



**Evaluation Report for the
*Final Evaluation of the project
"Safeguarding Women and Girls in Serbia" (SWGS,
from 21 October 2021 until 21 January 2024)***

December 2023

Project information		
Project/outcome title	Safeguarding Women and Girls in Serbia - SWGS	
Project number	00128883	
Donor reference	13645 Foreign, Commonwealth & Dev.Off.	
UN Women Strategic Areas	Global norms, policies & standards Governance and national planning	
Overall objective and specific objectives	<p>Overall objective of the project is to support the Government of Republic of Serbia to comply with national and international gender equality commitments and EU Gender Equality Acquis.</p> <p>The specific objective is to transform national and local-level authorities and stakeholders to be more responsive to violence against women and girls, including in public spaces, and to apply internationally validated tools and practices to better address violence against women and girls.</p> <p>The project will focus on the following key outcomes:</p> <p>Outcome 1: National-level authorities adopt measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence against women and girls, in public and private space</p> <p>Outcome 2: Local-level authorities and stakeholders use this action to apply internationally validated tools and practices to better address violence against women and girls, including in public spaces</p> <p>Outcome 3: Shelters for survivors of domestic and GBV equal accessibility to all women and girls exposed to violence, improved performance and work with increased capacity is facilitated</p>	
Region and Countries covered	Region: Western Balkans Country: Serbia	
Project Dates	Start	Planned End Date
	21 October 2021	21 January 2024
Total Committed Budget	600,000 GBP	
Funding Source	United Kingdom Government- Foreign, Commonwealth & Dev.Off	
Implementing Party	UN-Women Republic of Serbia	
Evaluation Information		
Evaluation type (project/ outcome/thematic/country program, etc.)	Programme Evaluation	
Final/midterm review/ other	Final Evaluation	
Evaluators	Mr. Tomislav Novović, Senior Evaluation Expert	
Evaluation Dates	Start	Completion
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List of abbreviations

CA	Contribution Analysis
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CoP	Community of Practice
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
EC	Evaluation Consultant
ECA RO	Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (UN Women)
ER	Evaluation Report
EU	European Union
EVAW	Eliminating Violence against Women
FE	Final Evaluation
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic violence
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
IR	Inception report
KII	Key Informants Interviews
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OVI	Objectively Verifiable Indicator
PCA	Project Cooperation Agreement
PM	Project Manager
PMF	Performance Measurement Framework
Prodoc	Project document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PT	Project Team
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMART	Specific Measurable Accepted Realistic Timely
SoV	Sources of Verification
SWGS	Safeguarding women and girls in Serbia
TC	Technical Coordinator
TOC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN SWAP	UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAWG	Violence against women and girls

Introduction

This document comprehensively details the results of the final evaluation of the "Safeguarding Women and Girls in Serbia" (SWGS) Project. This strategic initiative addressed the critical issue of violence against women and girls in Serbia, aligning with the country's national and international gender equality commitments, including the EU Gender Equality Acquis. Its primary focus was on transforming both national and local-level authorities and stakeholders into more responsive entities to violence against women and girls, especially in public spaces, by adopting internationally validated tools and practices.

Key outcomes of the SWGS included:

- **Adoption of Measures by National Authorities:** This pivotal aspect of the Project involved national-level authorities adopting measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence against women and girls in both public and private spaces. It marked a significant progression towards aligning Serbia's efforts with international standards and commitments to combat gender-based violence.
- **Utilisation of Internationally Validated Tools by Local Authorities:** Local authorities and stakeholders were equipped with and effectively utilized internationally validated tools and practices. This action underscored their commitment to applying global best methods to address violence against women and girls at the local level.
- **Enhancement of Shelters for Survivors:** A critical focus was also on making shelters for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence accessible to all women and girls. The Project ensured these shelters were equipped with improved performance and increased capacity, providing better support and protection to survivors.

The approach of the SWGS paralleled the broader UN Women's efforts in Serbia, where persistent advocacy against gender-based violence has been evident. The SWGS tackled the structural causes of gender inequality and societal norms addressing public security.

This report begins with an overview of ongoing efforts to combat such violence, followed by a detailed outline of the SWGS's specific objectives, strategies, outcomes, and outputs. It elaborates on the evaluation's design, methodology, data collection, analysis, and strategies to mitigate potential risks and limitations. The subsequent chapters present the evaluation's findings, draw conclusions and lessons learned, and offer recommendations based on the results. The annexes provide additional information about the evaluation process, including detailed methodologies and results frameworks, enhancing the understanding of the evaluation's thoroughness.

1 Background and evaluation context

1.1 *Gender equality and violence against women in Serbia*

The stakeholders in Serbia must address the issue of violence against women and girls, responding to the commitments under the broader context of international and regional frameworks dedicated to women's rights and gender equality. At the heart of global women's rights is the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)¹, which aims to eradicate gender discrimination and emphasizes the importance of gender mainstreaming². Although CEDAW doesn't explicitly mention violence against women and girls (VAWG), its mandate is broadened by the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 19. This recommendation underscores that VAWG is, in essence, a direct manifestation of gender discrimination that significantly impinges upon the human rights of women. This understanding has evolved and been further clarified by General Recommendation No. 35³, which updates the former recommendation by highlighting that gender-based violence against women is an infringement under customary international law. In addition to these global efforts, several other instruments and initiatives have been implemented to strengthen the fight

¹ On 18 December 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981 after the twentieth country had ratified it. By the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1989, almost one hundred nations had agreed to be bound by its provisions.

² UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) establishing the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) stipulated that the administration's responsibilities would include "protecting and promoting human rights."

³ General Recommendation 35, para 2.

against VAWG. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women⁴ and the institution of a Special Rapporteur on VAWG reinforce the global commitment to this cause. In 2013, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) took the decisive step of prioritizing the Elimination and prevention of VAWG, emphasizing its importance on the global agenda.

Turning the attention to the European landscape, the Istanbul Convention⁵ emerges as a pivotal framework in the fight against VAWG. The Serbian government's ratification⁶ of this Convention signals its commitment to regional standards and norms. To ensure that the principles of the Convention are upheld, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence⁷ (GREVIO) undertakes independent monitoring. GREVIO meticulously evaluates measures, including providing specialized services for victims, to determine alignment with the Convention's mandates.

The global standards and European normative framework is important for shaping overall policy and legislative framework and reforms in Serbia, given that countries are in the process of EU accession. The partners in Serbia are working to integrate a gender mainstreaming perspective and prepare and revise legislation in line with the highest EU and international standards⁸. Serbia is signatory or party to key international conventions CEDAW (1981) and its Optional Protocol, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Istanbul Convention. Still, further commitments are needed. The UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages (1962) protects women from early and forced marriages, recognized as one form of violence against women by the Istanbul Convention. Serbia has joined the European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes (2010).

In the context of Serbia, the country's journey towards European Union accession has significantly shaped its approach to gender equality and VAWG. Serbia strives to align its legislative and policy structures with premier European Union and international standards. This is evident in its robust national framework, which includes laws such as the 'Law on Gender Equality' and the 'Law on Prevention from Domestic Violence (2017)'. On the policy front, strategic initiatives like the 'Strategy for Gender Equality for 2021-2030' and the 'Strategy against Gender-based and Family Violence for 2021-2025' play a central role in driving change.

