

UN WOMEN ALBANIA COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

STRATEGIC NOTE 2022–2026

UN WOMEN

FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service with the participation of more than 109 stakeholders, including UN Women, other United Nations entities in Albania, government partners, civil society organizations and programme participants.

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COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

STRATEGIC NOTE 2022–2026



UN WOMEN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, AUDIT AND INVESTIGATION SERVICES (IEAIS)
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UN WOMEN FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

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ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COVID-19	Corona virus disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
EVAW	Eliminating Violence Against Women
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
Istanbul Convention	Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
Law on Domestic Violence	Law on Prevention of and Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women (2026)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation Background

The Country Portfolio Evaluation was intended to inform development of the next UN Women Albania Strategic Note while promoting accountability for results under the current Strategic Note 2022–2026.

The evaluation covered UN Women's integrated triple mandate (normative, coordination and operational) and its work to deliver on the Strategic Note Outcomes of

1. Strengthening government capacity to design and monitor gender-responsive social protection policies and services;
2. Addressing women's economic empowerment, climate change adaptation and access to productive and financial resources; and
3. Gender-responsive governance, ending violence against women and girls, women's political participation, gender data and UN system coordination for gender equality.

The intended users of this evaluation are the UN Women Albania Country Office and its partners, the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women headquarters, the United Nations Country Team, donor community and other stakeholders in Albania.

The evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods approach. It was conducted in accordance with UN Women and UN system evaluation policies and guidelines.

Evaluation context

Albania is an upper middle-income country with a population of 2.4 million and a very high level of human development (HDI 0.810). It is in the process of accelerated accession to the European Union (EU), with all accession chapters expected to close by 2027.

Albania's gender equality index was 60.4 in 2020. In recent years, there have been positive trends in strengthening gender equality legal and policy frameworks and in women's political participation. Challenges remain in terms of violence against women, women's economic participation and women's care burden. EU accession is a major driver of progress on gender equality.

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance

The Strategic Note and its implementation were well aligned with international frameworks, national and municipal level priorities, and the needs of Albanian women and girls. Work under the Strategic Note addressed pressing gender equality challenges; engaged in emerging areas; and took advantage of opportunities that emerged from legal, policy and institutional reform processes. The Country Office also demonstrated strong flexibility in responding to the emerging challenge of anti-gender backlash. Going forward, there is space for the Country Office to develop stronger alignment with the EU accession process.

The Country Office developed strong partnerships and close collaboration with a wide variety of relevant stakeholders. It had an excellent partnership with its key counterpart, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and good collaboration with other ministries, independent state bodies and local municipalities. However, some relationships – such as with the Commission for Protection from Discrimination and EU integration units within government institutions – could be further strengthened.

The Country Office had extensive partnerships with women's civil society at national and local level, which were perceived as a core added value of UN Women, and good collaboration with donors. Engagement with less traditional partners, such as the media and the private sector, generated promising initiatives but requires greater investment.

Albania's EU accession process will define the coming period and more strategic engagement with this process will be a central priority for the Country Office. The Country Office can play an important role in supporting implementation of new legal and policy frameworks; supporting the development of sustainable capacities within institutions; and countering anti-gender backlash. Given the possibility of different EU accession trajectories; uncertainty over the time frame for UN Women's continued engagement in Albania; and possible funding challenges, it will be important for the next Strategic Note to focus on a limited number of strategic priorities and build in flexibility to respond to different scenarios.

Coherence

The Country Office demonstrated good internal synergies across thematic areas and programmes, with strong cross-programmatic linkages evident in its work at national and municipal level. While these synergies have been strengthened during the Strategic Note period, there is space to further embed them within planning and reporting processes. Country Office work across UN Women's triple mandate also demonstrated strong coherence, with the normative agenda providing clear framing for operational and coordination efforts, and each element of the mandate leveraged to contribute to key achievements.

The Country Office provided leadership and expertise on gender equality within the UN Country Team and was proactive in its UN coordination role. However, coordination was apparently undermined by inter-agency competition and limited engagement on gender from some UN partners. While the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) standalone gender equality outcome provided an anchor for gender equality efforts and UN Women's leadership, its removal may reduce focus for gender equality work (the mainstreaming approach could be leveraged for more strategic engagement on gender by all agencies). Stronger UN system alignment around EU accession priorities is required, with potential for the Country Office to lead on priorities related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

UN Women's comparative advantage in Albania comes from its unique mandate, strong expertise and valuable coordinating and convening role. The Country Office was perceived as the "go-to" agency for technical expertise on a range of gender equality issues, and its expert inputs have been particularly useful in the context of extensive legal and policy reform. Another strong area of comparative advantage is the Country Office's excellent relationships with and consistent support for women's civil society and the breadth of its civil society partnerships.

Effectiveness

The Country Office's interventions made a substantial contribution to Strategic Note outcomes, with particularly extensive results achieved under Outcome 3 on gender responsive governance. Results were achieved at systemic, institutional, community and individual levels and were realized through multiple pathways, although assumptions about pathways of change were not always valid. However, some opportunities to advance outcomes by embedding gender within key plans and processes were missed, while in some cases interventions were too small in budget and outreach or too dispersed to make a significant contribution.

Albania's EU accession process created a highly enabling context for the Country Office's work. Results were enabled by strong relationships with government institutions at central and local level, civil society and other stakeholders; close alignment with national priorities; the Country Office's expertise and credibility; and the dedicated gender outcome within the UNSDCF. Growing backlash emerged as a major challenge to gender equality progress, while the achievement of results was also hindered by weak capacities and high turnover within government institutions, and the Country Office's limited influence within some key processes.

Efficiency

The Country Office benefitted from strong leadership; effective coordination routines; skilled staff who have successfully managed a rapidly scaling portfolio; and a well-functioning results-based management system, although outcome and impact- level measurement remained challenging. Direct funding of the Strategic Note supported by Sida (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) was a transformative enabler that filled critical staffing gaps and allowed for investment in some organizational functions that earmarked project funding cannot fully cover. It also allowed for the continuity of programme work in key areas, and investment in new emerging and promising areas of work. Sustaining current capacity levels depends on the continuation of flexible funding, alongside more streamlined corporate procedures and strengthened staff retention conditions.

The Country Office achieved a notable increase in resource mobilization (68 per cent) between 2022 and 2025, enabled by intensified proposal development, strategic positioning and the transformative role of Sida's Strategic Note Direct Funding. However, beyond the resources currently secured until 2027, the outlook is constrained by a deteriorating donor landscape, inter-agency competition for resources and short project cycles. There is a need to further strengthen the Country Office's thematic positioning in relation to evolving donor priorities, such as EU accession-oriented programming, and strategically focus on a selected number of priorities.

Human rights and gender equality

The Country Office achieved increasingly systematic integration of human rights and leave no one behind principles, with tangible outcomes for women with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian women, rural women and survivors of violence through dedicated programming, participatory budgeting and disability-inclusive service pilots at municipal level. However, coverage remains uneven across thematic areas and geographies, with disability inclusion not yet fully mainstreamed beyond work on ending violence against women and social protection; and there is scope for stronger intersectional approaches and more consistent reach to the most marginalized.

The Country Office worked to address the underlying causes of gender inequality through a well-conceived combination of legislative reform, gender-responsive planning and budgeting, youth and school-based engagement, media partnership and capacity-building, and innovative behavioural change approaches, including work with men and boys. At the same time, the depth and persistence of discriminatory social norms — compounded by a growing anti-gender backlash — underscore that sustained, long-term investment in structural and normative change is needed, moving beyond time-bound campaigns towards consistent, community-embedded engagement that reaches the most conservative and remote settings.

Sustainability

The Country Office has invested extensively in capacity development for government, civil society and oversight institutions. Although significant capacities have been built, the sustainability of these gains is undermined by high staff turnover in public administration; continued dependence on UN Women's direct technical inputs; and the slow pace of institutionalizing training through permanent national systems. As capacity and financing are mutually reinforcing, gender-responsive budgeting and EU-aligned financing instruments are the principal levers for addressing both constraints simultaneously. EU accession creates structural demand for the capacities UN Women has been building, offering a powerful sustainability anchor if capacity transfer can be accelerated.

The Country Office has also supported national and local-level ownership, anchored in legal frameworks, budgetary commitments and institutional champions. Key models such as Local Gender Action Plans and gender-responsive budgeting have been scaled up, while other initiatives demonstrate potential for replication. However, ownership remains uneven as smaller municipalities struggle to implement frameworks; women's economic empowerment pilots face uncertain viability; and geographical inequities in service coverage persist. The durability of current positive trajectories depends on embedding gender equality within EU-aligned financing instruments.

CONCLUSIONS

1

EU accession is the main driver of sustainable progress on gender equality in Albania and, while the Country Office has engaged in some important ways with this process, there have also been some gaps. A more strategic and clearly articulated alignment with the EU accession process would be valuable both for advancing gender equality outcomes and mobilizing resources for Country Office efforts.

2

The Country Office harnesses its expertise, credibility and convening power to contribute to gender equality results at multiple levels and across thematic areas. Its close relationships with government institutions and civil society have enabled the Country Office to influence gender-related agendas and reforms. However, there is a risk of overdependence by partners on Country Office support that needs to be addressed, particularly given uncertainties about UN Women's longer-term presence.

3

The Country Office leverages its normative mandate to take advantage of EU accession-related reforms and guide the development of legal and policy frameworks, while employing its operational mandate to help develop the capacities and systems to implement these frameworks. However, the Country Office's ability to provide leadership for coordinated UN system engagement on gender priorities is uneven and strengthening this will be critical in the next strategic period.

4

Anti-gender backlash and misinformation present a growing threat to gender equality progress in Albania. The Country Office demonstrated agility and built credibility with its response to backlash on the Gender Equality Law. It is well placed to build upon this experience to develop expanded coalitions and comprehensive strategies that can counter backlash, promote positive social norms and advance the rights of the most marginalized groups.

5

The Country Office's effectiveness is underpinned by strong internal systems and capacities, and a culture of collaboration. Together with Strategic Note Direct Funding, these factors have enabled the Country Office to respond to stakeholders' high expectations and deliver results. Maintaining sufficient capacities and resources in a challenging funding landscape will require strategic positioning in relation to shifting donor priorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 The Country Office should (a) develop a compelling vision of how it can align with and add value to the EU accession process as a key entry point for advancing Albania's international gender equality commitments; and (b) undertake scenario planning for different EU accession trajectories.

2 The Country Office should develop a multi-faceted approach to address backlash, building on corporate guidance and best practices in this area. This must include expanding work on social norms change and integrating a focus on the most marginalized groups across the portfolio.

3 The Country Office should continue to lead on mainstreaming gender equality throughout UNSDCF implementation; strengthen strategic partnerships and joint programming with other UN agencies, including in the context of UN80 reform; and develop coordinated UN system engagement on gender aspects of EU accession and in response to backlash.

4 The Country Office should engage in key strategic areas and critical partnerships, with a focus on consolidating and deepening national capacities and ownership to generate sustainable results at scale.

5 The Country Office should develop a resource mobilization strategy that (a) aligns its thematic positioning with evolving donor priorities; and (b) prioritizes securing Strategic Note funding, while improving outcome and impact monitoring to strengthen the evidence base for donor engagement.

SECTION 1

BACKGROUND

A Country Portfolio Evaluation is a systematic assessment of the contributions made by UN Women to development results with respect to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level. This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service in close cooperation with the UN Women Country Office in Albania.

1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope

The purpose of the evaluation was to (a) support the Country Office's strategic learning and decision-making to inform the next Strategic Note; and (b) support accountability for development effectiveness. Its specific objectives are detailed in Annex 2.

The evaluation scope included all Country Office work during the current Strategic Note period 2022–2026. The geographical scope of the evaluation included the entire country, with interviews conducted in Tirana, and in the Durres, Elbasan and Bulqiza Municipalities.

1.2 Evaluation approach, methodology and ethics

The evaluation applied a theory-based approach, assessing how, under what circumstances and to what extent UN Women contributed to results and how its interventions interplayed with other processes in the country. The evaluation applied the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Assistance Committee's criteria to assess UN Women's work, covering relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. It also added an additional criterion on human rights and gender equality.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Technical workshop on the gender mainstreaming guidance note in the health sector, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. March 2026.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Women entrepreneurs participating at the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO 2025 in Tirana, Albania.

The evaluation was guided by the following six key evaluation questions (see Annex 8 for a detailed evaluation matrix):

- To what extent does the Strategic Note and its implementation address the key priorities for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania?
- To what extent has the Country Office achieved internal and external coherence; strengthened coordination on gender equality and the empowerment of women; and leveraged UN Women's comparative advantages?
- To what extent has UN Women contributed to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania during the Strategic Note period (2022–2026)?
- To what extent is the Country Office able to ensure efficient use of resources (personnel, funding, assets)?
- Does the portfolio advance human rights and leave no one behind principles, address the underlying causes of gender inequality, and promote environmental sustainability?
- To what extent are Strategic Note results sustainable and nationally owned, and is there potential to scale up?

The evaluation methodology involved multiple methods of data collection and combined quantitative and qualitative research and case studies (see Figure 1). One hundred and nine internal and external stakeholders were consulted as part of the evaluation (see Figure 2).

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with UN Women and UN system evaluation policies and guidelines. For more details on the evaluation approach, methodology and ethics, see Annex 2.

1.3 Evaluation constraints and limitations

The evaluation did not encounter any major limitations. While the evaluation team was only able to engage with rights holders in the four locations visited, this constraint was mitigated through engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) that work with rights holders more broadly across the country. There was a risk of stakeholder fatigue due to other recent UN evaluations, but this was mitigated by limiting overlap with stakeholders targeted by other evaluations. In addition, the online personnel survey captured the self-reported perceptions of a small number of UN Women personnel (20 respondents). Its results were therefore used to complement and triangulate evidence from stakeholder interviews and the document review, rather than as a stand-alone source of evidence.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
UN Team cheering during the mini football tournament organized on the occasion of International Women's Day. March 2026.

FIGURE 1

Sources and methodology for data collection

Mixed-methods data collection

Quantitative and qualitative data collected and triangulated

Over 100 documents reviewed

Workplans, evaluations, project documents, reports, studies

109 internal and external stakeholders consulted

Through semi-structured interviews and focus groups (100 women, 9 men)

3 case studies

Contribution to normative gains on gender equality and the empowerment of women, Engagement at municipal level, Direct funding to 2022–26 Strategic Note

1 online survey

with UN Women personnel (20 responded, 90 per cent women)

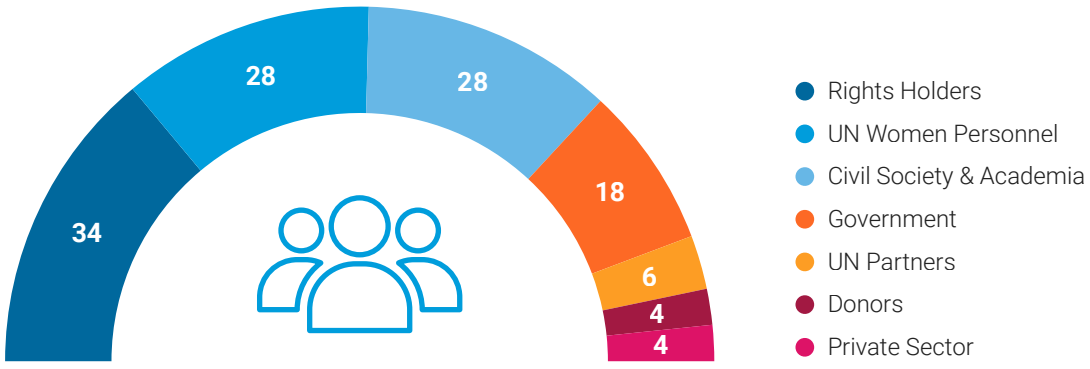
Quality assurance

IEAIS, UN Women Country Office Team, Evaluation Reference Group

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team.

