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# SYNTHESIS REPORT

## EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S WORK ON GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING IN THE EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION 2020–2025



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## EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S WORK ON GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING IN THE EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS ON THE REGIONAL PROGRAMME "TRANSFORMATIVE FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY TOWARDS MORE TRANSPARENT, INCLUSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS" (2020–2025)



**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, AUDIT AND  
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# ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	DEFINITION
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GEA</b>	Gender Equality Accelerator
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation)
<b>GRB</b>	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FPI</b>	Flagship Programming Initiative
<b>IEAIS</b>	Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services
<b>IES</b>	Independent Evaluation Service
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>PEFA</b>	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability
<b>PFM</b>	Public Finance Management
<b>RMS</b>	Results Management System
<b>SIDA</b>	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEG</b>	United Nations Evaluation Group
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children Fund
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Conducted between July 2024 and February 2025, the evaluation engaged over 160 stakeholders across the Europe and Central Asia region, including government counterparts, development partners, civil society representatives and personnel from UN Women Country Offices, the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and UN Women headquarters.

The evaluation team extends its deep appreciation to all participants for their invaluable insights, which have been instrumental in shaping a comprehensive assessment.

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1. References to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office established gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) as a core area of expertise, grounded in its strong technical skills and broader credibility in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Since 2007, through both regional and country-level initiatives – including in subregions such as the Western Balkans and individual countries – UN Women and its predecessor UNIFEM have advanced GRB efforts, often integrating them into the broader gender equality and women's empowerment agenda and public finance management reforms. To assess the impact of its GRB work, the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service conducted a regional thematic evaluation with a particular focus on four Western Balkans countries under the Regional Programme, while also aiming to extract broader lessons and best practices from across the region.

## Purpose, objectives and scope

The main purpose of the evaluation was to consolidate lessons learned and provide insights for more effective programming on GRB at corporate, regional and country levels. It aimed to enhance organizational accountability and offer learning to UN Women's partners in support of the development of sustainable GRB interventions across Europe and Central Asia. The evaluation focused on assessing the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UN Women's GRB initiatives; while also analysing the integration of human rights and gender equality principles, identifying good practices and providing actionable recommendations for future programming.

The evaluation covered the period from 2020 to December 2024 and included all countries and territories in the region, with a deep dive into Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. This report provides overall findings for the Europe and Central Asia region, as it should be used for future region-wide strategic programming. A brief report on the Western Balkans project is provided in the appendix. The evaluation also reviewed internal coordination, regional knowledge exchange and lessons from other countries through remote consultations.

## Users

Intended users of the evaluation include UN Women personnel, government counterparts, civil society

organizations, other UN agencies, the Executive Board, donors, development partners and citizens, with findings contributing to improved programming, accountability, knowledge management and policy dialogue on GRB in the region.

## Methodology

The evaluation took a participatory, theory-based approach and used contribution analysis. It applied mixed methods, respecting United Nations evaluation standards and incorporating the principles of gender-responsive evaluation, human rights and leave no one behind principles.

## Context

Countries in the Europe and Central Asia region vary in development and income levels, with most classified as upper-middle-income by the World Bank, except for Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Gender equality remains a significant challenge, with uneven progress across countries. While some have improved in global gender indices, others have regressed, and deep-rooted gender norms reinforce systemic inequalities. Disparities between women and men persist across the region in economic participation, political representation, pay equity, access to resources and the prevalence of violence against women and girls is still high. Although most countries have adopted international gender equality frameworks and legal structures, there is space to strengthen implementation supported by adequate financing.

UN Women has prioritized GRB as a strategic focus, strongly positioned in UN Women's corporate Strategic Plans. GRB efforts in the region involve integrating gender into public finance systems, capacity-building, gender data support, advocacy and knowledge generation. Since 2006, UN Women has implemented four regional GRB programmes in the Western Balkans and numerous country-level projects. Initiatives vary by country, targeting legal reforms, national planning and budgeting, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) financing and broader gender equality goals. UN Women strengthens national capacities for GRB, applying standardized training tools and tailored national support.



## KEY FINDINGS

Despite GRB being firmly established as a core cross-cutting strategy, featuring in both the 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 UN Women Strategic Plans, its interpretation and implementation vary significantly across the organization and among its partners. Internally, debates persist about whether GRB should remain a central focus or if the Entity should pivot towards engaging more with private financing for gender equality, or whether it can be implemented without programme budgeting first being introduced. Among partners, misconceptions sometimes reduce GRB to initiatives targeting only vulnerable women, or limit its application to the social welfare sector. These inconsistencies pose a risk to GRB's transformative potential and its broader role in driving structural change for gender equality across all sectors and levels of governance.

Nevertheless, the relevance of UN Women's GRB work across the Europe and Central Asia region remains high. It is strongly aligned with global normative frameworks and supports national efforts to improve public financial management systems with a gender lens. UN Women collaborates closely with Ministries of Finance and gender equality institutions to design tailored interventions based on country-specific contexts. These include policy analysis, integration of legal entry points for GRB, gender analysis of development programmes and capacity development to improve financial allocations and accountability for gender equality.

The Europe and Central Asia Regional Office plays a critical role in coordinating GRB efforts, providing oversight, ensuring consistency and quality control, and facilitating cross-country knowledge exchange. Through the leadership of the GRB Programme Specialist, the Regional Office has ensured a coherent regional strategy while supporting countries at different stages of GRB development. However, the lack of broader strategic engagement from UN Women headquarters and the reliance on project-based funding for regional coordination positions threaten the sustainability of these efforts. More systemic integration of GRB into organizational planning, staffing and financing is needed to maintain momentum and deepen impact.

UN Women's efforts yielded results such as policy and legal framework development, institutional capacity-building, integration of GRB into national and local public finance systems and allocations for gender equality interventions. UN Women has a standardized capacity development approach and materials, and has established a community of practice for its personnel engaged in GRB. UN Women has trained thousands of public officials, supported oversight institutions and engaged ministries in developing gender-responsive indicators and budget planning. Participatory approaches have also empowered civil

society and marginalized women to influence local budget decisions, although there is space to strengthen the Entity's collaboration with civil society.

In the Western Balkans, GRB has been integrated into national policies and legal frameworks, often as a result of UN Women's support. Albania mandates GRB through national budget laws, reinforced by the Strategy for Gender Equality (2021–2030) and international recommendations advocating for increased budget allocations. Bosnia and Herzegovina incorporated GRB in the Gender Equality Law and the Gender Action Plan (2023–2027), ensuring its application in budget planning. In Kosovo, GRB is included in the Law on Gender Equality, and aligned with the Programme for Gender Equality (2020–2024), which mandates its integration across all sectors as a vital tool for ensuring equitable resource allocation and advancing women's empowerment. The GRB Concept Document, approved by the Prime Minister in 2023 with UN Women support, represents a groundbreaking achievement leading to the development of a normative legal act, ensuring that gender considerations are embedded within fiscal policies.

Serbia has embedded GRB into the Budget Law since 2015, making it a key component of the Strategy for Gender Equality (2021–2030). In North Macedonia, the 2012–2017 Strategy for Gender-Responsive Budgeting initiated the adaption of planning and budgeting processes to ensure equal opportunities for women and men. GRB was embedded in the North Macedonia's Public Finance Management (PFM) reform through the Organic Budget Law, which mandates that all budget users integrate gender perspectives into planning, programming and reporting.

Beyond the Western Balkans, UN Women Country Offices across the Europe and Central Asia region collaborate with Ministries of Finance, ensuring that GRB aligns with public finance reforms and national gender equality commitments. Belarus is in the early stages of GRB integration, linking it to national socioeconomic strategies and the SDGs. In Georgia, supported by UN Women, GRB has been institutionalized through the Public Finance Management Strategy (2023–2026), with gender tagging piloted in five ministries. Kazakhstan aligns GRB efforts with national SDG targets, while Kyrgyzstan focuses on local-level GRB under the women, peace and security agenda.

In Moldova, UN Women partners with the Ministry of Finance to integrate gender objectives into financial planning and taxation reforms. In Ukraine, even at a time of war, the government has highly prioritized GRB and made it a mandatory requirement in the Budget Code, with UN Women providing ongoing technical support. Türkiye has taken significant steps by making GRB part of the country's strategic planning guidelines and all policy development processes; and by integrating GRB into national and

municipal budgets, including for the first time in its National Development Plan (2024–2028). Tajikistan has focused on sectoral gender analyses since 2020.

## Conclusions

### CONCLUSION 1:

UN Women's work on GRB in Europe and Central Asia is highly relevant to the context and shapes itself as a key powerful strategy to support gender equality and women's empowerment. However, significant inconsistencies in interpretation and implementation persist, particularly beyond the scope of the regional project, which pose a risk to GRB's full transformative potential.

While some view GRB as a comprehensive framework for integrating gender considerations into financial aspects of development planning and management, others focus on its technical and methodological aspects and observe it as a tool or limit its scope to supporting vulnerable groups of women. Despite ongoing internal debates, UN Women's GRB efforts remain highly relevant, aligning with global frameworks, international financial institutions' initiatives and PFM reforms. GRB has been integrated into national policies across Europe and Central Asia with country-specific approaches. Challenges remain in achieving comprehensive implementation that fully benefits end users.

### CONCLUSION 2:

GRB holds significant potential to drive progress across diverse UN Women impact areas and UN partners' development portfolios. In some countries, UN Women has managed to leverage this potential through consistent internal and joint UN programming.

Internally, while UN Women has a strong vision for GRB across thematic areas, uneven operationalization, funding constraints and limited internal coordination hinder systemic progress. Externally, UN Women holds a clear comparative advantage in GRB, particularly in government engagement, because of its specialized knowledge and comprehensive approach. In many contexts, other UN agencies and international financial institutions partner with UN Women in PFM interventions. However, challenges remain in maintaining a sustained role in broader public finance reforms due to competition, funding gaps and limited technical expertise. Although partnerships with institutions such as the World Bank and EU have strengthened UN Women's influence, coordination with national gender institutions and civil society remains inconsistent. To maximize impact and sustainability, UN Women must enhance its strategic positioning, strengthen internal alignment, build technical capacity and deepen collaboration with key stakeholders.

### CONCLUSION 3:

UN Women's GRB initiatives have achieved significant progress in consolidation of legal frameworks, embedding gender equality priorities into public budgets, awareness-raising and capacity development among duty bearers.

UN Women's efforts have led to the integration of GRB into legal and policy frameworks, strengthened institutional capacities and empowered civil society and women's groups to advocate for gender-responsive public spending. However, the effectiveness of GRB implementation varies across countries due to systemic constraints, institutional resistance and limited resources. Progress has been supported by gradual improvements in gender data and statistics, and the growing commitment of government champions who drive implementation forward. While civil society engagement has yielded positive outcomes in participatory budgeting, tensions with UN Women persist, and the watchdog role of CSOs remains underdeveloped.

### CONCLUSION 4:

Current UN Women capacities in Europe and Central Asia, with overloaded personnel, a project-funded regional specialist function compounded by insufficient corporate support to GRB, pose challenges to maintain the Entity's leading role in GRB.

UN Women's GRB interventions in Europe and Central Asia have proven highly efficient and cost-effective, delivering substantial results with an average annual investment of under US\$ 4 million. However, the regional portfolio remains heavily dependent on external donor funding, with uneven allocation across countries, and risks to long-term sustainability due to reliance on project-based financing and gaps in in-house technical expertise. The Regional GRB Programme Specialist, supported through the Western Balkans initiative, has played a crucial role in standardizing approaches, sharing best practices and supporting countries with limited capacity. The potential expiration of funding for this role poses a serious threat to maintaining coherence and momentum across the region, highlighting the need to institutionalize support mechanisms and strengthen regional action planning with national-level champions.

### CONCLUSION 5:

UN Women has made significant strides in institutionalizing GRB across the Europe and Central Asia region, embedding it into legal and financial governance frameworks. However, ensuring the long-term sustainability of GRB and building national ownership remains a challenge, contingent on both internal and external factors.

Comprehensive legal and policy frameworks, transfer of capacity development to civil servant training agencies, championship in the Ministries of Finance and other line



ministries, strong oversight and close UN Women and civil society follow-up are key for sustainability. However, sustainability remains highly variable across countries, influenced by factors such as political commitment, institutional ownership and the availability of financial and human resources. Initiatives with oversight mechanisms are promising, as in some contexts they have already resulted in responsible institutions preparing action plans to address their recommendations and efforts should be invested to maintain this momentum. Sustainability weakens at the sub-national administrative levels where governments lack capacities to consistently apply GRB from central to local governance structures; while UN Women has no financial and personnel capacities to provide stronger and continuous support to these processes. At the same time, CSOs lack either the knowledge or human resources to lead local governments' GRB efforts.

#### CONCLUSION 6:

UN Women's efforts to integrate leave no one behind principle in GRB initiatives in the region, even if not fully systematic, have contributed to better data on vulnerabilities; voicing the needs of marginalized groups; and success in introducing respective interventions in budgets at both central and local levels.

GRB initiatives mobilized grassroots women's groups, enabling marginalized communities to influence municipal budgets and secure targeted funding with UN Women's support. However, broader impact is limited by funding gaps, political resistance and lack of disaggregated data. There is space to strengthen intersectional approaches across a wider range of development sectors; strengthen intersectional perspectives in analyses; and expand focus on vulnerable groups in other development areas, beyond social welfare and agriculture, which currently dominate the portfolio.

## Recommendations

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The Europe and Central Asia Regional Office should consider making GRB and private financing for gender equality a key cross-cutting strategy to support its impact areas and outcomes, rather than discussing prioritization. It is important to articulate how to practically integrate GRB in all portfolios and what the entry points are (see Recommendation 2). This would strengthen the relevance and positioning of UN Women's GRB work across the region within a broader context of financial reforms and development management.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** To enhance internal coherence, the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia should focus on promoting GRB internally as a unifying framework, establishing institutionalized collaboration processes to identify synergies and the transformative potential of GRB

in each respective thematic area. Taking into account resource mobilization challenges for GRB-only focused projects in some countries, the integration and allocation of resources for GRB across UN Women's Country Office portfolio should be considered.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** By leveraging its expertise, gender analysis and data, convening power and partnerships, UN Women should strengthen its strategic position and collaboration with other stakeholders, including those leading international PFM reforms and development planning. The UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia should rethink collaboration methods with CSOs and the regional GRB Watchdog Network in particular, and continue consolidation of partnerships with diverse structures of governments and oversight institutions.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** While transferring ownership of budget planning to institutions, UN Women should **engage more on other critical areas**, such as gender analysis, public revenue, expenditure, monitoring and reporting on GRB to further strengthen the relevance of programmes and demonstrate effectiveness. Support should be provided to follow up on GRB audits to guarantee that institutions develop the required action plans and that recommendations are implemented.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** The Regional Office should **explore possibilities to focus more on strategic support to Country Offices**, stakeholders and resource mobilization at the country level, rather than on programme management and administration, to further strengthen the relevance of GRB interventions. Advisory support in programming and implementation, knowledge generation, exchange and transferring of best practices to other countries are other actions to consider.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** Further capacity development of **UN Women's personnel** in the Regional Office and Country Offices across thematic impact areas on GRB and attracting new personnel with PFM expertise is necessary.



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# 1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Regional gender equality context

Countries in the Europe and Central Asia region are classified by the World Bank as upper-middle-income countries, with the exception of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan which are classified as lower-middle-income countries.<sup>2</sup> Countries range from 0.679 in Tajikistan to 0.855 in Türkiye in the Human Development Index. According to global gender equality indices, countries in the region still face significant gender equality challenges.

While the situation (as measured by the Global Gender Gap Index) has improved in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Tajikistan and Ukraine, it has deteriorated in Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye (see Table 1). Cross-country differences are also prominent according to the Gender Inequality Index, ranging from the lowest score (which means lowest inequalities), to the highest score (and the most prominent inequalities) (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Key global gender equality indicators

Global gender equality indicators	Global Gender Gap Index 2023 <sup>3</sup>			Gender Inequality Index <sup>4</sup>		
	Score 2023	Score change 2022	Rank 2023	Rank change 2022	Score 2022	Rank 2022
Albania	0.791	+0.004	17/146	+1	0.116	34/193
Armenia	0.721	+0.023	61/146	+28	0.198	50/193
Azerbaijan	0.692	+0.005	97/146	+4	0.329	77/193
Belarus	0.752	+0.002	41/146	-5	0.096	29/193
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.698	-0.012	86/146	-13	0.148	40/193
Georgia	0.708	-0.002	76/146	-21	0.283	69/193
Kazakhstan	0.721	+0.003	62/146	+3	0.177	42/193
Kosovo	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	0.700	-	84/146	+2	0.345	81/193
Moldova	0.788	-0.001	19/146	-3	0.156	41/193
Montenegro	0.714	-0.018	69/146	+15	0.114	33/193
North Macedonia	0.711	-0.005	73/146	-4		
Serbia	0.760	-0.019	38/146	-15	0.119	36/193
Tajikistan	0.672	+0.009	111/146	+3	0.269	67/193
Turkmenistan	-	-	-	-	-	-
Türkiye	0.638	-0.001	129/146	-5	0.259	63/193
Ukraine	0.714	+0.007	66/146	+15	0.188	48/193
Uzbekistan	-	-	-	-	0.242	61/193

Source: World Economic Forum. Global Gender Gap Report 2023

2. World Bank, accessed on 24.07.2024 at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/world-bank-country-classifications-by-income-level-for-2024-2025>

3. World Economic Forum. Global Gender Gap Report 2023, p. 11, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2023.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf)

4. UNDP, 2022, accessed on 09/07/2024 at <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>



The Global Gender Gap report for 2023 highlights that, at the current rate of progress, it will take 167 years to reach gender parity in the region. Advancements have been uneven across sectors. For example, regional gender parity on economic participation and opportunity has been steadily increasing, with 68.8 per cent of the gender gap closed; the educational attainment index is near full parity; and gaps are relatively small in the areas of health and survival. However, political participation has persistently low scores.<sup>5</sup>

**Gender inequalities in economic participation and employment are persistent across the region**, manifesting in women's lower participation in the market economy; occupational and sectoral gender segregation; limited access to decision-making positions; and persistent gender pay gaps. No country in the region has achieved equal employment rates for women and men.<sup>6</sup> For example, Türkiye has an employment gender gap of 36.4 percentage points and Bosnia and Herzegovina 25.3 percentage points.<sup>7</sup> **A gender pay gap is present** across the region, ranging from 6.2 per cent in Albania<sup>8</sup> to 31.7 per cent in Georgia.<sup>9</sup> Women also encounter significant barriers to career advancement, particularly in leadership roles in businesses and policy-making institutions, which limits their influence on economic policies.