Table 1 Key national mechanism, laws and policies for gender equality

<p>Structure</p>	<p>Coordination Body for Gender Equality⁹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Function: Operates within the Serbian government to coordinate activities promoting gender equality. • Key Responsibilities: Drafts policies, monitors international commitments like CEDAW, collaborates with civil society, ensures gender mainstreaming, and organizes awareness campaigns. • Legal Framework: Operates under the 'Law on Gender Equality' and ensures the implementation of laws like the 'Law on Prevention from Domestic Violence (2017)'. • Policy Framework: Oversees policies like 'Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030' and 'Strategy against gender-based and family violence 2021-2025'. • Challenges: Faces obstacles in policy commitments and delays in enacting laws.
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⁴ <https://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

⁵ Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), 11/05/2011, CETS No.210, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210> (entered into force 01/08/2014).

⁶ Council of Europe https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures?p_auth=Osj3KEo

⁷ Information on GREVIO recommendations to States Parties is included in the following sub-section Council of Europe, About GREVIO; <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>

⁸ European Parliament, Women in the Western Balkans: Gender equality in the EU accession process, briefing, p: 3; [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2018\)625139](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)625139)

⁹ In essence, the Coordination Body for Gender Equality in Serbia serves as a central mechanism to align various efforts and initiatives towards achieving gender equality in the country. Its role is pivotal in bringing together different stakeholders, formulating policies, and ensuring that Serbia's commitments to international conventions and standards related to gender equality are met.

Legal framework	Law on Gender Equality ¹⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This law solidifies the country's dedication to eradicating discrimination based on gender. It aims to ensure equal opportunities and treatment for all individuals, irrespective of their gender. • It focuses on various spheres such as education, employment, public life, social care, health care, family relations, and media. • It promotes the active participation of both men and women in all public and private spheres of life, ensuring their equal representation and contribution.
	Law on prevention from Domestic Violence (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This legislation aims to protect victims of domestic violence, provide legal sanctions for perpetrators, and outline preventive measures to reduce occurrences. • The law emphasizes the importance of a coordinated response involving health, social, judicial, and police services to address domestic violence effectively. • It introduces emergency measures, such as removing perpetrators from the household or barring them from approaching victims, to ensure the immediate safety of victims.
Policy framework	Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 ¹¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This policy initiative provides a roadmap for achieving gender equality in Serbia over the decade. • It highlights key areas of intervention, including political participation, economic empowerment, health, education, and the prevention and eradication of gender-based violence. • The strategy also focuses on enhancing the role of women in decision-making processes and promoting their active participation in socio-economic development.
	Strategy for prevention and fight against gender-based violence and family violence for 2021-2025 ¹²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This strategic document focuses exclusively on addressing gender-based and family violence in Serbia. • It emphasizes a holistic approach to tackle violence, promoting prevention, protection, prosecution, and integrated policies. • The strategy underlines the importance of inter-sectoral cooperation, involving state institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the wider community in efforts to combat violence.

However, challenges persist. Notably, the country's commitment to gender equality has declined recently¹³. Issues like legislative delays, evident in the prolonged enactment of the new Law on Gender Equality (2016-2021), and the lack of regulatory mechanisms create barriers to effective implementation.

The reality in Serbia brings into sharp focus the disparities between policy intent and actual societal change. Traditional norms and gender roles still hold significant sway, leading to restricted opportunities for women, economic vulnerabilities, and an increased susceptibility to violence¹⁴. Disturbingly, as many as 70% of Serbian

¹⁰ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 52/2021.

¹¹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 103.

¹² "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No 47 10. May 2021.

https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index?gclid=CjoKCQjwk7ugBhDIARIsAGuvGpZ5KJvjrZ8hXWxm-Xyu6t_JoQXOnxVIAfcnjtfgxMUqZw1Tw1IM4p0aAm2BEALw_wcB#/indicies/GII UNDP (2022).

European Commission, Türkiye 2022 Report, <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/T%C3%BCrkiye%20Report%202022.pdf> and European Commission, Serbia 2022 Report <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Serbia%20Report%202022.pdf> pp 43

¹⁴ EU Progress Report for Serbia, 2023 https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_695_Serbia.pdf

women have faced some form of violence after the age of 15. Societal tendencies, which treat VAWG as a private matter, exacerbate the situation. Psychological violence is especially prevalent in Serbia, with its incidence rate of 60%, far surpassing the European Union average of 43%. Numerous factors, including exposure to violence during childhood, economic hardships, disabilities, and displacement, amplify the risk of VAWG. The health implications of this violence are severe, with a significant proportion of female victims suffering physical injuries, compromising their overall well-being¹⁵.

While Serbia demonstrates a commendable commitment at multiple levels to enhance women's rights and address VAWG, the gap between legislative frameworks and ground realities is evident. This gap must be bridged, requiring not just policy interventions but a more profound societal shift, positioning women's rights and safety at the forefront of national priorities.

1.2 Project “Safeguarding Women and Girls in Serbia” (SWGS)

In Serbia, UN Women partnered with government institutions, civil society, and other key players to advocate for gender equality and address the pressing issues of domestic and gender-based violence. The collaboration sought to bolster policy and legal structures, enhance service provider capacity, and promote women's entrepreneurship and participation in political processes. Through its work, UN Women has also been committed to integrating gender perspectives into Serbian policy, advocating for sustainable development with a focus on Gender Equality (Goal 5), and pushing for gender-sensitive responses to environmental and climate challenges.

The SWGS, spearheaded by UN Women, was established to encourage a transformative shift in institutional attitudes and practices, making them more attuned to and proactive against violence against women and girls. Recognizing the prevalence of violence beyond private spaces, the Project adopted international best practices and effective measures to address this pervasive issue.

A significant goal of the SWGS was to align with Serbia's national commitment to gender equality and the requirements of the EU Gender Equality Acquis. The Project's focused objective was to improve the responsiveness of national and local entities to violence against women and girls, including in public areas, and to utilize internationally endorsed tools and methods to combat such violence.

The Project centred on three key outcomes:

At the national level, the initiative aimed to promote the adoption of measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence against women and girls, both in public and private spaces. The Project convened a series of capacity development events designed to galvanize support across a spectrum of stakeholders and to craft evidence-based strategies that could be broadly endorsed and implemented.

At the local level, the Project endeavoured to provide authorities and stakeholders with the necessary tools and knowledge to address violence against women and girls more effectively. These Project's efforts included the development and implementation of the Women's Safety Audit Tool, tailored to the Serbian context, to assess and enhance women's safety in public spaces. Select cities became active participants in this initiative, participating in the creation of plans aimed at transforming public spaces to be safe for women and girls.

The Project also sought to **improve the accessibility and effectiveness of shelters for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence**. Recognizing the inadequacy of existing facilities, especially for women with disabilities, the Project aimed to implement GREVIO recommendations and Council of Europe standards to enhance shelter capacity and service quality. The Project facilitated grants to augment the shelters' operational efficacy and launched campaigns to raise awareness and professional capacity in addressing violence against women and girls.

Throughout its duration, the SWGS involved various partners, including the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, local self-governments, and women's organizations. These partnerships facilitated a multifaceted approach to creating a safer and more equitable environment for women and girls in Serbia. The Project's endeavours, structured around its key outcomes, sought to lay a foundation for ongoing efforts to confront and eliminate violence against women and girls, reinforcing commitments from societal and governmental bodies.

¹⁵ Ref to SeSonS Development Initiative Group: "Improving the safety of women and girls by increasing the effectiveness of safe houses for victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence", Belgrade, 2022 "

The SWGS Project, covering Serbia, commenced on 21 October 2021 with a planned end date of 21 January 2024. Funded by the United Kingdom Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the Project had a total budget of 600,000 GBP (around 700,000 EUR).