FIGURE 2

Types of stakeholders consulted from different groups



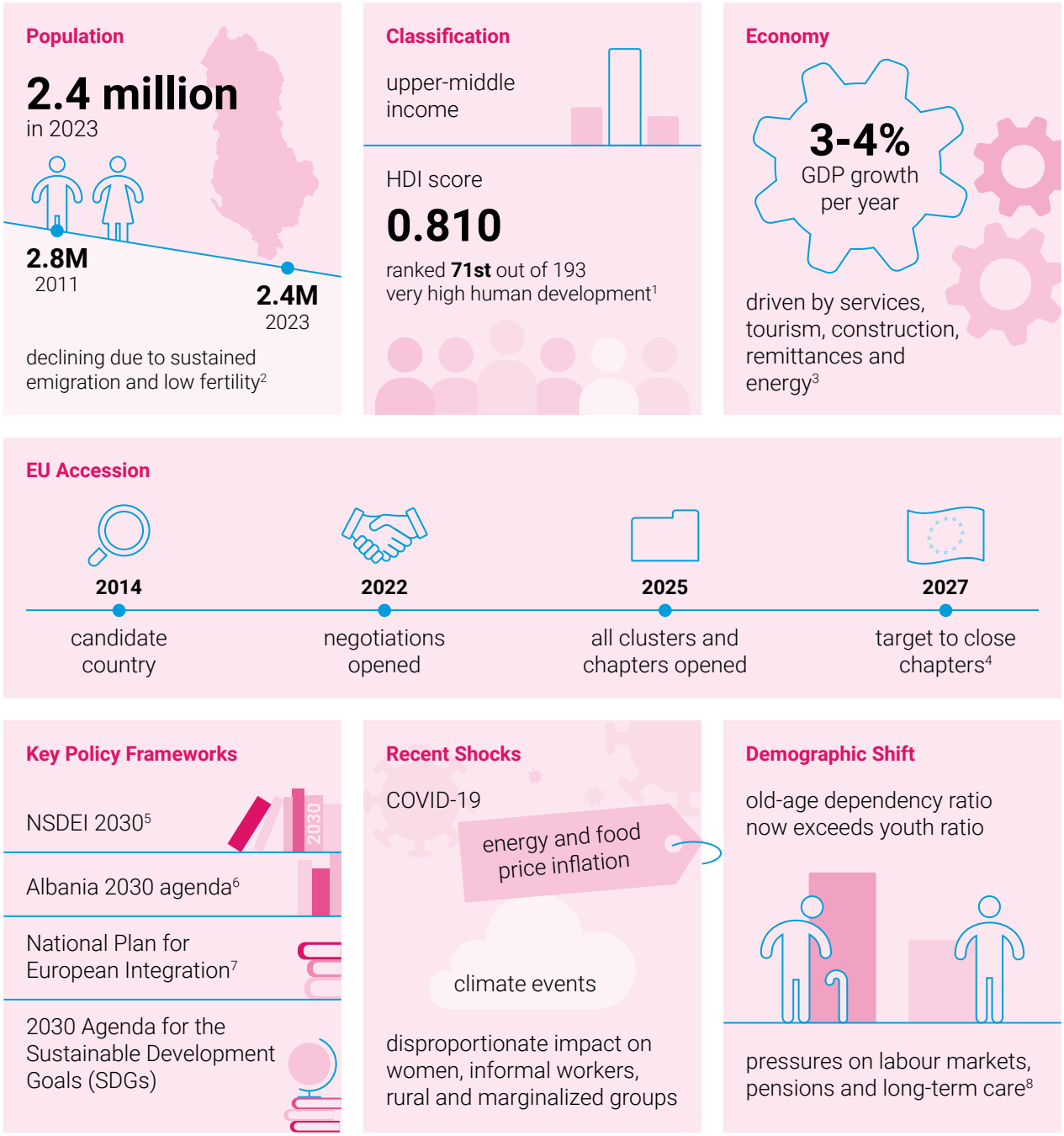
Source: Compiled by the evaluation team.

SECTION 2

EVALUATION CONTEXT

Figure 3 below present key data on the evaluation context. A detailed description of the Albania country context, gender context, and UN structures and frameworks can be found in Annex 3.

FIGURE 3
Key data on the Albania country context



[1] The 2025 Human Development Report – "A matter of choice: people and possibilities in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)". Source: https://www.undp.org/albania/press-releases/human-development-progress-slows-35-year-low-according-un-development-programme-report

[2] Albanian Population and Housing Census 2023, INSTAT 2024. Source: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2024/albanian-population-and-housing-census-2023/

[3] World Bank country profile, Albania. Source https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/albania

[4] EU-Albania relations. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/countries/albania_en

[5] https://saspac.gov.al/vendim-nr-88-date-22-2-2023-per-miratimin-e-strategjise-kombetare-per-zhvillim-dhe-integrim-evropian-2022-2030/

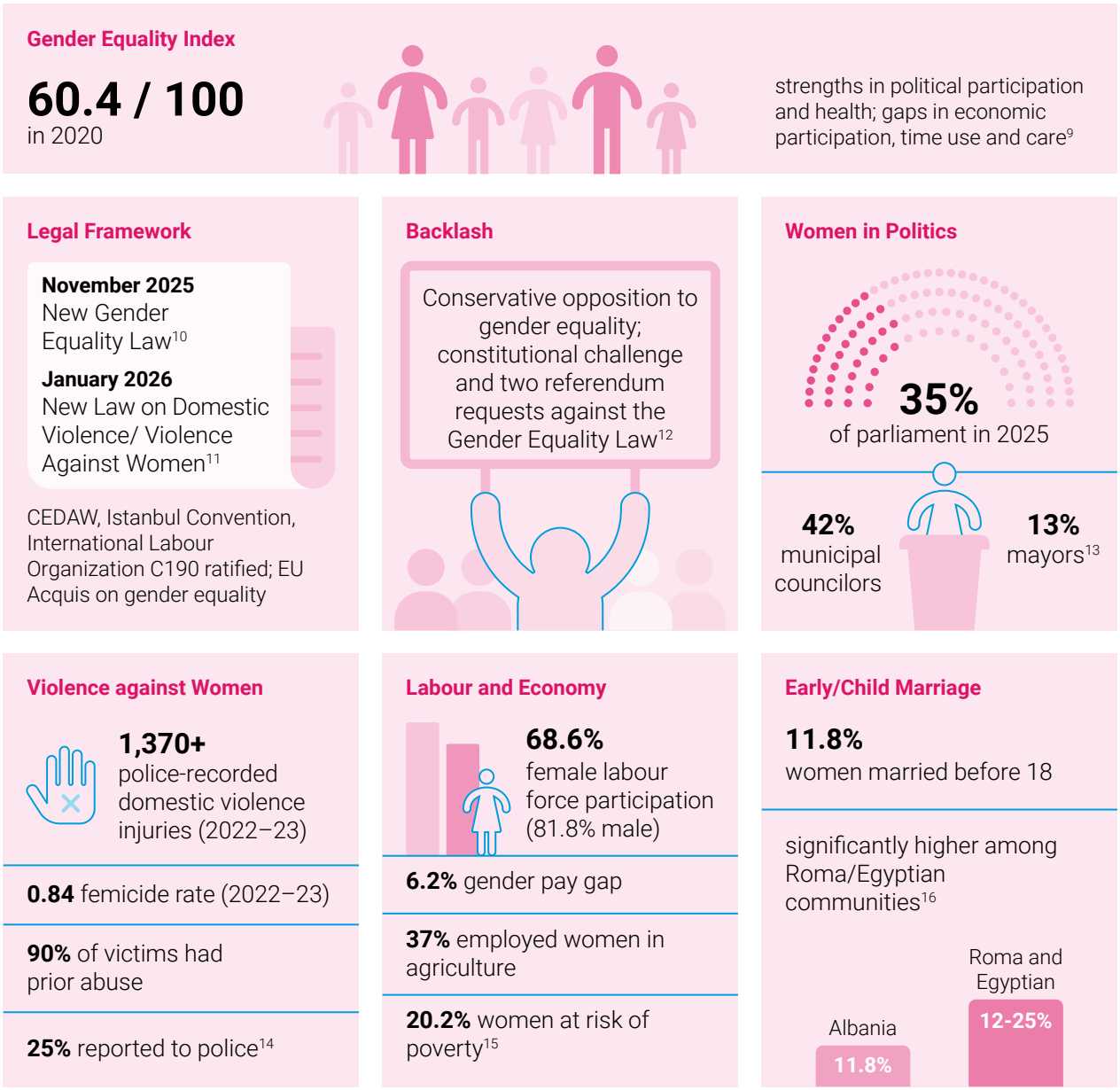
[6] https://saspac.gov.al/en/reform-agenda-growth-plan/

[7] https://www.kryeministria.al/en/plani-kombetar-per-integrimin-evropian-pkie/

[8] "Aging in Albania" (UNDP 2025). Source: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-08/aging_in_albania.pdf

These structural dynamics set the parameters within which gender equality is pursued in Albania. Figure 4 turns to that dimension, profiling the country's gender equality landscape: a strengthening legal and institutional framework alongside persistent gaps in women's economic participation, a high incidence of violence against women, and the emergence of an organized anti-gender backlash.

FIGURE 4
Key data on the gender equality context



[9] Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania 2020, INSTAT 2020. Source https://www.instat.gov.al/media/6661/gender_equality_index_for_the_republic_of_albania_2020.pdf

[10] http://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2025/11/06/64

[11] https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Ligj-nr.-11-dt.-28.1.2026-i-miratuar-ne-kuvend.pdf

[12] See Citizens Channel "Why can't there be a referendum on the GE law" (March 2026). Source https://citizens.al/en/2026/03/12/pse-nuk-mund-te-kete-referendum-per-ligjin-e-barazise-gjinore/

[13] Albania Country Gender equality Profile (UN Women 2025). Source: https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/11/country-gender-equality-profile-albania

[14] Femicide in Albania 2024 (UN Women 2025). Source: https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2026/03/femicide-in-albania-2024

[15] INSTAT 2025: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/employment-and-unemployment-from-lfs/

[16] "Girls not brides – Albania". Source https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/en/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/albania/

SECTION 3

PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

3.1 The UN Women Albania Strategic Note 2022–2026

The UN Women Albania Country Office Strategic Note 2022–2026 supports the organization's triple mandate in alignment with the UN Women Global Strategic Plan 2022–2025, the Albanian National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022–2026 to which UN Women contributes programmatically across three of the four framework outcomes.

The Strategic Note is structured around one overarching impact statement – ensuring all women and girls in Albania fully enjoy and exercise their human rights in a gender-equal society – and three Strategic Note Outcomes aligned to UNSDCF Outcomes A, B and C. Outcome 1 (UNSDCF Outcome A) focuses on strengthening government capacity to design and monitor gender-responsive social protection policies and services. Outcome 2 (UNSDCF Outcome B) addresses women's economic empowerment, climate change adaptation and access to productive and financial resources. Outcome 3 (UNSDCF Outcome C) covers gender-responsive governance, ending violence against women (EVAW) and girls, women's political participation, gender data and UN system coordination for gender equality. Together, these outcomes include 11 outputs spanning institutional capacity-building, gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), EVAW service provision, norms change and evidence generation.

On the normative side, the Country Office has supported Albania's engagement with key international and regional mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review (2024), CEDAW Concluding Observations (2023), GREVIO reporting (2024), the Beijing+30 national review and development of the Second National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2023–2027). Technical and legal assistance has been provided for gender equality legal reform in the context of EU accession. UN Women leads the Gender Thematic and Results Group, co-chairs the UNSDCF Outcome on Gender-Responsive Governance with the United Nations Population Fund and contributes to output groups across all four UNSDCF outcomes. The Country Office also produced Albania's Country Gender Equality Profile (2025) and led the process for the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality Scorecard.

The operational portfolio during the Strategic Note period comprises 14 projects and programmes, including both country-level initiatives and components of regional programmes. Key interventions span EVAW (Phase II regional and joint programmes), GRB and governance (Transformative Financing regional programme; EU 4 Gender Equality I and II), women's economic empowerment and rural development (GREAT; Empowering Women for Rural Development in Northern Albania), social inclusion (Leave No One Behind Phase 2; LEAP), earthquake recovery, youth and peacebuilding, and women's political participation. The portfolio is delivered through a mix of joint programmes with other UN agencies, regional programmes and stand-alone country projects.

3.2 Human resources and financial analysis

The Country Office's budget increased significantly over the Strategic Note period from US$ 2.6 million in 2022 to US$ 4.9 million in 2026: 77 per cent of funding during this period was non-core. Top donors include the Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the EU and government funding from Sweden, Italy and the United Kingdom. As of July 2026, the Country Office employs 28 personnel (14 on personnel services agreements, 6 consultants, 7 staff and 1 intern). See Figure 5 for further details.

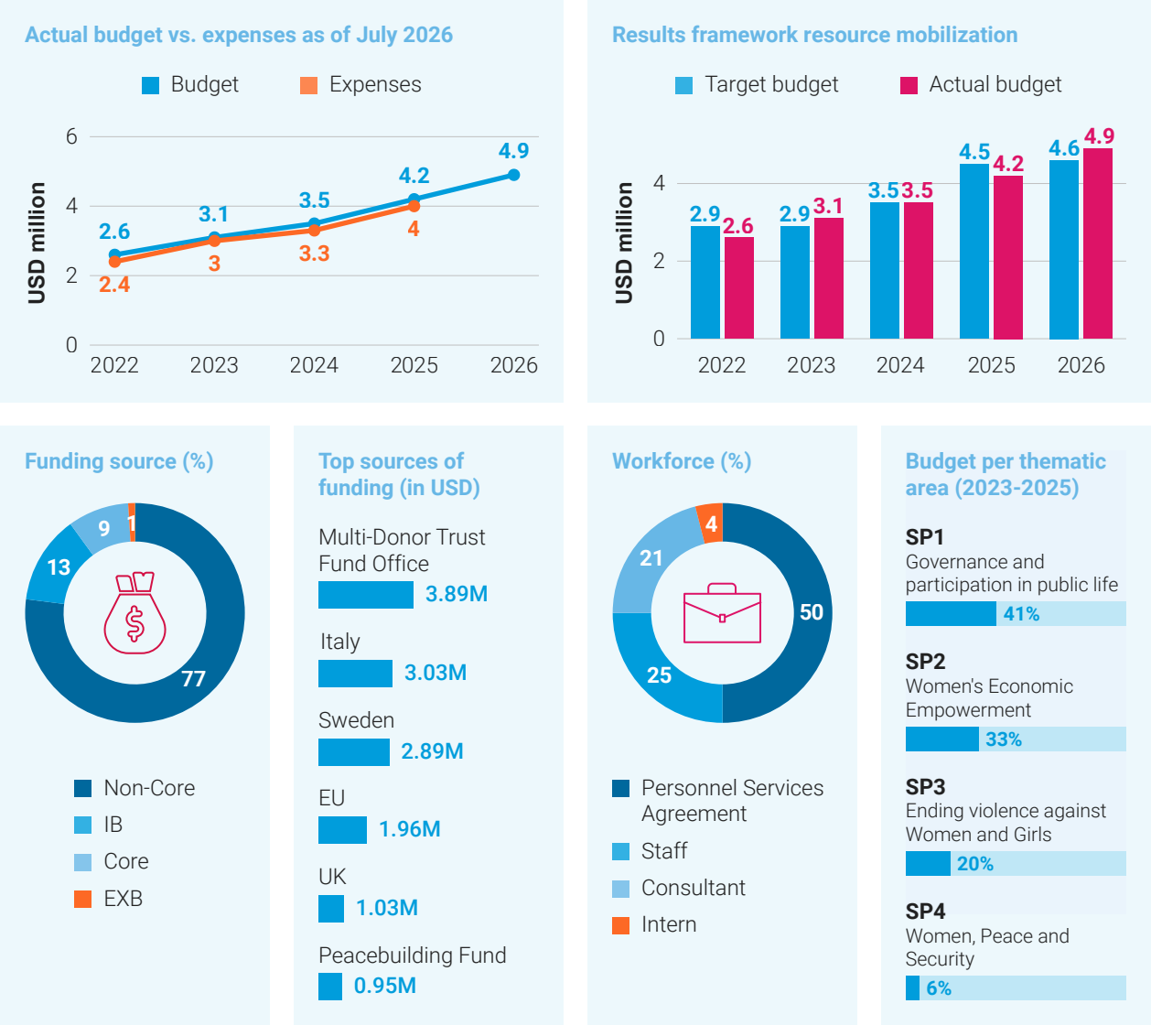
3.3 Key stakeholders

Key stakeholders for this evaluation were identified during the inception phase through document review and consultation with the Country Office. The primary stakeholders include:

- Government institutions
- CSOs
- UN partners
- Donors
- Private companies
- Target groups of UN Women's programmes
- UN Women stakeholders

(see Annex 6 for more details).

FIGURE 5
Portfolio analysis



FINDINGS

FIGURE 6

Evaluation findings at a glance

Assessment

Needs attention | Mixed | Strong

Relevance	**F1** Strong alignment with international, national and municipal priorities; flexible response to backlash; stronger EU accession alignment is needed.
	F2 Strong partnerships with government and civil society; engagement with the media and private sector requires greater investment.
	F3 EU accession will define the coming period; next Strategic Note should focus on a limited set of transformative priorities with built-in flexibility for different scenarios.
Coherence	**F4** Good internal synergies across thematic areas and the triple mandate, with space to further embed them in planning and reporting processes.
	F5 Proactive UN coordination leadership, but undermined by inter-agency competition and limited engagement on gender from some UN partners.
	F6 Clear comparative advantage through UN Women's unique mandate, strong technical expertise and extensive civil society relationships.
Effectiveness	**F7** Substantial contribution to outcomes at systemic, institutional, community and individual levels, although some opportunities were missed and scale was uneven.
	F8 EU accession and strong relationships enabled results; backlash and weak institutional capacities emerged as major challenges.
Efficiency	**F9** Strong leadership, coordination and results-based management, although outcome-level measurement remains challenging; Sida's flexible funding was a transformative enabler.
	F10 68 per cent increase in resource mobilization since 2022; outlook constrained by a deteriorating donor landscape and evolving EU accession financing dynamics.
Human Rights & Gender Equality	**F11** Increasingly systematic leave no one behind integration with tangible outcomes, although coverage remains uneven across thematic areas and geographies.
	F12 Well-conceived approach to root causes of inequality, but depth of discriminatory norms requires sustained, long-term investment beyond time-bound campaigns.
Sustainability	**F13** Capacities built but undermined by public administration turnover and dependency on direct UN Women inputs; EU accession offers a powerful sustainability anchor.
	F14 Ownership anchored in law, budget and institutional champions; durability depends on embedding gender equality in EU-aligned financing instruments.