**Women face barriers in access to resources** essential for their economic participation and overall well-being, including property, capital and financial markets, affordable technologies and transport. In the Western Balkans, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Bank, approximately two thirds of all property and mortgages are registered in men's names.<sup>10</sup> This disparity is strongly influenced by customary norms that favour male inheritance, particularly in rural areas. Unfavourable labour market participation affects gender pension gaps and risks of poverty in older age. Across the region, a lower proportion of women receive old-age pensions based on employment contributions compared to men, and on average their pensions are lower.<sup>11</sup>

Unequal distribution of power between men and women, and patriarchal norms result in a high prevalence of **violence against women**. Available data show that violence

against women and girls still predominantly occurs in domestic settings, committed by current or former partners or other family members. It also occurs in public spaces, workplaces, digital spaces and political arenas. This has devastating consequences on women's physical, emotional, social and psychological well-being, impacting women at the personal and collective level and discouraging them from seeking power, speaking out and participating in decisions that shape societies and everyday lives.<sup>12</sup>

## International and national frameworks for gender equality

Countries in the region are committed to the advancement of gender equality and the improvement of the position of women as signatories or parties of key international conventions, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1981) and its Optional Protocol, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and, in the case of European countries, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2011) (the Istanbul Convention).<sup>13</sup> As aspiring EU member states, project countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia) are also committed to implementing the EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III).<sup>14</sup>

In most countries, the fundamental legal and institutional frameworks for gender equality are in place: countries have adopted gender equality laws and/or anti-discrimination laws and set up an institutional mechanism for gender equality, usually across administrative levels. There are no regular, structured regional gender equality mechanisms. Regional cooperation of national gender equality mechanisms is inconsistent and lacks systematic coordination (for additional contextual details, see Annex 4: Gender equality and PFM reform context in regional programme countries).

5. World Economic Forum. Global Gender Gap Report 2023, p. 21

6. For EU and candidate countries see Employment and activity by sex and age - annual data [lfsi\_emp\_a\_custom\_11839894], for Western Balkans, Türkiye, Eastern Europe and Central Asia countries see UN Women (2024) A Snapshot of Gender and Poverty in the Europe and Central Asia Region, p. 20, [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/gender-and-poverty-in-eca-region\\_final\\_7\\_march.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/gender-and-poverty-in-eca-region_final_7_march.pdf)

7. Eurostat, Employment and activity by sex and age - annual data [lfsi\_emp\_a\_custom\_11850504]

8. Instat (2023) Women and Men in Albania 2023, p. 82, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/12598/burra-dhe-gra-2023.pdf>

9. National Statistics Office of Georgia (2023) Women and Men in Georgia, p. 75, [https://www.geostat.ge/media/58119/Women\\_And\\_Men\\_In\\_Georgia\\_2023\\_ENG.PDF](https://www.geostat.ge/media/58119/Women_And_Men_In_Georgia_2023_ENG.PDF)

10. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7068en/cb7068en.pdf> FAO & World Bank (n. d.). Gender Disaggregated Data – Western Balkans, Statistical Reports 2005–2013. Available at: [https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/nr/land\\_tenure/Genders\\_Report\\_WB.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/nr/land_tenure/Genders_Report_WB.pdf)

11. UN Women (2024) A Snapshot of Gender and Poverty in the Europe and Central Asia Region, p. 20,

[https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/gender-and-poverty-in-eca-region\\_final\\_7\\_march.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/gender-and-poverty-in-eca-region_final_7_march.pdf)

12. OSCE (2019) Well-being and safety of women. Main report, [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/2/413237\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/2/413237_0.pdf); UN Women (2023) The dark side of digitalization: Technology-facilitated violence against women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/research-tf-vaw\\_full-report\\_24-january2.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/research-tf-vaw_full-report_24-january2.pdf); UN Women (2022) National Study on Violence against Women in Georgia, <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/national-study-violence-against-women-georgia-2022#:~:text=The%20study%20revealed%20that%2050.1%20of%20violence%20in%20their%20lifetime>

13. Exception is Kosovo which is formally unable to ratify the Convention and the CEDAW Committee or to sign or ratify the Council of Europe 2011 Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul convention). However, these international instruments are directly applicable to Kosovo through the Constitution.

14. <https://www.coe-civ.eu/kh/eu-gender-action-plan-gap-iii#:~:text=GAP%20III%20is%20an%20ambitious,of%20GAP%20III's%20key%20areas>.

## 1.2 Gender-responsive budgeting at UN Women

In the period observed by the evaluation, GRB has been a strategic priority for UN Women at headquarters and field levels during both Strategic Plans under review. In Strategic Plan 2018–2021, GRB was positioned under Outcome 2 (Women lead, participate and benefit equally from governance

systems) and Output 5 (more national and local plans and budgets are gender responsive).<sup>15</sup> In the current Strategic Plan 2022–2025 it is reflected under Outcome 2 (Financing for gender equality) and its output (Changes attributed to UN Women in skills or abilities and capacities of individuals or institutions and/or the availability of new products and services contributing to financing for gender equality).<sup>16</sup>

### Selected definitions of GRB:

"Gender-responsive budgeting is a strategy that creates budgets that work for everyone. By considering and analyzing the unique and diverse needs of every person, gender-responsive budgets strive for a fair distribution of resources." ([UN Women's web-site](#)).

"We recognize that significant additional domestic public resources, supplemented by international assistance as appropriate, will be critical to realizing sustainable development and achieving the sustainable development goals. We commit to enhancing revenue administration through modernized, progressive tax systems, improved tax policy and more efficient tax collection. We will work to improve the fairness, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of our tax systems, including by broadening the tax base and continuing efforts to integrate the informal sector into the formal

economy in line with country circumstances" ([Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development](#))

"Gender-responsive budgeting is a key strategy and tool for integrating the gender perspective and mainstreaming gender into the policy budget cycle. ... Gender-responsive budgeting is government planning, programming and budgeting that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights. It entails identifying and reflecting needed interventions to address gender gaps in sector and local government policies, plans and budgets. GRB also aims to analyse the gender-differentiated impact of revenue-raising policies and the allocation of domestic resources and Official Development Assistance." (UN Women's Resource Pack Gender Responsive Budgeting for Public Officials and Practitioners working at the National Level)

Over the past two decades, UN Women has supported more than 80 countries in designing and implementing gender-responsive budgets aiming to ensure the fair distribution of public resources based on the needs of both women and men. UN Women's database on GRB practices in 105 countries shows significant strides have been made in gender-responsive policy adoption and also the need to integrate gender analysis further into all stages of public financial management.<sup>18</sup>

Since 2015, UN Women has intensified efforts to refine its corporate approach to GRB through its Flagship Programming Initiatives (FPIs),<sup>19</sup> e.g. Transformative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The FPIs were found to be highly successful in embedding a corporate mind shift towards standard and focused programmatic approaches, unified by clear theories of change and facilitated by global and regional policy support.<sup>20</sup>

The FPIs were intended to be partnership vehicles for engagement with UN agencies and other stakeholders, but this expectation was not fully realized, and collaborations mostly remained within the remit of programmes rather than long-term institutional agreements.<sup>21</sup> However, the FPIs supported substantive coordination, especially with national governments and institutional gender mechanisms.

UN Women has made similar efforts in relation to its current Strategic Plan. Based on lessons from implementation of the FPIs, and taking into account recent developments in its strategic areas, UN Women developed the Gender Equality Accelerator<sup>22</sup> (GEA) approach with Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting being one of the 10 accelerators. GEAs were formulated as programmatic frameworks that aimed to translate international normative guidance on gender equality into local initiatives that support gender-responsive policy and institutional reforms,

15. [UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#)

16. [UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025 – Integrated Results and Resources Framework](#)

17. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2023/11/what-is-gender-responsive-budgeting>

18. UN Women Policy, Programme & Intergovernmental Division Annual Report 2023

19. [UN Women Flagship Programme Initiatives](#)

20. [Effectiveness and Efficiency Assessment of UN Women Flagship Programme Initiatives and Thematic Priorities of The Strategic Plan 2018–2021](#), p.56

21. *Ibid*, p. 42-43

22. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/gender-equality-accelerators>



capacity strengthening, financing and improvements in access to goods and services. The GEAs were also formulated to leverage existing and new partnerships with UN organizations and national governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector and other stakeholders. The GEAs were published in July 2024; therefore, it is still too soon to assess their results.

The Europe and Central Asia Regional Office has positioned GRB as one of its priority areas where it holds unique technical expertise, combining technical skills in GRB with expertise and credibility in gender equality and the empowerment of women. GRB is a core component of the Outcome 1 of the regional Strategic Note 2022–2025 (Duty bearers implement and finance evidence-based gender-responsive normative frameworks and policies, including in the context of crisis response and recovery).

The scope and focus of UN Women's GRB interventions at the country level vary across the region but, overall, they include all or some of the following:

- The introduction of GRB in PFM reforms, budget laws, integrated financial management and information systems and integrated planning systems, accompanied by specific key performance indicators.
- Context-specific policy guidance, technical support and capacity strengthening.
- Technical and capacity development support to states in gender analysis of programmes and financing flows.
- Support to states in integrating relevant data and targets on gender equality into national financing policies and strategies.
- Support for the collection and monitoring of data on GRB.
- Support for increased women's participation in budgeting processes.
- Advocating for financing for gender equality in global forums.
- Generating and exchanging knowledge, and developing communities of practice.

GRB interventions have been implemented throughout Europe and Central Asia as regional programmes, country-level projects, joint programmes with other UN agencies, or in some cases global programmes. Since 2006, four regional programmes on GRB have been implemented in the region, namely: "GRB in South East Europe: Advancing Gender Equality and Democratic Governance through Increased Transparency and Accountability" implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North

Macedonia and Serbia (2006–2010); three phases of the programme "Promoting Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets in South-East Europe": phase I from 2011 to 2013 implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, phase II implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Moldova from 2013 to 2016, and phase III implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Moldova from 2016 to 2019; and the latest regional programme "Transformative Financing for Gender Equality towards more Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans (2020–2024)" which is subject of this evaluation. Table 2 presents the overview of GRB initiatives in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, to which UN Women contributed to a large extent.

Other countries in the region have developed their own GRB projects (North Macedonia, Türkiye, Kazakhstan) with similar approaches – enhancement of the legal framework, national and local planning and budgeting processes, and support to oversight. Some countries support national counterparts integrating GRB in the context of wider initiatives on the SDGs, advancement of gender equality and human rights or the women, peace and security agenda (Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine). Key donors for GRB in the region are the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), European Union (EU), Government of Norway, Government of Denmark, Swiss Development Cooperation, Austrian Development Agency and the SDG Fund.

As part of its capacity development efforts, under the leadership of the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, UN Women developed its own standardized GRB approach, with training curricula, manuals and tools<sup>23</sup> to be used across the region, while allowing adjustment to country contexts. Capacity development interventions typically involve training, followed by mentoring and on-the-job technical support provided to national counterparts.

23. Gender-Responsive Budgeting for Public Officials and Practitioners Working at the National Level Training Manual, Gender-Responsive Budgeting for Public Officials and Practitioners Working at The National Level Resource Pack, Gender-Responsive Budgeting for Public Officials and Practitioners Working at the Local Level Resource Pack, Gender-Responsive Budgeting for Public Officials and Practitioners Working at The Local Level Training Manual.

**TABLE 2. Overview of UN Women's GRB initiatives in Europe and Central Asia 2020–2024**

Country	Initiative	Country	Donor
Albania	Transformative Financing for Gender Equality towards more Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans (2020-2024), Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT), with FAO; Leave No One Behind Joint Programme with UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF.	Albania	Sida, Italy, Swiss Development Cooperation
Belarus	Joint Programme “Promoting new tools of sustainable development budgeting that prioritize vulnerable populations in Belarus; Development Emergency Modality – Response to the global crisis on food, energy, finance” implemented jointly with UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women	SDG planning and budgeting, policy and tools strengthening	Joint SDG Fund
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Transformative Financing for Gender Equality towards more Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans (2020-2024), Women driving resilience in agriculture and rural areas (2022-2025) with FAO, Towards the SDG Financing Ecosystem in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020-2024) with UNDP	GRB, SDG financing	Sida, Joint SDG Fund
Georgia	Good Governance for Gender Equality in Georgia project, phases I and II (2018-2025); Women's Increased Leadership for Democracy in Georgia – funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2023-2027); Women's Economic Empowerment in South Caucasus (WEESC) phases I and II, 2018–2024	Gender equality policies, Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessment, GRB and grassroots mobilization for advocacy, Women's Economic Empowerment	Government of Norway, Swiss Development Cooperation, Austrian Development Agency
Kazakhstan	Contributing to the achievement of the SDGs and implementation of commitments in the field of promoting equality in Kazakhstan (2017-2019), assistance in achieving the SDGs and fulfilling commitments to promote gender equality in Kazakhstan (2020-2022)	GRB	Government of Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan	Tackled across various initiatives	Women, peace and security, peacebuilding, policy advocacy	Peacebuilding Fund, EU, United Kingdom, Sida
Kosovo	Transformative Financing for Gender Equality towards more Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans (2020-2024), Gender Equality Facility (2023-2024)	GRB, Gender mainstreaming of EU integration agenda	Sida, EU

**TABLE 2. Overview of UN Women's GRB initiatives in Europe and Central Asia 2020–2024**

Country	Initiative	Country	Donor
Moldova	GRB interventions within UN Women Country Office Strategic Note Implementation 2018–2022, Ending Violence, Expanding Livelihood Opportunities for Women and Accelerating Gender Governance in Moldova (EVOLVE4GE) (2023–2027), alignment continued with Strategic Note 2023–2027 as it includes activities related to GRB, EVA Strengthening Gender Action Project in Cahul and Ungheni (2020–2022) with UNICEF, Strengthening Peace and Prosperity through Women's Leadership and Inclusion (2024–2028) with the International Labour Organization (ILO).	Development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and budgets, international gender equality commitments, EVAW	Sida, EU, SDC
North Macedonia	Promoting Gender-Responsive Policies and Budgets: Towards Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Republic of North Macedonia	GRB at national and local level, work with oversight institutions and CSOs	Sida, Swiss Development Cooperation
Serbia	Transformative Financing for Gender Equality towards more Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans (2020–2024), prior to this multiple GRB initiatives supported by UN Women core funding (since 2014) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) (2020)	GRB	Sida, GIZ, UN Women core funding
Ukraine	Transformative Approaches to Achieving Gender Equality in Ukraine (2022–2026); Supporting the government in integration of gender equality and women's rights into the decentralization and law enforcement reforms at the national level (2018–2022)	Gender-responsive policy development, GRB, EVAW, gender-responsive recovery	Sida, Government of Denmark
Uzbekistan	Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan	Gender-responsive policy development, GRB	
Tajikistan	"Financing for SDGs" (joint with UNDP and UNICEF, 2020–2022), "Empowerment of the Families Left Behind for Improved Migration Outcomes in Khatlon" Joint programme with FAO, IOM and UNICEF, 2020–2023	Addressing vulnerabilities in families affected by migration	SDG Fund, Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund
Türkiye	Implementing Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting in Türkiye (2020–2023)	GRB	EU

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on inception stage interviews and documentation

### 1.3 Theory of change

UN Women's work on GRB has been supported by several theories of change, including for Outcome 2 of the current UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025; FPI: Transformative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and GEA: Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting; and for the regional programme in the Western Balkans. Based on the above theories of change and previously presented data collected in the inception phase, the evaluation team

reconstructed a comprehensive theory of change to guide this evaluation. It was adjusted to the regional context, taking into account the challenging context in which GRB programmes are implemented. Beginning on the left, this theory of change identifies the range of inputs required for the successful start of a GRB intervention. It then identifies different levels of results (outputs, lower and higher outcomes and impacts) and the requirements being out of UN Women control (assumptions) that are required so that each next level of results is achieved.