1.2.1 Target groups and beneficiaries

The evaluation process ensured the inclusive participation of all stakeholders, emphasising both male and female contributions, in the retrospective review of the SWGS initiative. The EC included institutional partners across various levels whose roles were pivotal, or the SWGS had a direct impact on them. Recognising the importance of involving those directly benefiting from such initiatives, the EC sought to garner insights from beneficiaries via CSOs and other service providers, which acted as proxies in gathering pertinent feedback and perspectives. Additionally, the EC utilised available surveys and research to glean insights into the effect of the Project's activities on the ultimate beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups.

During the Inception Phase, the EC conducted the stakeholder analysis, delineating the roles of duty bearers, rights holders, and development actors involved in the interventions. This analysis synthesised human rights-based approaches (HRBA) with development actor perspectives to identify primary stakeholder categories:

Duty bearers with decision-making authority over the intervention included various governance structures, with the Government of Serbia and its ministries taking a principal stance as they are charged with creating and enforcing policies and legislation conforming to international standards on violence against women and discrimination. Notable national-level stakeholders comprised ministries such as the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, along with authorities from the participating municipalities of Kragujevac, Krusevac, Nis, Novi Pazar, and Sombor. The Coordination Body for Gender Equality was also integral to the Project's activities in Serbia.

Duty bearers with direct responsibility for the intervention have been those with a direct mandate over the initiative or specific components. UN Women, mandated for gender equality and women's empowerment, played an indispensable role in the implementation, management, and oversight of the Project. Implementing partners ranged from national authorities, local self-governments, and service providers for victims of violence to women's civil society organisations.

Secondary duty bearers included the Government of the United Kingdom as a significant stakeholder, along with organisations like the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) and the Council of Europe. United Nations agencies such as UNFPA, UNDP, and UNICEF, which possess specialised expertise in ending violence against women and girls, collaborated with UN Women, sharing valuable insights and practices. Additional consultancy support services and partners were also engaged, including the University of Belgrade, the Group for Development Initiative "SeConS," and the Women Against Violence Network from Serbia.

Rights holders, both intended and unintended beneficiaries of the intervention, included a variety of institutions. Under the first outcome, primary beneficiaries like the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs received benefits. These entities played a vital role in integrating gender equality into government strategies and actions, as well as in developing policies to address gender-related concerns, particularly violence against women and girls. Beneficiaries of subsequent outcomes included local government units and civil society organisations, which benefited from grants and capacity-building activities to promote gender equality and public safety. Additionally, the existing safe houses in Serbia were central beneficiaries under the third outcome, receiving support through grants administered by women-focused civil society organisations.

Indirect beneficiaries extended to a broader demographic, including women connected to civil society organisations or residing in project cities who would benefit from improved public safety and women and girls seeking refuge and support from enhanced safe house capacities. Campaigns to raise public awareness about women's and girls' safety aimed to inform and involve the wider community, contributing to a safer, more equitable society.

1.2.2 Project governance

The management of the SWGS was presided over by UN Women, which assembled a cadre of experts, each specialised in their respective fields. With support from a Project Assistant, the Project Manager guided the Project, presiding over the entirety of the Project's activities. The Project Management Specialist/ Head of Office provided strategic direction, aligning the Project's trajectory with UN Women's strategic imperatives.

The UN Women's Office provided additional operational assistance in managing the administrative and financial operations. Furthermore, the Communication Officer was responsible for devising and executing a communication strategy that broadened the Project's reach and amplified its message through various outreach endeavours.

This formal operational infrastructure has the role in coordinating and executing SWGS's activities.

2 Evaluation purpose, objective and scope

2.1 Scope of the final evaluation

The comprehensive external independent final evaluation of the SWGS was conducted, covering its lifespan from October 2021 to December 2023- extended until January 2024. This evaluative effort was designed to thoroughly assess all facets of the Project, meticulously reviewing the array of activities executed within the framework of three interrelated outcomes and scrutinising the resultant effects.

The evaluation was implemented in the terminal phase of the Project's timeline, particularly from September to December 2023. The EC undertook a series of data-gathering tasks that involved various stakeholders (from different regions and municipalities in Serbia).

2.2 Purpose of the final evaluation

The purpose of the SWGS final evaluation was three-fold: i) Ensuring accountability by verifying adherence to the Project's intended goals and standards; ii) Facilitating learning by extracting valuable insights and discerning best practices for potential replication in future endeavours and iii) Informing decision-making by supplying evidence-based recommendations for strategic planning and policy formulation, with a particular emphasis on gender-responsive policies to bolster women's empowerment.

The EC analyzed the Project's achievements and the knowledge derived from both the programmatic and coordination perspectives. This in-depth exploration should contribute to and facilitate organizational learning and bolster accountability, laying a solid groundwork for well-founded decision-making processes. Particular emphasis was placed on generating practical recommendations for upcoming initiatives, advocating for adopting novel strategies and practices, and indicating the optimal focus for interventions to amplify their effects.

In line with its commitment to participatory processes, the evaluation implemented a participatory approach, ensuring all key partners were involved. This method was designed to enable comprehensive discussions with a diverse group of stakeholders, including official representatives from government agencies, local authorities, CSOs, women's groups, and leading development partners. These engagements aimed to deepen the understanding of the Project's nuances, thereby promoting a thorough and critical examination supporting the evaluation purpose of accountability, learning, and informed decision-making.

2.3 Specific objectives of the final evaluation

The specific objectives of the evaluation were delineated as follows:

- **Conducted a Relevance Analysis:** The evaluation examined the pertinence of the Project's aims, strategies, and methodologies at both local and national levels. This scrutiny encompassed the Project's responsiveness to violence against women and girls in public spaces and the capacity building of operational safe houses in Serbia.
- **Evaluated Coherence:** The EC focused o/n the Project's internal and external coherence with other initiatives and within the national policy framework on gender equality and women's empowerment;
- **Assessed Efficiency:** The evaluation appraised the efficiency of the Project implementation, analysing processes and approaches to convert resources into results.
- **Measured Effectiveness and Potential Impact:** The effectiveness and potential impact of the Project interventions on the intended beneficiaries were gauged across all three defined outcomes.
- **Evaluated Sustainability:** The durability of the outcomes and the longevity of the interventions in preventing and protecting women and girls from violence within the target group were assessed.

- **Examined Integrated Human Rights and Gender Equality Principles:** The extent to which the principles of human rights and gender equality were woven into the fabric of project execution was analyzed.
- **Analyzed Contribution to Agenda 2030 and SDGs:** The alignment and contribution of the intervention and its outcomes towards the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals were investigated.
- **Documented Lessons and Practices:** The evaluation sought to identify, lessons learned, commendable practices, innovative approaches, success narratives, and encountered challenges within the Project's scope.
- **Identified Strategies for Replication and Up-scaling:** The evaluation aimed to pinpoint strategies that could facilitate the replication and expansion of the Project's exemplary practices.

The intended audience for this evaluation included the Government of Serbia, civil society organizations, staff of UN Women and other UN agencies in Serbia, and principally, the UN Women's Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECA RO). The evaluation was scheduled to unfold during the concluding phase of the Project, between September and December 2023, incorporating a data collection mission throughout various municipalities in Serbia.

The final evaluation of the SWGS was comprehensive, spanning the entire duration of the Project from 21 October 2021 to 31 December 2023. It undertook a thorough review of all project elements.

3 Evaluation approach

3.1 Specific approach to this evaluation

The ToR established a framework for the Final Evaluation (FE), and the EC designed this customized methodology following its stipulations. The principal reference for the evaluation methodology was the OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria¹⁶, which include relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, along with an additional standalone criterion on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) that was integrated throughout the evaluation process.

At the same time, the EC strictly conformed to the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards¹⁷, and UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation¹⁸. Moreover, the EC designed this methodology to be gender-responsive and feminist, adhere to a human-rights-based approach, and incorporate systems thinking.

