning and implementation?</li> </ol>
Recommendations	What recommendations would you make for the future?
Any other comments	

## Annex 6.2 Key Questions for KIIs

1. Please briefly describe your role in the organization. How long you have held the role? What is your role in the GEF II project?
2. Have you cooperated with the GEF II project and how?
3. Were you asked to take part in the programming/project preparation of the GEF II (your organisation)? *Note that this question is relevant only for the representatives of the institutions that are main political partners (i.e., CBGE and MEI).*
4. How relevant is GEF II for the national/local needs and priorities? Why?
5. From your perspective, what are the major problems in your area of jurisdiction?
6. What exactly are your priorities that are addressed through GEF II?
7. Has the GEF II project contributed to improving the overall situation in your jurisdiction and in what respect?
8. Are you taking part in the implementation of the GEF II, i.e., are you asked for opinions and can you influence decision-making and flow of action?
9. What mechanisms are in place to ensure coordination between the UN project team and beneficiaries, project partners and other donors/stakeholders? In your opinion, is the level of coordination adequate for achieving the expected results?
10. Is UN Women delivering well, as per your opinion? What are particularly satisfactory results of the UN Women support/projects? What were the challenges and issues? What could have been done better, in your opinion?
11. Are there still uncovered needs to be addressed by potential donors?
12. To what extent was the financial contribution justified by the benefits generated, in your opinion?
13. In your opinion, was the project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives?

Please consider the following aspects of efficiency:

- a. Resource Utilization: How effectively were financial, human, and other resources managed throughout the project?
- b. Timeliness: To what extent were project activities completed within established timelines?
- c. Cost-effectiveness: Were project outcomes achieved in a cost-effective manner?
- d. Workflow and Processes: How streamlined were the project's workflows and internal processes?
- e. Innovation: Were innovative approaches or technologies employed to enhance project efficiency?
- f. Lessons Learned: Were lessons from previous phases incorporated to improve efficiency in subsequent activities?
- g. Adaptive Management: How well did the project adapt to unforeseen challenges or changes in circumstances?
- h. Stakeholder Engagement: How efficiently were stakeholders involved and their input considered in decision-making?

- i. Monitoring and Evaluation: How robust were the project's monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in ensuring efficiency?
  - j. Any other factors you believe contributed to or hindered the overall efficiency of the project.
14. Are these projects sustainable, in your opinion? Are there any political, legal and financial obstacles from the beneficiary side to the sustainability of project outputs?
  15. What is the level of local ownership of these projects, in your opinion?
  16. Do you believe that there is a continued need for this kind of assistance in the future? Why?
  17. Any other comments/recommendations.



### Annex 6.3 Survey for Women's CSOs

The project *Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia, phase II* (GEF II) is implemented by UN Women in cooperation with the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and the Ministry of European Integration, with the financial support of the European Union, in the period from March 2021 to February 2024.

This short questionnaire was designed as part of the project evaluation process to gather information about the experiences of civil society organisations that had the opportunity to participate in the GEF II project. Experiences, observations and recommendations of organisations are of great importance for the evaluation to be based on quality data.

All answers are confidential and the findings will be presented in such a way that it will not be possible to connect the identity of the organisation with specific information.

We sincerely thank you for your willingness to contribute to the evaluation of the project and enable recommendations for future similar projects to be based on the experiences and needs of civil society.

1. Name of the organisation
2. Name and position of the person who filled out the questionnaire
3. How did you find out about the possibility to participate in the GEF II project, within which you received a grant?

It is possible to choose more than one answer

- Directly, in direct contact with UN Women employees (via e-mail, phone, orally)
  - Through the UN Women website/social media accounts
  - Through the website/social media accounts of another UN agency
  - Via website/social media accounts or in direct contact with employees of institutions or international organisations that are not part of the UN system
  - From another civil society organization (in direct contact, via website, social networks, mailing list, etc.)
  - From friends, acquaintances
  - Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
4. Was it difficult to make a successful application and receive a grant?
    - It was not difficult at all
    - It was a bit difficult
    - It was very difficult
  5. Please explain what was challenging in preparing the application and the grant process. (*The question was shown to those who answered "It was a bit difficult" or "It was very difficult"*)
  6. During the preparation of the project proposal, did you spend money on the preparation of the proposal (e.g., paying a consultant to prepare the project proposal, paying for translation, etc.)?
    - Yes
    - No