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**FIGURE 1. Reconstructed theory of change developed by the evaluation team**

INPUTS	ASSUMPTIONS	OUTPUTS	ASSUMPTIONS	LOWER OUTCOMES	ASSUMPTIONS	HIGHER OUTCOMES	ASSUMPTIONS	IMPACT
<p>Established relations with the Ministry of Finance, institutional gender mechanisms, oversight bodies (parliaments, auditor, ombudsman) and non-state actors (CSOs, media, businesses)</p> <p>Problem definition - Gender assessment of PFM policies and practices</p> <p>Participatory, programmatic needs assessment and prioritization</p> <p>Evidence-based, tailored GRB methodology and approach</p> <p>Monitoring and evaluation plan and tools</p> <p>Human resources: macro finance PFM/policy development and impact assessment / gender and human rights expertise</p>	<p>Existing demand and/or commitments of national partners for GRB</p> <p>PFM and development planning policy framework and practices available</p> <p>Available human resources in partner institutions to own the process</p> <p>Interest and commitment of oversight bodies and non-state actors</p> <p>Interest and openness to coordination by other fiscal reform stakeholders (UN, development agencies, donors)</p> <p>Interest and openness for cross-country and regional cooperation and learning</p>	<p>Gender data and evidence collected and provided to partners</p> <p>Proposals for improvement of policy, legal and regulatory framework at different levels (development planning, PFM)</p> <p>Preparedness in a participatory manner of GRB focal points (identified across government)</p> <p>Standardized capacity development methodologies, tools, tailored to country needs</p> <p>Key public officials in the Ministry of Finance (incl. ministries) and municipalities and non-state actors trained in GRB</p> <p>Women in the communities empowered to participate in GRB processes</p> <p>Best practices and lessons learned collected</p>	<p>Policy proposals adopted and new practices introduced</p> <p>Enabling environment in the institutions for trained officials to apply policy knowledge</p> <p>Stable socioeconomic situation</p> <p>Oversight bodies engage in GRB (support to policy creation/adoption, oversight, monitoring, auditing)</p> <p>Non-state actors engage in watchdog activities</p> <p>Other fiscal reform stakeholders (UN, development agencies, donors) integrate gender perspective, coordinate and cooperate</p>	<p>Improved policy, legal and regulatory frameworks at different levels</p> <p>Established whole government horizontal and vertical coordination</p> <p>Gender-responsive budgets prepared thanks to successful knowledge and skills application by all stakeholders (use of gender data, GRB methodologies, monitoring oversight and watchdog)</p> <p>Synergies among fiscal reform programmes on GRB established</p> <p>In-country and cross-country/regional communities of practice established</p>	<p>Budgets (based on gender-responsive programming) adopted</p> <p>Enabling environment in the institutions for trained officials to continue to apply knowledge</p> <p>Stable socioeconomic situation</p> <p>Oversight bodies engage in GRB (support to policy creation/adoption, oversight, monitoring, auditing)</p> <p>Non-state actors engage in watchdog activities</p> <p>Budget execution monitored</p> <p>Stakeholders engage in communities of practice and cross-country learning activities</p>	<p>Gender-responsive policies and GRB-backed up with gender responsive budgets (services and resources available to women and girls, including those most vulnerable)</p> <p>National and local governments systemically apply GRB and integrate gender equality principles in public financing processes</p> <p>Best practices and lessons learned applied cross-country / regionally.</p>	<p>GRB legal obligations, principles and best practices integrated in routine processes of budget planning, revenue collection, execution, reporting and oversight</p> <p>Non-state actors continuously monitor and call for accountability</p> <p>Stable socioeconomic situation</p> <p>Data and evidence collected from GRB practices and used for strengthened improvements and programming</p>	<p>Structural gender inequalities reduced</p> <p>Countries' international commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women implemented and standards achieved</p> <p>Social norms change</p>





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## 2. PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

## PURPOSE:

The main purpose of the evaluation was to (a) consolidate lessons learned and provide inputs to support effective programming on GRB for UN Women at corporate, regional and country level, arising from implementation of the Regional GRB Programme and additional GRB interventions in other Europe and Central Asia countries; and (b) enhance organizational accountability. The evaluation aimed to provide overarching findings for the Europe and Central Asia region to inform future region-wide strategic programming. A specific Western Balkan project perspective was also analysed and is presented in the evaluation appendix.

The evaluation aims to provide lessons on GRB for UN Women partners in the region, including policymakers and other stakeholders at local, national and regional levels to facilitate the development of sustainable interventions on GRB.

## OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

1. Assess the relevance, coherence and sustainability of UN Women's contribution to GRB in the Europe and Central Asia region.

- Assess effectiveness and organizational efficiency in progressing towards achievement of GRB regional programme results.
- Analyse how a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated in implementation of GRB programming.
- Identify and validate lessons learned, good practices, examples and innovations of work supported by UN Women in GRB programming.

2. Provide actionable recommendations with respect to UN Women's work on GRB in the Europe and Central Asia region.

## SCOPE:

The evaluation was conducted in the final stage of the GRB regional programme and covers the period from June 2020 to December 2024. It covered all countries in the Europe and Central Asia region, with in-depth focus on the countries covered by the Regional Programme (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia). The evaluation also assessed the internal vertical and horizontal coordination and coherence of UN Women's work on GRB; regional knowledge generation and exchange; and lessons

learned from other countries in the region (via remote consultations).

## INTENDED USERS OF THE EVALUATION:

Intended users of the evaluation are UN Women personnel in Country Offices and the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women headquarters and the Executive Board, government counterparts at local and national levels, CSOs, other UN agencies, the donor community and development partners present in the countries and territories where initiatives have been implemented, and the participants of different interventions. The findings of the evaluation are expected to contribute to effective programming, organizational learning and accountability. The evaluation will also be a key input to knowledge management and policy dialogues on GRB in Europe and Central Asia.

## EVALUATION MANAGEMENT:

The evaluation team comprised the Regional Evaluation Specialist for Europe and Central Asia, who is a member of UN Women's Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS) and acted as the team lead; three independent evaluators and a research assistant. The Regional and Country Offices provided administrative, technical and logistical support for this exercise. The Evaluation Reference Group was established to enhance the evaluation's participatory approach, national ownership of the process and for validation purposes. It included a representative sample of key stakeholders involved in the regional programme. The evaluation report was validated by the Evaluation Reference Group and GRB programme managers across the region. IEAIS provided quality assurance support, oversight and methodological guidance.





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## 3. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation approach is designed in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards and Ethical Code of Conduct and the UN Women Evaluation Policy and guidelines. The evaluation used a **theory-based approach and contribution analysis**. The team took into account that UN Women's GRB support to partners is placed within wider public development management, finance management and fiscal reform contexts. The results of which are largely dependent on complex policy processes and the multiple national stakeholders involved and their synergies. There may also be a large time span between UN Women's interventions and results. Therefore, the team reconstructed a comprehensive theory of change (see Section 1.3) to understand the causal pathways, including the sequence of activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts as well as the assumptions that must hold for the results to be achieved.

The evaluation gathered evidence along the theory of change lines to examine how, under what circumstances and to what extent UN Women contributed to the identified results and how the Entity's interventions interplay with other processes in the countries/region. The data collected included contextual factors, alternative explanations and other external influences that could have affected the observed outcomes to be able to assess plausibility of contribution.

The evaluation was organized as a transparent and participatory process involving relevant UN Women stakeholders and partners in the countries and territories of programme implementation. The evaluation adheres to UNEG guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluations<sup>24</sup> and UN Women guidance and Handbook on Gender-Responsive Evaluations,<sup>25</sup> with gender-responsive and human rights approaches integrated into the scope and conduct of the evaluation. The evaluation was grounded in a human rights-based and gender-responsive approach looking into how duty bearers (those responsible and accountable for meeting obligations) and rights holders (groups who are intended to benefit from UN Women's support and those most likely to have their rights violated) and their perspectives are involved in the interventions and benefit from their outcomes.

The evaluation used a systematic approach to examining factors promoting and preventing/derogating human rights and gender equality, and an analysis of the structures of political and social control.

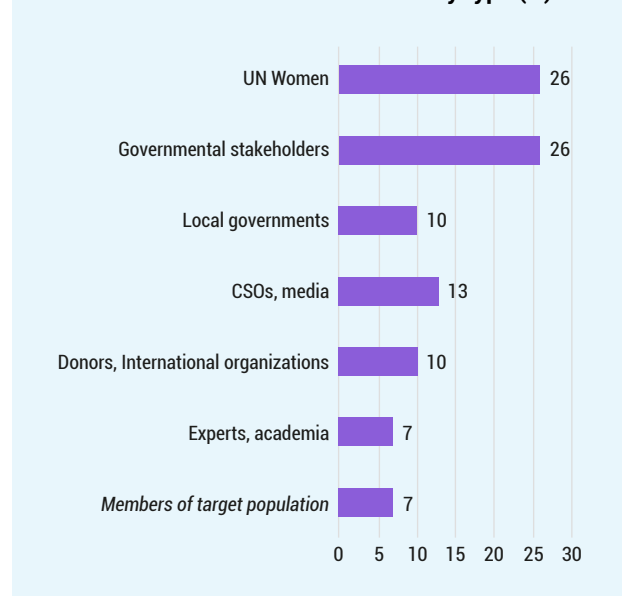
The team applied a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative methods (including key informant interviews and document review) and quantitative methods through analysis of quantitative data from the documentation. This enabled deeper exploration of UN Women's approaches and results in GRB, triangulation of evidence and the filling of potential evidence gaps by alternative sources of information (for more details see the Evaluation Matrix in Annex 7).

The **desk-based document and data review** started in the inception phase and was conducted throughout the data collection phase and, to a certain extent, during the analysis phase. The desk review included UN Women documentation and other sources of information that were referred by other stakeholders in the evaluation, including project documents; activity, periodic and other monitoring reports and data; training curricula and knowledge products; data from internal monitoring and reporting systems; existing evaluation reports on GRB interventions; and available implementing partner reports, knowledge products and analyses. More than 100 documents were reviewed (listed in Annex 3).

**Semi-structured individual and group interviews** with UN Women Regional and Country Office personnel and country-level partners and donors were used to collect in-depth reflections and interpretations on evaluation questions (see data collection instruments in Annex 8).

In total, 164 stakeholders were interviewed during the evaluation (see Figure 2 and the full list of stakeholders in Annex 5). A survey of UN Women's GRB community of practice was also undertaken, with a response rate of 19 personnel from 12 countries, from a total 43 members of the group (44.2 per cent response rate).

**FIGURE 2. Interviewed stakeholders by type (%)**



Source: compiled by the evaluation team

24. <https://www.uneval.org/document/detail/980>

25. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/un-women-evaluation-handbook-2022>

Qualitative and quantitative data were analysed in relation to the evaluation criteria and indicators. Quantitative data such as programme monitoring data from Country Offices and programme financial data when relevant to assess programme effectiveness, primarily served for descriptive statistics on distribution and frequencies for example.

**Two cross-country thematic case studies on INTERNAL COHERENCE AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT ON GRB** were prepared to provide a more in-depth thematic view on issues identified during the inception phase (for details see Case Studies Appendix). In order to provide a systematic overview of UN Women's engagement in GRB across the region, the evaluation included analysis of UN Women's GRB work in countries not included in the regional project, through interviews with Country Office personnel and a review of annual and evaluation reports (for details see the Case Studies Appendix).

### 3.1 Evaluation criteria and questions

The selection of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence effectiveness, efficiency, human rights and gender equality, and sustainability) is based on the evaluation terms of reference. The evaluation focused on seven key questions:

#### RELEVANCE

**Question 1: How were GRB interventions in the Europe and Central Asia region designed and to what extent were the approaches chosen relevant to different contexts?**

Aspects explored: approaches taken in programming; underlying assumptions and theories that support them; how needs assessment and lessons from earlier evaluation had been taken forward; and alignment with international commitments, the UN Women strategic framework, and national and regional priorities.

#### COHERENCE

**Question 2: To what extent does GRB programming contribute to other systemic outcomes and work across UN Women's impact areas?**

**Question 3: To what extent is GRB programming coherent with PFM reform processes and relevant to ongoing national and international stakeholder interventions?**

Aspects explored: Internal coherence – linkages and synergies with other Strategic Plan systemic outcomes and all four impact areas; coherence of interventions at regional and country levels. External coherence – adherence to government priorities and synergies with reform processes; coordination and synergies with other PFM initiatives at different levels; coordination with CSO initiatives, including the Gender Budget Watchdog Network; and UN Women's comparative advantage and added value in the area of GRB.

#### EFFECTIVENESS

**Question 4: To what extent have the expected results of the GRB regional programme been achieved in the four countries and at cross-country/regional level? Have there been any unexpected results?**

Aspects explored: progress against expected results; contribution to gender equality and making an impact on the advancement of women's rights; enablers and barriers to results – political (including backlash against gender equality), economic, social and institutional contexts; mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the results; and good practices and lessons learned.



## **EFFICIENCY**

**Question 5: Were the available financial and human resources sufficient for management and implementation of the GRB initiatives implemented in the region (including the Regional GRB Programme) and were they used in a transparent and accountable manner?**

Aspects explored: resource management, transparency and accountability; management structures and coordination mechanisms at all levels; timeliness of delivery; and good practices and lessons learned.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

**Question 6: To what extent are the results sustainable and what are the factors that ensure/challenge the ownership and sustainability of GRB processes and results?**

Aspects observed: local and national ownership over processes and results, and the sustainability of results; sustainability of participatory processes involving civil society and women's organizations; key factors contributing and preventing sustainability; and future sustainability perspectives.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY**

**Question 7: How were human rights, women's priorities and the priorities of vulnerable groups identified and addressed in the regional programme countries and other programmatic initiatives supported in the region?**

Aspects explored: integration of gender and human rights principles and leave no one behind (particularly persons with disabilities) into programme design and implementation; results for the most vulnerable; and links between GRB and any gender-transformative changes (addressing the root causes of gender inequalities or social norms).

## **3.2 Information availability, risks and limitations**

Supported by the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office and Country Offices, the evaluation team collected a wide range of documentation, such as corporate and regional strategic documents; GRB project documentation, including project documents, results matrix, periodic reports to donors and midterm reviews; country level reports; knowledge products; a repository of other evidence on progress and implementation; and earlier evaluation reports on GRB in the Europe and Central Asia region.

In parallel to this evaluation, IES conducted a corporate formative evaluation of UN Women's work in sustainable finance<sup>26</sup> and some of its findings – related to definitions and organization of work on sustainable finance – were taken into account in this report.

Most of the results statements, indicators and interventions focus on the policy level and budget planning stage. UN Women also tracked capacity development results, keeping solid records on progress against key performance indicators and measuring knowledge advancement. The evaluation invested efforts to collect more data on how this knowledge had been applied and to identify the enablers and barriers. Challenges were faced in identifying project impact for women and girls, particularly those most vulnerable, as in most cases UN Women does not directly engage with these groups. Turnover in some institutions was reported, which prevented contacts with some targeted institutions. The evaluation faced the following limitations:

- Limited availability of external sources of information in the countries outside the Western Balkans due to the design of the evaluation and primary focus on the Regional GRB Programme. The evaluation team consulted UN Women personnel in all the Country Offices, the Regional Office as well as available annual Results Management System (RMS) documentation and evaluation reports.
- Limited accessibility to rights holders – as most GRB interventions related to policy development and budget planning, information on how spending really affected those most in need was not equally available across the region. With UN Women's support in relevant country offices, the evaluation team reached some rights holders or the CSOs which engaged them and collected some perspectives and anecdotal human-interest stories and triangulated them with other evidence.
- Language barriers – language barriers and the need to process the survey in multiple languages, compounded with the demands of the evaluation on UN Women personnel prevented implementation of the originally planned region-wide survey of UN Women partners.
- Positive bias – Data collected via interviews may have some limitations, as some stakeholders have had long-term relationships with UN Women and tend to provide highly positive feedback. To mitigate this, the team applied data triangulation and explored the experiences of stakeholders in more detail, obtaining additional evidence.

26. UN Women (2025): [Formative Evaluation of UN Women's Work in Sustainable Finance](#)



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## 4. FINDINGS

## 4.1 RELEVANCE

**Evaluation Question 1: How were GRB interventions in the Europe and Central Asia region designed and to what extent were the approaches chosen relevant to different contexts?**

### Understanding of GRB

#### FINDING 1

**Despite GRB being explicitly positioned as a core cross-cutting strategy within UN Women, significant inconsistencies persist in its interpretation, which poses a risk of diluting its transformative potential.**

GRB is a key area of work in the two UN Women Strategic Plans active in the period under evaluation. However, there is no unified conceptualization of this area of work within UN Women, and internal debates persist on whether GRB should remain the primary focus or if a shift towards leveraging private financing is required. Among partners, there is a dilemma regarding whether GRB is conditioned by the introduction of programme-based budgeting: in some contexts, there are trends to narrow GRB's scope solely to initiatives targeting vulnerable women, rather than embracing it as a foundation for gender equality across sectors.

There are differing views on GRB within UN Women as identified in the consultations which took place in the context of this evaluation. One perspective underscores GRB's comprehensive approach, integrating gender considerations into public finance and development reforms with the ultimate goal of fair distribution of resources and contributing to the advancement of gender equality and women's rights. Others emphasize the methodological and technical aspects necessary to obtain financing for gender equality actions. Taking a narrow perspective of GRB as a budgeting tool also led to some discussion about whether UN Women should prioritize financing from private sources for programming over advocacy for gender-responsive financing and the allocation of public budgets, which has been implemented for decades and where impact requires time.

Similarly, views among national stakeholders vary. Some see GRB as a transformative strategy for systemic change, recognizing and analysing the root causes of inequality, their effects and having a view of transformational change. Others see it merely as an operational tool or technical methodology to support the fairer distribution of resources, which is not necessarily applicable in all sectors.

Corporately and across countries, UN Women engages in emerging policy developments establishing frameworks for SDG financing. These efforts present an opportunity to embed gender mainstreaming across broader SDG financing initiatives, including both public and private funding. However, due attention is also required to maintain a comprehensive approach as there is growing emphasis on private financing

and the prioritization of specific thematic sectors such as digitalization, small and medium enterprises, or energy. Prioritization of private financing over GRB, instead of synergies of public and private funding in UN Women's programming has also been an issue. This may be influenced by the different priorities of UN Women leadership, and also the internal division of UN Women's work with public and private sectors, where the Sustainable Finance team focused on private finance and financial sector development is housed in UN Women's Economic Empowerment section, while the GRB and public financial management team sits within the Governance and Participation section.<sup>27</sup>

Voices among UN Women personnel and consultants at regional and country levels suggested that the Entity needs to promote a clear definition of GRB at the corporate level as a cross-cutting strategy for achieving transformative results across all impact areas. Key informants, governmental and civil society stakeholders, as well as consultants expressed their desire for UN Women to extend its GRB work on budget revenues and expenditure, or in specific areas such as humanitarian, climate and green finance.

Another misconception identified is the equation of GRB with budgeting for the needs of vulnerable women and girls only. Although it is an important strategy to support those most vulnerable, this narrow framing of GRB risks overshadowing its core objective – to be a systemic approach for gender equality at large, embedded across all sectors. Some of the reasons for this misalignment appear to be an attempt to help governments move beyond simplistic numerical analyses of budget allocations for men and women. In many cases, capacity development efforts and initial GRB implementation have focused on social welfare and marginalized groups, as these areas provide clearer perspectives of inequality and needs, and accessible entry points for policymakers and institutions. In contexts experiencing backlash against gender equality, sectors such as social welfare and health remain among the few areas where gender-focused initiatives are still feasible. As a result, some governmental partners do not see the opportunities in applying GRB in all sectors and efforts are steered towards social welfare areas.