Outlined below is how the Evaluation Consultant employed a unique methodology, blending these approaches for the evaluation of the SWGS:

The gender-responsive evaluation¹⁹ methodology aimed to reshape gender and power dynamics, remaining true to international commitments on gender equality, human rights, and women's empowerment. This approach emphasized national ownership and leadership and the proactive engagement of rights holders and duty bearers. The planning and implementation of the evaluation were anchored in a comprehensive analysis of gender and power relations, with a particular focus on novel approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment.

The evaluation followed the highest ethical standards and honoured the rights of all participants while maintaining strict adherence to principles of transparency, independence, and impartiality. The EC collected data inclusively, involving inputs from rights holders, such as women organizations, and duty bearers including national governments and policy-making entities. The evaluation ensured compliance with international norms, particularly the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW, concentrating on women's empowerment and examining shifts in gender power dynamics.

¹⁶ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC), Network on Development Evaluation, Better Criteria for Better Evaluation Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use, 2019, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/download/2787>

¹⁸ <http://www.uneval.org/document/download/1294>

¹⁹ How to Manage Gender Responsive Evaluation. Evaluation Handbook: www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/4/un-women-evaluation-handbook-how-to-manage-gender-responsive-evaluation (p. 2-4)

The Feminist Evaluation²⁰ methodology was recognized as inherently political, focusing on systemic and structural gender inequalities that contribute to social injustice. It acknowledged that gender-based discrimination is deeply embedded within societal structures. This methodology validated the personal experiences and perspectives of the EC, including inherent political assumptions. The EC embraced the activist's role, aiming to expose and contest entrenched gender biases, promoting an inclusive evaluation process that empowers marginalized individuals and advocates for gender equality and social justice.

The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)²¹ evaluation placed human rights principles at the core of its methodology. Grounded in the rule of law and state obligations, it promoted equality and non-discrimination. This approach was considered and included in the process to enhance the capabilities of rights holders to assert their rights and duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities. It endeavoured to discern and address the root causes of significant developmental hurdles and unmet rights, advocating for a transparent and accountable evaluation that underscores non-discrimination, equality, participation, and inclusion.

The Systems Thinking²² approach recognized the subject of the evaluation as part of broader system of interrelated components. This methodology sought to understand the interactions among various actors, institutions, and their connections. It enabled a profound comprehension of system dynamics over time, identifying possible leverage points for interventions. The Systems Thinking methodology proved particularly effective when applied by an evaluator well-versed in the contextual social, economic, and political milieu, facilitating a comprehensive evaluation of the system's operations and effects.

In line with the ToRs, the Evaluation Consultant also employed a **theory-based evaluation**, using the Project's Theory of Change (TOC) to appraise the relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, and sustainability of the Project's outcomes. For measuring relevance, the evaluation focused on a thorough situation analysis, examining the Project's alignment with the current needs and challenges of the target population (conditions) and rigorously testing the underlying assumptions of the ToC against the external/enabling environment. The EC assessed coherence, examining its components' synergy and alignment with other initiatives and objectives. For effectiveness, the EC traced the causal pathways outlined in the ToC, comparing the projected outputs against actual achievements, thereby ascertaining the extent to which the Project achieved these outputs. Efficiency analysis focused on optimising resources and processes, scrutinising how the Project Team used these resources and converted activities into outputs. The impact was measured by examining the Project's contribution to the overall "impact" objective, considering broader socioeconomic and political influences. Lastly, sustainability was evaluated by predicting the Project's durability and capacity for creating lasting benefits, considering the strength and viability of the mechanisms put in place for continued impact post-completion. This comprehensive, theory-based approach enabled a structured and detailed assessment, linking the Project's stated aims with tangible outcomes and its overarching strategic objectives.

3.2 Analysis of the Theory of Change

The UN Women's historical and current strategies and methodologies, established in the field to confront discrimination and eradicate violence against women and girls (VAWG), steered the Project. In particular, the foundational principles outlined in UN Women's "theory of change" (ToC), aimed at realizing the human rights of women and girls by mitigating violence against them, informed the strategic framework of the Project.

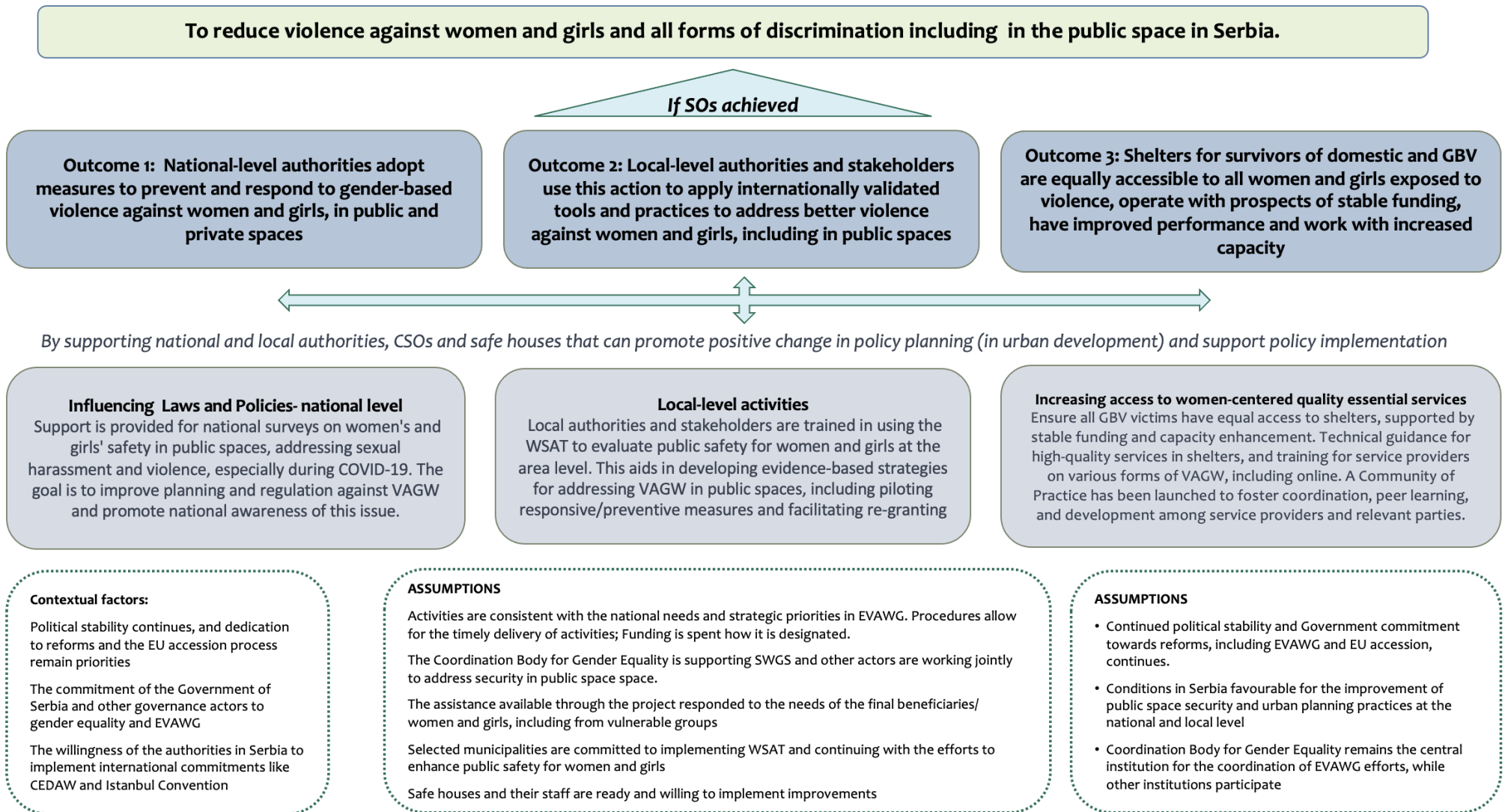
The SWGS's ToC posited that Serbia could enhance the well-being and safety of women and girls via specific change pathways. Practically, this ToC has been based on the notion that national and local-level authorities and stakeholders exhibited heightened responsiveness to violence against women and girls, and local-level authorities adopted internationally recognized tools and practices to combat such violence. In addition, the shelters for GBV survivors offered equitable access, working to sustain funding and ensure adequate capacities. The ToC rested on the understanding that acknowledging, responding to, and managing VAWG in public spaces, the provision of accessible and efficacious shelters, together with concerted engagement of stakeholders, and public awareness of the implications of GBV were imperative in strengthening the welfare and security of women and girls. The ToC articulated the anticipated results and the interventions requisite for the improvement of the well-being and safety of women and girls, anchored on the following rationales:

²⁰ Better Evaluation (2019): Feminist Evaluation: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/feminist_evaluation

²¹ United Nations Evaluation Group (2014). Integrating Human Rights-Based and Gender Equality in Evaluation. New York: UNEG.

²² Richard Hummelbrunner (2011). Keynote Address "Systems Thinking and Evaluation". Conference "Systemic Approaches in Evaluation; and Bowman K. et al. (2015). Systems Thinking: An introduction for Oxfam Project Staff

Figure 1: SWGS Theory of Change



It acknowledged that *if national-level authorities and stakeholders showed responsiveness to violence against women and girls, spurred by Project-induced knowledge, capability, and awareness, then definitive support and actions would occur.* This concept encompassed the orchestration and execution of a national survey on the safety of public spaces for women and girls, aiming to amass data on the incidence of sexual harassment, stalking, and sexual violence. Additionally, there were efforts to cultivate evidence-informed responsiveness among national authorities through strategic planning and regulatory frameworks, thereby enhancing their ability to counter violence against women and girls. The ToC further accentuated the significance of a national public campaign addressing violence against women and girls in public areas to promote awareness and establish a zero-tolerance ethos toward gender-based violence.

At the grassroots level, the ToC underlined the pivotal function of local authorities and stakeholders, inclusive of women's organizations, in employing globally sanctioned tools and methodologies to tackle violence against women and girls, especially in public spaces. The Project worked to acquire local authorities with the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) and provide mentorship for considering public safety concerns specific to women and girls. This initiative supported responsive and preventative measures through re-granting schemes, offering the opportunity to local stakeholders to pioneer interventions that effectively mitigated violence against women and girls. Such actions facilitated the dissemination and mentoring of best practices for broader implementation. Through these measures, the ToC aspired to empower local entities to undertake active roles in diminishing violence against women and girls within their domains.

A fundamental element of the ToC was the assurance of accessible shelters for survivors of gender-based violence. The ToC recognized that equitable access, consistent funding, and superior performance and capability of shelters were vital for delivering quality support to victims and survivors. There was a commitment to provide technical expertise to endorse the allocation of adequate funds and the formulation of regulatory documentation that would uphold non-discriminatory admission policies, suitable operating standards, and adequate capacity at the national level. Service providers, including shelter operators, were to be educated to adeptly handle various manifestations of violence, extending beyond "conventional" domestic abuse scenarios. The beginning of a Community of Practice (CoP) was intended to ignite cooperation, shared learning, and the planning of subsequent advancements among service providers and pertinent stakeholders. The ToC considered fortifying shelters and enhancing the understanding and coordination of service providers to ensure survivors had access to necessary resources for their recovery and rehabilitation.

The EC finds that the SWGS team meticulously crafted the ToC and forged a multilayered, interrelated schema, each tier emphasizing the necessity of a comprehensive response to the complexities of GBV. The integration of strategies at both national and local levels, augmented by improvements in shelter services, was aimed at effectuating a paradigm shift in societal attitudes, norms, and behaviours concerning gender equality and women's rights.

Overall, the consolidated ToC offered a coherent blueprint to alleviate Violence Against Women and Girls in Serbia, intertwining myriad stakeholders and levels of interventions to create substantive, sustainable change. By addressing the issues at multiple strata and involving various stakeholders, the Project worked to contribute to a society where the rights, dignity, and safety of every woman and girl are unconditionally upheld, progressing in the realization of a safer, more equitable societal landscape.

The EC assessed the validity and credibility of the ToC by examining the intervention logic, including the hierarchy of objectives, potential gaps in the logic, and the adequacy of preconditions and assumptions to reach specific and overall objectives. In addition, the EC analyzed the relevance of the intervention, and achievability of the ToC, evaluating whether the Project could meet its overall objective and ensure impact.

4 Methodology for the final SWGS evaluation

The EC conducted the final evaluation of the SWGS following the Terms of Reference (ToR); thus, assessing its relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. This evaluation also integrated cross-cutting criteria such as gender mainstreaming and the principle of leaving no one behind.

In retrospect, the EC scrutinized the SWGS's relevance by juxtaposing the beneficiaries' articulated needs with its ToC and realized achievements, examining how well the Project's objectives resonated with the situational demands and necessities in Serbia, while also assessing internal and external coherence. The EV evaluated the Project's effectiveness by charting the trajectory of results against planned objectives and identifying factors that either propelled or impeded these developments. Beyond the confines of initial results-based management frameworks, the EC took a holistic view of the Project's achievements. Efficiency was gauged by

probing the Project's administrative practices, resource distribution, and cost-effectiveness of results. The EC aimed to assess how resource utilization underpinned the attainment of project results, highlighting potential enhancements.

The evaluation's lens on impact centred on the Project's role in catalysing significant and enduring changes, especially given its relatively brief implementation span. The EC gauged the extent to which the Project fostered enduring, positive shifts in combating violence against women and girls in Serbia. Sustainability evaluation delved into the persistence of benefits post-project, exploring structural, technical, social, and financial pillars crucial for continuing the fight against violence towards women and girls.

Throughout this process, the EC adhered to an evaluation matrix derived from the ToC, encompassing core and sub-questions, to ensure an exhaustive exploration of the criteria. This framework facilitated a thorough and focused inquiry. In pursuit of inclusiveness, the EC engaged with various stakeholders, from high-ranking officials to local governance representatives. In addition, the EC benefited from the women CSOs' inputs, serving as a proxy for the women and girls who bore the brunt of violence and discrimination. These different views and perspectives were pivotal in understanding the Project's tangible influence.

In adherence to the UN Women Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS), the Evaluation Committee (EC) integrated disability-focused inquiries into the evaluation process. This approach involved indirectly incorporating the experiences of persons with disabilities through Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) representing these groups. This inclusion was designed to enhance the evaluation's inclusivity and depth, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the effects on diverse population cohorts.

The evaluation offered a thorough dissection of the SWGS's accomplishments, obstacles, and actionable advice for future endeavours. Its insights are poised to inform evidence-based decision-making, foster learning, and underpin accountability, with the overarching aim of enhancing the protection of women and girls in Serbia.

4.1 Data collection methods and instruments

The SWGS culminated in a comprehensive final evaluation that employed both summative and formative methodologies. The EC considered the summative aspect to encapsulate and scrutinize the accumulated lessons, assessing the achievement of tangible results at both output and outcome levels. Complementary to this, the EC used the analysis of formative dimension prospectively, considering the applicability of results for future iterations and potential amplifications of the Project.