Source: Synthesis of Section 4 findings by the evaluation team.

RELEVANCE

To what extent does the Strategic Note and its implementation address the key priorities for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania?

FINDING 1

The Strategic Note and its implementation were well aligned with international frameworks, national and municipal level priorities, and the needs of Albanian women and girls. Work under the Strategic Note addressed pressing gender equality challenges; engaged in emerging areas; and took advantage of opportunities that emerged from legal, policy and institutional reform processes. The Country Office demonstrated strong flexibility in responding to the emerging challenge of backlash. Going forward, there is space for stronger alignment with the EU accession process.

The Strategic Note was well aligned with international human rights and gender equality frameworks, drawing on CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Istanbul Convention, and mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review, to leverage progress on gender equality frameworks in Albania. This strong alignment was also recognized internally, with most respondents to the Country Office personnel survey rating it as excellent. The Strategic Note was also well aligned with UN system priorities in Albania and contributed to three UNSDCF outcomes. The Country Office played an important role in shaping the current UNSDCF and ensuring it was relevant to national gender priorities and that gender results were strongly articulated, including through a stand-alone gender equality outcome led by UN Women.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Workshop on the Latest Updates to the Standard Budget Instructions for the Medium-Term Budget Program Preparation in Tirana, Albania. December 2024.

Work under the Strategic Note was closely aligned with government priorities, including the National Strategy for Development and EU Integration, and the National Strategy for Gender Equality which the Country Office helped to shape. UN Women's key government counterpart, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, reported that Country Office support was well aligned to its priorities, as did several other ministries and state institutions. For example, the Country Office's normative work was seen as highly relevant to national legal and policy reforms; the Country Office's support to INSTAT and partner institutions in strengthening the production, dissemination and use of official gender statistics was seen as valuable for informing policymaking and strengthening official gender statistics in line with the Law on Official Statistics, the Official Statistics Programme and the European Statistical System; and the Country Office's GRB support was reported to be highly relevant to Albania's public finance reform agenda, given that GRB is embedded in core public finance legislation, integrated into performance-based budgeting within line ministries and mandatory for all municipalities. Project-level evaluations identified strong alignment with sectoral-level policies. For example, the final evaluation of the Gender Rural Equality and Tourism project found it to be well aligned with the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, while the midterm evaluation of

the UN Joint Programme Leave No One Behind (LNB2) found that it was well aligned with the National Social Protection Strategy, Social Inclusion Policy Document and National Action Plans for Roma/Egyptians, persons with disabilities, the elderly and LGBTI.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Visitors at the "Voices of Virtual Violence" exhibition during the 16 Days of Activism, Tirana, Albania. December 2024.

Strategic Note implementation was also well aligned with municipal and local priorities. Municipalities reported that the support provided by the Country Office was relevant to their efforts to deliver on new gender equality related requirements, e.g. in integrating gender into planning and budgeting processes and strengthening services for women and girls. Representatives of the Bulqiza Municipality reported that the Country Office's support was well tailored to the municipality's priorities and local development strategy and was based on a mapping of local needs. Local-level work with CSOs to provide services was also reported to be relevant to local contexts and needs, and in addressing critical gaps in state service provision, notably in relation to EVAW. Similarly, the 2024 midterm evaluation of UN Joint Programme Leave No One Behind[17] found that the programme responded to the decentralization of social care responsibilities to municipalities and the need to consolidate the roll-out of the Law on Social Care Services.

The Country Office's work during the Strategic Note period addressed some of the most pressing gender equality challenges in Albania and advanced the key priorities of women and girls. This was most evident in the Country Office's comprehensive work across multiple levels to address violence against women, which is a critical issue due to rising violence trends and very limited services in rural areas. Similarly, the focus on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) addressed pressing challenges regarding women's low labour force participation, unpaid care work and the economic vulnerabilities of marginalized women. However, WEE initiatives were not always well aligned with women's priorities, for example stakeholders involved in the Gender Rural Equality and Tourism project reported that needs assessments and consultation with communities were inadequate, while the final evaluation of the project found its emphasis on entrepreneurship did not align with rural women's aspirations.[18] The Strategic Note also addressed emerging issues, for example in relation to women's participation in the rapidly growing tourism sector.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Albanian journalist during the annual meeting of the UN Women Media Forum in Durres, Albania. November 2025.

17 "Mid-term evaluation of UN JP "Leave No One Behind" -Phase 2" 2024, UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and UNFPA in Albania (Link: https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11619)

18 The management response to this evaluation recognized that future WEE programming must do more to ensure that economic empowerment strategies are responsive to the diverse needs of beneficiaries, as well as provide a stronger focus on market integration, intergenerational engagement and financial sustainability.

The Country Office aligned its work with the EU accession process to a significant extent, notably by engaging extensively on gender-related legal, policy and institutional reforms required to meet the EU accession criteria. For example, the Country Office played a key role in development of the 2025 Gender Equality Law and the 2026 Law on Domestic Violence, which were required to meet EU Chapter 23 Benchmarks on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, with knowledge generated under the EU for Gender Equality project informing these processes.[19] However, stakeholders reported that some opportunities to align with the EU accession agenda were missed, for example that the Country Office's work with the private sector does not sufficiently align with or seek to leverage EU private-sector requirements (e.g. in relation to equal pay, decent work or work life balance). Given that EU accession will continue to be the overarching context for UN Women's work in Albania over the coming years, there is a need to ensure that all Country Office work is clearly aligned with EU accession processes, and to develop a narrative that demonstrates UN Women's relevance to these processes.

The Country Office demonstrated flexibility in responding to emerging challenges, with stakeholder interviews, project reports and the personnel survey all indicating that interventions had been adapted to respond to contextual developments. One of the clearest examples of adaptation was in response to a backlash against the Gender Equality Law, which involved organized misinformation campaigns by multiple sets of actors with a specific focus on sexual orientation and gender identity provisions. The Country Office responded in several ways, including working in alliance with civil society, academia and supportive actors within the media to address misinformation; collaborating with the parliamentary women's alliance to advocate with parliamentarians and political party leaders; engaging with religious leaders to address concerns; and advising the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Ombudsperson on navigating backlash and advancing the progress of the law. It also brought the issue of backlash to the attention of the UNCT and Gender Theme Group, although there was limited appetite among UN partners to engage on this issue. Meanwhile, steps were taken to strengthen the capacity of the Country Office and its partners to respond to backlash, including engaging a communications consultant to work on strategic communication and address misinformation.[20] The Regional Office also provided expertise, training and experience sharing.

[19] The Country Office's work on the 2026 Law on Domestic Violence was supported through the Sida-funded Joint Programme Ending Violence Against Women in Albania, while work on the Gender Equality Law was supported by Sida's direct funding for the Strategic Note.

[20] This role was funded with Strategic Note Direct Funding.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Representatives of the private sector signing the Women Empowerment Principles during the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO 2025 in Tirana, Albania. October 2025.

FINDING 2

The Country Office developed strong partnerships and close collaboration with a wide variety of relevant stakeholders. It had an excellent partnership with its key counterpart, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and good collaboration with other ministries, independent state bodies and local municipalities, although some relationships require further strengthening. The Country Office also had extensive partnerships with women's civil society at national and local level, which were perceived as a core added value of UN Women, as well as its good collaboration with donors. Engagement with less traditional partners, such as the media and private sector, generated promising initiatives but require greater investment.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Women entrepreneurs participating at the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO 2024 in Tirana, Albania.

Interviews across stakeholder groups confirmed that the Country Office had extensive relationships with relevant partners. This view was also reflected among responses to the UN Women personnel survey. Partnerships with government and state institutions were strong, with government stakeholders reporting that they view UN Women as a trusted and reliable partner, and surveyed personnel similarly highly rating engagement with government and public administration. The Country Office worked in close partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and ministry officials reported that this partnership adds value to their gender-related work. The Country Office has good partnerships with other ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of State for Local Government and the State Agency of Strategic Planning and Aid Coordination. The Country Office has also developed strong partnerships with independent state institutions, such as INSTAT, and the Ombudsperson, whose staff reported that partnership with UN Women gave them access to critical expertise on a range of gender issues. Partnerships with municipal authorities were strong, with the centrepiece of these partnerships the collaboration on Local Gender Action Plans.

However, the evaluation found there is space to strengthen partnerships with some institutions. For example, the Country Office could expand its engagement with Albania's parliament, including by engaging with a broader range of parliamentarians and working more closely with the Commission for Protection from Discrimination on leave no one behind issues and responding to backlash. Similarly, given the context of accelerated EU accession, stakeholders reported that the Country Office should further strengthen engagement with key actors relevant to the accession process, including EU integration units within government institutions and the negotiator for integration in the Prime Minister's Office.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
National Conference on Women, Peace, and Security in Tirana, Albania. November 2024.

The Country Office partnered with a diverse range of national and local-level CSOs. Multiple CSO representatives reported good collaboration with the Country Office, characterized by strong consultation and information-sharing, clear complementarity and valuable support for CSO capacities and networks.[21] Support to women's civil society will continue to be critical, especially given its key role in addressing backlash and holding the government to account on implementation of new gender frameworks. However, the evaluation identified a risk that the civil society partners which depend on UN Women funding may face sustainability challenges if UN Women's presence is reduced in the coming years. An important future priority will be developing the capacity of women's civil society to access diverse sources of support and funding given the funding challenges they face.

The evaluation identified some good examples of partnership and collaboration with donors and other international actors, such as the Human Capital Development Deep Dive that was jointly developed with the UN, EU and World Bank. However, there is more to be done in this area, with government stakeholders stressing that, to increase its impact, the Country Office must strengthen collaboration with international actors which provide large-scale financing in support of EU accession processes, including the EU, World Bank and French Development Agency. A coordinated approach to such partnerships with the wider UN system could be valuable.

The Country Office strengthened engagement with less traditional partners during the Strategic Note period. Most notably, its Media Forum provided space for collaboration with over 30 journalists; the partnership proved particularly valuable in addressing backlash. However, multiple stakeholders reported that, given the central role that the media plays in perpetuating discriminatory gender norms, the Country Office should seek to further strengthen this engagement and go beyond working with journalists to also convene editors and others involved in the industry. Results from the personnel survey also suggest there is space to strengthen partnership with media, with just 50 per cent of personnel reporting that the Country Office engaged with the media "very well".

Partnership with the private sector was found to be one of the weaker areas — a view expressed by stakeholders and widely shared by Country Office personnel. While the Country Office successfully expanded the number of signatories to the Women's Empowerment Principles from 11 in 2022 to 87 in 2026 and there were some strong examples of activities with the private sector,[22] multiple stakeholders reported that the Country Office could do more to deepen collaboration with the private sector. Stakeholders involved in Women's Empowerment Principles initiatives reported that greater and more sustained investment is required from the Country Office to follow up with signatories and keep them actively engaged, especially as recent economic pressures have reduced the appetite of companies to be involved in such efforts.[23]



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Women entrepreneurs participating at the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO 2025 in Tirana, Albania.

[21] For example, the Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence and PRISMA network.

[22] For example, through the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO co-organized with the Ministry of State for Economy and Innovation, Start-Up Albania, the Women's Chamber of Commerce and companies committed to the Women's Empowerment Principles.

[23] It is important to note that broader challenges to engaging the private sector in Albania include perceptions that partnerships with UN agencies are primarily a source of funding rather than a platform for mutual accountability and normative alignment, and the legacy of Albania's communist period which has contributed to a weak culture of corporate social responsibility.

FIGURE 7

Partnership strength and stakeholder categories



Source: Evaluation team assessment (Finding 2).

FINDING 3

Albania's EU accession process will define the coming period and more strategic engagement with this process will be a central priority for the Country Office. The Country Office can play an important role in supporting the implementation of new legal and policy frameworks; supporting the development of sustainable capacities within institutions; and countering backlash. Given the possibility of different EU accession trajectories; uncertainty over the time frame for UN Women's continued engagement in Albania; and possible funding challenges, it will be important for the next Strategic Note to focus on a limited number of strategic priorities and build in flexibility to respond to different scenarios.

Albania's EU accession process will drive extensive change in the country over the next few years. It is widely agreed that the Country Office must engage more strategically and extensively with this process under the next Strategic Note. Multiple stakeholders suggested that this will require deepening engagement with the EU and with key actors within government responsible for EU integration by (a) advancing a more strategic vision regarding the gender equality aspects of EU accession; (b) supporting gender mainstreaming within key accession-related processes and instruments;[24] and (c) ensuring alignment with the EU's new 2026–2030 Gender Equality Strategy.[25] This could build on the substantial work on gender and EU integration that is being undertaken by the Gender Equality fund in Albania. It was noted that significantly stepping up engagement on EU accession may require increased expertise within the Country Office.

Albania has developed strong legal and policy frameworks for gender equality with support from the Country Office; and a central priority should now be supporting implementation of these frameworks. There is a strong demand for assistance in this area from government institutions: government stakeholders noted that UN Women's technical support will be crucial for the effective implementation of the Gender Equality Law and the Law on Domestic Violence. Such support could involve assisting with the development and adoption of required sub-legal acts and revisions to secondary legislation; supporting the development of guidelines and protocols; strengthening national gender data and monitoring systems; and conducting impact assessments. Crucially, institutions at multiple levels will require enhanced capacities to implement these new frameworks. Stakeholders reported that developing these capacities should be a top priority for the Country Office, particularly through system-level support to embed sustainable capacities for implementation (see Finding 13).

Implementation will be particularly challenging at municipal level, where around 70 per cent of the EU acquis should be implemented and where capacities are particularly limited. A key future priority for the Country Office should therefore be supporting sustainable implementation and monitoring capacities at municipal level, e.g. GRB and planning, the Gender Equality Law, or the gender aspects of territorial reform.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Students of the Faculty of Social Science in Tirana, Albania, were the first prize-winning team at Bootcamp 2023. They turned their idea to promote gender equality in the community by giving out coffee in cups inscribed with messages against gender discrimination and stereotypes in the workplace.

[24] For example, within implementation of the National Reform Agenda and Growth Plan, and within financing mechanisms.
[25] It is also necessary to ensure alignment with other relevant EU strategies, such as the European Care Strategy.

The experience of the Gender Equality Law indicates that backlash is likely to be a significant challenge[26] and will require a sustained and comprehensive response from the Country Office, working in partnership with a wide alliance of stakeholders; deploying a variety of strategies; mobilizing the UN system; and drawing on corporate guidance and strategies.[27] Stakeholders suggested that key elements of the Country Office's response to backlash should include deepening efforts to support and defend women's civil society; scaling up communications work to develop counter narratives and make a positive case for gender equality; expanding work with the media and academia; and providing technical support to the government in responding to backlash and defence against legal challenges to gender equality legislation (such as the current challenge to the Gender Equality Law in the constitutional court).

Finally, while accelerated EU accession remains the most likely trajectory for Albania, there remains the possibility that the accession process will slow or stall. Given this would significantly change the context for advancing gender equality, a scenario planning approach would be valuable to identify key priorities in the case of these different trajectories. In developing the next Strategic Note, the Country Office should take into account its own uncertain future, as successful EU accession would involve the end of Official Development Assistance for Albania and a likely phase out of UN presence; while stalled EU accession combined with challenging global development aid trends could result in a significant reduction in donor funding to the country. Given these potential limitations in time frame and funding, it is important that the next Strategic Note focuses on a limited set of strategic priorities where UN Women can support sustainable impact. All donors interviewed for this evaluation stressed that the Country Office should engage on a few transformative priorities with key partners; support strategic, system-level change; and avoid dispersed and small-scale projects.

[26] Experience from some other countries in the region suggests that backlash against gender equality may increase if EU accession stalls or following successful accession.

[27] UN Women, 2024. Pushing Forward for Rights, Equality and Justice: An Evolving UN Women Strategy (internal document); UN Women, 2025; Pushing Forward for Rights, Equality and Justice in a Shifting Global Context Pushing forward for rights, equality and justice in a shifting global context | Publications | UN Women Knowledge portal; UN Women 2026, Ideologies, institutions and power: Addressing discriminatory social norms, https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2026/03/ideologies-institutions-and-power-addressing-discriminatory-social-norms



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Training on the care economy with students in Tirana, Albania. December 2025.