27. Formative Evaluation of UN Women's Work in Sustainable Finance, UN Women IEAS, 2025



## Alignment with global and national policies and priorities

### FINDING 2

**UN Women's work on GRB is highly relevant across all observed countries in the region, anchored within the global framework of the SDGs and CEDAW and guiding the development or aligning with existing national policy frameworks on gender equality and PFM.**

UN Women and its predecessor UNIFEM have worked on GRB since their early days, grounding GRB in CEDAW and the global Sustainable Development Agenda. Since 2015, and the adoption of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, UN Women invited governments to monitor and report on international financial allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment. UN Women's work on GRB is strongly aligned with SDG 5 and the target to strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. SDG 5 indicator 5.c.1 (related to the proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment) is integrated and tracked at the Strategic Plan level and in regional and country-level projects. Both at corporate level and across the region, UN Women follows the Commission on the Status of Women (2022) call on countries to support and institutionalize GRB and its tracking across all sectors of public expenditure to address gaps in resourcing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Based on the key informant interviews and UN Women reporting, at the corporate level UN Women engaged with international finance institutions in the development of supplementary methodology to the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA)<sup>28</sup> programme for assessing gender-responsive PFM, as the original PEFA assessments were usually gender blind. At the country level, in Georgia, Moldova and Kosovo, UN Women engaged with the World Bank in conducting the gender PEFA through the PEFA supplementary framework for assessing gender-responsive public financial management (GRPFM). While there were other engagements with the World Bank and other financial institutions across the region, the results of these efforts are yet to be seen.

In Europe and Central Asia, GRB interventions align with international commitments on gender equality such as the SDGs, CEDAW (including specific country recommendations) and the Beijing Platform for Action. This strategic alignment not only addresses immediate fiscal policies but also ensures long-term commitment to gender equality across various governance and societal structures. In countries undergoing EU integration and approximation processes, GRB efforts align with recommendations arising from EU country reports in the areas of gender equality and PFM; and UN Women has also supported the mainstreaming of gender in the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. In some countries, in the context of backlash against gender equality, GRB is one of the last safeguards for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In the Western Balkans, GRB has been integrated into national policies and legal frameworks, often as a result of UN Women's support. Albania mandates GRB through national budget laws, reinforced by the Strategy for Gender Equality (2021–2030) and international recommendations advocating for increased budget allocations. Bosnia and Herzegovina incorporated GRB in the Gender Equality Law and the Gender Action Plan (2023–2027), ensuring its application in budget planning. In Kosovo, GRB is included in the Law on Gender Equality, and is aligned with the Programme for Gender Equality (2020–2024), which mandates its integration across all sectors as a vital tool for ensuring equitable resource allocation and advancing women's empowerment. The GRB Concept Document, approved by the Prime Minister in 2023 with UN Women support, represents a groundbreaking achievement which led to development of a normative legal act, ensuring that gender considerations are embedded within fiscal policies.

Serbia has embedded GRB into the Budget Law since 2015, making it a key component of the Strategy for Gender Equality (2021–2030). In North Macedonia, the 2012–2017 Strategy for Gender-Responsive Budgeting initiated the adaption of planning and budgeting processes to ensure equal opportunities for women and men. GRB was embedded in the North Macedonia's PFM reform through the Organic Budget Law, which mandates that all budget users integrate gender perspectives into planning, programming, and reporting.

Beyond the Western Balkans, UN Women Country Offices across the Europe and Central Asia region collaborate with Ministries of Finance, ensuring that GRB aligns with public finance reforms and national gender equality commitments. Belarus is in the early stages of GRB integration, linking it to national socioeconomic strategies and the SDGs. In Georgia, supported by UN Women, GRB has been institutionalized through the Public Finance Management Strategy (2023–2026), with gender tagging piloted in five ministries. Kazakhstan aligns GRB efforts with national SDG targets, while Kyrgyzstan focuses on local-level GRB under the women, peace and security agenda.

In Moldova, UN Women partnered with the Ministry of Finance to integrate gender objectives into financial planning and taxation reforms. In Ukraine, even at a time of war, the government has highly prioritized GRB and made it a mandatory requirement in the Budget Code, with UN Women providing ongoing technical support. Türkiye has taken significant steps by making GRB part of the country's strategic planning guidelines and all policy development processes; and by integrating GRB into national and municipal budgets, including for the first time in its National Development Plan (2024–2028). Tajikistan has focused on sectoral gender analyses since 2020.

28. The Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) programme was initiated in 2001 by seven international development partners: The European Commission, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the governments of France, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom and later joined by the Ministries of Finance of the Slovak Republic and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The PEFA programme provides a framework for assessing and reporting on the strengths and weaknesses of PFM using quantitative indicators to measure performance. More at: <https://www.pefa.org/>

## Alignment with national stakeholders' needs

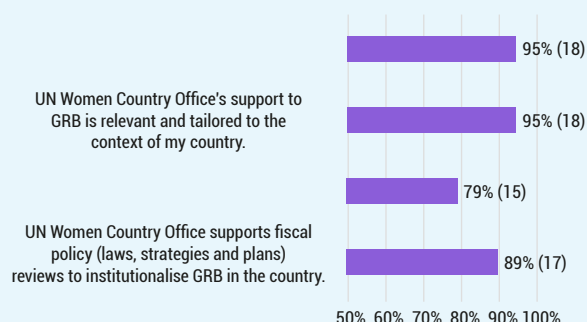
### FINDING 3

While UN Women takes a standardized approach to capacity development on GRB across the region, it remains flexible in designing country interventions, tailoring them to the needs and priorities of the stakeholders involved.

Both UN Women and its national partners confirmed the GRB programme's high level of relevance in the Europe and Central Asia region. Country interventions varied across the region depending on the context and were usually agreed with the respective Ministries of Finance and institutional gender mechanisms. Interventions include policy analysis; introduction of legal entry points for GRB at the national and lower administrative levels; gender analysis of development programmes; and training and hands-on capacity development to ensure financial allocations for gender equality and to strengthen accountability mechanisms by supporting monitoring, reporting and audit. A standardized curriculum on GRB, consisting of basic and advanced training along with relevant resource packs and case studies, is consistently applied across the region. Key informants assessed these materials as highly relevant.

The Regional GRB Programme in the Western Balkans built upon previous achievements and aligns with national gender equality and public finance institution priorities, ensuring flexibility, capacity development and tailored interventions to strengthen GRB implementation across diverse country contexts. Relevance is further ensured by taking forward the continuous cooperation employed by Country Offices with the respective Ministries of Finance and other key stakeholders; the strong capacity development component; gender analyses in priority thematic sectors; and, more recently, the Western Balkans support to oversight mechanisms and public awareness on GRB. Some of the key components in all the countries that were deemed highly relevant included support to policy development; sectoral needs assessments; capacity development and technical assistance for implementation of GRB; and, as deemed relevant, work with local self-governments, media and communities. Figure 3 highlights the views of UN Women GRB practitioners on the relevance of the Entity's GRB interventions.

**FIGURE 3. UN Women personnel on the relevance of the Entity's GRB interventions (strongly agree and agree responses)**



Source: Evaluation survey

In Albania, thanks to systemic support for GRB, UN Women engaged a wider pool of duty bearers across central and local governments, beyond the institutions that historically work in this area such as the Ministries of Social Welfare, Education, Business and Agriculture. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the programme reached those in need by placing emphasis on sectoral and local government interventions, integrating gender analysis and budgeting ahead of legal changes that will enable transition to programme budgeting. In Kosovo, duty bearers were further supported to strengthen legal positioning of GRB. Strong cooperation between the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers and the Agency for Gender Equality anchored GRB within governance reforms. In Serbia, efforts were made to maintain the momentum and safeguard gender equality through GRB interventions in a context of backlash against gender equality and suspension of the Gender Equality Law.

In Belarus, GRB is at an initial stage and UN Women established cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Ministry of Finance through initial gender analysis, laying the foundation for GRB. UN Women



in Georgia supports the piloting of gender tagging in financial systems of five state institutions, including: the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture; the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure; the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development; the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth; and the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs. UN Women in Kazakhstan focuses on the government's requests to integrate GRB in its national planning for the SDGs; while in Kyrgyzstan, UN Women responds to the needs of grassroots women, supporting them to advocate for inclusion of their priorities in local budgets under the women, peace and security agenda.

In Moldova, UN Women partnered with the Ministry of Finance to integrate GRB into PFM, starting with a budget circular in annual planning and capacity development; and technical assistance to ministries in embedding gender objectives and indicators into financial planning for their programmes, which expanded to initiatives on gender-responsive taxation. Within the established legal framework, UN Women in North Macedonia responds to capacity needs in GRB at national and local levels and supports implementation. In cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, a regional Resource Centre for Gender-Responsive Policy Making and Budgeting was established, although information on its effects was still limited at the time of evaluation. In Tajikistan, UN Women started GRB initiatives in 2020 and responds to the needs of the government by continued capacity development for public officials and gender analysis of priority sectoral programmes.

In Ukraine, UN Women's GRB interventions are more recent and build on the results of another development partner's GRB project.<sup>29</sup> UN Women focused on integrating gender perspectives into national and local budgeting processes mostly through capacity development efforts and technical support to institutions in gender analysis of budget requests. Since 2024, efforts have focused on support to the introduction of a mandatory requirement for GRB in the Budget Code of Ukraine. In Türkiye, UN Women has worked on GRB since 2020, supporting national partners in budget processes at national and municipal levels.

In the Western Balkans Regional Programme, relatively recent engagements with supreme audit institutions and parliaments were assessed as highly relevant to enforce the oversight function and strengthen accountability. However, some stakeholders (particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina) referred to the project design as being top-down during the initial stages and noted insufficient coordination with the national gender machinery and some financial institutions. During implementation, the project managed to address these challenges.

Some stakeholders in Albania, Serbia and North Macedonia raised the need for support to GRB beyond the planning stage, for example in terms of expenditure and revenues. Initial steps were undertaken to address this need, but haven't yet gained much traction with governments. This also highlights the importance of UN Women's role in pioneering and exploring new areas, without being limited to what governments currently recognize as priorities.



Photo©UN Women GRB

29. Sida-funded project "Gender Budgeting in Ukraine" (2014-2020)

## 4.2 COHERENCE

**Evaluation Question 2: To what extent does GRB programming contribute to other systemic outcomes and work across UN Women impact areas?**

### Organizational coherence and coordination

#### FINDING 4

**Coordination between the Regional Office and Country Offices, and regional knowledge generation and exchange initiatives ensured a standardized yet context-tailored approach to GRB across countries in the region, enhancing vertical coherence. With limited engagement of headquarters in strategy discussions on GRB, the Regional Office has also undertaken some cross-regional exchange initiatives.**

The Europe and Central Asia Regional Office and its GRB Programme Specialist play a key role in vertical coordination and the coherence of GRB work in the region. Regional Office efforts have ensured a standardized approach to capacity development, which is also tailored to the needs of each specific country. With management oversight of developments, lessons learned and best practices, the Regional Office manages to provide relevant

support to interventions in diverse contexts across the region, which is highly appreciated by Country Office personnel. Although there is strong recognition of the added value of the regional layer of engagement by both UN Women personnel and immediate UN Women partners in countries, further efforts are needed to strengthen synergies and avoid a projectized approach to implementation.

#### BOX 1. Regional exchanges

UN Women's GRB Community of Practice facilitated by the Regional Office strengthens coordination of its GRB efforts across the region and between regions (e.g. exchanges with the Arab States and Morocco). This regional forum supports the exchange of experiences, tools and methodologies, enhancing the adaptability and effectiveness of GRB solutions across diverse contexts. Although the transfer of practice is still limited, the evaluation identified multiple examples of knowledge-sharing that was appreciated by Country Offices and their counterparts, such as:

- Albanian best practices and lessons learned are widely known across the region.
- UN Women in Moldova has leveraged regional best practices to improve its budget circulars, tagging methodologies and digital tools, actively participating in regional events to share its advances in curricula development. The country has also advocated for the creation of a GRB implementation road map that includes standardized tools and guidelines to facilitate broader regional application.
- Work in Belarus has been supported by the UN Women Country Office, e.g. the office's experiences in programming through gender assessments, tagging and practical GRB tools were used.
- GRB in Tajikistan and Türkiye capitalized on regional events such as GRB conferences to enhance their local GRB programming frameworks.

Country programmes also benefitted from multiple study visits in which the Regional Office provided conceptual design support. Serbia, Albania and Türkiye in particular hosted multiple study visits, while multiple countries reported useful experiences during study visits in Austria. North Macedonia is deeply engaged in exchanging experiences with neighbouring countries and aims to become a regional Centre of Excellence on GRB, although it faces challenges related to capacity and ownership that are yet to be addressed.

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and national partner institutions, and documentation reviews)

Looking ahead, there is space for stronger articulation and positioning of GRB in UN Women's Regional Strategic Note and consideration of how to synergize GRB with other programmatic areas and contribute to cross-cutting impacts (for example through knowledge generation and dissemination, refining monitoring strategies, linking GRB

with other regional interventions etc.). As coordination with headquarters is limited to regular reporting, strategic discussions on GRB have become sporadic over time and the Regional Office takes the lead in cross-regional knowledge-sharing and discussions.

## Internal programmatic coherence

### FINDING 5

**UN Women in Europe and Central Asia has advanced GRB integration across systemic outcomes, particularly in access to services and gender data, and across impact areas. While senior personnel share a strategic vision for synergies, comprehensive operationalization is hindered by uneven understanding among personnel and funding constraints that prevent continuity and limit scope.**

Based on the key informant interviews and documentation reviewed, including projects implemented in the region and annual reports, UN Women in Europe and Central Asia aims to make horizontal linkages between its GRB work and other Strategic Plan systemic outcomes, particularly Outcome 4: Women's equitable access to services, goods and resources; and Outcome 6 Production, analysis and use of gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data and knowledge.

UN Women management reports that GRB contributes to all four thematic impact areas across the region by supporting financing for gender equality in governments' integrated development and sectoral programmes. However, this vision is not equally shared across UN Women programme personnel in the region, which was noted in interviews with personnel. Other challenges noted by personnel include the non-core nature of funding for GRB programmes; ensuring continuity of funding in many

countries, while also having the ambition for GRB to be a cross-cutting strategy across the entire portfolio; and the time required for reforms in countries to be completed.

Synergies across programmes often happen in an ad hoc and opportunistic manner, dependent on donor or partner priorities and the personal commitment of personnel to identify openings for GRB within UN Women's portfolio or in the context of partner institutions programmes when collaboration is pursued. In some Country Offices, the structure of internal coordination meetings focused on progress updates, rather than on action planning and exploring potential for synergies. Interviewed consultants stated these meetings usually discussed isolated tasks within one portfolio without a broader understanding of UN Women's interventions that could benefit from GRB. As a result, there is a risk that opportunities are missed to create synergies across programmes and contribute more effectively to systemic results in GRB through consultants' work.

### BOX 2. Embedded consultants support synergies

In the Western Balkans Regional Programme, embedding a UN Women consultant within Albania's Ministry of Health and Social Protection was recognized as a good practice among the country stakeholders interviewed to enhance the coherence of GRB support. This approach enabled the consultant to maintain a comprehensive understanding of UN Women's programming priorities while actively supporting the ministry in fulfilling its mandate as the institutional gender mechanism. By advising other institutions on developing gender indicators and allocating resources for gender-responsive programmes, the embedded consultant played a strategic role in strengthening policy alignment and institutional capacity-building across the government. A similar approach was implemented at the local level, where UN Women consultants supported municipalities and grassroots initiatives. This model has been particularly effective given the strong policy framework, government-wide commitment to GRB and internal coordination across multiple UN Women projects. The approach also helps to address limited human resource capacities within both UN Women and government institutions. However, to ensure long-term sustainability and the successful transfer of ownership, strategies for institutionalizing GRB within government structures should be integrated into the approach.

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and national partner institutions, and documentation reviews)

Country Office personnel are mostly familiar with UN Women's FPIs and GEAs, and their theories of change to some extent. While sometimes used in programming, these initiatives were not fully operationalized into coherent internal practice.

However, examples of intentional, more comprehensive and/or cross-cutting initiatives to link GRB with other country programmes and projects were found. These were primarily reflected in:

- Strong linkages with UN Women's support to the generation of gender data and statistics (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Serbia).
- A comprehensive approach to GRB, combining support to central and local governments, CSOs and oversight mechanisms. For example, UN Women focuses on governments and oversight mechanisms in the Western Balkan countries; while additional work with CSOs, mostly in advocacy through participatory budgeting at the local level, was seen in Albania and to some extent in Georgia, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan. While UN Women's engagement with CSOs on budget watchdog activities is rare, some isolated examples were reported in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia.

Examples of integration of GRB across thematic impact areas were identified as follows:

- Women's Economic Empowerment: GRB enhances women's access to financing in sectors such as business and agriculture. For instance, in Albania, Georgia, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia, rural women engage in participatory budgeting to influence local spending; in Bosnia and Herzegovina, GRB will be used in institutionalization of recently developed care economy models; in Kazakhstan, GRB tools are institutionalized to integrate women's needs into national economic frameworks; and in Moldova in local economic development plans.
- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: GRB prioritizes funding for services to prevent and respond to violence against women across the region. Kyrgyzstan focuses on local budget allocations for ending violence against women and girls initiatives, and North Macedonia incorporates actions in local gender action plans to address gender stereotypes and violence prevention. In Albania, free legal aid is provided to women survivors of violence thanks to systemic GRB efforts. In Kosovo, significant funds were allocated to safe houses through GRB; while in both Albania and Kosovo, UN Women engaged in revision of the legal framework to allow CSOs to be eligible to participate in tenders for social services and to facilitate financing of specialized services for women survivors of violence.

- Women's Leadership and Political Participation: GRB initiatives build capacities for women to engage in budget processes and foster leadership at various governance levels. In Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, women councillors and/or election candidates were trained to apply gender equality principles in the budget planning process. In Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia, women's groups in local communities were empowered through grassroots advocacy to influence municipal budgets.
- A Peace and Security: Although less prevalent, examples include Kyrgyzstan, where GRB supports peacebuilding efforts by empowering women in conflict-prone areas to participate in decision-making and budget planning. In Tajikistan, GRB addresses the socioeconomic impacts on families affected by migration. In Moldova, local governments committed to allocate 2 per cent of their budget to promote gender equality and respond to violence against women and girls at the local level, as a result of GRB capacity development interventions.