7. During the preparation of the project application, did you receive appropriate support from UN Women employees (e.g., through info sessions, additional clarifications, etc.)?
- Yes
  - No
  - We didn't need support
8. Please indicate what was missing for the support to be adequate. *(The question was shown to those who answered "No")*
9. How would you rate the quality of the information and knowledge obtained through kick-off training(s) and other activities undertaken by the UN Women that aimed at assisting with the rules for grant implementation?
- Very good
  - Good
  - Acceptable
  - Poor
  - Very poor
10. How would you rate the quality of the guidance that you received from UN Women during the implementation of your projects?
- Excellent
  - Above average
  - Average
  - Bellow average
  - Very poor
11. Do you consider that participation in the GEF II project has contributed towards increasing your capacities for project planning and preparation?
- Yes. Please, briefly elaborate as to why\_\_\_\_\_
  - No. Please, briefly elaborate as to why\_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you consider that participation in the GEF II project has contributed towards increasing your capacities for grant management and implementation of grants?
- Yes. Please, briefly elaborate as to why\_\_\_\_\_
  - No. Please, briefly elaborate as to why\_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you consider that participation in the GEF II project positively influenced your role in the local community?
- Yes. Please, briefly elaborate as to why\_\_\_\_\_
  - No. Please, briefly elaborate as to why\_\_\_\_\_

14. In your opinion, what made your project application successful? What did you emphasize in your application that you think contributed to the donor's approval of your project?
15. For the needs of this project, has someone assessed the capacities of your organization to implement the given project?
  - Yes
  - No
16. Please specify who and how assessed the capacities of your organization to implement the given project. *(The question was shown to those who answered "Yes")*
17. How important is the financial support you received through this project to your organisation? Why is it important?
18. What were the biggest challenges in implementing the project? Please explain the specific difficulties you encountered. Consider aspects such as administrative processes, communication channels, availability of resources, collaboration with stakeholders, and any other factors that contributed to perceived difficulties in implementing the grant. Providing specific examples and recommendations for improvement would be valuable.
19. Please describe in one sentence the change that you achieved with this project.
20. Do you think that the criteria for selecting beneficiaries within this grant scheme were adequate?
  - Yes
  - No
21. What would you change concerning the criteria for selecting beneficiaries within this grant scheme? *(The question was shown to those who answered "No")*
22. Please provide suggestions for improving similar grant schemes in the future. Do you think that this grant scheme could be organized differently and in what way?
23. Do you think there is a need for this type of help in the future? Please explain your answer.
24. If you have any other comments, please state them below.

## Annex 6.4 Key Questions for FGDs

1. How did you learn about GEF II and become involved?
2. What were your personal benefits from taking part in the project? What are the benefits for the organization?
3. How important is the support you received? Why?
4. To your knowledge, what is the unique role of the GEF II project and EU support to UN Women? What is the comparative advantage of UN Women as the implementing partner?
5. What could have been done better?
6. Are there still uncovered needs to be addressed by potential donors and UN Women in the area of GEF?
7. Could the projects be more efficiently implemented otherwise, in your experience?
8. Do you believe that there is a continued need for this kind of assistance in the future? Please elaborate your answer.
9. What recommendations would you make for a future? Any other comments?

### Annex 6.5 Key Questions for the Donor

1. From your perspective, what are the major problems related to the implementation of gender-responsive development programs in the country?
2. What exactly are your priorities around this issue?
3. What comments do you have on GEF II relevance for the needs and priorities?
4. Are there still uncovered needs to be addressed by potential donors, including you?
5. What is the unique role of the EU support to UN Women, if any?
6. To what extent do you find EU support for UN Women effective?
7. To what extent was the financial contribution justified by the benefits generated, in your opinion?
8. Was the project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives, in your opinion?
9. Could the projects be more efficiently implemented otherwise?
10. Are there any risks to the sustainability of the project?
11. What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the existing EU support?
12. Do you believe that there is a continued need for this kind of assistance in the future? Why?
13. What recommendations would you make for the future? Any other comments?

## Annex 7: ToRs

International Consultant to conduct the Final Evaluation of the second phase of the Project Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia - The Gender Equality Facility Serbia (GEF II):



ToR International  
Consultant for GEF I

National Consultant to support the Final Evaluation of the second phase of the Project Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia - The Gender Equality Facility Serbia (GEF II):



ToR National  
Consultant for GEF II F

## Annex 8: Composition of EMG and ERG

Evaluation Management Group (EMG)		
Name	Title	Organization
Isabel Suarez Garcia	Evaluation Specialist	UN Women ECA RO
Milana Rikanović	Gender Specialist/HoO	UN Women Office in Serbia
Aleksandra Miletić	Project Officer	UN Women Office in Serbia
Nevena Marčeta	Project Officer	UN Women Office in Serbia
Jelena Sekulić Nedeljković	Project Officer	UN Women Office in Serbia

Evaluation Reference Group (ERG)		
Name	Title	Institution/Organization
Gordana Gavrilović	Adviser/Project Steering Committee member	Coordination Body for Gender Equality
Milica Radovanović Dumonjić	Head of Group/ Project Steering Committee member	Ministry of European Integration
Nina Mitić	Assistant Minister/ Project Steering Committee member	Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue
Ana Milenić	Gender Focal Point/ Project Steering Committee member	Delegation of the European Union
Kosana Beker	Gender Expert	Women CSOs representative (CSO FemPlatz)
Marija Babović	Gender Expert	SeCons Development Initiative
Zorana Antonijević	Gender Expert	/