COHERENCE

To what extent has the Country Office achieved internal and external coherence, strengthened coordination on gender equality and the empowerment of women, and leveraged UN Women's comparative advantages?

FINDING 4

The Country Office demonstrated good internal synergies across thematic areas and programmes, with strong cross-programmatic linkages evident in its work at national and municipal level. While these synergies have been strengthened during the Strategic Note period, there is space to further embed them within planning and reporting processes. The Country Office's work across its triple mandate also demonstrated strong coherence, with the normative agenda providing clear framing for operational and coordination efforts, and each element of the mandate being leveraged to contribute to key achievements.

The evaluation found strong internal synergies across Strategic Note outcomes, thematic areas and programmes. Sixty-five per cent of Country Office personnel reported synergies across programmes and between thematic areas "to a great extent", while 20 per cent reported synergies "to some extent". Country Office personnel gave multiple examples of such synergies, for example using GRB as a cross-cutting entry point to institutionalize and finance EVAW services, social protection and inclusive local governance; linking EVAW and women's economic empowerment by combining survivor protection services with livelihood and skills-building support; and applying gender data and evidence as a common backbone across multiple programmes.

The evaluation found clear evidence of cross-thematic working in the Country Office's support for the development of Local Gender Action Plans, which involved strong inputs from different thematic teams (see Annex 3 for details on support for Local Gender Action Plans) The plans, supported in 13 municipalities, integrated objectives on WEE, EVAW, Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and governance to create an integrated local-level framework;[28] while youth engagement through WPS programming was linked to development of Local Gender Action Plans in the Dibër and Bulqizë Municipalities. The EU for Gender Equality project was also highlighted by multiple stakeholders as a particularly strong example of a cross-thematic intervention that aligns GRB, WEE, EVAW, rural development, care economy and support for EU accession within a unified framework.

It was reported that internal coherence within the Country Office has improved during this Strategic Note period, driven by an office culture of collaboration, information-sharing and joint strategizing among colleagues. Ensuring such collaborative working has been particularly crucial as the Country Office team has grown significantly in the current strategic period. It was also reported that the Strategic Note Direct Funding from Sida was a critical factor in providing space for stronger cross-programmatic working outside of projects. However, despite these improvements A few Country Office personnel suggested that there is still space to deepen internal synergies. For example, by further institutionalizing cross-thematic planning and monitoring, and developing shared indicators and joint results pathways.

[28] Annual Report 2025

The evaluation found strong coherence across the triple mandate and evidence that the Country Office leveraged its normative, operational and coordination mandates in a joined-up way to deliver gender equality results. This assessment, drawn primarily from interviews and the document review, was echoed by personnel, most of whom considered that the Country Office had developed a good balance and strong synergies between normative, coordination and operational work. One example is the support provided in relation to the Gender Equality Law, which involved strong normative leadership, reinforced through operational activities such as capacity development and convening of multiple stakeholders. Another example is the use of analytical products, such as the Country Gender Equality Profile, to connect normative standards, UN coordination and operational programming across all thematic areas.

In addition to joined up working within the Country Office, the evaluation also noted that the Country Office has achieved strong coherence with corporate UN Women initiatives (e.g. Women Count, care economy, women's political participation). These have been piloted or applied in Albania and were enabled by flexible funding.

FINDING 5

The Country Office provided leadership and expertise on gender equality within the UNCT and was proactive in its UN coordination role. However, coordination was apparently undermined by inter-agency competition and limited engagement on gender from some UN partners. The current UNSDCF stand-alone gender equality outcome provided an anchor for gender equality efforts and UN Women's leadership; the fact that there will not be a stand-alone outcome in the next UNSDCF may reduce space for gender equality work, although the mainstreaming approach could be leveraged for more strategic engagement on gender by all agencies. Stronger UN system alignment around EU accession priorities is required, with potential for the Country Office to lead on priorities related to gender.

The Country Office has taken a proactive approach to its coordination role, which is widely appreciated by UN partners and donors. The Country Office provided leadership and expertise within the UNCT, with the Country Representative acting as a strong advocate on gender issues and gender included as a standing agenda item in UNCT monthly meetings throughout the duration of the current UNSDCF/Strategic Note period. The Country Office also chaired the Gender Thematic and Results Group and led the Outcome Group on gender-responsive governance under the current UNSDCF. The Country Office has used its leadership of the Gender Thematic and Results Group to (a) effectively advance UN processes such as the gender equality scorecard, gender marking of annual and biannual workplans and development of annual gender equality action plans; (b) engage other agencies on key themes and issues, such as the Gender Equality Law and elections; (c) coordinate activities, e.g. around the 16 Days of Activism; and (d) develop resources such as an innovative gender screening tool for new UN joint programmes. The Country Office participated in six joint programmes during the Strategic Note period, with the Joint Programme Ending Violence Against Women in Albania Phase 2 and LNB2 reported to be particularly positive examples of collaborative working.

Development of the 2025 Country Gender Equality Profile was highlighted as a positive example of the Country Office's coordination work. It was one of the first such profiles in the region to be aligned with the new UN system-wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan[29] and

[29] The Gender Equality Acceleration Plan requires gender equality profiles to be developed as a common UNCT product rather than a UN Women product as previously was the case.

was used to inform the Common Country Assessment and subsequent development of the new UNSDCF. Stakeholders reported that, through its strong leadership and planning in relation to the Gender Equality Profile, the Country Office effectively leveraged UNCT processes to strengthen the UN system's gender focus.

However, despite the Country Office's extensive coordination efforts, multiple stakeholders reported that UN system coordination is inadequate (both in general and in relation to gender equality); that there is insufficient strategic alignment among UN agencies in support of government priorities; and that there is friction among agencies regarding visibility and positioning. Competition between agencies for funding – which is increasing as the funding landscape narrows – poses a particular barrier to more collaborative efforts on gender equality. It was also observed that there is limited buy-in among UN agencies regarding the strategic importance of gender equality.

For example, although the Country Office brought the issue of backlash against the Gender Equality Law to the Gender Thematic and Results Group, other agencies did not provide much support. Similarly, when the Country Office, in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Office, organized capacity development on gender for UN system colleagues, there was limited engagement.[30]

The evaluation found that the stand-alone gender equality outcome in the current UNSDCF provided an important anchor for gender equality efforts and for UN Women's leadership. However, there is no gender outcome in the next UNSDCF and gender will instead be mainstreamed (although a gender output has been included). This is in part because of (a) limited financial support for the existing gender outcome; and (b) a wider effort to streamline the next UNSDCF.[31] This creates a risk that gender equality will be lost within the UN system response and the Country Office will have less space to advance gender priorities. However, some stakeholders suggested that if the Country Office can use this new approach to encourage meaningful gender mainstreaming – including by leveraging the Gender Thematic and Results Group to advance a strategic approach to mainstreaming – this could potentially bolster engagement on gender across all agencies.

In terms of coordination priorities going forward, the Resident Coordinator and Country Office (in its role as the chair of the Gender Thematic and Results Group), are leading efforts to develop a Gender Equality Accelerator, which would bring together system-wide work on gender equality, elevating the gender equality agenda and facilitating a more comprehensive and strategic approach. This could provide significant impetus for strengthened UN coordination on gender, although it would be critical that the Country Office maintains a leadership role. There is also an ambition to develop a clearer and more coherent UN system offer in support of EU accession as a pathway to achieving the SDGs, with potential space for the Country Office to lead on the gender-related elements.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Women entrepreneurs participating at the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO 2025 in Tirana, Albania.

[30] As part of preparations for the next UNSDCF (2027–2031), the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and UN Women Albania jointly organized a two-day workshop on "Fostering a Shift Towards Systems Thinking and Human Rights and Gender Equality Integration in the Development of the Cooperation Framework."

[31] The number of outcomes in the next UNSDCF has been reduced from four to three, and outputs from 22 to 11. Gender considerations remain integrated across all outcome and output statements in the new framework, as well as within its narrative and indicators.

FINDING 6

UN Women's comparative advantage in Albania comes from its unique mandate, strong expertise and valuable coordinating and convening role. The Country Office was perceived as the "go-to" agency for technical expertise on a range of gender equality issues, and its expert inputs have been particularly useful in the context of extensive legal and policy reform. Another strong area of comparative advantage is the Country Office's excellent relationships with and consistent support for women's civil society and the breadth of its civil society partnerships.

UN Women's comparative advantage in Albania is built upon its unique mandate as the specialized agency on gender equality. Stakeholders reported that this mandate enables the Country Office to provide leadership on international gender equality frameworks, act as an axis for all gender equality efforts and advocate with government on gender issues. Stakeholders also noted that UN Women's mandate means it has a critical role to play in addressing backlash, for example through communicating gender equality principles and coordinating responses.

UN Women is widely appreciated for its strong technical expertise on gender equality. This was the added value most cited by stakeholders at both national and local level, with many reporting that the Country Office is the "go-to" actor for gender expertise and guidance. This technical expertise has been especially valuable in informing legal and policy reforms related to EU accession.[32] Stakeholders particularly highlighted the Country Office's expertise in normative and legislative issues; gender-responsive planning and budgeting; gender data and analysis; and in thematic areas such as EVAW and women's political participation. However, some stakeholders reported gaps in the Country Office's technical expertise, most critically regarding the gender-related aspects of EU integration.

Another important aspect of the Country Office's added value is its role in convening different actors for multi-stakeholder dialogue,[33] networking building and coordination around gender equality issues. Examples of this include Country Office support to the Ombudsperson to hold annual meetings with civil society on a range of issues; the 16 Days campaign that brings together government institutions, international partners, civil society and others for joint activities around an annual theme; and supporting the National Gender Equality Council, which is a key platform where CSOs can raise issues directly with high-level government representatives. Stakeholders reported that the Country Office facilitates diverse and cross-sectoral partnerships, and enables engagement and coordination between civil society and both central and local government institutions. The Country Office also makes an important contribution to exchange and coordination among donors and international actors by co-chairing (with the Embassy of Sweden) the Development Partners Coordination Group on Gender, which donors value as a space for technical discussions and information-sharing.

The Country Office's relationship with women's civil society in Albania is also a unique comparative advantage, as no other actor partners with as many women's organizations. The Country Office dedicates significant funding to civil society and supports civil society networking and access to key institutions and processes. This support will continue to be critical in the context of growing backlash and EU accession-related reforms, as discussed in Finding 2.

[32] For example, the Annual Report 2025 noted that the Country Office provided normative and legislative technical assistance for the Gender Equality Law, the Law on Domestic Violence and agricultural legislation.

[33] The 2025 Annual Report noted 16 such dialogue processes in 2025.

EFFECTIVENESS

To what extent has UN Women contributed to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in Albania during the Strategic Note period (2022–2026)?

FINDING 7

The Country Office's interventions made a substantial contribution to Strategic Note outcomes, with particularly extensive results achieved under Outcome 3. Results were achieved at systemic, institutional, community and individual levels and were realized through multiple pathways, although assumptions about pathways of change were not always valid. Some opportunities to advance outcomes by embedding gender within key plans and processes were missed, while in some cases interventions were too small or dispersed to make a significant contribution.

The evaluation found that the Country Office has contributed to all three Strategic Note outcomes. The strongest results were identified under Outcome 3 on gender-responsive governance that strengthens equality and non-discrimination. This was because most Strategic Note outputs are located under this outcome, and because work under this outcome was well aligned with EU accession-related reforms (e.g. normative frameworks or planning and budgeting); therefore, the Country Office was able to build on the opportunities that these reforms presented. Results were also identified under Outcome 2 – WEE efforts and work with the private sector; and Outcome 1 – by supporting the integration of gender into the government's social protection strategy, although these results were more limited.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Young activists in Albania came together to develop a Call to Action on gender, youth and climate change. April 2022.

The Country Office contributed to results at multiple levels. At systemic level, it made a strong contribution to strengthening legal and policy frameworks on gender equality through (a) support for the Gender Equality Law – a landmark accomplishment achieved with extensive technical support from the Country Office – and the Law on Domestic Violence, and the National Gender Strategy; and (b) by integrating gender into legal and policy frameworks covering other sectors such as agriculture and social protection. The Country Office also supported the government to embed GRB within its systems: around 9.5 per cent of total expenditure in the country is now gender sensitive, making Albania a regional leader in this area.

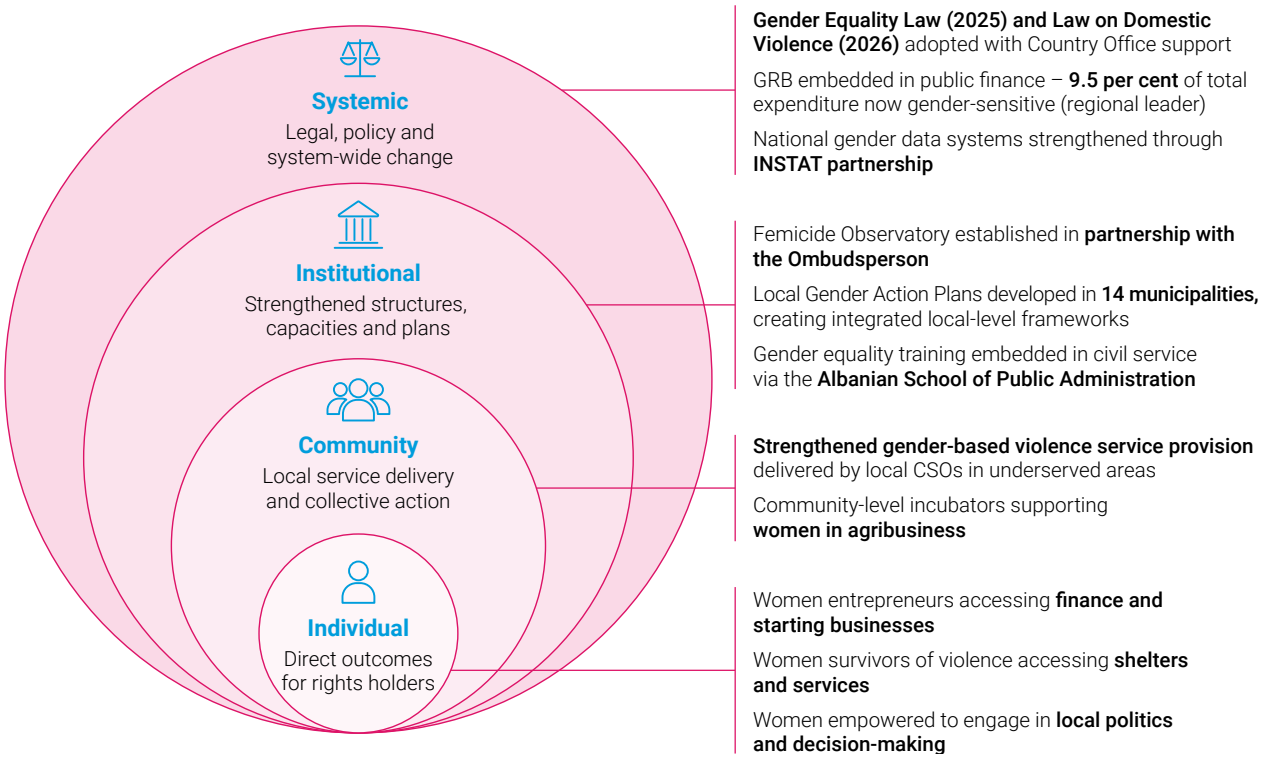
The Country Office has supported INSTAT and partner institutions in strengthening the production, dissemination and use of official gender statistics and administrative data, ensuring that policymaking can be based on stronger gender data. Stakeholders reported that the Country Office has played an important role in ensuring gender equality is better embedded in government systems and no longer addressed through isolated initiatives.

The Country Office also made a strong contribution to institutional-level results. This included strengthening institutional structures, plans and capacities on gender equality by supporting the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to develop strategies, action plans and analysis, and working with the Ombudsperson to establish the

Femicide Observatory. This work has also included integrating gender content into civil service training provided by the Albanian School of Public Administration to help embed gender capacities across government. At municipal level, Country Office support for Local Gender Action Plans in 14 municipalities enabled the development of municipal-level strategies and capacities to address EVAW, WEE, GRB, WPS and inclusive governance within a single planning framework. Stakeholders reported that this support has resulted in municipalities being more aware of and responsive to women's needs; better able to track progress in this area; and in women being more involved in local planning processes. Stakeholders also reported that the Country Office's work with civil society has strengthened CSOs and civil society networks at national and local levels.

There have also been results from the Country Office's efforts at community and individual level, although these were less visible and in some cases less substantial than the systemic and institutional level results. Community level results include strengthened GBV service provision by local CSOs, as well as community level incubators for women in agribusiness. Meanwhile, rights holders reported individual level results from Country Office supported initiatives, including women entrepreneurs accessing finance and starting businesses, women survivors of violence accessing shelters and services, and women empowered to engage in local politics.