A large majority of the UN Women GRB practitioners surveyed strongly agreed or agreed with the claim that the Entity ensures synergies across thematic areas (89 per cent). However, this should be interpreted with caution as the UN Women colleagues running programmes in other thematic areas and UN Women's external partners in other programmes were sometimes not aware of these efforts or the materialization of synergistic visions.



## External coherence and coordination

### Evaluation Question 3: To what extent is GRB programming coherent with PFM reform processes and relevant ongoing national and international stakeholder interventions?

#### FINDING 6

In Europe and Central Asia UN Women continues to hold a comparative advantage in GRB efforts with governments. However, in some contexts, the Entity faces challenges in securing a role in public finance reform discussions. There is a growing need to strengthen fundraising strategies; enhance technical expertise in public finance and macroeconomics; and address resource gaps to sustain GRB momentum and maximize systemic results.

UN Women's GRB initiatives in Europe and Central Asia have gradually transitioned from a technical focus to a more integrated, political approach, strengthening the Entity's influence on public finance and policymaking. This shift has positioned UN Women as a key player in GRB discussions, enabling it to engage with governments and international financial institutions to shape wider policies in support of gender equality. In some contexts, collaboration with global and regional partners, including the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and EU has played a crucial role in advancing GRB efforts. Examples of successful partnerships include joint efforts with the World Bank on gender analysis within PEFA in Georgia and Moldova; development of a GRB by-law in North Macedonia; partnership with GIZ in Kosovo; and partnering with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and EU to advance GRB in Moldova. PEFA findings have been an important driver in advancing GRB policy work in these countries.

UN Women's Regional Office has collaborated with the World Bank to provide training on PFM and gender-responsive PEFA for officials from 11 Ministries of Finance and UN Women personnel. In Kazakhstan, partnerships with the Asian Development Bank and World Bank have been instrumental in advancing GRB initiatives; while in Kyrgyzstan, UN Women works with EU-supported budget programmes and government agencies to integrate GRB tools effectively. In Uzbekistan, a partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development was established to conduct a gender-responsive energy sector analysis in 2025; and, together with the Asian Development Bank, UN Women developed a GRB manual, standardized the technical framework for budget users across seven institutions, piloted programme-based budgeting and collaboratively agreed to develop gender-sensitive key performance indicators.

In the Western Balkans, UN Women has achieved results in GRB by engaging with other UN agencies through joint programmes and initiatives (see Box 3). While reflections on

these collaborations were positive and UN Women was seen as a "logical partner" whose expertise in GRB made a strong contribution to joint programmes, feedback on the true "jointness" of programmes was mixed, with some projects demonstrating synergistic work and some implemented in silos.

Despite progress, regional stakeholders stated that UN Women's has not fully leveraged its initial successes equally across the region or maintained momentum in the field.<sup>30</sup> UN Women personnel in the region perceived GRB to lack a clear fundraising strategy, and donor interest in GRB appears to be waning. External stakeholders suggested that UN Women requires more human resources and expertise in macroeconomics and public finance to strengthen its credibility in fiscal reforms. A major challenge is the limited availability of national GRB and public finance experts, which hinders the sustainability and expansion of GRB initiatives.

While UN Women has successfully engaged with Ministries of Finance in many countries, in some contexts, coordination with institutional mechanisms for gender equality has weakened in favour of work with line ministries, such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Institutions responsible for gender equality have called for greater involvement in GRB efforts to align with their mandates and to ensure government wide reach.

Collaboration with CSOs on GRB remains limited. Where it did exist, it focused mostly on the engagement of CSOs to support women's participation in budget planning processes. In Serbia, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities played a key role in local-level GRB efforts; while in Albania, the PRISMA network of grassroots organizations engaged thousands of women in local budget planning. Similar collaborations can be seen in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova. However, in other countries, meaningful cooperation with CSOs on GRB has yet to be established. Coordination with the CSO Gender Budget Watchdog Network (supported by Sida and the

30. For example, unlike in other countries UN Women's strategic positioning on GRB was unanimously recognized in Albania.

Austrian Development Agency) did not develop beyond the exchange of information. In the Western Balkans, both CSOs and UN Women reported coordination was challenged by competition and UN Women's inconsistent, project-based approaches to engagement with civil society. In the same region, some well-established CSOs were not interested in taking on a larger role in GRB, due to lack of expertise in their teams or time constraints.

Overall, while UN Women has made significant strides in promoting GRB in Europe and Central Asia, there is room for improvement in strategic positioning, fundraising and collaboration with both institutional and civil society partners. Strengthening technical expertise; enhancing coordination with gender institutions; and fostering more meaningful partnerships with CSOs will be key to sustaining and scaling GRB efforts.

### **BOX 3. External synergies with UN agencies in the Western Balkans**

In Albania, UN Women has actively collaborated with FAO on the Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT) project to support local development planning and budgeting for the economic empowerment of rural women. GRB-related capacity development resulted in budgets for gender-responsive programmes in three municipalities increasing from 4 per cent to 8.22 per cent; while one municipality business incubator for women entrepreneurs provided municipal space free of charge and local taxes were waived.

Through the Leave No One Behind Joint Programme with UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, vulnerable women have been mobilized for advocacy and public consultations, while municipalities received support in developing and financing social care plans. At the national level, the Social Enterprises Fund and Social Care Fund have been operationalized and incorporated into public budgets, enhancing financial sustainability for gender-responsive initiatives.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Women has worked with UNDP to integrate gender considerations into the country's SDG financing framework, which has been well received by the SDG Council. However, while UNDP sees potential for further integration into development planning, UN Women's strategic direction for leveraging these efforts remains unclear. There is limited coordination between GRB initiatives and UNDP's long-standing local development planning interventions, although both agencies work with the same ministries and in many cases in the same municipalities. UN Women has also collaborated with FAO to support rural women's economic empowerment, including through automatization, time-saving technologies and further strengthening GRB in the Ministry of Agriculture and by exploring other innovative financing sources.

In Kosovo, UN Women's GRB project aligns with international efforts such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's governance training for local councillors, GIZ's PEFA project and the EU's Gender Equality Fund. UN Women also coordinates with the World Bank and National Democratic Institute to bring more focus on GRB into their respective areas of work.

In Serbia, UN Women has made notable progress in linking GRB with climate change and circular economy policies, particularly through its contributions to environmental legislation analysis. By incorporating gender-responsive approaches into waste management and circular economy strategies, UN Women has demonstrated how GRB can drive inclusive environmental and economic policies. UN Women also has strong collaboration with GIZ and the United Nations Office for Project Services on gender equality and GRB initiatives at the local level, further strengthening UN Women's presence in Serbia's policy landscape.

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and partner institutions, and documentation reviews)

## 4.3 EFFECTIVENESS

**Evaluation Question 4: To what extent have the expected results of the GRB regional programme been achieved in the four countries and at cross-country/regional level? Have there been any unexpected results?**

### Achievements

#### FINDING 7

**UN Women's GRB interventions in the Europe and Central Asia region have driven policy shifts, institutional capacity-building and participatory processes to ensure gender equality priorities are reflected in public budgets at national and subnational levels. Progress varies by country, and achievements range from awareness-raising, gender analysis, the gender mainstreaming of sectoral programmes and gender budget tagging, to more systemic public finance reform results.**

Based on 2024 UN Women RMS reporting, national and local governments in 16 of 18 countries in Europe and Central Asia engaged in GRB, with Albania and Serbia among the 19 per cent of nations worldwide that track and publicly disclose allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG target 5.c.1).<sup>31</sup>

Overall, the results of UN Women's GRB efforts across the region can be grouped as follows:

#### **Integrating GRB into policy and legal frameworks (PFM strategies, national laws and action plans)**

Over more than a decade, UN Women has contributed to the development of comprehensive policy and legal frameworks for GRB in several countries (e.g. Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia [organic budget laws, tools, sectoral policies and gender-responsive indicators]) and to initial steps in countries with more recent initiatives, such as integration of GRB into PFM strategies, gender equality strategies, budget circulars and tagging methodologies (e.g. Georgia, Moldova, Türkiye), creating the framework for application.

#### **Building institutional capacity through extensive training and technical support for ministries, civil servants, local governments, oversight mechanisms and civil society**

Over the last five years, UN Women reported that it has supported capacity development on GRB for thousands of public officials from central and local levels across the region (e.g. more than 1,500 in Serbia; over 1,000 in Albania, Moldova and Türkiye; approximately 800 in Serbia and Ukraine; more than 600 in Georgia; close to 500 in Bosnia and Herzegovina; 400 in Kosovo; and slightly less in other countries). Pre and post-testing of training completed by

management showed progress in knowledge about GRB. Training was usually followed by targeted support to line ministries and agencies, and technical assistance in the application of GRB, which led to policy development, development of gender-responsive indicators and gender-responsive allocations across sectors.

UN Women has also built capacities within oversight institutions, such as supreme audit, parliaments and municipal councils (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye and Ukraine) and ombudspersons, resulting in line ministries preparing responses or action plans based on the enquiries and recommendations the oversight institutions provide. Training, coaching, technical assistance and regional exchange were identified as the most effective strategies in GRB by the UN Women's GRB practitioners surveyed.

#### **Support to participatory approaches to enable women's groups and CSOs to advocate for GRB and influence decision-making at both national and local levels**

The capacity of thousands of women was built across several countries in the region, usually women belonging to vulnerable groups (such as rural women, women with disabilities) on GRB and advocacy. They were supported by partner CSOs or consultants in voicing their needs and participating in discussions around local budgets.

31. UN Women RMS 2024 Report.

## BOX 4. Advocacy for gender-responsive budgets

Evaluation interviews and RMS reporting showed that over the last few years, thousands of individuals from local communities in Albania, more than half belonging to vulnerable groups (female-heads of households, survivors of violence, unemployed, disabled and rural residents), actively engaged in a series of participatory budgeting meetings. UN Women reported civic actions which resulted in local governments successfully resolving to budget more than 70 per cent of the issues raised (mostly environmental issues, hygiene and access to services).

In Georgia, thousands of rural women actively engaged in advocacy initiatives with local governments, presenting proposals for the 2023 and 2024 budgets, resulting in promises to consider around 60 per cent of the requests in annual budgets.

In North Macedonia, in 2023, close to 600 women belonging to the most excluded communities, such as in remote and rural areas and ethnic minority groups, were empowered to voice their needs and priorities in local budgetary programmes by UN Women CSO partners and women's grassroots organizations. As a result of their advocacy initiatives, 31 policy recommendations have been adopted by municipalities to address the needs and challenges of women and the most vulnerable.

UN Women in Kyrgyzstan uses so-called "speed dating" sessions in rural areas of the Batken district with the participation of national experts and local self-government bodies, local council deputies and residents to discuss climate change, gender equality and social cohesion issues; identify priority needs; and collect suggestions for their inclusion in workplans and budgets.

In Ukraine, UN Women supported the establishment of more than 130 grassroots groups of women and men, so called "self-help groups" which are engaged in advocacy for gender-responsive planning and budgeting of crisis response and recovery plans, mostly in the Eastern part of Ukraine.

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and partner institutions, and documentation reviews)

### Budget allocations for gender equality across government sectors

UN Women contributed to these results by supporting sectoral analyses. The Regional Office reported that Albania and Serbia developed a PFM system to comprehensively track budget allocations for gender equality. In Albania, as per information provided by UN Women and the Ministry of Finance, in 2015, only 1 per cent of budget allocations were assessed as gender responsive, which increased to 9 per cent in 2025. This progress is a result of both better tracking of existing gender-responsive initiatives and the introduction of new gender-responsive programmes within institutions.

A one-time exercise to identify allocations was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina by an external consultant, while other countries usually provide information on allocations by different sectors. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on the consultant's research, UN Women reported that in 2022, 1.45 per cent of the budget was gender-responsive at the level of central Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions; 5.79 per cent in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and 6.39 per cent in Republika Srpska. While Serbia was reported as having a system to track allocations, the evaluation team received information only on gender-responsive

programmes, but not on the amounts and/or percentages of allocated resources in the country.

### Providing quality gender analysis and strengthening gender-disaggregated data systems

Across the region, UN Women collaborates with statistic agencies, institutional gender mechanisms and line ministries in thematic analyses and research contributing to the quality of statistical data and to inform the development of gender-responsive programmes. UN Women and its partners reported a continuous increase in the number of gender-sensitive indicators (e.g. Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina),<sup>32</sup> while sectoral analyses in the care economy, disaster preparedness, education, labour, defence and others (across the region) as well as analyses of budget rebalances (around COVID-19 and other emergencies) fed policy and programme development, their costing plans and consequently respective budgets.

Regional and international cooperation was promoted and facilitated through numerous study visits, conferences and knowledge exchanges, both through the regional programme and in the wider region, to share best practices and lessons learned.

32. Some examples of indicators in the 2024 Albania budget were: women and girls benefit from targeted agricultural information and advisory services; amount of investments in maternity hospitals; number of women reached with breast cancer screening; increased number of women employees; number of women reached by disability payment measures; number of women covered by unemployment policies and measures; and improvement of social conditions for women and men from socially vulnerable groups etc.



## FINDING 8

**Continuity of efforts through the Western Balkans Regional Programme allowed UN Women to follow progress, address challenges and support governments to systemically integrate GRB in financial reform and management processes. However, due to various factors, countries remain at different levels of GRB development.**

The Regional GRB Project in the Western Balkans demonstrated high-level achievements. Based on monitoring data at the end of 2023, outcome-level indicators show that achievement of results is on track, while most output-level indicators show achievement or even overachievement.

The Regional Programme significantly contributed to the systemic integration of GRB; raised awareness on the importance and understanding of GRB; increased the capacities and skills of civil servants implementing GRB and budget users; and civil society stakeholders that benefitted from GRB results and strengthened accountability mechanisms through collaboration with audit institutions, institutions of ombudspersons and parliamentarians.

The results of GRB initiatives were most notable in budget planning. In Albania, UN Women has the longest history of

engagement on GRB, with strong commitment of key national stakeholders and the most comprehensive legal and policy framework, to which UN Women contributed to large extent.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, thanks to UN Women's efforts, progress has been made in tracking budget allocations (although concerns were raised by some public officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the accuracy of the reported information: allocations were calculated manually as the PFM system cannot track such data).

In Kosovo, GRB is recognized as a key tool for accelerating gender equality, a view that is encapsulated in the GRB Concept Document which aims to influence future legislation in public finance, procurement and audit.

### BOX 5. Progress against results in the Western Balkans GRB Programme

Review of the programme's monitoring matrix showed that at the end of 2023, results were reported as achieved in 2 of 5 outcome level indicators (77 local governments had GRB policies and practices in place and 73 recommendations provided by key stakeholders to influence local government programme/budget decisions had been implemented/addressed). Results are approaching target on other outcome indicators (systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and the empowerment of women exist in Albania and partly in Serbia [stakeholders were not able to provide amounts or percentages of gender-responsive budget allocations] and 206 programmes mainstreamed gender and 12 reports on GRB were published by oversight bodies). At the output level, 13 of 17 output indicators were reported as fully achieved or overachieved (76.5 per cent); two were on track; while two showed lower achievement (50 per cent). These mostly related to capacity development, GRB initiatives submitted and the exchange of experiences and best practices in regional events (for more information, see Annex 5).

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and partner institutions, and documentation reviews)

## BOX 6. Good practices – GRB process in Albania

Years of UN Women's support to policy development and institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Finance and Economy and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (institutional gender mechanism) and other line ministries resulted in the establishment of a system to ensure continuous increases in allocations for gender equality – reaching 9 per cent as per Midterm Budget Programme 2023–2025 (see Figure 4 on development of the GRB framework in Albania). Fifty-nine per cent of budgetary programmes in 2025 incorporated gender-specific objectives.

Within the annual budget planning process, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, with the embedded UN Women consultant, encourages and provides advisory support to other line ministries and institutions in the mainstreaming of gender within programmes and the formulation of key performance indicators, the number of which has continuously increased. All line ministries are obliged to report on budget execution along the same lines; however, while reports exist, there is still no technical capacity to provide gender analysis of expenditure, although manual data processing would be possible. Tracking of financing for gender equality is also mandatory at the local level and, in 2022, initial tracking showed that 12 per cent of local public financing is gender-responsive. At the local level, UN Women invests efforts in women's participation in annual budget planning. In partnership with CSOs, hundreds of women are involved in municipalities in the articulation of local development priorities, of which between 60 and 70 per cent are addressed by local governments

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and national partner institutions, and documentation reviews)

GRB has significantly increased awareness and uptake among budget users, generating demand across various institutions, including within public procurement offices. The provision of hands-on technical support during planning processes and the development of sector-specific key performance indicators for GRB have proven to be effective and scalable capacity-building approaches.

The most significant progress in GRB has been achieved in the social welfare, health and agriculture sectors across all

four countries, with Albania also making advancements in free legal aid within the justice sector. However, challenges persist in sectors such as security, broader justice reforms and infrastructure. UN Women has contributed to promising achievements in Serbia and Albania, which successfully introduced GRB into taxation and environmental policies. While in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Women contributed by mainstreaming gender in the SDG financing framework, which holds significant promise for future operationalization.

**FIGURE 4. Overview of the development of GRB work in Albania**



Source: Reconstructed by the evaluation team

Work with local governments led to advancements across several municipalities, highlighting tangible progress in mainstreaming gender into programmes, objectives and indicators and building local capacities for planning and implementation. In 2020, a partnership was established with the Association of Local Self-Government Units and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe. This alliance promotes and replicates good GRB practices at the local level and enhances networking among local governments within countries and regionally.

In Albania, with the support of UN Women's field mentors, capacity-building initiatives continued to strengthen municipal governance frameworks and use of gender-disaggregated data and analytical tools, which informs the development of local gender action plans and integration of gender-sensitive priorities into midterm municipal budget plans. The primary focus is on economic development, public service enhancement, accessible infrastructure and addressing the needs of marginalized groups. There are anecdotal examples of local parliamentarians leading small community initiatives and campaigns related to ending violence against women and women's health issues.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Women conducted gender analysis in 12 municipalities, leading to the introduction of

GRB in the budget instructions of three municipalities, with plans to expand to 12 more partner municipalities. Notable initiatives include incentives for women entrepreneurs and farmers, and gender-responsive measures such as subsidized in-vitro fertilization, kindergartens, safe houses and social housing for victims of violence. Rural development support was also formalized in Republika Srpska, including a five-year programme in the Ministry of Agriculture, which benefitted 40 women in 2023.