This evaluation yielded a thorough understanding of the SWGS's implementation and effects in Serbia, leveraging multiple data collection techniques and accounting for the complexities of the governance system and gender dynamics in the country. Adhering to a Theory of Change model, the EC employed a mixed-methods framework combining qualitative and quantitative data. This approach embraced diverse knowledge and perspectives, with participatory methods recognizing the agency and expertise of stakeholders, especially women from various backgrounds. The EC acknowledged the subjectivity in research and aimed to maintain a connection with the subjects of the evaluation, regularly reflecting on power dynamics.

The evaluation process began with a review of Project-related and strategic documents, including national policies, laws, critical reports, and the UN Women strategic framework²³). These sources offered insights into gender equality trends in North Macedonia. The assessment encompassed external and contextual factors affecting the SWGS at different implementation levels, exploring legal, political, economic, and societal influences and reviewing positive experiences in inclusive and eco-sensitive growth contexts.

Secondary data sources, such as national statistics on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, were examined to assess the influence of the EU accession process and international norms on Serbia's population. The desk review incorporated various country reports²⁴, considering potential limitations like reliability and data sensitivity, especially regarding vulnerable groups and gender equality issues.

The EC refined evaluation questions for clarity and alignment with the evaluation's purpose, establishing a transparent evidence chain linking Project objectives, evaluation questions, and data collection and analysis

²³ UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025, UN Women Flagship Initiatives; United Nations Sustainable Cooperation Frameworks for Serbia, among other

²⁴ Such as annual EU Progress Reports; GREVIO reports, national surveys on violence against women and girls (VAWG), and concluding observations from the CEDAW Committee in relation to States Parties' reports

methods. The process was iterative, with ongoing document reviews and collaboration with UN Women and stakeholders to expand the document list as data collection progressed. The evaluation benefited from a comprehensive understanding of the broader context and existing knowledge related to the SWGS by conducting a thorough literature review and utilising secondary data sources.

Primary data collection: This evaluation followed gender-sensitive and feminist approaches that ensured the participation of stakeholders, including men and women from national institutions like governmental entities and the State Statistical Office. These approaches were further enriched through a human rights-based approach (HRBA), integrating principles of transparency, equality, and non-discrimination.

For the SWGS, the EC conducted individual and group interviews with participatory discussions to gather qualitative data and insights. Analyzing the stakeholder participation in the SWGS Project interviews reveals a diverse representation from various sectors, reflecting a commitment to gender balance and inclusivity. The stakeholder engagement was strategic, with professionals from the legal, urban planning, social protection, and advocacy sectors partnering or benefiting from the SWGS Project.

The participants were female (29) and male (3) professionals holding positions ranging from elected or nominated officials, advisors and directors, managers and research/ technical experts. The institutions involved included the Government of Serbia, multiple ministries, and specialized agencies dedicated to gender equality and urban planning. Civil society's involvement was significant, with gender- and management staff structures from various organizations contributing their insights and advocacy skills, particularly in public safety and gender-based violence. Local-level authorities and urban planners were integral in implementing internationally recognized practices and tools to enhance the safety of women and girls in public spaces, and the EC discussed these elements with them. Key informant groups involved representatives of local support structures, including centres for social welfare and safe houses and CSOs working with or representing vulnerable groups.

Consultants specialized in gender issues and training that worked to strengthen the capacity of shelters and social welfare centres have been involved in the interviews, providing inputs on various aspects of service delivery and support for survivors of violence.

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility in expanding the topics of conversation, involving representatives engaged in the implementation of project components and those that benefited from capacity development activities. The primary focus of the data collection was to assess the SWGS and its contribution to women's empowerment.

The report included a detailed analysis of the Project's stakeholders, emphasizing the diverse range of perspectives and experiences that contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the Project's impact and effectiveness.

4.2 Data analysis

The EC analyzed data to facilitate the preparation of the evaluation report, using the qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA, to upload completed data collection instruments²⁵. The EC prepared codes and classifications, based on the evaluation matrix and its elements - the sub-questions, judgment criteria, and indicators. In parallel, the EC added classifications or other attributes (such as duty bearer, rightsholder, implementation strategy) to facilitate data analysis that was tailored to the evaluation purpose.

The responses were grouped according to the evaluation matrix and respondent categories (SWGS team/UN Women, national authorities/partners, UN officials, institutional duty bearers, and rights holders). Interview notes were coded against the evaluation matrix for alignment with its judgment criteria and indicators.

Content analysis involved the following methodologies:

Cross-Validation²⁶: The EC applied a cross-validation approach, validating information from different methods to ensure the accuracy of findings. By comparing data from interview responses, group discussions, project

²⁵ Such instruments include document review templates, semi-structured interview guides (individual and group), and discussion or reflection guides.

²⁶ Morras-Imas and Rist define triangulation of methods as "Collection of the same information using different methods in order to increase the accuracy of data", p. 300. Morra **Imas**, L. G., & **Rist**, R. C. (2009). *The Road to Results: Designing and Conducting Effective Development Evaluations*. Washington, D.C., World Bank.

documents, and secondary data, the EC verified findings against established benchmarks, such as international standards or results from similar regional initiatives.

Triangulation of Sources: To ensure the internal validity of findings, the EC examined multiple sources. This triangulation, involving various sources, ensured the confirmation and cross-checking of major trends. For example, data from UN Women, other UN Agencies, government institutions, rights holders, and external experts were cross-checked to identify and confirm major trends. This approach assured the establishment of a pattern through the convergence of data from different sources²⁷.

5 Findings

This section delineates the substantive findings from the final evaluation of the SWGS, informed by a meticulous collection and examination of data, incorporating diverse perspectives and extensive fieldwork. The EC strived to synthesise the achievements and shortcomings in meeting its stated goals and objectives. Thus, the findings encapsulate how the Project has addressed the crucial issues of violence against women and girls in Serbia, reflecting on the interventions' relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. These findings reflect the Project's performance and serve as inputs for conclusions.

5.1 Relevance

The EC delved into the relevance of the SWGS, examining its alignment with the needs and priorities of its beneficiaries and key stakeholders. This assessment encompassed the extent to which the Project's design reflected its intended audience's actual needs and priorities, the involvement of crucial national partners in its conceptualisation, and the integration of consultation feedback into the project design.

Furthermore, the evaluation probed deeper to understand how well the Project embedded gender equality, human rights principles, and strategies anchored in these ideals into its structure and implementation. The EC also evaluated the depth of disability inclusion within the Project's design and implementation, ensuring its holistic relevance to all beneficiaries, including those with disabilities.

F1. The SWGS responded to the needs of the partners and beneficiaries in Serbia. This initiative solidified its relevance in its quest to forge a safer and more inclusive environment for women and girls in Serbia, aligning with national policy and the demands of communities.

The Project tapped into a critical nexus of needs within Serbia, navigating the intricate challenges of gender-based violence in the public sphere, synergising/ complementing various efforts that are working on the elimination of gender-based violence in the private sphere. At the national level, the Project proposed a set of preventative and responsive measures against gender-based violence for the Action Plan under the Strategy for Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. These inputs are based on the results of the national survey²⁸ that showed widespread apprehension among women about different forms of violence in the public space and a pronounced mistrust in the abilities of state institutions to address these issues²⁹.

Locally, introducing and adapting the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) has been relevant in addressing grassroots challenges³⁰. This tool offered "a reactive measure and a proactive strategy to address the structural and environmental factors contributing to violence against women in public spaces³¹". These efforts responded to the needs of local authorities to "address overlooked areas, which, when improved, can drastically enhance women's safety³²", thus becoming more active in supporting a bottom-up approach to addressing community-specific challenges for women and girls. Furthermore, the local stakeholders recognised these efforts contributed to a gradual paradigm shift, underlining the necessity to design local spaces with the safety and comfort of all its residents, especially women, in mind³³.