FIGURE 8
Results achieved at four levels of change



Selected examples of the Country Office's contribution to Strategic Note outcomes, 2022–2026

Source: Evaluation team, based on interviews, project document review and Country Office annual reports (2022–2025)

Note: Systemic and institutional level results were more prominent than community and individual level results during the Strategic Note period

Results were achieved through a number of different pathways. Capacity development was the most common pathway[34] and generated some significant results, as described above, although assumptions about the extent to which capacities would be sustained and institutionalized were not always valid (see Finding 13). Technical assistance and a mentoring approach were used to support key processes, such as partnering with the Ombudsperson to establish the Femicide Observatory and supporting the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to advance the Gender Equality Law. Developing gender data and evidence was also an important pathway to results as it enabled both evidence-based policymaking and evidence-based advocacy and communications.

A particularly effective pathway for results was leveraging international normative frameworks, such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, to strengthen national gender equality frameworks, which was facilitated by Albania's need to strengthen its legal frameworks to meet EU accession requirements. Experience sharing within the region was also reported to be valuable. The Country Office shared examples from other countries to inform development of the Femicide Observatory, and has supported peer visits and exchanges. Relationship building, networking and convening were also pathways to results, as discussed in Findings 2 and 6.

However, the evaluation found that the Country Office missed some important opportunities to advance gender equality and weaknesses in some interventions undermined results. Critically, the Country Office did not influence development of the 2024–2027 Albania National Reform Agenda and National Growth Plan, which are key planning and financing frameworks for Albania's EU accession process and are largely gender blind. Stakeholders reported that this was partly due to insufficient Country Office capacity to engage on this process, and suggested that more support should have been provided by UN Women's Regional Office and Brussels office.

Multiple stakeholders reported that some Country Office interventions at local level were too small or fragmented to generate sustainable or scalable results. The evaluation found that some local-level interventions – e.g. WEE interventions such as the Gender Rural Equality and Tourism project – would have benefitted from a stronger needs assessment and beneficiary identification to ensure they had potential to generate results.

It was also noted that, despite Outcome 2 providing a potential entry point, environmental sustainability was not systematically integrated into the Country Office portfolio, representing a missed opportunity.

[34] This is reflected in the Strategic Note, as 9 of 10 Strategic Note Outputs focus on strengthened capacities



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Woman entrepreneur participating at the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO 2025 in Tirana, Albania.

FIGURE 9

Personnel survey results: Extent to which outcomes were achieved through the following pathways

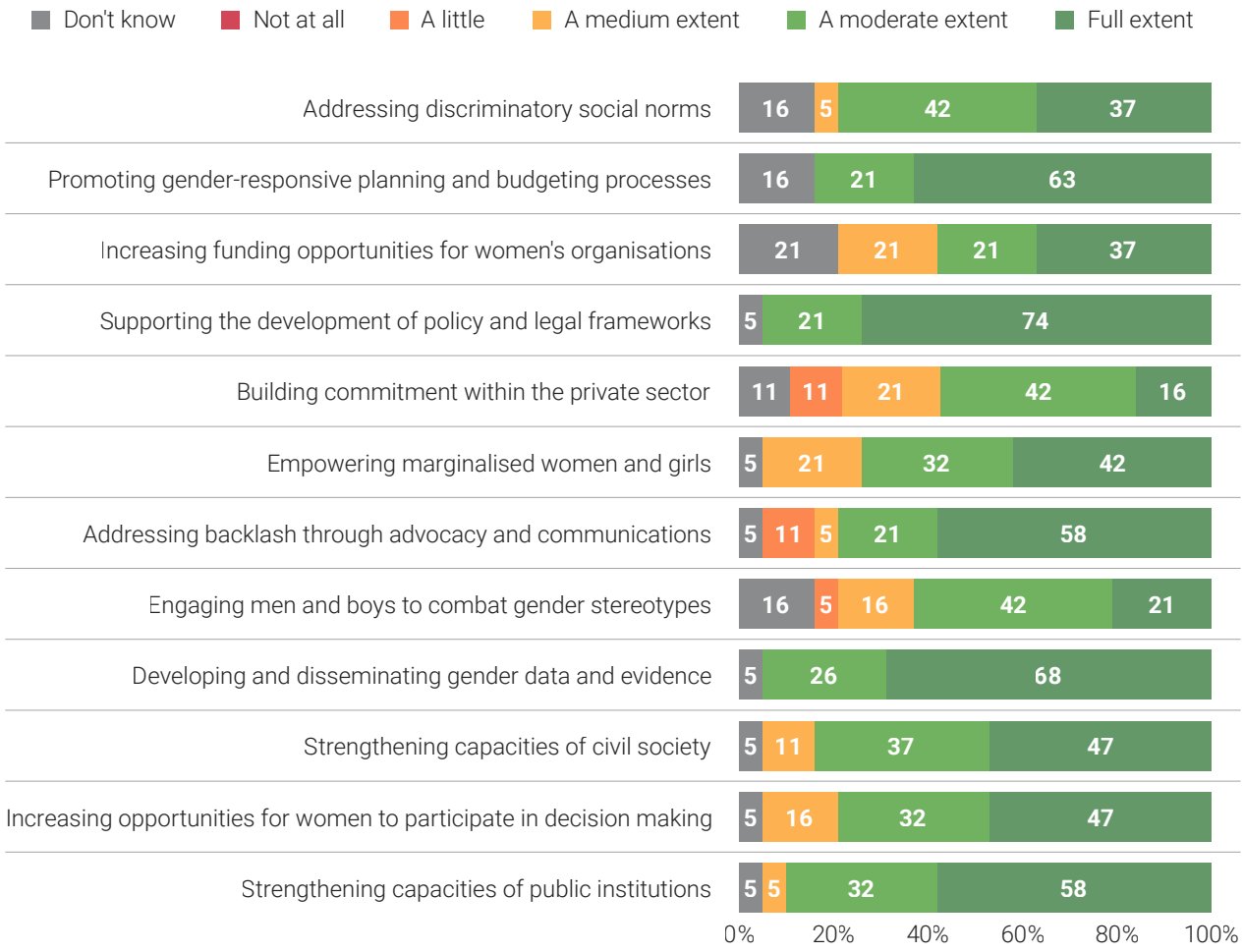




Photo: © UN Women Albania
Journalists, UN staff and the Albanian Football Association took part in the mini football tournament organized on International Women's Day in Tirana, Albania. March 2025.

FINDING 8

Albania's EU accession process created a highly enabling context for the Country Office's work. Results were enabled by strong relationships with government institutions, civil society and other stakeholders; close alignment with national priorities; the Country Office's expertise and credibility; and the dedicated gender outcome within the UNSDCF. Growing backlash emerged as a major challenge to gender equality progress, while the achievement of results was also hindered by weak capacities and high turnover within government institutions, and the Country Office's limited influence within some key processes.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Albanian Members of Parliament during the presentation of the key findings from UN Women media monitoring of Albania's 2025 parliamentary elections.

The key driver of progress on gender equality in Albania is EU accession, which requires Albania to strengthen its gender equality frameworks, and provides opportunities to advance gender equality through extensive reforms undertaken across multiple sectors and levels. Stakeholders across all groups identified EU accession as the foremost enabler of the Country Office's work, and it was also the highest rated enabling factor in the personnel survey (see Figure 10). While some elements of the Country Office's work directly address EU accession, such as the EU for Gender Equality project that supports implementation of gender-related elements of the EU Aquis, the accession process has also been a critical entry point and enabler for work in other areas such as GRB, EVAW or gender data. For example, the midterm evaluation of the LNB2 programme[35] found that alignment with EU accession dynamics was an important enabling factor for the programme.

Government commitment on gender equality has also been a crucial enabling factor for the Country Office's work. This commitment is driven to a large extent by the need to meet EU accession criteria, and has created conditions for the Country Office to align closely with national gender priorities and engage in extensive collaboration with government institutions. Government commitment was similarly highlighted by interviewees, and was among the factors personnel most frequently identified as enabling implementation of the Strategic Note.

The Country Office's strong relationships with central government institutions, independent bodies, municipalities, civil society, donors and others (as detailed in Finding 2) were also a valuable enabler for its work. For example, stakeholders reported that the strong relationship of trust with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare was central in advancing gender equality agendas; while the relationship with the EU delegation helped leverage EU support on key issues. One example of the value of Country Office relationships at multiple levels can be seen in the final evaluation of the Gender Rural Equality and Tourism project, which identified that strong relationships and engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Finance, Kolonja municipality and local grassroots partners were all enabling factors for results.

[35] "Mid-term evaluation of UN JP "Leave No One Behind" -Phase 2" 2024, UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and UNFPA in Albania (Link: https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11619)

Other enabling factors highlighted by stakeholders include the capacity and credibility of the Country Office (as detailed in Finding 6), its ability to provide relevant and valuable expertise, and its consultative and inclusive approach. The SNDF from Sida was also an important enabler of results. UN Women's internal Strategic Note Direct Funding Guidance identifies how SNDF provides value through its flexibility and strategic level of financing, and this is evident in the case of Albania, as SNDF allowed the Country Office to strengthen its capacities and operate more flexibly.[36] Meanwhile, within the UN system, the standalone gender equality outcome was an important factor that enabled the Country Office to lead gender equality efforts.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Women entrepreneurs and institutions take part in a consultation roundtable in Tirana, Albania, on policies to better support women-owned small businesses. June 2026.

Although the Albania context was in many ways highly conducive to advancing gender equality, the Country Office also faced some significant challenges to its work. One of the most serious was the backlash against gender equality that emerged in response to the Gender Equality Law in 2025 (see Finding 1). Stakeholders consistently identified growing conservatism and anti-gender discourse as the most significant challenge to implementation of the Strategic Note, a view also reflected in the personnel survey. The backlash was particularly challenging because it was unexpected –apparently fuelled by a concerted campaign of misinformation supported by powerful actors – and because there was reluctance within some key government institutions to strongly defend the Gender Equality Law in the face of this backlash.

Another factor that impeded the ability of the Country Office to contribute to sustainable results was limited capacities and high turnover within public institutions at both central and municipal level (see Finding 13). This issue was raised consistently in interviews and project evaluations, and was also mentioned in the personnel survey. Multiple examples were reported, including limited capacity within parliament to meaningfully scrutinize EU accession-related laws and ensure gender was integrated; limited awareness and capacity at municipal level to implement new gender-related laws; weak structures for public service provision at local level and an over-reliance on civil society to fill this gap; and constrained capacities for national data collection resulting in limited disaggregated data and delays to important gender-related surveys, such as the time use survey and survey on gender-based violence.

Finally, it was reported that, before the Strategic Note Direct Funding provided by Sida from 2024, the Country Office's internal capacity limitations were also a barrier to delivering results, especially given the Strategic Note's ambitious agenda and the tight time frame for progress dictated by the EU accession process that included a strong focus on fast-tracking legal reform. Funding challenges were also prominent among the hindering factors identified by stakeholders and personnel alike. Multiple stakeholders noted that, given the increasingly challenging funding landscape, this may again become a significant constraint.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Participant at UN Women Training of Trainers on women's political participation in Albania. September 2024.

[36] UN Women. 2025. STRATEGIC NOTE DIRECT FUNDING GUIDANCE. UN Women internal document

FIGURE 10

Personnel survey results: Extent to which the below factors hindered or enabled implementation of the Strategic Note and contribution to outcomes

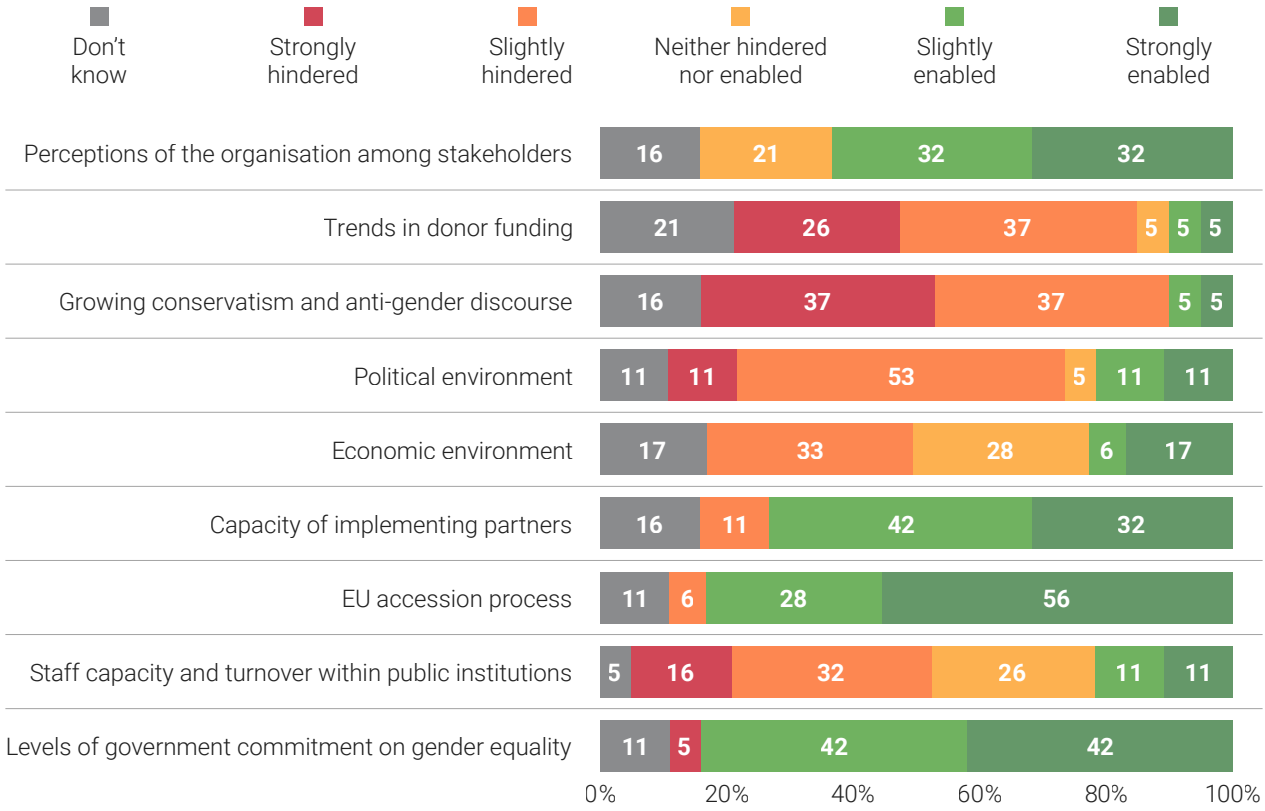




Photo: © ESD Albania
Winners of "She Runs" Marathon in Tirana, Albania. March 2026.

EFFICIENCY

To what extent is the Country Office able to ensure efficient use of resources (personnel, funding, assets)?

FINDING 9

The Country Office benefitted from strong leadership; effective coordination routines; skilled staff who have successfully managed a rapidly scaling portfolio; and a well-functioning results-based management system, although outcome and impact-level measurement remained challenging. Sida's Strategic Note Direct Funding was a transformative enabler that addressed critical staff functions and allowed investment in organizational functions, which earmarked project funding cannot cover. Sustaining current capacity levels depends on the continuation of flexible funding, alongside more streamlined corporate procedures and strengthened staff retention conditions.

The Country Office demonstrated strong organizational efficiency throughout the Strategic Note period, underpinned by effective leadership, well-functioning internal systems and a committed and skilled team. External stakeholders consistently described the Country Office as responsive, well organized and easy to work with – an assessment corroborated by project evaluations and financial delivery data. Personnel shared this view, rating management structures, leadership and the efficient use of human resources and internal processes highly. Government partners highlighted the cost-effectiveness of technical assistance delivery, and CSO partners noted that the Country Office's long-standing, experienced staff reduced transaction costs and supported smooth implementation.

The Country Office has managed a rapidly scaling portfolio — growing from a leaner set of interventions in 2022 to managing multiple concurrent donor-funded projects by 2024–2025. This expansion was facilitated by robust internal coordination practices, including regular all-staff and programme–operations meetings, and a collaborative office culture. Several project evaluations confirm efficient financial delivery, with fund utilization rates consistently above 95 per cent across the portfolio. According to the 2025 Annual Report, the implementation rate for regular and other resources was 100 per cent and 92 per cent, respectively.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Joint technical workshop with the State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination (SASPAC) to explore EU's legal and policy framework on gender equality, as well as practical approaches to integrating a gender perspective into strategic planning, policy development and the programming of EU-funded initiatives.

Sida's direct funding of the Strategic Note, operationalized from March 2024, was a transformative enabler of this efficiency. Direct funding of the Strategic Note filled critical staffing gaps in results-based management (including strategic planning, monitoring, reporting, evaluation and coordination support), communications and data analysis — functions essential for organizational performance but difficult to fully finance through earmarked project budgets.[37] Evidence from various sources indicates that, prior to direct funding of the Strategic Note, these functions were stretched, limiting the Country Office's capacity to deliver on its full mandate. Direct funding of the Strategic Note also provided the agility to respond to emerging priorities, such as backlash against the Gender Equality Law, which tightly earmarked funding could not have accommodated. Figure 11 below highlights how the scope of UN Women's communications activities increased between 2022 and 2025.