In Kosovo, memorandums of understanding were signed with 16 local government units. This provides for implementation of GRB legislation at the local level, and included 30 gender assessments, 32 gender analyses in local policy sectors such as agriculture, sport and education, development or respective programmes and allocations in the budget. With its adoption of 16 gender action plans, Kosovo demonstrated that it has advanced GRB beyond pilot initiatives into institutionalized practices.

In Serbia, municipalities involved in the project demonstrate more effective implementation of GRB than municipalities which were not involved, according to the observation of experts providing continuous support to local governments across the country. This distinction underscores the project's effectiveness in enhancing GRB practices where it has been actively pursued.

## BOX 7. Good practices – GRB performance audits

The GRB project supported alignment of GRB practices with international auditing standards and integration of gender sensitivity into auditing and budgeting processes. Two initiatives were undertaken, one included Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro; while the other included Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia. Capacity development for audit institutions, regional conferences and study visits to Austria and Sweden supported the exercise. Audits were conducted and resulted in annual reports, with recommendations to audited institutions at the national level. In Serbia, 22 local audits were also conducted. The project produced a special report on SDG 5, showcasing national gender audits. According to the supreme audit institutions, public institutions are about to prepare action plans to respond to audit recommendations, and interviews with line ministries in Bosnia and Herzegovina confirmed some had already been prepared.

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and national partner institutions, and documentation reviews)

## BOX 8. Good practices – GRB initiatives in Sarajevo Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Finance serves as an example of successful GRB implementation within broader PFM reforms. This initiative, built on a long-standing collaboration with UN Women, demonstrates substantial progress in embedding gender equality into budgetary processes. The ministry develops a budget annex specifically for gender-responsive projects which not only earmarks funds for these initiatives, but also enhances transparency and accountability by quantifying the budget allocation dedicated to promoting gender equality. This approach has been effectively integrated into sectors critical for societal well-being such as health, education and social welfare, ensuring that gender considerations are central to budget proposals. In particular, the focus on women's health and welfare has led to targeted funding for preventive healthcare programmes, including vital screenings for cervical and breast cancer.

The Canton has also implemented financial support measures for maternity leave, offering year-long payments that match the Federation's average salary for both employed and unemployed mothers. The policy was promoted to other cantons, aiming for replication.

The Sarajevo Canton has invested in capacity-building by organizing comprehensive training programmes on GRB for line-ministry officials and budget users. These sessions, led by experienced consultants, have been instrumental in disseminating practical and advanced knowledge on GRB.

Lastly, the ministry is actively engaged in upgrading its IT systems to enhance budget management capabilities. Although financial resources are a limiting factor, there is ongoing dialogue about adopting standardized software solutions to support both programmes and GRB, signalling a commitment to sustaining and advancing these reforms.

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and partner institutions, and documentation reviews)

These results are confirmed in the survey of UN Women GRB practitioners, where the majority of UN Women personnel in Country Offices claimed that UN Women contributed to the development of legal and policy frameworks (84 per cent, 16 of 19); production of

gender-sensitive statistics (79 per cent, 15 of 19); or strengthening of capacities within country institutions (89 per cent, 17 of 19). However, personnel were less sure about UN Women's contribution to the resulting allocations and benefits for women and girls (between 53 and 63 per cent).

## BOX 9. Good practices – Octopus service in Western Serbia

The project, implemented by the Women's Association of Kolubara District (ŽUKO), focused on the women of Mionica and Lajkovac. The main objective was to identify social services that could meet the specific needs of women in rural areas. The initiative was named the "Octopus" programme, and began by surveying women to determine their use of social services and the barriers they faced if not using them. Following the research phase, the project team developed the "Octopus" service – a comprehensive support system offering a range of services tailored to women's needs. Participants could select various forms of support, including transportation, legal assistance, educational support for children and basic healthcare services, encompassing a total of

eight services. The service provider was the local community. The pilot phase of the service included monitoring and gathering feedback from women to evaluate their satisfaction with the services provided. Based on this feedback, the project team conducted an analysis and offered recommendations to the municipality on how to integrate these services sustainably through GRB. The final outcome showed that the cost per person for this basket of services was calculated at EUR 16, based on the pilot's operational costs. Encouraged by the results, the Mionica municipality decided to expand the service framework, opting to rename it from a women-specific to a citizen-based service for the following year. Lajkovac also included a GRB objective in its budget to ensure healthcare services for uninsured women in rural areas.

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and partner organizations, and documentation reviews)



**Regional perspective:** UN Women facilitated regional exchanges and fostered collaboration among governments, civil society and international partners to promote best practices and address shared challenges. While cross-border and regional cooperation was widely appreciated as an opportunity to enhance knowledge-sharing and build capacities, there was limited evidence of spill-over or replication of successful practices across countries. Nevertheless, during the evaluation's key informant interviews, the Regional Office and the Regional GRB Programme Specialist were recognized by UN Women and their country partners as valuable resources and effective channels for introducing external expertise at the country level, strengthening national efforts in GRB implementation.

**Work with the media:** After identifying that media coverage on GRB is extremely rare in the region, the UN Women Regional Programme, through the Country Offices, engaged in capacity development for journalists across the region. In collaboration with media CSOs, UN Women reported that close to 100 journalists and university students were trained and hundreds more raised their awareness of budget planning, GRB and its benefits. In Albania, media workers confirmed that this resulted in the establishment of an informal journalists' club where professionals can exchange ideas on reporting on the budget and identify experts and sources of information. Subsequently, 70 media reports have been published on the transformative potential of GRB.

**Towards impact:** Donors urged UN Women leadership to demonstrate the impact of GRB. The evaluation identified multiple examples of impact for project participants across the region through thematic interventions within GRB projects. However, due to the complexity of public finance reforms; major attention paid to budget planning; and weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms within government partners, it is estimated that at least three to

gender mainstreaming of the more recent Strategic Plan for Development of Rural Areas (2021–2027) and Programme of Economic Empowerment of Women in Rural Areas (2021–2025). Over this period, officials from the ministry took part in more than 10 training sessions organized by UN Women and other development partners and pursued development of gender-responsive subsidy programmes, which became sustainable and financed from the Republika Srpska's own budget over time. Although financing obtained by women still represents only 12 per cent of the amount granted to male beneficiaries, the programme increased the number of female beneficiaries reaching more than 9,000 directly-supported women in the amount of BAM 30 million (US\$ 17.7 million) over the last four years. The amount significantly increased from BAM 5 million (US\$ 2.95 million) in 2020 to close to BAM 13 million (US\$ 7.67 million) in 2023.

(based on interviews with UN Women personnel and partner organizations, and documentation reviews)

four budget cycles and a stronger focus on expenditure are needed to better understand how GRB affects women and girls at a larger scale.

Based primarily on the evidence of the regional programme in the Western Balkans, and UN Women's insights from other countries, multiple enabling factors were identified which contribute to UN Women's achievements in the introduction and implementation of GRB.

**Integration of GRB into legal and policy frameworks:** In many countries, GRB is reflected in budget laws, national gender equality strategies or public finance reform strategies. This gives GRB legitimacy and continuity beyond individual projects.

**Political will and ownership by key institutions:** Ministries of Finance, line ministries and audit institutions that understood the value of GRB were more willing to embed it into their systems and practices.

**Flexibility in project design** allowed UN Women and its partners to align activities with the needs and readiness of different countries. In places where GRB was already embedded in law, such as Serbia, efforts focused on expanding sectoral implementation. In countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, where legal frameworks were less developed, the project supported awareness-raising, capacity-building and piloting of GRB elements aligned with existing reforms or institutional needs.

#### BOX 10. Good practices – Programmes of support to rural women in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Republika Srpska Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management partnered with the Gender Centre of Republika Srpska entity and UN Women over the last two phases of the regional GRB project to empower women in rural areas. The actions were inspired by gender analyses on the position of rural women and the Action Plan for Improvement of the Position of Rural Women 2011–2015, which was followed by

**Extensive training and capacity-building** supported implementation across countries. Thousands of civil servants, municipal officials and civil society representatives received tailored training. Some countries institutionalized GRB in public administration curricula or developed dedicated online courses.

**Engaging civil society and non-state actors** proved to be another enabling factor. GRB became more responsive and transformative when grassroots organizations were involved. In several countries, women's priorities were reflected in local budgets as a result of participatory planning. Media and academic partners helped raise awareness and build public support for GRB.

**GRB also served as a strategic tool for exploring other policy areas**, such as climate action, rural development and tax equity. Serbia applied GRB to analyse public investments in energy and infrastructure, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo used GRB to inform rural development and social protection planning. This cross-sectoral application increased relevance and buy-in across government institutions.

**Regional collaboration:** Countries shared tools, lessons learned and examples of good practice. The regional platform also created a politically neutral space for dialogue between institutions that otherwise had limited contact, such as finance ministries and audit offices from different parts of the Western Balkans.

**Alignment with international frameworks** such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs (particularly target 5.c.1) and the EU gender equality acquis helped secure donor support and policy traction. The contribution of GRB to these commitments made it a strategic priority in contexts undergoing EU integration or public finance reform.

Taken together, these factors created a supportive environment for GRB to take root and evolve, even in countries facing political instability or gender policy backlash.

Despite notable progress in GRB across countries, its implementation continues to face **challenges**. Barriers stem from systemic constraints, institutional resistance and capacity gaps, all of which hinder the full integration of gender perspectives into budgeting processes. Sociopolitical factors, resource limitations and data deficiencies generate additional complexities. The key obstacles that impact the effectiveness and sustainability of GRB efforts identified in key informant interviews and documentation review are listed below:

- › **Systemic constraints:** GRB implementation proves difficult under traditional line budgeting systems, which are not always conducive to integrating gender perspectives effectively.

- › **Unfavourable context:** “Backsliding” on gender equality has become institutionalized in some countries. For example, critical mechanisms such as the Gender Equality Law have been suspended in Serbia.
- › **Capacity gaps:** There is a significant lack of knowledge and expertise in GRB.
- › **High personnel turnover:** Ministries and local government bodies experience high turnover rates, resulting in a loss of accumulated expertise and continuity in GRB efforts.
- › **Resource constraints:** With a hiring freeze for public administrations in some countries, existing personnel are often overburdened, perceiving GRB-related tasks as additional rather than integral to their roles.
- › **Data deficiency:** The absence of comprehensive data restricts the ability to perform thorough gender analyses across all sectors, which is crucial for effective GRB.
- › **Programmatic misunderstandings:** Many administrators involved in GRB do not fully understand programme budgeting or their roles within the GRB framework, leading to implementation challenges.
- › **Resistance to change:** There is considerable resistance among local public administration personnel who view GRB as an added workload rather than a necessary part of their regular duties.
- › **Cultural and attitudinal barriers:** Anti-gender attitudes are still prevalent among public officials, further complicating the acceptance and implementation of GRB.
- › **Lack of tangibility:** The intangible nature of GRB outcomes makes it challenging for people to recognize its benefits, which undermines the visibility and perceived value of gender analysis and planning.
- › **Selective implementation:** GRB is often more robustly implemented in certain sectors, typically social sectors, due to legal frameworks that allow for gradual adoption and a lack of strict oversight or feedback mechanisms.
- › **Implementation errors:** Many budget users still struggle with correctly identifying and marking gender-responsive objectives due to a poor understanding of gender equality and GRB methodologies.
- › **Inconsistent gender responsiveness in reporting on budget expenditure:** Considerable room for improvement remains in GRB reporting on budget expenditure, which is not yet systematic. In cases where institutions do produce reports, there is often a lack of analysis at the central level.

## Engagement with civil society

### FINDING 9

**While there are tangible effects of engagement with civil society, particularly in participatory budget planning and voicing vulnerable women and girls' needs, engagement with civil society requires further articulation.**

Engagement with CSOs is an important aspect of GRB from participatory budget planning to watchdog activities. There are examples of women's organizations empowered through local GRB interventions in all countries involved in the region and strong emphasis on participatory local budgeting in Albania, Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia, in collaboration with civil society partners. Sixty-three per cent of UN Women respondents to the evaluation survey (12 of 19) across the Europe and Central Asia region agreed that UN Women contributed to development of CSO capacities for monitoring and advocating on GRB, while 37 per cent were not sure or disagreed (7 of 19). These efforts resulted in mainstreaming gender within local development programmes and the introduction of measures for economic empowerment and support to survivors of gender-based violence.

However, the evaluation found challenges in engagement and cooperation with CSOs on watchdog interventions. In the Western Balkans, parallel to the GRB project, the Gender Budget Watchdog Network was established, supported by the Austrian Development Agency and Sida, with the donors aiming to provide direct and larger funding to civil society. The network is a joint effort of women's

organizations across the Western Balkans to improve implementation of GRB through advocacy and monitoring of GRB processes. It employs a learning-by-doing approach, providing capacity development and small grants to local organizations to implement GRB projects.

Representatives of the Gender Budget Watchdog Network and its member organizations shared critical remarks related to missed opportunities for cooperation on GRB with UN Women, e.g. the lack of information-sharing, and in coordinating possible joint actions that would bring synergy and more effective involvement of both UN Women and CSOs.

CSOs were also vocal regarding the resources used by UN Women from the civil society sector to hire experts. This is often undertaken by engaging individual experts who transfer knowledge, methodologies and tools from CSOs' work to the UN Women portfolio, transferring the rights on the products to UN Women. Instead of such practice, according to CSO representatives, UN Women should develop strategic partnerships with CSOs where women's organizations and their resources are treated as equal partners.



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## 4.4 EFFICIENCY

**Evaluation Question 5: Were the available financial and human resources sufficient for management and implementation of the GRB initiatives implemented in the region (including the Regional GRB Programme) and were they used in a transparent and accountable manner?**

### FINDING 10

UN Women's GRB interventions provide notable value for money, with limited human and financial resources. However, gaps in strategic coherence, in-house technical expertise and funding continuity pose challenges to long-term impact.

#### Financial overview of the GRB portfolio

Analysis of expenditure for UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 Outcome 2 Output 5 (for the period 2020–2021) and UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 Outcome 2 (in the period 2022–2023), and the budget plan for 2024 show that investments in GRB are in the range of 5–50 per cent of the financial portfolio of UN Women offices – or between US\$ 34,000 and US\$ 4.5 million. At the

same time, the nominal value of the projects and initiatives financed under these strategic results is relatively low, compared to the results reported and UN Women's ambitions. On average, less than US\$ 4 million was invested in GRB regionally per year, which implies high efficiency and value for money of the portfolio (see Table 3). On the other hand, gender-responsive government programmes accounted for between 1.45 and 9 per cent of national budgets<sup>33</sup> in only two countries. Results could be higher; however, countries are not able to track allocations.

**TABLE 3. : Financial allocations to GRB in UN Women Europe and Central Asia country/regional presences**

Office	Total budget 2020-2024, US\$	Total GRB budget 2020-2024, US\$	% GRB budget of total budget in the period 2020-2024
Albania	15,573,687	915,470	5.9%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	16,141,652	1,636,100	10%
Georgia	42,698,772	34,576	0.1%
Kosovo	7,755,788	925,694	11.9%
Kyrgyzstan	7,203,901	3,870,949	53.7%
Moldova	28,855,913	4,564,041	15.8%
North Macedonia	9,855,059	610,711	6.2%
Serbia	13,875,187	971,645	7.0%
Tajikistan	6,332,771	116,657	1.8%
Türkiye	32,154,710	3,554,465	11.1%
Regional Office Europe & Central Asia	44,085,271	2,079,272	4.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>224,532,711</b>	<b>19,279,581</b>	<b>8.6%</b>

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on data from UN Women's corporate system, Quantum.

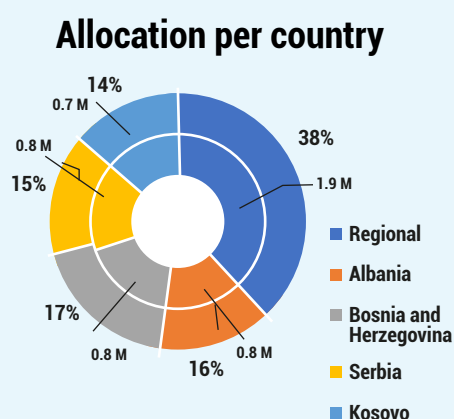
\* This table reports only Country Offices in the Europe and Central Asia region that had GRB projects during 2020–2024. Stand-alone activities related to GRB were not included. The evaluation team identified GRB projects and validated them with the Country Offices.

33. From close to US\$ 16 million in Bosnia and Herzegovina (state institutions level) in (2022) to around US\$ 800 million in Albania (2023).

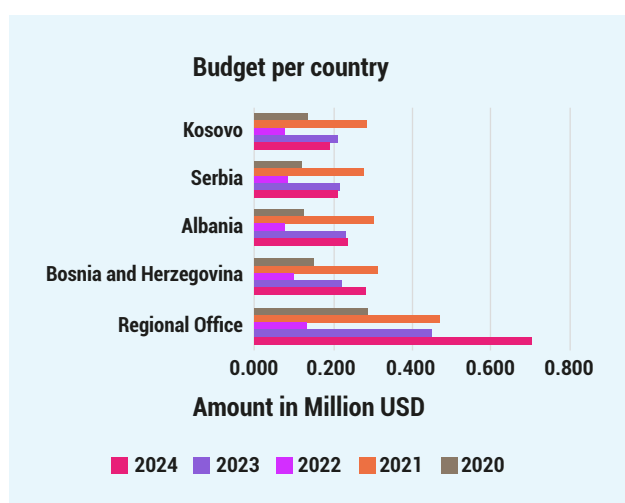


There are similar findings for the Regional GRB Programme in Western Balkan countries. Compared to the funds and human resources invested, the programme has delivered significant results. Each country involved an average of US\$ 190,000 annually for project implementation, with 57.3 per cent allocated for programmatic costs and the rest for direct management and support. Achievements are seen across all administrative levels of government. While funding was relatively low, the results were possible to a large extent thanks to long-term interventions in these countries and a certain level of ownership by national stakeholders over processes and results.