²⁷Morras- Imas and Rist, p. 376.

²⁸ FemPlatz experts and researches: Violence against women and girls in public space- national research", 2022

²⁹ Violence against women and girls in public spaces (Nasilje prema ženama i devojčicama u javnom prostoru), Pancevo 2022, Authors: Dr Slobodanka Konstantinović Vilić, Dr Nevena Petrušić, Dr Kosana Beker, Dr Natalija Žunić; Researches: Dr Vida Vilić, Ivana Milovanović, Maja Mirkov, Sonja Kojić, Marijana Kraker and Jelena Džunić

³⁰ KII notes and experts' views

³¹ KII notes, and the analysis of the WSAT application- reports that ZAD provided

³² KII notes

³³ KII notes and the analysis of the WSAT/ ZAD reports

Beyond tools and strategies, the SWGS endeavour to enhance the capacities of shelters/ safe houses for victims of gender-based violence directly responded to the existing discrepancies, especially concerning capacity challenges and service delivery gaps. Despite Serbia's commitment³⁴, the SWGS analysis³⁵ revealed considerable problems and systemic gaps³⁶: human capacities, under-equipment and a lack of mandatory operation licenses³⁷. The insecurity was also highlighted as the safe houses did not have constant security coverage³⁸. The ET finds that the Project considered these challenges and adopted a comprehensive approach. For example, the infrastructural dimensions of safety within safe houses received attention³⁹ and bolstered security while fostering an environment conducive to recovery and psychological solace. In addition, the Project considered the need for improving operational efficiency in the safe houses, working with the partners on a systematic refinement of internal protocols, paralleled by an overhaul of the extant documentation systems to ensure that every safe house operates and delivers quality services. However, the ET finds that this process remained a work in progress, as the actual adoption and implementation of these new and harmonised systems would require further efforts and longer-term assistance (beyond the timeline and the scope of the SWGS)

The stakeholders stated that the Project has been relevant in addressing the capacity gaps (vis-à-vis international standards). In parallel, the Project analyzed various options for financial stability and adequate staffing for these shelters, responding to the challenge of their operational viability in the long term.

F2. The SWGS design has been collaborative, and this initiative has been crafted through the engagement and synergy of national and local government entities, public institutions, and civil society organisations championing gender equality. These long-lasting partnerships, combined with the in-depth analysis and understanding of the prevailing needs, ensured that the SWGS was responsive and contextually relevant.

The SWGS formulation was collaborative and included a diverse coalition of stakeholders from central and local authorities to grassroots CSOs. Their cumulative expertise and insights were beneficial from the priority setting and identification phase, contributing to the SWGS's relevance.

While the discourse around gender-based violence has traditionally revolved around domestic dimensions, the SWGS highlighted the need to address such violence in public spaces. The investigative findings of the Women's Architectural Society (Zensko Arhitektonsku Drustvo- ZAD⁴⁰) catalysed these paradigm changes. Practically, this analysis, under the purview of UN Women's preceding project, "Key Steps towards Gender Equality", exposed the glaring omission of public space security from conventional EVAWG discussions⁴¹. UN Women and ZAD collaborated intensively to navigate this 'uncharted territory', emphasising the importance of gender-responsive urban planning and advocating for a gender perspective in urban design and development. The analysis provided the basis for shaping urban policies in Serbia from a grassroots perspective, serving as foundational steps for ongoing and future efforts to champion gender-responsive urban planning⁴². Following on these findings, the SWGS adopted a stakeholder engagement model, enlisting

³⁴ As enshrined in laws such as the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Law on Gender Equality

³⁵ Under the regional initiative "Implementing Norms- Changing Minds" <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/regional-programme-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey>

³⁶ CSO Atina (2022). *Bolja podrška za žene i decu žrtve nasilja – unapređenje pristupačnosti i kapaciteta sigurnih kuća u Srbiji*. Beograd. The analysis showed that, as of 2018, Serbia had only 12 operational safehouses (and one was exclusively for victims of human trafficking) with the ability to receive 226 victims.

³⁷ CSO Atina (2022). *Bolja podrška za žene i decu žrtve nasilja – unapređenje pristupačnosti i kapaciteta sigurnih kuća u Srbiji*. Beograd.

³⁸ Todorov, D. (2022). *Specijalizovana usluga sigurne kuće u Srbiji – potrebe, kapaciteti i sredstva za stabilno, dugoročno i nesmetano funkcionisanje*. Beograd., https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/un-women-sigurne_kuce-pbp-Specialised-service-of-safe-houses-in-Serbia.pdf

³⁹ These elements included surveillance infrastructure such as cameras, augmented lighting mechanisms, reinforced window fortifications, and safeguarding apparatus

⁴⁰ www.zad.rs

⁴¹ <https://www.zad.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Analiza-urbanog-planiranja-i-projektovanja-u-Srbiji-rodni-aspekti.pdf> and <https://www.zad.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Vodic-ka-rodno-osetljivim-javnim-prostorima.pdf>

⁴² Prevailing societal norms, economic constraints, infrastructural limitations, and the perceived inadequacies of law enforcement contributed to an environment that affected women's security in public spaces. Although limited, available statistics reveal the proportions of this problem: an overwhelming eighty 80% of the women surveyed reported experiencing violence in public settings. For example, 96% of surveyed women had encountered some form of sexual harassment during public transport commutes. In addition, specific sectors like sports or tertiary education institutions surfaced where gender-based violence was rampant yet woefully unaddressed. Despite their seriousness, such findings often remained on the peripheries of public focus and seldom translated into tangible policy reform. More details are available at: <https://www.zad.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Vodic-ka-rodno-osetljivim-javnim-prostorima.pdf>

also urban planners, academia, think tanks, local utilities, and many other critical entities such as public transport regulators.

Leading women's organisations like CSO Atina⁴³ and the Center for Women's Support⁴⁴ have also been involved in designing and implementing the SWGS and its components. For instance, the EC analysed in the previous paragraphs how the SWGS benefited from exploring the operational landscape and challenges of safe houses in Serbia⁴⁵ that these two organisations identified. Thus, these two organisations, together with the safe houses, defined the features of the SWGS's comprehensive support to the safe houses, expanding it with developing capacities in some areas and facilitating more active interaction among the safe houses (through the CoP). Furthermore, the Project's support mechanisms, tools, and grant provisions for municipalities and civil society entities were collaboratively charted, underscoring the spirit of partnership during the entire project lifecycle⁴⁶.

F3. The SWGS remained responsive to the needs of beneficiaries and well-aligned with the EAWG-related national strategic priorities

The analysis of the changes on the demand side⁴⁷ showed that the SWGS's intervention logic remained relevant throughout its implementation. Critical strategic documents, such as the EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and at the national level, UN Women and Serbia's strategies and legal documents, recognised the need for strengthening efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls and promote gender equality in the country. They emphasised the importance of creating compelling and inclusive partnerships among CSOs, authorities and other stakeholders (to implement the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO recommendations and address the root causes of gender-based violence). However, the last EU Progress report⁴⁸ highlighted the need for continued efforts to strengthen legal frameworks, enhance the quality, availability and sustainability of support services for survivors, and tackle harmful gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes that contribute to violence against women.