FIGURE 11

Increase in UN Women's communications activities between 2022 and 2025

	# stories published on website	# press releases	Social media reach (Instagram users)	# campaigns
2022	23	3	-	4
2023	29	6	-	4
2024	32	6	162,111	3
2025	25	13	400,971	6

Source: UN Women Annual Reports in RMS.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Adela Demetja, artist advocating for more women in the art scene.

The Country Office has invested in a well-functioning results-based management system. Annual reports are structured around a results framework with baselines, targets and progress ratings, and most outputs are rated on track or achieved. The Country Office received corporate recognition for its monitoring and reporting practices and has applied lessons from previous evaluations to strengthen programme design and implementation.

However, evidence points to persistent challenges regarding outcome and impact-level measurement. While output-level indicators are tracked effectively, several stakeholders noted that the global results framework is heavily process and indicator-driven, with limited capacity to capture behaviour change, institutional

[37] This is in line with the role envisaged for SNDF in relation to human resource planning and management. For example, UN Women's 2025 Strategic Note Direct Funding Guidance identifies that SNDF enables Country Offices to retain talent, build technical expertise, and cover understaffed functions.

capacity development or longer-term impact. The reliance on short-term, project-cycle monitoring — driven by earmarked funding with defined deliverables and reporting timelines — has reinforced a focus on output-level tracking at the expense of sustained investment in longer-term outcome and impact measurement. Outcome and impact-level data for Strategic Note indicators also partially rely on publicly available data that contain gaps (such as time-use and prevalence rates of violence). Disaggregated reporting at output level remains uneven, often limited to sex disaggregation without intersectional depth, and impact-level data (including the prevalence of violence against women and girls and time use survey results) are pending collection in 2026. Previous project evaluations identified underdeveloped long-term monitoring mechanisms and reporting that did not fully meet donor expectations in some cases, which in turn propelled the Country Office to invest in strengthening capacities in these areas through direct funding of the Strategic Note.

Sustaining current capacity levels presents a challenge as the Country Office's expanded staffing structure depends largely on the continuation of flexible funding. Most staff are employed on service contract modalities tied to project funding, and several key functions remain outside core budget coverage. Internally, the transition to the Quantum ERP system created an additional administrative load, and a single finance officer managing an expanding transaction volume has led to a recognized bottleneck. Corporate procedures — including procurement, recruitment timelines and the roll-out of new platforms — were cited by multiple stakeholders as areas where greater delegation of authority and streamlined processes would enhance efficiency.

Staff retention also emerged as a partial concern: while interviewees and surveyed personnel rated staff capacity and skills highly, there was less internal confidence in the Country Office's ability to attract and retain high-calibre staff. Overall, the Country Office has indicators of strong organizational efficiency, with flexible funding playing a pivotal role in sustaining and scaling capacity. However, structural dependencies on short-term, earmarked funding continue to constrain outcome-level measurement and pose risks to the sustainability of current staffing levels. Addressing these gaps will require continued investment in flexible resources, streamlined corporate processes and a more deliberate shift towards longer-term results monitoring.



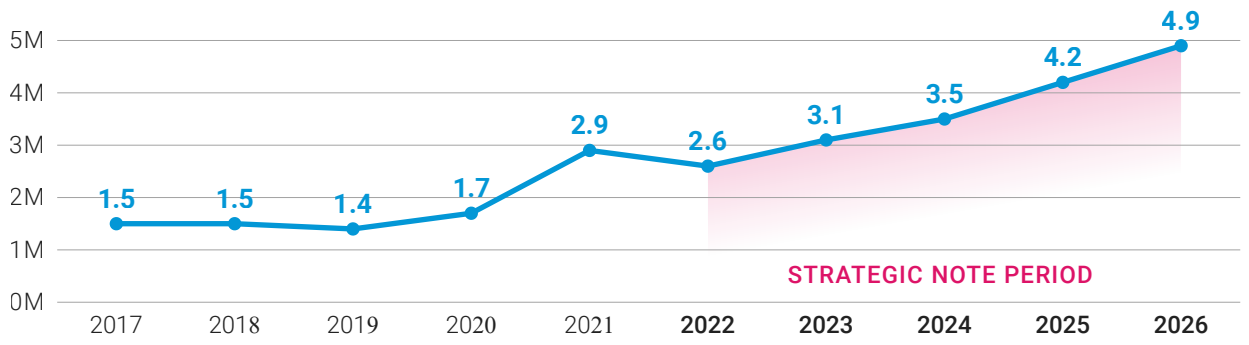
Photo: © UN Women Albania
Young participants at the presentation of the regional research Voices of YOUth: Gender Equality and Social Cohesion in the Western Balkans.

FINDING 10

The Country Office achieved a notable increase (88 per cent) in resource mobilization between 2022 and 2026, enabled by intensified proposal development, strategic positioning and the transformative role of Sida's direct funding of the Strategic Note. However, the outlook is constrained by a deteriorating donor landscape, inter-agency competition, short project cycles and a need to further strengthen the Country Office's broader thematic positioning in relation to evolving donor priorities, such as EU accession-oriented programming.

The Country Office achieved a significant increase in resource mobilization over the Strategic Note period, growing from approximately US$ 2.6 million in 2022 to US$ 4.9 million by 2026, thereby transitioning from a small to a medium-sized Country Office. This growth was driven by intensified proposal development (with 17 proposals submitted in 2023 alone); strategic positioning as a partner of choice through co-chairing coordination mechanisms; and the diversification of donor partnerships. By 2024, the Country Office had secured five new agreements totalling US$ 7.25 million from both established and new donors, and managed a broad portfolio spanning social protection, governance, WEE, EVAW, WPS and climate change. Figure 12 shows the significant increase in budget between the previous Strategic Note period (US$ 9 million for 2017–2021) and the 2022–2026 Strategic Note, which has, thus far, had a budget of US$ 18.3 million (as of July 2026).

FIGURE 12
Country Office budgets since 2017 (US$ million)



Source: Albania Country Portfolio Evaluation 2021 Report and Quantum for the period 2021–2026

Sida's direct funding of the Strategic Note played a catalytic role in this trajectory. By financing core institutional functions that earmarked project budgets cannot cover, direct funding enabled the Country Office to strengthen its organizational infrastructure and credibility, which in turn supported successful proposal development and donor engagement. It also allowed for the continuity of programme work in key areas, and investing in new, emerging and promising areas of work. However, this direct funding modality remains unique in the wider portfolio of projects and not standard practice within UN Women's donor partnerships at country level. Despite strong performance, the outlook is constrained by a deteriorating donor landscape. Multiple data sources highlight a consistent picture of shrinking Official Development Assistance, with traditional European bilateral donors withdrawing or realigning their priorities. USAID changes have affected civil society funding, and inter-agency competition for gender-related funding remains persistent. It was reported that these dynamics reduce predictability, while short project cycles of one to two years create stop-and-go dynamics that undermine continuity and the return on earlier investments. CSO partners in particular expressed uncertainty about how to sustain service delivery as funding sources contract.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Mini football tournament organized on the occasion of International Women's Day. March 2026.

An emerging strategic challenge concerns the Country Office's positioning in relation to EU accession-oriented programming. As Albania advances towards EU membership, EU funds are expected to become the predominant financing modality, flowing increasingly through government and international financial institutions rather than directly to UN agencies. Interview evidence suggests that the Country Office's current thematic offer — while strong on EVAW, GRB and normative frameworks — is not yet sufficiently tailored to the language and sectoral specificity that EU engagement requires. Stakeholders noted limited internal expertise on justice reform, private-sector development and EU accession processes, and indicated that the Country Office's broader gender framing may not be specialized enough to compete effectively for EU-aligned technical assistance opportunities. At the same time, government interest in contributing to a UN joint fund for EU integration and SDG acceleration (such as the partnership with Switzerland through the local SDG Acceleration Fund), presents a potentially new resource mobilization avenue that the Country Office and UNCT are pursuing. It was noted that the Country Office is actively engaging in UNCT/Resident Coordinator-led dialogue with the Government of Albania on future funding possibilities.

Looking ahead, the combination of contracting traditional donor funding; uncertainty around continuation of direct funding of the Strategic Note; the removal of gender equality as a stand-alone outcome in the next UNSDCF; and the shift towards EU-aligned financing modalities presents a resource mobilization environment that will require strategic adaptation. The Country Office has demonstrated the capacity to grow and diversify its funding base, but sustaining this trajectory will depend on strengthening its positioning within the EU accession architecture, exploring non-traditional donor partnerships and securing continued flexible funding to maintain the institutional functions that underpin its effectiveness.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

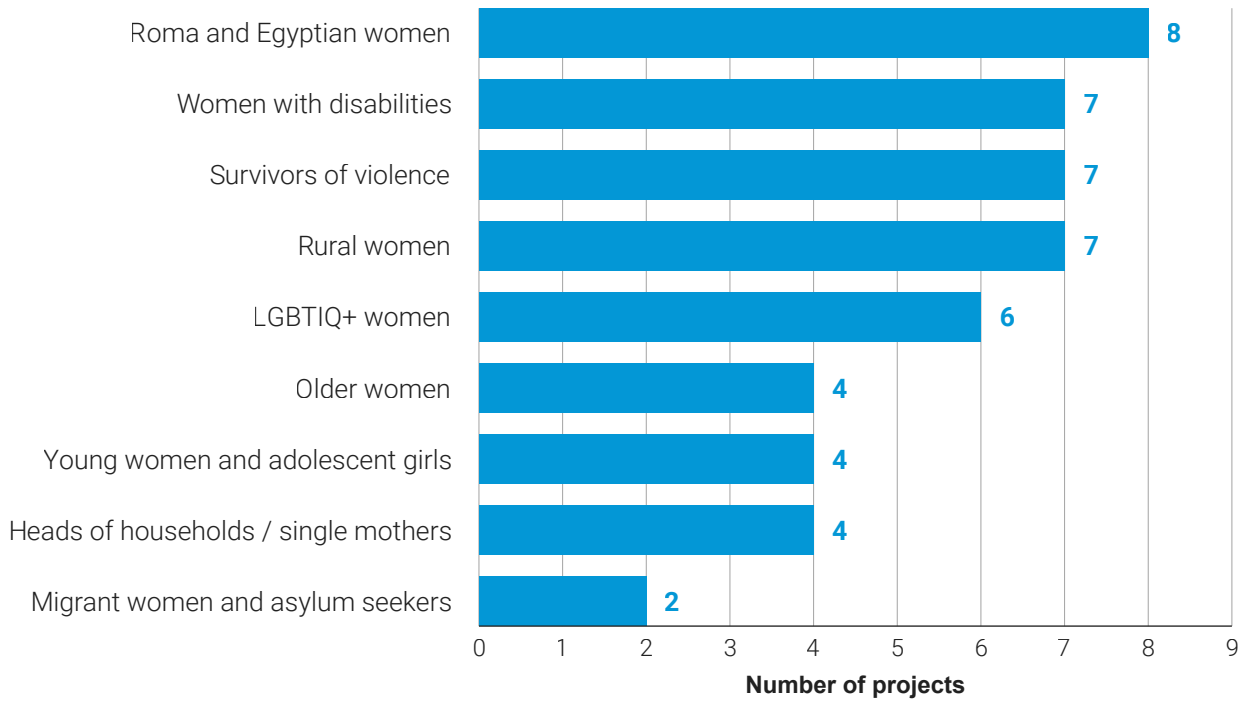
Does the portfolio advance human rights and leave no one behind principles, address the underlying causes of gender inequality, and promote environmental sustainability?

FINDING 11

The Country Office achieved increasingly systematic integration of human rights and leave no one behind principles, with tangible outcomes for women with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian women, rural women and survivors of violence through dedicated programming, participatory budgeting and disability-inclusive service pilots at municipal level. However, coverage remains uneven across thematic areas and geographies, with disability inclusion not yet fully mainstreamed beyond EVAW and social protection, and scope for stronger intersectional approaches and more consistent reach to the most marginalized.

Evaluation evidence demonstrates an increasingly systematic integration of human rights and leave no one behind principles across the Country Office's portfolio during the Strategic Note period. Of the 14 project documents reviewed, 12 explicitly identify and target specific vulnerable or marginalized groups of women and girls.

FIGURE 13
Marginalized groups targeted across the project portfolio



Number of projects explicitly targeting each group (of 14 reviewed).

Source: Evaluation team analysis, Albania CPE (2022–2026).

While the depth of targeting varies — from dedicated activities and minimum beneficiary benchmarks to broader beneficiary selection criteria — the portfolio demonstrates a clear pattern of moving beyond generic references to "women and girls" towards intersectional programming that names and plans for the groups most at risk of being left behind. Ninety-seven per cent of personnel said that leave no one behind is "completely" or "well-integrated" across the portfolio. Interview data corroborates this, with internal and external stakeholders consistently describing leave no one behind as foundational to the Country Office's approach and embedded across its programming, policy dialogue and institutional partnerships.

The Country Office has operationalized leave no one behind through both dedicated programming and systematic integration across its broader portfolio. The LNB2 programme provided the most comprehensive platform, reaching persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities, older populations, vulnerable children and LGBTI communities through integrated social services, inclusive education and community-based support. At the normative level, leave no one behind principles were embedded in the development of the Gender Equality Law, including provisions on intersecting discrimination. Annual report data confirms a strengthening trajectory: while leave no one behind evidence in 2023 was present but less systematic, by 2024–2025 explicit targeting of marginalized groups was embedded across virtually all programme areas.

These commitments translated into concrete service delivery outcomes. Women with disabilities were reached through disability-inclusive service pilots in multiple municipalities, survivors of violence received direct support through EVAW services (including Roma and Egyptian women) and rural women participated in WEE initiatives. Gender-responsive participatory budgeting at municipal level emerged as a flagship mechanism for translating leave no one behind principles into local outcomes by prioritizing the needs of marginalized women in municipal budget processes.

Disability inclusion has advanced notably, particularly within the EVAW and social protection portfolios. At municipal level, programming delivered a range of tailored support including assistive devices, home modifications, digital literacy training, psychosocial support, personal assistance training, and leadership development for women and girls with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities. The LNB2 programme supported the development and submission of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Shadow Report; rolled out bio-psychosocial assessments; trained sign language interpreters; and transformed special schools into inclusive resource centres. Stakeholders reported that this type of work is comparatively rare among agencies operating in Albania. Multiple stakeholders described disability inclusion as an area of promising initial steps that must now become more systematic across the full portfolio.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
UN Women Representative in Albania, Michele Ribotta (left) and the Director of A2 CNN TV station, Astrit Patozi (right), signing the Women's Empowerment Principles.

Despite these achievements, coverage varies across thematic areas and geographies. Disability inclusion is well embedded in EVAW and social protection efforts, although opportunities remain to strengthen its visibility within WEE and governance portfolios, suggesting scope for deeper mainstreaming across the portfolio. Dedicated programming for Roma and Egyptian women could be further strengthened, a point acknowledged by several stakeholders. LGBTIQ+ inclusion shows promising project-level engagement, although there is scope for more consistent integration as part of the Country Office's broader mandate. The urban–rural divide remains a persistent challenge, with stakeholders emphasizing that rural women are among the hardest to reach and that services and economic opportunities need to be brought closer to women in remote areas. Intersectional analysis, while recognized as important, is not yet systematically applied across the programme cycle, and disaggregated monitoring data (particularly on disability) would benefit from strengthening to enable more precise tracking of leave no one behind outcomes.

Continued investment in understanding the unique needs, challenges and priorities of different groups of women and girls is essential to ensure that programming responds to lived realities. For example, focus group evidence from young women highlights that those actively engaged in gender equality advocacy face online attacks, hate speech and conservative backlash, while technology-facilitated violence is emerging as a growing form of gender-based violence disproportionately affecting young women and girls — challenges that require dedicated programmatic attention.

FINDING 12

The Country Office addressed the underlying causes of gender inequality through a well-conceived combination of legislative reform, GRB, youth and school-based engagement, media capacity-building and innovative behavioural change approaches, including work with men and boys. At the same time, the depth and persistence of discriminatory social norms – compounded by a growing anti-gender backlash – underscore that sustained, long-term investment in structural and normative change is needed, moving beyond time-bound campaigns towards consistent, community-embedded engagement that reaches the most conservative and remote settings.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Students at a tourism high school training in Empowerment through Self-Defense. Tirana, Albania, 2025.

The Country Office worked to address the underlying causes of gender inequality through a combination of normative interventions targeting laws and public finance; community-level engagement aimed at shifting social norms; and economic empowerment programming addressing gendered power dynamics in the workplace and value chains. At the normative level, the Country Office's contributions to legislative and policy reform —through the Gender Equality Law, GRB and the legal review of discriminatory elements in Criminal, Family and Civil Codes (see Finding 7) — represent foundational interventions that address structural barriers to gender equality.