**FIGURE 5. Financial allocations to GRB in the Western Balkan programme**



	Amount	Percentage (%)
<b>Total GRB Programme</b>		
DMC and support	2.78M \$	55.6
Programmatic	2.22M \$	44.4
<b>Country level</b>		
DMC and support	1.33M \$	42.7
Programmatic	1.79M \$	57.3



Source: GRB Regional programme financial reports

Other reported challenges include project-oriented funding for GRB which usually requires one–two decades of work, which threatens to prevent long-term, systemic integration of GRB into public finance reforms. The necessity of continuous funding is illustrated in Albania, which after almost 20 years of work on GRB, and with a comprehensive and systemic approach to GRB, still has many opportunities for further development. A strategic shift towards positioning GRB on the global reform agenda at UN Women might gain donors' attention and elevate GRB as a priority in their plans.

Among the Western Balkan countries, personnel turnover at UN Women was reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and mentioned as a risk in the countries beyond, which disrupts momentum; creates gaps in knowledge and ownership; and affects the continuity of GRB initiatives.

Historically, GRB projects in the Western Balkans have been constrained by minimal budgets (see Table 3), while initiatives were labour-intensive (the Regional Project Manager was at the same time GRB a thematic adviser for the entire region, while country personnel often worked on several other projects simultaneously). Resources were particularly small for countries with very complex administrative structures, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, where engagement had to be undertaken at multiple levels (state, entity, cantonal, local) with multiple stakeholders.

Perspectives for future fundraising at the country level are more promising than at the regional level and there are strong GRB programmes in Moldova, North Macedonia, Türkiye and Ukraine, with multiple donors supporting the portfolio and recent positive developments in Uzbekistan. There is donor readiness for constructive dialogue, including with Sida, to identify the added value of the regional layer of work and to explore funding opportunities.

## FINDING 11

**The Regional GRB Programme Specialist position brought a more systemic and standardized approach to GRB in the entire region; however, the concept is at risk as the position is supported by project funding which is about to expire.**

Specialist expertise in human resources dedicated to GRB is limited, with one senior policy adviser on governance and national planning at headquarters, the UN Women Programme Specialist (managing the Western Balkans GRB Programme), a Monitoring and Reporting Analyst in the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, and country initiatives coordinated by personnel across the Europe and Central Asia region (sometimes full-time on GRB projects and sometimes covering multiple projects simultaneously). Support personnel to the GRB Programme are also either fully or partially employed.

From the very beginning of the Western Balkans Regional GRB Programme it was agreed that the project manager would serve as the UN Women Regional Programme Specialist at the same time as supporting GRB initiatives in the entire Europe and Central Asia region and ensuring knowledge generation and exchange beyond programme countries. Country Offices largely rely on this position and therefore future developments in the region will be affected if the position is discontinued. The Regional Programme was allocated an additional EUR 500,000 and nine-month extension, with no promising prospects of funding of such scope in the future. Regional Office leadership is aware that this time should be used to focus on strategic resource mobilization to maintain regional expertise and the management structure.

Human resources in Country Offices were constrained, relying on external consultants, with personnel often multi-tasking and feeling overloaded with administrative work. UN Women personnel's expertise on public finances and GRB varies across countries in the region, with most

personnel being project management and gender experts, but aiming for continuous development in the subject. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, high personnel turnover further compounded these challenges. Despite these difficulties, project management, coordination, implementation and reporting were carried out smoothly and efficiently.

According to interviews with UN Women, across the Regional and Country Offices, 43 members of personnel are knowledgeable in GRB. Based on input from internal and external key informants, the varying levels of personnel's expertise present a challenge when guiding or advising Ministries of Finance or supreme audit institutions, sometimes posing a risk to credibility and influence. This is more or less successfully compensated by external expertise in macro economy, public finance or budgeting, used to convey clearer messages to government partners. Some key informants reported that this contributes to a limited influence on public finance systems beyond initial strategic policy work in many contexts.

UN Women personnel struggle to balance engagement between programmatic and other areas of work, administrative in particular. The Regional Programme Manager was found to be multi-tasking as a manager, fundraiser and adviser, diluting the focus needed for the strategic positioning of GRB, which is a priority for both UN Women and the wider development community. UN Women Country Office personnel report high overload with administrative work, which according to their assessment reaches to between 40 and 50 per cent of working hours, harming programmatic efficiency and effectiveness.



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## 4.5 SUSTAINABILITY

**Evaluation Question 6: To what extent are the results sustainable and what are the factors that ensure/challenge the ownership and sustainability of GRB processes and results?**

### FINDING 12

**While UN Women has made significant progress in GRB across the region, sustainability depends on multiple internal and external factors. Internally these include securing long-term funding and strengthening technical expertise; and, externally, stronger ownership and the need to integrate GRB into institutional routines.**

UN Women has collaboratively contributed to the establishment of a legal foundation for the institutionalization of GRB within public finance reforms across the region. This foundational work is crucial for embedding GRB into partner countries' financial governance systems. Despite these achievements, there are notable areas where the sustainability of initiatives requires further attention and strengthening.

One significant aspect of UN Women's strategy has been the capacity-building initiatives targeted at public officials, civil servants and local governments, which are central to the operational success of GRB. However, these efforts face sustainability challenges due to the high turnover of personnel within public institutions; a noted lack of ownership at various administrative levels; and practical difficulties in applying GRB tools effectively. To counteract these issues, some UN Women offices (notably Moldova, and Georgia) have adopted more hands-on approaches to capacity development, which have proven effective in those contexts.

Integrating GRB training into ongoing programmes within civil service training centres has been a strategic move to support long-term sustainability (as achieved in the regional programme countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and beyond in Tajikistan and North Macedonia). This integration ensures that GRB becomes a standard part of training for public officials, thereby embedding gender-responsive practices within the regular curriculum of public administration education.

However, at the local level, sustainability challenges are more pronounced. Gender action plans, although developed, often go unmonitored and lack strong implementation and accountability mechanisms, which diminishes their impact and the continuity of gender-responsive initiatives. The results of mobilizing grassroots women's groups also highlight sustainability issues, as these efforts are heavily dependent on external funding from entities such as UN Women or CSOs.

Collaboration with key stakeholders such as Ministries of Finance, relevant line ministries and international partners, including the World Bank, other international financial institutions and the EU has been instrumental in reinforcing efforts to integrate GRB into broader governmental reforms. These partnerships provide crucial support and leverage for embedding GRB into national financial systems. However, to fully capitalize on these collaborations and ensure the long-term sustainability of its GRB initiatives, UN Women needs to enhance its own capacities. This would enable UN Women not only to provide continued support for operationalizing GRB but also effectively utilize the partnerships and platforms that these collaborations afford.

In summary, while significant progress has been made in establishing and promoting GRB across various regions, ensuring the sustainability of initiatives beyond the scope of individual projects remains a critical challenge. Addressing this will require continued investment in capacity-building; better integration of GRB into public administration training; enhanced monitoring and implementation of local gender action plans; and stronger internal capacities to sustain partnerships and leverage external support.

Sustainability aspects received lower scores than other aspects in the responses from the UN Women GRB practitioners surveyed. Based on the evaluation survey, although 68 per cent of personnel (13 of 19) strongly agreed and agreed that results are likely to be sustained after UN Women's support, they are less optimistic about the quality and completeness of the legal and policy framework to support GRB practice (9 personnel or 47 per cent); capacities of national institutions (7 personnel or 37 per cent); capacities of lower-level institutions (6 personnel or 32 per cent); and country stakeholder commitment (9 personnel or 47 per cent) (see Figure 6).

## BOX 11.

### Factors contributing to sustainability

- GRB included in budget laws, legally binding.
- Capacities of public officials responsible for budgeting increased to the extent that enables them to fully implement GRB but preferably increased also to understand gender equality and women's empowerment in different policy sectors.
- Championship and enthusiasm of some individuals in key positions in Ministries of Finance and line ministries, motivating others to sustain the reform.
- Engagement of oversight institutions and mechanisms in GRB processes.
- Integration of GRB in training systems for civil servants.

### Factors inhibiting sustainability

- Gender backsliding in institutions in some countries, e.g. Serbia where commitment to GRB has been declining. Evaluation evidence indicates that the Ministry of Finance has requested the Ministry of Human, Minority Rights and Social Dialogue to remove most of the activities related to the improvement of GRB from the next Action Plan for Gender Equality.
- Insufficient institutional capacities due to the high turnover of public administration personnel, perception that GRB is an addition to their work, lack of knowledge and skills.
- GRB is unevenly implemented in different sectors. Local officials are more skilled in applying GRB in sectors such as social policy and education, while in other sectors there are no such competences.

**FIGURE 6. UN Women personnel's perception of the sustainability of GRB results (strongly agree and agree responses)**



Source: Evaluation survey



In the Western Balkans, sustainability prospects vary between countries, the strongest prospects being in Albania. Legal obligations that introduce GRB as mandatory are an important precondition but are not sufficient to ensure sustainable, meaningful implementation of GRB. Other factors are important, such as political commitment; capacities of public officials to implement GRB and to understand gender equality and the empowerment of women in various sectors; presence of champions who can motivate other relevant stakeholders to implement GRB at different levels of governance; good cooperation between financial and gender equality institutions; active oversight by independent institutions and civil society; and continuous work in advancing further capacities which requires an available pool of expertise and institutionalized training. In Albania, there is strong leadership from the Ministry of Finance, coordination by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and technical assistance to other ministries. While GRB is legally mandatory, it is more substantially applied in the ministries related to social welfare, labour and education; and fewer programmes are gender mainstreamed in, for example, justice and infrastructure where inequalities are less obvious to the public officials. Sustainability at the local level is weak, due to weak capacities and high reliance of consulted local governments on UN Women (e.g. municipalities asked UN Women to support them again with development of local gender action plans).

In Serbia, despite legally established GRB, the context is not favourable, particularly at the local level. Stakeholders in the

troubling political environment lack the motivation to fully apply GRB, they perceive it as an additional obligation to their regular work instead of a new way of working and often undertake activities formalistically. According to some testimonies, at the local level some stakeholders are even hoping that this legal obligation will be cancelled. Additional challenges come with the financial problems faced by many municipalities as reported by representatives of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities. Suspension of the Gender Equality Law; lack of national gender equality mechanisms; and the inactivity of local gender equality mechanisms all negatively influence the sustainability of GRB.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are promising signs that GRB will become institutionalized with the PFM reforms and the introduction of programme budgeting at state and entity levels in 2025. Good and sustainable practices are present, e.g. in Canton Sarajevo and GRB in specific programmes in entity governments (such as agriculture, entrepreneurship), which can be used to replicate positive models and provide guidance for other stakeholders.

In Kosovo, normative aspects are still being developed, while political willingness and commitment, and joint efforts of the Ministry of Finance and Agency for Gender Equality provide good grounds for advancing processes further. Work with local communities, although bearing positive results, will only be sustainable in the long term if a national level system is established.



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34. According to the UN Women Albania 2023 RMS report, 52 per cent of the social welfare and health programmes and 40 per cent of education programmes were gender responsive, while the percentage in other sectors is far lower – 11 per cent in justice, 5 per cent in interior affairs and 2.6 per cent in culture.



## 4.6 HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

**Evaluation Question 7: How were human rights, women's priorities and the priorities of vulnerable groups identified and addressed in the regional programme countries and other programmatic initiatives supported in the region?**

### FINDING 13

**The integration of leave no one behind principles in GRB is inconsistent across the region and sometimes ad hoc, despite wide recognition of GRB's relevance to intersectionality and vulnerable groups.**

Although many key informants perceive GRB as linked to intersectionality and vulnerable groups, integration of leave no one behind perspectives is not systematic but rather opportunistic and ad hoc. It appears as a topic in general capacity development programmes on GRB, and occasionally in sectoral analyses, particularly in social and agriculture sectors (support to unemployed women, women with disabilities, rural women).

In the operationalization of GRB, UN Women and its partners have placed significant emphasis on sectors such as social welfare and health, which directly impact the most vulnerable groups in society. These include women survivors of violence, women with disabilities, rural women, single mothers and large families. This strategic focus aligns with the commitment to ensure that no one is left behind, particularly through targeted resource allocation that addresses the needs of marginalized groups.

Through participatory approaches, UN Women has also facilitated grassroots mobilization across various countries, ensuring that the voices and priorities of marginalized groups are front and centre in the development of local policies and budgets. This has been particularly effective in places such as Georgia, where self-help groups have empowered rural women to significantly influence municipal budgets; and, in Moldova, where local councils have integrated gender-sensitive measures that prioritize the needs of women, youth and vulnerable populations.

Despite these efforts, there are notable challenges in consistently applying an intersectional lens to address the multifaceted forms of discrimination faced by diverse groups.

For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, specific attention has been given to women in conflict-prone border areas, integrating their unique needs into local budgeting processes. In North Macedonia, local gender action plans have included a variety of services aimed at supporting women and children, and violence survivors in entrepreneurship programmes. Similarly, in countries such as Armenia,

Georgia and Azerbaijan, grassroots advocacy has led to local budgets which address the economic concerns of women, supporting skills training and self-employment.

Despite these successes, several challenges impede the full realization of GRB initiatives for marginalized communities. Funding constraints often threaten the impact of these initiatives, while political instability and resistance to gender equality persist at both national and local levels. The lack of sufficient gender-disaggregated data also hampers evidence-based decision-making, making it difficult to precisely identify and address the needs of marginalized groups.

The principle of intersectionality, emphasized during GRB training and awareness sessions, sometimes risks diluting the focus on gender equality when the emphasis on vulnerable groups is overly strong. This was a notable concern among stakeholders in Serbia and other regions, indicating the need for a more balanced approach in project design and implementation.

Overall, while the direct link between GRB and support for vulnerable women is most evident in local initiatives, the broader application of leave no one behind in GRB projects often reflects a natural inclination to focus on social sectors. To enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of GRB, a more intentionally planned approach to integrating leave no one behind within project designs and ongoing strategies is essential. This strategic integration would ensure that GRB not only advances gender equality but also robustly supports the diverse needs of all women, particularly those most at risk of being left behind.

## BOX 12. Women's economic empowerment in Orašac, Serbia

The Women's Association in Orašac, demonstrates a successful model of integrating local production and gender-responsive initiatives in rural development. The association comprises 25 members engaged in diverse local productions, ranging from traditional Serbian preserves such as ajvar and old-style cakes to emerging projects in rural tourism and crafts.

Local production empowerment is at the heart of their activities. For example, the local producer "Ukus iz bakinog kredenca" (Taste from Grandma's Cupboard) uses locally sourced materials to produce high-quality traditional preserves. Supported by the local municipality, the women participate in national fairs, enhancing their market visibility and reach. Rural tourism is another area of focus, with members incorporating local products into a hospitality business. One member is establishing apartments and bungalows to attract tourists, contributing to the diversification of rural income sources.

Capacity-building and advocacy are central to the association's strategy. Through training initiatives supported by local gender-responsive mechanisms, the women transition from traditional roles to empowered entrepreneurs. Their participation in regional fairs, such as the Šumadija Fair in Kragujevac, has increased their business networks and advanced advocacy for rural women's economic contributions.

The impact of these initiatives is significant, with enhanced economic independence among women; increased visibility of their contributions to the economy; and a sustainable model for rural development that integrates gender-responsive practices. However, challenges remain, particularly in securing funding for expanding retail market access and tourism ventures, as well as addressing high unemployment and underutilized skills among women.

Looking forward, the association aims to bring local products into retail markets with proper barcoding and expand rural tourism offerings to attract wider audiences. These efforts serve as an inspiring example of how rural women can transform traditional roles into impactful economic and entrepreneurial contributions, fostering sustainable development in their communities.

Source: Interviews and focus group discussions with local producers in municipality Orašac in Serbia, and documentation review



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## 5. LESSONS LEARNED

From the analysis of GRB implementation across the Europe and Central Asia region, the following key lessons have been drawn.

**The differences in the understanding and interpretation of GRB can impact the consistency and effectiveness of GRB initiatives.**

Understanding of GRB varies widely among UN Women personnel and key stakeholders. Some view it as synonymous with financing for gender equality, others as an approach, methodology or tool. There are also differences in understanding its essential purpose in either promoting gender equality or more its aspects related to intersectionality and social inclusion. There is a need for unified understanding that GRB is not just about addressing the needs of vulnerable groups but is a foundational strategy for promoting gender equality across all sectors of development. This requires broader discussions within UN Women about common corporate concepts and strategies.

**Legal obligations for GRB do not guarantee its essential implementation.**

While legally mandating GRB sets a formal requirement, actual execution hinges on several interdependent factors, including strong political and administrative will, with committed leadership and a dedicated civil service; capacities and expertise of the personnel involved; resource allocation in terms of adequate funding, appropriate staffing and modern technological support; and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Positive examples of championship and commitment were found in Albania, with more than a decade of engagement in GRB, and in Georgia, which is starting to implement GRB, with strong institutional ownership built in earlier gender mainstreaming initiatives.

**When GRB is used formally as a technical budgeting tool there is a risk it will fail to be used as a gender-transformative strategy for systemic change, contributing to gender equality and the empowerment of women.**

Without sufficient capacity, political willingness and a conducive planning environment, public administration officials do not use the full potential of GRB for transformative policies. Instead they tend to see GRB not as an essential part of their work but as an additional burden. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, approaches and commitment levels varied from fulfilling legal obligations to meet the requirements, to in-depth understanding and use of GRB as a transformational strategy, such as in areas of social welfare, agriculture and entrepreneurship, or at the government-wide level in the case of Sarajevo Canton.

**Investing in capacity development before legally establishing GRB can yield positive outcomes. However, without a legal mandate, these efforts risk inefficiency due**

**to fluctuating political will, shifting priorities and frequent changes in public administration personnel.**

Without legal obligations, governmental institutions, both central and local, may view GRB as a complex and burdensome addition to their workload, leading to a lack of commitment to implement these practices effectively. Therefore, it is crucial that capacity development and the development of a legal framework for GRB proceed concurrently. This approach ensures that when GRB becomes a legal requirement, the necessary capacities and understanding are already in place to support its effective implementation and sustainability. Capacity development needs to entail more than training and should include hands-on support in practical implementation of GRB, as demonstrated in the Western Balkan countries, and Georgia, Türkiye and Ukraine.