At the same time, the depth and persistence of discriminatory social norms and the growing anti-gender backlash have complicated the operating environment. Stakeholders across all categories consistently identified discriminatory norms as a central, underlying cause of gender inequality in Albania, while the backlash against the Gender Equality Law was described as unexpected and intense (see Finding 1). This backlash has had ripple effects, including discouraging young women from entering local politics, emboldening conservative narratives and making institutions reluctant to take a stand on gender equality. The media environment poses an additional constraint, with widespread gender discriminatory content, low journalist interest in gender equality and male-dominated editorial decision-making. Online platforms, particularly those popular with youth, are saturated with anti-gender content against which limited counter-narratives exist.

The Country Office has deployed a range of community-level approaches to challenge some of these deeply embedded norms. The Implementing Norms, Changing Minds[38] programme introduced the COMBI methodology for behavioural change, student-led peer education, football-based campaigns challenging toxic masculinity and survivor-safety-oriented perpetrator programmes. The Country Office also supported various initiatives related to social norms work with youth including bootcamps which brought young people together for engagement on gender equality in multiple municipalities; the IMAGINE campaign targeting youth attitudes on gender equality and social cohesion; and the Voices of Youth research which engaged over 1,200 young people across the region in exploring gender norms and social cohesion. There has been some work with men and boys, including men's clubs in northern Albania and grassroots outreach targeting Roma communities through door-to-door initiatives. Interview evidence points to emerging shifts from such work, for example women entering local politics described training provided by the Country Office as helpful in navigating patriarchal political cultures.

However, multiple stakeholders reported that these efforts require a strategic shift. Current communication and advocacy efforts were described as reaching primarily supportive audiences — institutions, civil society, activists and urban, educated groups — rather than the conservative and remote settings where discriminatory norms are most entrenched. Awareness-raising also remains concentrated around time-bound campaigns, particularly the 16 Days of Activism, rather than being sustained throughout the year.

Internal reflections suggest that sustained work on gender stereotypes and long-term norms change has not yet been treated as a core workstream, despite being recognized as essential. Social norms change was consistently identified as the most important yet least funded area of work. Multiple stakeholders recommended moving beyond ad hoc campaigns towards a comprehensive, long-term norms change agenda that starts early in schools and youth organizations; scales up engagement with men and boys as active partners, particularly in remote areas; leverages grassroots movements with longer-term funding; and uses media engagement and trusted messengers to shift public perceptions.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Training on care economy with students in Tirana, Albania.
December 2025.

[38] Ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, Phase II (Regional Programme) 01/02/2020 - 31/07/2023..

SUSTAINABILITY

To what extent are Strategic Note results sustainable and nationally owned, and is there potential to scale up?

FINDING 13

The Country Office has invested extensively in capacity development for government, civil society and oversight institutions. Although significant capacities have been built, the sustainability of these gains is undermined by high staff turnover in public administration; continued dependence on UN Women's direct technical inputs; and the slow pace of institutionalizing training through permanent national systems. As capacity and financing are mutually reinforcing, GRB and EU-aligned financing instruments are the principal levers for addressing both constraints simultaneously. EU accession creates structural demand for the capacities UN Women has been building, offering a powerful sustainability anchor if capacity transfer can be accelerated.

The Country Office invests heavily in capacity development, which personnel and stakeholders alike identified as the main route through which it seeks to ensure the sustainability of its activities. Annual reports document training for a large number of public officials on a range of issues (see Figure 14)[39] CSO partners such as Different and Equal, Vatra Centre, Women's Forum Elbasan and ARSIS all reported tangible improvements in their organizational, programme and financial management capacities due to UN Women's training, mentoring and micro-assessment support. Several CSOs noted that training-of-trainers approaches have enabled them to cascade knowledge independently.

[39] UN Women Albania, 2025 Annual Report; 2024 Annual Report; 2023 Annual Report.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Technical Workshop on Gender Mainstreaming Guidance Note on Anti-Corruption Measures. Minister of State for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption. March 2026.

FIGURE 14
Training of public officials

200+
public officials trained on Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and Medium-Term Budget Programming

231
municipal officials trained on Local Gender Action Plan (LGAP) processes

176
women councillors trained on gender-sensitive local legislation

160
coordinated referral mechanism members trained on addressing violence against women

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on Annual Reports 2023, 2024, 2025.

The Local Gender Action Plan process offers successful examples of progressive capacity transfer. The Municipality of Elbasan developed its first Local Gender Action Plans (2018–2020) with full Country Office support; by its third plan (2025–2030), UN Women served only as a facilitator, with the municipality leading the process using its own capacities. Similarly, following support from the Country Office, the Municipality of Durrës established a full-time gender equality officer position and sustainable internal mechanisms.

However, multiple stakeholders identified high turnover in public administration as a major challenge to developing sustainable capacities, with institutional reference points changing frequently, partly driven by EU accession-related reforms. Stakeholders reported that the municipalities and ministries where staff have remained in post and received repeated capacity development now have significantly stronger capacities; while in those institutions where staff have rotated, capacities have been lost.

The upcoming reform of the administrative and territorial division presents a significant risk to the sustainability of municipal-level achievements.[40] Such transitions generate extended periods of institutional uncertainty, high staff turnover and service disruption, precisely the conditions that most undermine gender equality gains at local level. It is therefore of utmost importance for the Country Office to proactively engage in the upcoming administrative-territorial reform to safeguard gender equality gains.

A recurring system-wide concern which is shaped by supply and demand side dynamics, raised by donors, UN partners and independent experts, is that UN Women's hands-on, technically intensive support model – while producing high-quality immediate outputs – may inadvertently sustain government dependency rather than building self-reliant institutional capacity. Several stakeholders observed that repeated direct implementation maintains contracts and income for those involved, creating resistance to institutionalization. Similarly, some UN partners expressed concern that government institutions remain heavily dependent on UN-funded consultants for tasks such as treaty-body reporting, instead of securing permanent internal capacities.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Training on care economy with students in Tirana, Albania. December 2025.

[40] As was seen in the last territorial and administrative reform (2014-2015).

To address this challenge, the Country Office has taken steps towards institutionalization of capacities, including working with the Albanian School of Public Administration to embed gender equality training in civil service programmes; supporting the Department of Gender in the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to become a capacity provider at local level; and developing standardized tools (e.g. gender impact assessments, Local Gender Action Plan formats) that can be used beyond project cycles. Similarly, the Country Office's support to the Ombudsperson for the Femicide Observatory involves a built-in transition plan for independent production of reports after 2026.

A further structural constraint on institutionalization is the limited domestic financing available to sustain these arrangements: capacity functions that lack dedicated budget lines, established staff positions or recurrent operational resources tend to revert to project-funded modalities once UN Women support tapers, regardless of how well designed the original capacity-building intervention was. GRB is therefore not only an ownership and scale-up issue but a precondition for institutionalization, as it converts policy commitments into recurrent budget allocations and creates the fiscal space within which capacity gains can be embedded in permanent national systems.

Multiple stakeholders flagged the precarious situation of women's CSOs as a major sustainability risk. These organizations play a critical role in advocacy, watchdog functions, GRB monitoring and service delivery, yet they face chronic underfunding, shrinking civic space and anticipated loss of Official Development Assistance following EU accession.[41] Although the Country Office's capacity development for CSOs (including organizational strengthening and fundraising support) has been valuable, structural funding and long-term sustainability challenges remain unresolved. Stakeholders suggested that the Country Office needs to think strategically about how to support and protect women's CSOs in the pre and post-accession period.

Finally, Albania's EU accession creates strong structural demand for the capacities that UN Women has been developing, such as supporting INSTAT and partner institutions in strengthening official gender statistics in line with the European Statistical System, relevant EU regulations and international statistical standards; and implementation of EU directives on violence against women and integration of gender equality into the instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA) programming and public finance reform. This can offer a powerful anchor for sustainability if capacity transfer can be accelerated.

41 Final Evaluation of the Regional Programme "Ending Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds, Phase II."



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Activists at the march organized on International Women's Day in Tirana, Albania, 2023.

FINDING 14

The Country Office has supported national and local-level ownership, anchored in legal frameworks, budgetary commitments and institutional champions. Key models such as Local Gender Action Plans and GRB have been scaled up, while other initiatives demonstrate potential for replication. However, ownership remains uneven as smaller municipalities struggle to implement frameworks, WEE pilots face uncertain viability and geographical inequities in service coverage persist. The durability of current positive trajectories depends on embedding gender equality within EU-aligned financing instruments.

The Country Office's consistent strategy of embedding gender equality commitments in legislation, costed strategies, action plans and budgetary frameworks has created durable institutional anchors that simultaneously underwrite ownership and address the financing gap that constrains institutionalization (see Finding 13). The adoption of the Gender Equality Law and the Law on Domestic Violence represent landmark achievements, with the Country Office supporting the costing of both laws over a 10-year horizon to link policy commitments with predictable public expenditure. The inclusion of a GRB article in the Gender Equality Law obliges local government to implement GRB, thereby transforming a previously project-driven practice into a legal requirement with national reach and, critically, into a mechanism through which the recurrent costs of gender equality functions can be financed from domestic resources rather than donor projects.

The evaluation found that municipal ownership of gender equality efforts has progressively deepened in some areas. For example, in Elbasan, the share of the municipal budget allocated to Local Gender Action Plans grew from 2 per cent (first plan) to 9 per cent (third plan), with 70 per cent now covered by the municipality's own resources. However, the Gender Rural Equality and Tourism project evaluation identified highly differentiated levels of ownership for its activities, with strong municipal ownership in Leskovik/Kolonja but very low engagement in Elbasan.[42]

[42] Final Evaluation of the Project "Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT)" – Final Report.



Photo: © Today for the Future Community Center
Women farmers in Albania.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Students of "Qiriazi College" training on Empowerment through Self-Defense. Tirana, Albania, 2025.

The Country Office has supported progress in scaling some gender equality models. The Local Gender Action Plans model has expanded from a handful of pilot municipalities to 14 municipalities, with the Performance-Based Grant mechanism creating systemic incentives for further adoption. Similarly, GRB integration expanded from 17 national partners at baseline to 42 in 2025.[43] Taken together, these trajectories indicate that GRB is functioning not only as an ownership indicator but as the principal domestic financing instrument through which the capacity gains discussed in Finding 13 can be sustained beyond project cycles

Beyond the Local Gender Action Plans and GRB models, some other Country Office-supported interventions have demonstrated replication potential. The school-based model of training teachers to deliver self-defence and empowerment content is considered more scalable and institutionally anchored than direct delivery. However, in other areas, significant challenges to scaling-up remain, including from the uncertain business viability of WEE pilots, persistent geographical inequities, constrained municipal fiscal space and CSO funding dependency.

Several institutions have emerged as gender champions, with support and mentoring from the Country Office. The Ministry of Finance has shown leadership in institutionalizing GRB in laws, regulations and budget instructions; the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare led the drafting of the Gender Equality Law with 24 institutions and is costing its implementation from the state budget over 10 years; and the Ombudsperson has appointed a dedicated commissioner for gender equality and violence against women. Among civil society, the PRISMA network of 58 members operates as a key actor in inclusive budgeting and advocacy and has achieved amendments to procurement law.

Government co-financing of services previously funded entirely by donors is a tangible indicator of increasing ownership. For example, the CSO Vatra Centre now receives 40 per cent of its programme budget from the state, while ARSIS' national shelter is co-funded by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare after years of donor-only funding. However, national gender equality strategies still contain built-in funding gaps due to over-reliance on donor financing.

Going forward, the degree to which gender equality gains are embedded in EU-aligned financing instruments such as the Growth Plan for Albania and instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA) programming will be a critical determinant of whether current ownership and scale-up trajectories prove durable beyond accession.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Fisherman and participants of "Women solo travelers tours" initiative at the Shkodra lake. Albania 2025.

[43] UN Women Albania, 2025 Annual Report; 2024 Annual Report.

SECTION 5

LESSONS LEARNED AND PROMISING PRACTICES

EU accession provides unique incentives, opportunities and entry points to advance gender equality within normative frameworks and institutional practices.

Taking advantage of these opportunities requires Country Offices to develop strong alignment with accession priorities, close relationships with institutions involved in accession-related reforms and the ability to influence key processes and provide relevant expertise. This may require the development of specific technical and political capacities within the Country Office, as well as tailored support from colleagues at regional level and in Brussels.

The Country Office's joined-up approach to supporting reforms and strengthening capacities at national and municipal level provides a valuable example of localization.

This approach enabled support for the development of national frameworks to be based on an understanding of local realities, while pilot municipalities were assisted in implementing new frameworks and learning from their experience was fed back to national level. The model provides a strong basis for deepening support at municipal level in the lead up to EU accession, e.g. local-level implementation of new legal frameworks.

Backlash can emerge unexpectedly and threaten gender equality progress, even in apparently supportive environments, with partners sometimes reluctant to respond forcefully because of the political risks involved.

The Country Office's experience demonstrated that flexibility to address emerging backlash is critical, as are good communication capacities, strong relationships with civil society and the media, and the ability to provide practical guidance to partners that are the focus of backlash. Critically, countering backlash requires long-term investment in social norms and communication efforts, as well as the capacity to anticipate and respond rapidly to flare ups, as happened in response to the Gender Equality Law.

A key lesson has been the importance of building permanent domestic capacity infrastructure within national institutions to avoid long-term reliance on UN Women's direct technical inputs and ensure national capacities and results can be sustained.

This requires recognizing and addressing the incentives that can encourage the Country Office and its partners to prioritize repeated rounds of training. It also requires building on existing good practices in sustainable capacity transfer, such as engagement with the Albanian School of Public Administration to embed gender equality content in civil service training programmes, and the transition plan for the Femicide Observatory.

SECTION 6

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1

(Based on Findings 1, 3, 5, 8, 13, 14)

EU accession is the main driver of sustainable progress on gender equality in Albania and, while the Country Office has engaged in some important ways with this process, there have also been some gaps. A more strategic and clearly articulated alignment with the EU accession process would be valuable both for advancing gender equality outcomes and mobilizing resources for Country Office efforts. At the same time, UN Women's work in Albania remains grounded in international commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment – including CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs – with EU accession serving as an important entry point and enabler for advancing these commitments.

The strong progress on gender equality in Albania during the Strategic Note period has been largely driven by the EU accession process, which requires Albania to strengthen its gender equality frameworks and creates opportunities to advance gender equality through extensive reforms across multiple sectors and levels. This process created a highly conducive environment for the Country Office's work, particularly by generating government appetite for rapid progress on gender equality and demand for UN Women's support.

The Country Office built upon these opportunities and engaged in important ways with the accession process, including supporting and influencing the legal, policy and institutional reforms required to meet EU accession criteria, and developing national and local-level capacities to implement new frameworks and policies. However, the Country Office also missed opportunities to shape important EU accession-related plans – notably the 2024–2027 Albania National Reform Agenda and National Growth Plan – and its portfolio and capacities are still perceived as insufficiently aligned with EU requirements.

Given that the accelerated EU accession process will dominate the policy and financing environment for the coming strategic period, it would be valuable for the Country Office to strengthen its alignment with this process and clearly communicate its added value, ensuring it has sufficient technical and political capacities to be a meaningful actor in this space. This would ensure the strongest possible focus on gender within Albania's EU accession processes and facilitate resource mobilization as EU funds become the predominant financing modality.

At the same time, international frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment – including CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, WPS

resolutions and the SDGs – continue to provide the foundation for UN Women's work, in line with its global normative mandate. In this context, the EU accession process offers an important entry point and enabler for advancing these commitments, supporting sustained progress irrespective of the pace and dynamics of accession reforms.

CONCLUSION 2

(Based on Findings 2, 6, 7, 13)

The Country Office harnesses its expertise, credibility and convening power to contribute to gender equality results at multiple levels and across thematic areas. Its close relationships with government institutions and civil society have enabled the Country Office to influence gender-related agendas and reforms. However, there is a risk of overdependence by partners on Country Office support that needs to be addressed, particularly given uncertainties about UN Women's longer-term presence.

The Country Office has been largely effective in generating results across thematic areas, with particularly strong results under Strategic Note Outcome 3. The Country Office has contributed to results at systemic, institutional, community and individual levels and through multiple pathways, although in some areas results were limited and opportunities missed.

The Country Office's strong technical expertise is an important factor that enables it to contribute to results, which has been especially valuable in informing legal and policy reforms, and strengthening systems such as data collection or planning and budgeting. This expertise also ensured the Country Office has strong credibility and influence with key actors and institutions – another important factor in its effectiveness.

The Country Office's strong partnerships with a wide variety of relevant stakeholders from national and local government, civil society and other sectors, have provided a good basis for collaborative efforts to achieve results, although space remains to further expand partnerships.

Partners' continued dependence on high levels of support from the Country Office creates significant risks to the sustainability of results, given that EU accession means that UN Women's presence in Albania beyond the next Strategic Period is uncertain.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Participant at the Training of Trainers on women's political participation in Albania. September 2024.

CONCLUSION 3

(Based on Findings 1, 5, 6, 7)

The Country Office leverages its normative mandate to take advantage of EU accession-related reforms and guide the development of legal and policy frameworks, while employing its operational mandate to help develop the capacities and systems to implement these frameworks. However, the Country Office's ability to provide leadership for coordinated UN system engagement on gender priorities is uneven and strengthening this will be critical in the next strategic period.

The Country Office has invested strongly in all three elements of its mandate and ensured they are well connected, that they build on each other to contribute to results, and are based on solid data and evidence.

The EU accession process has created substantial space for normative engagement, and the Country Office has effectively supported the strengthening of national gender equality frameworks, drawing on international standards and best practices. This normative work has provided clear framing for operational efforts, which have focused strongly on developing the systems and capacities required to implement new legal and policy frameworks at national and municipal level. Operational efforts have focused on supporting pilot initiatives and developing models that can be scaled up, e.g. municipal-level planning, service provision for survivors of violence and women's entrepreneurship.

The Country Office's coordination efforts have also been strong and the office is recognized by UN partners for its leadership, expertise and coordination work on gender equality within the UN system. However, it has been difficult for the Country Office to translate these efforts into results (stronger and better coordinated UN system engagement on gender equality) due to high levels of inter-agency competition and weak engagement by UN partners on gender. With the removal of the UNSDCF stand-alone gender outcome and an increasingly constrained funding environment, stronger UN system coordination on gender equality will be critical in the next strategic period.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Meri Poni, a participant in the Training of Trainers on women's political participation in Albania. September 2024.

CONCLUSION 4

(Based on Findings 1, 3, 8, 11, 12)

Anti-gender backlash and misinformation present a growing threat to gender equality progress in Albania. The Country Office demonstrated agility and built credibility with its response to backlash on the Gender Equality Law. It is well placed to build upon this experience to develop expanded coalitions and comprehensive strategies that can counter backlash, promote positive social norms and advance the rights of the most marginalized groups.

Despite the largely conducive environment for gender equality progress in Albania, backlash has recently emerged as a significant challenge, driven by a variety of internal and external dynamics. The Country Office's response to the 2025 backlash against the Gender Equality Law was relevant and agile, with partners highly appreciative of how UN Women provided leadership; engaged with a wide range of stakeholders; and offered guidance to institutions that were the focus of the backlash. Civil society and media partners proved to be particularly key allies in efforts to resist backlash.

It is likely that backlash will pose a growing challenge going forward. The Country Office is well placed to build on its experience in relation to the Gender Equality Law to expand the coalition of stakeholders working to resist backlash and promote positive narratives around gender equality; develop more comprehensive strategies to address the factors that fuel anti-gender attitudes; and anticipate and prepare for future manifestations of backlash. It will be important for the Country Office to reflect on how best it can strengthen the integration of work on social norms and leave no one behind across its portfolio; enhance its communication capacities; draw on corporate and regional-level resources; and strengthen engagement of the wider UN system in this endeavour.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Students of "Qiriazi College" training on Empowerment through Self-Defense. Tirana, Albania, 2025.

CONCLUSION 5

(Based on Findings 4, 9, 10)

The Country Office's effectiveness is underpinned by strong internal systems and capacities, and a culture of collaboration. Together with Strategic Note Direct Funding, these factors have enabled the Country Office to respond to stakeholders' high expectations and deliver results. Maintaining sufficient capacities and resources in a challenging funding landscape will require strategic positioning in relation to shifting donor priorities.

The Country Office's effectiveness rests on a strong organizational foundation characterized by effective leadership, well-functioning coordination routines and robust results-based management systems. This is reflected in the perceptions of both Country Office personnel and external stakeholders, who view the Country Office as well managed, efficient and responsive. A collaborative office culture enabled the Country Office to manage a rapidly scaling portfolio while maintaining fund utilization rates consistently above 95 per cent.

Sida's direct funding of the Strategic Note played a catalytic role in this trajectory, financing critical institutional functions (including monitoring, communications and data analysis) which earmarked project budgets cannot cover. It also enabled the Country Office to effectively respond to emerging priorities and political windows, including through rapid coordination to respond to backlash against the Gender Equality Law. This combination of strong internal capacities and flexible resourcing enabled the Country Office to meet the high expectations of government, civil society and donor partners.

However, sustaining this level of performance presents a challenge. The broader funding environment is becoming increasingly constrained, shaped by shifting donor priorities, growing competition for resources and project cycles that can limit continuity. As Albania advances towards EU membership, financing modalities are shifting in ways that require the Country Office to tailor its thematic positioning to EU accession-oriented programming. Maintaining the capacities and institutional functions that underpin effectiveness will depend on continued access to flexible funding and strategic adaptation to these evolving realities.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Young activists at the march organized on International Women's Day in Tirana, Albania in 2026.

SECTION 7

RECOMMENDATIONS

The next strategic period will be one of intense transitions, as Albania prepares to join the EU; funding trends shift away from Official Development Assistance; and the UN system carries out internal reforms. The Country Office has strong structures, capacities, relationships and reputation to draw on to navigate these transitions. The following recommendations have been validated with the Albania Country Office and the Evaluation Reference Group and are intended to identify key priorities and next steps for the Country Office to build on its existing strengths to take advantage of transition processes to advance gender equality.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
International Day of Girls in ICT celebrated in Tirana, Albania. 2026

RECOMMENDATION 1

(Based on Conclusion 1)

The Country Office should (a) develop a compelling vision of how it can align with and add value to the EU accession process as a key entry point for advancing Albania's international gender equality commitments; and (b) undertake scenario planning for different EU accession trajectories.

Priority: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Timeline: **SHORT-TERM** / MEDIUM-TERM / LONG-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Use the next Strategic Note to develop and communicate a clear vision of how the Country Office can support Albania's EU accession process, both through targeted work on gender-related elements of the EU Aquis and by supporting gender mainstreaming within wider accession-related processes and instruments. Ideally this vision should be embedded within a coherent UN system "offer" on support to EU accession as a pathway to achieving the SDGs (see Recommendation 3).
- Ensure that work across all thematic areas remains anchored in international normative frameworks (including CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the WPS agenda) while being informed by and well aligned with EU accession priorities and requirements, the new EU Gender Equality Strategy (2026–2030) and other relevant EU strategies and frameworks.
- Deepen engagement with the EU delegation, national actors that play a key role in the accession process (e.g. EU integration units within government institutions, Chief Negotiator for EU accession in the Prime Minister's Office) and with international financial institutions that provide large-scale financing in support of EU accession processes (e.g. World Bank, French Development Agency). A coordinated UN system approach to such partnerships would be valuable.
- Ensure the Country Office has sufficient technical capacities to engage effectively on key elements of the EU accession process, with support from the Regional Office and Brussels office.
- While focusing on accelerated EU accession as the most likely future trajectory, the Country Office should also undertake scenario planning for other possible trajectories (slower or stalled accession) and build in flexibility within the next Strategic Note to respond to such alternative scenarios. Anchoring programming in Albania's international gender equality commitments will help ensure continuity of engagement across all scenarios.

To be led by: Country Office with support from Regional Office and Brussels Office, ideally in partnership with wider UNCT

Impact: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Difficulty: **LOW** / MEDIUM / HIGH

If not implemented: The Country Office may not be perceived as a relevant actor in relation to the EU accession process; the Country Office may lack technical capacities to engage effectively on EU accession; key partnerships and opportunities to advance gender equality within the accession process may not be developed; the Country Office may have limited access to EU funds; and the Country Office may be unprepared for alternative scenarios.

RECOMMENDATION 2

(Based on Conclusion 4)

The Country Office should develop a multi-faceted approach to address backlash, building on corporate guidance and best practices in this area. This must include expanding work on social norms change and integrating a focus on the most marginalized groups across the portfolio.

Priority: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Timeline: SHORT-TERM / MEDIUM-TERM / **LONG-TERM**

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Continue to provide (a) guidance and support to national institutions responsible for safeguarding gender equality commitments in responding to backlash, particularly in relation to the current legal challenges to the Gender Equality Law (notably the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ombudsperson); and (b) strategies to prepare for and respond to future backlash on gender equality.
- Integrate a strong focus on promoting positive narratives on gender equality and addressing discriminatory social norms within civil society partnerships and collaboration to support civil society to play a leadership role in this area, including attention to protecting civic space for women's rights organizations and supporting the protection and resilience of women human rights defenders.
- Expand and strengthen the coalition of actors engaged in countering backlash and support coordinated advocacy, building on the alliances developed during the backlash against the Gender Equality Law. This should include deepening engagement with stakeholders with a key role to play in addressing backlash, including by broadening work with the media to engage with editors and media decision makers; engaging more extensively with academia; and building partnerships with key institutions such as the Commission for Protection from Discrimination.
- Embed sustained social norms change objectives and indicators across all programme areas and communication initiatives, moving beyond time-bound campaigns towards long-term engagement, drawing on corporate guidance on social norms work, and prioritizing outreach to conservative and remote settings.
- Continue to support government, the private sector and civil society partners to embed leave no one behind principles in their planning, budgeting and monitoring systems, including through intersectional targeting criteria, inclusive participatory budgeting and strengthened capacity for disaggregated data collection and use.
- Strengthen the application of intersectional analysis and leave no one behind principles by investing in disaggregated data collection (particularly on disability, age and rural/urban dimensions) and participatory research on the needs of the most marginalized groups. Translate this evidence into programme design and advocacy, and develop internal guidance and accountability mechanisms to ensure consistent integration across the portfolio.
- Deepen the mainstreaming of disability inclusion across the portfolio. Designate a disability inclusion focal point with a clear mandate and accountability for supporting consistent application across all programmes, operations, communications and monitoring.
- Continue to develop internal Country Office capacities to address backlash and discriminatory social norms, including through maintaining and enhancing current communications capacities and socializing corporate-level strategies on backlash and social norms change among personnel. This should be supported by capacity development and guidance from the Regional Office and opportunities for experience sharing among Country Offices experiencing backlash.

To be led by: Country Office with support from Regional Office

Impact: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Difficulty: LOW / **MEDIUM** / HIGH

If not implemented: Responses to backlash may be uncoordinated and less effective; stakeholders may lack the necessary capacity and support to counter backlash and defend gender equality; Country Office capacities may be inadequate to respond to the growing challenge of backlash; efforts to address the root causes of gender inequality may be insufficient; approaches to leave no one behind within programming risk being ad hoc and incoherent; and leave no one behind groups may become further marginalized.

RECOMMENDATION 3

(Based on Conclusion 3)

The Country Office should continue to lead on mainstreaming gender equality throughout UNSDCF implementation; strengthen strategic partnerships and joint programming with other UN agencies, including in the context of UN80 reform; and promote coordinated UN system engagement on gender aspects of EU accession and in response to backlash.

Priority: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Timeline: SHORT-TERM / **MEDIUM-TERM** / LONG-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Promote substantive mainstreaming of gender equality within the next UNSDCF to strengthen engagement on gender across all agencies. This could involve leveraging the Gender Thematic and Results Group as a forum to develop strategic approaches to mainstreaming; building on UN Women's strong credibility within the UNCT to promote such approaches; and providing relevant expertise, tools and capacity development for UN partners.
- Proactively position UN Women's mandate and expertise within UN80 reform processes at country level, including through joint programming, pooled funding arrangements, integrated policy support and more efficient use of UNCT capacities, to ensure that gender equality remains central to UN support to Albania's national development priorities and EU accession process in a constrained funding environment.
- Strengthen strategic partnerships with other UN agencies in areas where UN Women brings a clear comparative advantage and identify opportunities for joint resource mobilization and joint programmes under the UNSDCF, while ensuring that UN Women's normative mandate and accountability for gender equality and the empowerment of women results remain visible.
- Work with the Resident Coordinator and UNCT to develop a clear and coherent UN system offer in support of EU accession that includes a strong focus on gender equality and which can be a basis for coordinated UN engagement across key policy agendas.
- Leverage the Country Office's coordination role to (a) develop a coherent UN system-wide approach to backlash on gender equality and human rights; and (b) ensure the UN can offer a strong collective response to backlash in future.
- Continue to advocate for the development of a Gender Accelerator in Albania to enable a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to gender equality and make the case for the Country Office to have a leadership role within the Accelerator given its mandate and expertise.

To be led by: Country Office, in collaboration with Resident Coordinator and UNCT

Impact: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Difficulty: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**

If not implemented: Gender equality may not be meaningfully mainstreamed within next UNSDCF; UN system work on gender equality may decrease; UN system efforts in support of EU accession will be uncoordinated and less appealing for donors; the UN system may not be well placed to respond to backlash; and opportunities to strengthen gender equality results through a Gender Accelerator will be missed.

RECOMMENDATION 4

(Based on Conclusions 1 and 2)

The Country Office should engage in key strategic areas and critical partnerships, with a focus on consolidating and deepening national capacities and ownership to generate sustainable results at scale.

Priority: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Timeline: SHORT-TERM / **MEDIUM-TERM** / LONG-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Ensure that the next Strategic Note focuses on advancing a limited set of strategic priorities together with a range of partners, with an emphasis on supporting transformative, system-level change and avoiding dispersed and small-scale initiatives.
- Develop a transition strategy for each major area of Country Office technical support that is aligned with EU accession timelines and defines milestones for transferring lead responsibility to national counterparts. Distinguish between areas where institutionalization is advanced and those where dependency remains high, and communicate the transition plan transparently to partners.
- Build permanent domestic capacity infrastructure by formalizing partnerships with the Albanian School of Public Administration, academia and the Department of Gender in the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to deliver training on gender equality, with the Country Office providing quality assurance. Invest in institutionalized tools (e.g. digitized Local Gender Action Plan templates, GRB software, monitoring dashboards) aligned with Eurostat and EU accession benchmarks.
- Develop a scale-up strategy to take proven models to national reach. Leverage existing systemic incentive mechanisms (e.g. the PBG requirement for Local Gender Action Plans) and advocate for similar mechanisms in other areas. Address uneven municipal ownership through differentiated engagement and peer-to-peer learning.
- Consolidate national ownership of coordination by supporting government co-leadership of the Development Partner Coordination Group on Gender; formalizing institutional champion roles in organizational structures; and advocating for the integration of gender equality commitments into EU accession financing instruments (IPA III, Growth Plan, sector budget support) to safeguard gains as Official Development Assistance declines.
- Address civil society sustainability by supporting CSOs to diversify funding sources (e.g. through government procurement of social services, municipal co-financing, private-sector partnerships) and by advocating for a sustainable funding framework in advance of EU accession.

To be led by: Country Office, with support from the Regional Office and in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of Finance, Albanian School of Public Administration, Ministry for Local Government and the EU Delegation

Impact: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Difficulty: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**

If not implemented: Partners may remain overly dependent on UN Women for key functions; capacity gains may be lost with staff turnover; proven models may stall at pilot stage; gender equality may not be embedded in EU financing instruments; and civil society may face funding crises.

RECOMMENDATION 5

(Based on Conclusion 5)

The Country Office should develop a resource mobilization strategy that (a) aligns its thematic positioning with evolving donor priorities; and (b) prioritizes securing Strategic Note funding, while improving the availability of outcome and impact data and monitoring to strengthen the evidence base for donor engagement.

Priority: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Timeline: SHORT-TERM / **MEDIUM-TERM** / LONG-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Develop a resource mobilization and partnership strategy that maps the evolving donor landscape and diversifies funding sources, with a focus on strengthening engagement with the EU and other actors providing large-scale financing in support of EU accession. Articulate a clear thematic offer tailored to key financing modalities and explore emerging avenues such as the proposed UN joint fund for EU integration and SDG acceleration.
- Pursue the continuation and expansion of direct funding of the Strategic Note by documenting and communicating the catalytic role that flexible funding has played in enabling organizational performance, agility and results delivery. Explore opportunities to secure similar flexible funding arrangements with other donors.
- Strengthen internal expertise on EU accession processes and key sectoral areas where the Country Office's current thematic offer requires improvement, including through recruitment, partnerships or collaboration with the Regional Office, to position the Country Office competitively for EU-aligned opportunities.
- Strengthen outcome and impact-level monitoring by investing in longer-term results measurement that goes beyond output tracking, including behavioural change and institutional capacity development. Adopt approaches suited to capturing complex change, such as outcome harvesting, and use this strengthened evidence base to demonstrate value and support donor engagement.

To be led by: Country Office, informed by strategic processes at the regional level and headquarters	
Impact: LOW / MEDIUM / **HIGH**	Difficulty: LOW / **MEDIUM** / HIGH

If not implemented: Organizational capacities and institutional functions may not be sustained; and Country Office competitiveness may be weakened as the funding landscape shifts.



Photo: © UN Women Albania
Albanian journalist during the annual meeting of the UN Women Media Forum in Durres, Albania. November 2025.

ANNEXES AND CASE STUDIES

Annexes are available in Volume II of the report.

Case studies are available in Volume III of the report.

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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.

UN WOMEN

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