**The continuity of collaboration between UN Women and Ministries of Finance and institutional gender mechanisms, coupled with ministries' strong reliance on UN Women's technical support, supports consistency, effectiveness and sustainability in implementation of GRB.**

These partnerships ensure that GRB is applied with a substantive focus on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, rather than merely adhering to formal aspects and standards. Such a focused approach helps to deepen the understanding and application of GRB as a tool for achieving genuine gender equality, preventing it from becoming a token compliance measure.





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## 6. CONCLUSIONS



## CONCLUSION 1 (CORRESPONDING TO FINDINGS 1-3):

**UN Women's work on GRB in Europe and Central Asia is highly relevant to the context and shapes itself as a key, powerful strategy to support gender equality and women's empowerment. However, significant inconsistencies in interpretation and implementation persist, particularly beyond the scope of the regional project, which pose a risk to GRB's full transformative potential.**

Despite these internal debates, UN Women's GRB efforts remain highly relevant, aligning with global frameworks and international financial institutions' initiatives and PFM reforms. Across Europe and Central Asia, GRB has been integrated into national policies and legal frameworks, with varied implementation approaches tailored to country-specific needs. However, challenges persist in ensuring its comprehensive application so that end beneficiaries feel its effects in full.

To address these challenges, the Regional Office plays a critical role in standardizing capacity development; supporting the alignment of country initiatives to best meet

needs; and facilitating cross-country knowledge exchange. Stronger engagement from headquarters; corporate clarity within the area of financing gender equality; and addressing funding constraints would reduce the adverse effects of inconsistencies in interpretation and implementation.

To maximize the impact of GRB, UN Women in the Europe and Central Asia Region (if not corporately) should establish a clear corporate position and use it to reinforce synergies across programmatic areas at all levels. Discussion on prioritization of public or private financing should be reframed into strategic and sustained commitment towards their synergistic effects.

## CONCLUSION 2 (CORRESPONDING TO FINDINGS 4-6, 10, 11):

**GRB holds significant potential to drive progress across diverse UN Women impact areas and UN partners' development portfolios. In some countries, UN Women has managed to leverage this through consistent internal and joint UN programming. In other contexts, the lack of a cohesive strategic vision and fragmented implementation often limits the potential of GRB. Leadership and unequal GRB capacities within UN Women across the region further reduce UN Women's potential in a competitive environment, with other stakeholders involved in gender equality or PFM reforms.**

Internally, while there is a strong vision for integrating GRB across thematic impact areas, operationalization remains uneven. Funding constraints, varying levels of understanding among personnel and an ad hoc approach to synergies hinder systemic progress. More structured internal coordination and strategic alignment with other programmatic areas could enhance GRB's transformative potential.

Externally, UN Women maintains a strong comparative advantage in GRB efforts, confirmed in multiple partnerships with UN agencies and (in some countries) international finance institutions, as well as with partner governments. Close to 90 per cent of the UN Women's GRB practitioners surveyed share this view.

Challenges persist in scaling up this role in broader public finance reform discussions, due to gaps in funding and technical expertise in macroeconomics and public finance in some Country Offices. While strengthening partnerships with institutions such as the World Bank, Asian

Development Bank and EU has been beneficial, further efforts are needed to maintain momentum and expand influence.

While UN Women has successfully collaborated with Ministries of Finance, engagement with national gender equality institutions has weakened in some contexts, and coordination with CSOs remains limited. To maximize impact, UN Women should enhance its strategic positioning; refine its fundraising approach; build technical expertise; and foster deeper collaboration with both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

Overall, UN Women's GRB efforts have been instrumental in shaping policies and institutionalizing gender-responsive public finance mechanisms across the region. However, to ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness, a more strategic, well-resourced and integrated approach is needed, reinforcing GRB as a core mechanism for achieving gender equality and systemic reform.

### CONCLUSION 3 (CORRESPONDING TO FINDINGS 7-9, 13):

**UN Women's GRB initiatives in Europe and Central Asia have achieved significant progress in consolidating legal frameworks, embedding gender equality priorities into public budgets, raising awareness and developing the capacity of duty bearers. To fully realize the transformative potential of GRB, sustained efforts are needed to expand GRB across thematic sectors and administrative levels; mainstream gender in budget revenues; enhance expenditure monitoring mechanisms and impact assessments; and ensure stronger oversight and watchdog engagement.**

UN Women's GRB initiatives in Europe and Central Asia have made substantial contributions to policy reform, institutional capacity-building and participatory budgeting, leading to tangible progress in embedding gender equality considerations into public finance systems. The Entity's efforts have resulted in the integration of GRB into legal and policy frameworks; the strengthening of institutional capacities; and the empowerment of civil society and women's groups to advocate for gender-responsive public spending. To achieve transformative effects, GRB needs to be further strengthened on the expenditure side and in terms of revenue policy. Without strong full-cycle integration, the effects of GRB risk remaining limited.

Despite the achievements noted above, the effectiveness of GRB implementation varies across countries due to systemic constraints, institutional resistance or lack of ownership, and resource limitations. Nevertheless, results are supported by gradual consolidation of the legal and policy framework; parallel work on strengthening gender data and statistics; and growing capacities in numerous champions across governments who

maintain the momentum and pursue implementation.

The engagement of civil society in GRB has led to positive outcomes, mostly in participatory budget planning and with organizations UN Women has supported as partners. However, tensions persist between UN Women and CSOs within the Gender Budget Watchdog Network and there were missed opportunities to further strengthen the watchdog function. Some examples mentioned during consultations including limited access and delays in delivering information by public institutions on financial data, might have been facilitated by a joint UN Women and network approach. Watchdog analyses and reports could have been more aligned with efforts undertaken alongside governments to shed more light on the real expenditure and impact of GRB.

These challenges highlight the need for articulation of a more strategic, transparent and partnership-driven approach to CSO engagement, regardless of the funding provided by UN Women.

### CONCLUSION 4 (CORRESPONDING TO FINDINGS 10-11):

**Current UN Women capacities in Europe and Central Asia, with overloaded personnel and a project-funded regional specialist function, compounded by insufficient corporate commitment to GRB, pose challenges to maintain the Entity's leading role in GRB.**

UN Women's GRB interventions have demonstrated efficiency and value for money despite operating with constrained financial and human resources. With an average annual regional investment of less than US\$ 4 million, GRB initiatives have led to substantial results. However, limited continuity of funding, dependence on project-based financing and gaps in in-house technical expertise pose risks to sustaining long-term, systemic integration of GRB into public finance reforms.

The regional GRB portfolio has been largely dependent on external donor support, with significant variation in financial allocations across countries. While some countries have received substantial GRB funding for stand-alone projects and pursue its integration with other thematic areas, others have had smaller investments and GRB is a smaller component of other projects. Notably, the Western Balkans Regional Programme has successfully delivered results with limited annual budgets, highlighting the cost-effectiveness of sustained, long-term engagement.

The function of the Regional GRB Specialist, supported by the Western Balkans programme, provided multiple benefits, not only in the subregion but across the entire Europe and Central Asia region. This has been reflected in the standardized approach; generation and dissemination of knowledge and best practices; facilitation of communities of practice; and high-quality technical advisory support to offices lacking expertise. Further efforts are needed to consolidate UN Women's role among regional development stakeholders and strengthen regional action planning involving country-level champions.

The end of funding for the regional project, particularly for the Regional GRB Programme Specialist position, poses a significant risk to maintaining a standardized, region-wide approach to GRB.

## CONCLUSION 5 (CORRESPONDING TO FINDING 12):

**UN Women has made significant strides in institutionalizing GRB across the Europe and Central Asia region, embedding GRB into legal and financial governance frameworks. However, ensuring the long-term sustainability of GRB and building national ownership remains a challenge, contingent on both internal and external factors.**

Comprehensive legal and policy frameworks; transfer of capacity development to civil servant training agencies; championship in Ministries of Finance and other line ministries; strong oversight; and close UN Women and civil society follow-up are key for sustainability. However, sustainability remains highly variable across countries, influenced by factors such as political commitment, institutional ownership and the availability of financial and human resources for GRB.

Initiatives with oversight mechanisms are promising: in some contexts they have already resulted in responsible institutions preparing action plans to address

recommendations and efforts should be invested to maintain the momentum in this area.

Sustainability weakens at the sub-national administrative levels as UN Women has no capacities to ensure continuous presence at a large number of local institutions. Similarly, the local reach of central governments varies across different contexts, while CSOs lack either knowledge or human resources to lead local governments' GRB efforts. Many local gender action plans, although developed and costed, lack monitoring and accountability mechanisms, limiting their long-term impact. At the same time, local governments are not confident in developing

## CONCLUSION 6 (CORRESPONDING TO FINDING 13):

**UN Women's efforts to integrate leave no one behind principles within GRB initiatives in the region, even if not fully systematic, have contributed to better data on vulnerabilities; voicing the needs of marginalized groups; and success in introducing respective interventions in budgets at both central and local levels.**

GRB has been effectively used to mobilize thousands of grassroots women's groups, including those most vulnerable such as Roma and minorities, rural women, self-sustaining mothers, survivors of gender-based violence and, in some contexts, women with disabilities. With UN Women's support these groups managed to influence municipal budgets and secure targeted allocations for marginalized communities.

GRB's broader application is hindered by funding constraints, political resistance and the absence of gender-disaggregated data. There is space to strengthen intersectional perspectives in analyses and expand focus on vulnerable groups in other development areas, beyond social welfare, education and agriculture, which currently dominate the portfolio.



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## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations were developed based on the findings and conclusions, and consultations with the UN Women Regional Office and Country Offices in the Western Balkans.

## **RECOMMENDATION 1** UN Women's position on GRB and financing for gender equality

**The Europe and Central Asia Regional Office should consider making GRB and private financing for gender equality key cross-cutting strategies to support its impact areas and outcomes, rather than discussing prioritization. It is important to articulate how to practically integrate GRB in all portfolios and what the entry points are (see Recommendation 2). This would strengthen the relevance and positioning of UN Women's GRB work across the region within a broader context of financial reforms and development management.**

BASED ON FINDINGS 1, 3, 4, 5 AND CONCLUSIONS 1, 2, 5

PRIORITY **HIGH**

### **Suggested steps to be taken:**

- Establish a working group composed of representatives from Regional Offices and GRB advisers to produce a concept paper.
- Articulate a clear position on GRB in the new UN Women Strategic Plan, e.g. approaches, partnership strategies and more clarity of how GRB integrates across impact areas and synergizes with other financing for gender equality initiatives to support transformative results.
- Discuss GRB in the new Strategic Plan with headquarters, and the corporate communication of GRB as a transformative strategy rather than a technical tool.
- Consolidate the function of the Regional GRB Specialist.

**To be led by:** UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, in coordination with UN Women headquarters and UN Women Country Offices

**If not implemented:** Continued investment and prioritization of coordination would allow the Country Office to operate on a bigger scale, leading the UN system in gender equality and women's empowerment issues.



## RECOMMENDATION 2 Internal coherence and coordination

To enhance internal coherence, the Regional Office should focus on promoting GRB internally as a unifying framework, establishing institutionalized collaboration processes to identify synergies and the transformative potential of GRB in each respective thematic area. Taking into account resource mobilization challenges for GRB-only focused projects in some countries, the integration and allocation of resources for GRB across UN Women's Country Office portfolios should be considered.

BASED ON FINDINGS 4, 5, 13 AND CONCLUSION 2

PRIORITY HIGH

### Suggested steps to be taken:

- Both the Regional Office and Country Offices should review their programmes identifying opportunities for synergies and embedding GRB as a transformative strategy. This has the potential to enhance programming and resource mobilization for GRB perspectives.
- Collect and promote good practices on GRB, demonstrating transformational effects across thematic portfolios and contributions by diverse stakeholders on the ground.
- Within overall internal coordination efforts, more structured and results-oriented internal coordination meetings should be institutionalized to optimize synergistic work.
- Considering UN Women's limited human resources, opportunities to use the same consultants/consulting companies on GRB to support budget-related interventions across portfolios should be considered.

*To be led by:* UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, UN Women Country Offices

**If not implemented:** GRB interventions siloed in the governance impact area; lost opportunity to use GRB as a transformative strategy across thematic portfolios and support efforts in thematic areas; and inefficient use of resources.

### RECOMMENDATION 3 External coherence and coordination

By leveraging its expertise, gender analysis and data, convening power and partnerships, the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia should strengthen its strategic position and collaboration with other stakeholders, including those international leading PFM reforms and development planning. The Regional Office should rethink collaboration methods with CSOs and the regional GRB Watchdog Network in particular, and continue consolidation of partnerships with diverse structures of governments and oversight institutions.

BASED ON FINDINGS 6 AND CONCLUSIONS 3 AND 4

PRIORITY HIGH

#### Suggested steps to be taken:

- Continue engage with key processes of financial management reforms in the region at both regional and country level, leveraging and deepening partnerships with international finance institutions and development organizations engaged in reforms.
- Leverage existing collaborations with international finance institutions and develop new partnerships, where missing, for more a impactful footprint in public finance reforms.
- Explore opportunities and integrate GRB as a strategy for gender equality and the empowerment of women in UN joint programming.
- Rethink engagement with CSOs at the regional and country level, in particular resolve tensions and encourage stronger collaboration with the GRB Watchdog Network, women's CSOs at the country level and also CSOs beyond the women's and human rights movement, such as development and policy advocacy CSOs.
- Support communication between governments and CSOs on GRB, including dialogue on participation, advocacy, watchdog activities and budget transparency.
- Consider building CSOs capacities to take over part of capacity development and/or watchdog interventions, particularly at the local level.

**To be led by:** UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, in coordination with UN Women Country Offices

**If not implemented:** Diminished influence in PFM reforms; compartmentalized approach to stakeholders; missed opportunities for systemic change; and inefficient use of resources.

## RECOMMENDATION 4 Thematic focus

**While transferring ownership of budget planning to institutions, UN Women should engage more on other critical areas, such as gender analysis, public revenue, expenditure, monitoring and reporting on GRB to further strengthen the relevance of programmes and demonstrate their effectiveness. Support should be provided to follow up on GRB audits to guarantee that institutions develop action plans and that recommendations are implemented.**

BASED ON FINDINGS 7, 8, 9, 12, 13 AND CONCLUSION 3, 6

PRIORITY **HIGH**

### Suggested steps to be taken:

- Transfer ownership by supporting the development of appropriate by-laws and other instruments and tools that can standardize and make implementation easier.
- Continue UN Women's involvement in development of IT systems used in PFM to ensure they meet GRB requirements. This is crucial for data consolidation and sustaining the progress of GRB reforms.
- Continue GRB training through civil service training agencies and expand capacity-building to broader circles of budget users, beyond those where GRB is well established.
- Build capacities for gender analysis in institutions as a basis for GRB; and explore possibilities for CSOs and academia's involvement in this area.
- Follow up on gender audit recommendations and support institutions in the development and monitoring of audit-related action plans.
- Demonstrate the benefits and effects of GRB in diverse development areas, including non-traditional areas, but maintain the focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups integrated across the portfolio.

*To be led by:* UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, in coordination with UN Women Country Offices

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**If not implemented:** Missed opportunity to sensitize revenues and increase allocations; reduced or unknown effects of budget allocations; superficial institutional ownership; and audit recommendations not implemented.

## RECOMMENDATION 5 Regional Office role

**The Regional Office should explore possibilities to focus more on strategic support to Country Offices, stakeholders and resource mobilization at the country level, rather than on programme management and administration, to further strengthen the relevance of GRB interventions. Advisory support in programming and implementation, knowledge generation, exchange and transferring of best practices to other countries are other actions to consider.**

BASED ON FINDINGS 4-7, 9 AND CONCLUSION 1, 5, 7

PRIORITY **MEDIUM**

### Suggested steps to be taken:

- While this recommendation is highly dependent on funding of the Regional GRB Specialist function, the Regional Office should rethink and define its role within the next regional Strategic Plan and position itself strategically in further pursuit of the introduction and implementation of GRB.
- Provide clear articulation of the added value of regional work on GRB that can be easily communicated to development partners and donors; and consider thematic areas of expertise where the Regional Office can provide added value, including leaving no one behind.
- Expand engagement with regional stakeholders and strategic support to Country Offices and phase out management of local components of GRB programmes.
- Leverage established partnerships with key institutions and their champions at the country level and initiate collaborative regional action planning in various areas of interest (similar to the initiatives with audit institutions). Connect national stakeholders with international and regional organizations and decision-making hubs.
- Continue dialogue with Sida to promote the added value of regional work and its benefits on GRB across the region, and better understand its priorities in the coming years.

*To be led by:* UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, in coordination with UN Women Country Offices

**If not implemented:** Work overload and burnout of personnel; inefficiencies and missed opportunities in implementing strategic functions; missed opportunities for stronger political support for GRB at different levels; and insufficient/inadequate support to the country level.

## RECOMMENDATION 6 UN Women's capacities

**Further capacity development of UN Women's personnel in the region across thematic impact areas on GRB and attracting new personnel with PFM expertise is necessary.**

BASED ON FINDINGS 10 AND 11 AND CONCLUSION 5

PRIORITY **MEDIUM**

### Suggested steps to be taken:

- Initiate and support positioning GRB high on the strategic agenda and integrate it across thematic portfolios to ensure continuity in funding.
- Continue internal capacity development of existing personnel and coaching by the existing GRB experts.
- Explore internal assets in expertise and knowledge across the portfolio and provide internal knowledge-sharing.
- Depending on future programming and resource mobilization for GRB, establish specialist functions in Country Offices, where possible, and attract personnel with PFM expertise.

*To be led by:* UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, in coordination with UN Women Country Offices

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**If not implemented:** Reduced effectiveness of GRB interventions; inconsistent communication of GRB objectives and potential; and unequal quality of design and implementation of GRB interventions across the region.





# ANNEXES

ANNEXES ARE AVAILABLE  
IN VOLUME II OF THE  
REPORT.

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Produced by the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the UN Women Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS)

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# UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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