The analysis showed that the underlying constraints remain the limited operational and functional capacities and funding gaps for safe houses. The EC finds that the safe houses are still in the process of adoption and implementation of the rulebooks (that the SWGS designed). More challenges remain to ensure that safe houses develop and ensure capacities to provide demanded and quality services to the victims of violence (hence facilitating their future re-integration). The issues to ensure gender-responsive sectoral policies and enhance implementation through more effective stakeholder coordination continue. The EC finds that priorities are to bridge skills gaps, build institutional capacity, expedite reforms and improve public structures' performance in this area.

In recent years, various indicators have shown that Serbia remains below the levels obtained in EU countries regarding gender equality and EAWG prevention, and the distance from the frontier has been widening⁴⁹. The ET finds the need to enhance and institutionalise partnerships between safe houses and CSOs as particularly beneficial in delivering support services to the victims of violence. In addition, the monitoring/watchdog role of the CSOs remains critical.

F4. The SWGS showed integration of gender and human rights principles and strategies throughout its design phase and subsequent implementation, established within a broader framework for eradicating gender-based violence. Partners unanimously recognized the Project's paradigm of intertwining gender and human rights, recognising the actual impact such integrative mechanisms can precipitate, especially in crafting sustainable solutions to combat VAWG in different (even non-traditional) areas.

⁴³ <http://atina.org.rs/en/about-us>

⁴⁴ <https://www.cpz.rs/misija-cpz/>

⁴⁵ As indicated in the previous paragraphs, under the framework of a large-scale EAWG regional programme, "Implementing Norms-Changing Minds"

⁴⁶ KII notes

⁴⁷ The EC assessed if the external developments required a response and if the Programme adjusted and fine-tuned its intervention as set out in the ToC and its intervention logic. The evaluation has focused on whether the overall objective and outcomes, as the main references under the intervention logic, remained valid and achievable or whether there was a case for revision to take account of changes in the external environment, demand, or speed of delivery.

⁴⁸ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports_en- this document acknowledged the efforts to address EAWG and implement the Istanbul Convention.

⁴⁹ For example, <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII> or World Wide Governance Indicators, <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>

The Project's strategies resonated with the Beijing Declaration's focus on societal norms countering violence against women, launching public awareness campaigns, and policy dialogues. Upholding the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the SWGS aimed to eradicate violence against women in Serbia, in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), demonstrating its unwavering commitment to championing human rights. The EC finds this in the Project's adherence to an evidence-centric and human rights-based approach, attentively examining needs of women and girls, including from marginalised groups, through empirical research that partners and pertinent studies provided. This pivotal method addressed entrenched societal norms, fostering an environment where women's rights are prioritised and protected. For example, the SWGS ardently supported endeavours spotlighting historically entrenched gender-neutral urban developmental paradigms, fostering environments exuding safety and dignity for every individual, irrespective of gender distinctions. The partners recognized that the efforts to align operational and functional aspects of the safe houses with internationally established norms and benchmarks and consider the need of most vulnerable women and girls victims of violence confirmed the Project's explicit understanding of HRBA.

F5. UN Women's SWGS emphasised disability inclusion, acknowledging the intricate challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities. The Project considered their needs, looking at gender-based violence in public spaces and accessibility to services.

The SWGS Project emphasized a commitment to promoting rights-centric, gender-responsive, and disability-inclusive approaches closely aligning with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The Project engaged with (national and local) authorities and stakeholders to harmonize relevant policies with CRPD, particularly in the areas of violence prevention in public spaces. For example, the first National survey on violence against women and girls in public areas provided also disability-disaggregated data. Namely, this pivotal research highlighted the ubiquity and intricacies of issues such as sexual harassment, stalking, and violence; it ventured beyond the overt, interpreting the nuanced vulnerabilities of specific groups of women, including those from rural areas, young women and girls and older women, the Roma community, and, significantly, women and girls with disabilities. It revealed the layers of vulnerability women and girls with disabilities face (serving for evidence-driven policies and interventions)⁵⁰.

Equally important, the Project addressed the need for improving services in line with the needs and rights of women and girls with disabilities. For example, the Project focused on enhancing Safe House infrastructures to meet the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities. The ET finds that the partner, CSO Atina helped implement necessary modifications and adjustments in safe houses in Nis and Priboj. These centres underwent improvements like floor renovations and toilet adaptations to enhance accessibility.

The Project also emphasized the importance of anti-discriminatory principles in foundational documents governing safe houses, ensuring universal accessibility and dignified, equitable service for every woman. The Rulebook for Safe Houses emerged as a critical document underscoring the commitment to universal accessibility, ensuring every woman, regardless of her circumstances, could avail of the services in a dignified, equitable manner.

5.2 Coherence

The EC assessed the SWGS coherence⁵¹ by examining its internal and external facets. Internally, the evaluation scrutinized whether the Project's objectives, activities and expected outcomes were logically interconnected and consistent, ensuring a cohesive integration of its components. Externally, the EC analyzed its alignment with the UN Women's Strategic Plan, focusing on its adherence to UN Women's threefold mandate and its alignment with broader corporate strategic priorities. The evaluation also assessed the Project's harmony with national development strategies, commitments, and priorities on GE and EVAWG. This encompassed understanding its compliance with international agreements and conventions related to GE and EVAWG and its alignment with national strategies tailored to EVAWG. Furthermore, the EC determined the extent to which the Project complemented, synergized and coordinated with other EVAWG-related initiatives and interventions. Feedback was collected from partners and beneficiaries to understand UN Women's

⁵⁰ Violence against women and girls in public spaces (Nasilje prema ženama i devojčicama u javnom prostoru), Pancevo 2022, Authors: Dr Slobodanka Konstantinović Vilić, Dr Nevena Petrušić, Dr Kosana Beker, Dr Natalija Žunić; Researches: Dr Vida Vilić, Ivana Milovanović, Maja Mirkov, Sonja Kojić, Marijana Kraker and Jelena Džunić

⁵¹ Drawing from the OECD DAC definition, coherence refers to the connection between the Project and different policies and interventions to ensure they do not undermine one another but collectively support achieving specific objectives.

comparative advantage in Serbia for EAWG implementation, highlighting their perception of UN Women's support in GE and EAWG areas.

F6. The SWGS in Serbia coherently aligns with corporate strategic priorities of UN Women and integrates the guidelines delineated in the UN Women Strategic Notes for Serbia.

The SWGS Project, aligned with the strategic priorities of UN Women, reflects a deep commitment to the principles set out in the UN Women Strategic Notes for Serbia. This alignment is confirmed in its adherence to the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and its collaborative approach with national gender mechanism institutions and CSOs. In addition, the Project aligned with the critical priority of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAW), channelling resources to strengthen Serbia's protection and prevention system. This initiative aimed to provide survivors with consistent and high-quality services, fostering a culture that refuses violence against women. Notably, the focus was on the elimination of violence against women and girls in public spaces while working on gender equality in urban planning and public domain aspects (such as transport and higher education).

The Project's alignment with UN Women's priorities was further exemplified in its efforts to strengthen the infrastructure and operational support for survivors through safe houses. Additionally, the SWGS extended its influence by fostering capacity-building programs and forming partnerships with Serbian civil society, indirectly supporting other core objectives of the UN Women Strategic Plan. These initiatives served to enhance women's participation and empowerment but also to underscore UN Women's mandate for strategic, context-specific interventions to address violence against women and girls.

The ET finds that the Project harmonized with the UN Women's Global Flagship Programme Initiative⁵², working on “amplifying the capabilities of CSOs and safe houses in Serbia and augmenting their service delivery potential⁵³”. Furthermore, the Project's goals resonated with the strategic emphases highlighted in the Beijing Declaration⁵⁴, especially its dedication to endorsing societal norms that counteract violence against women

The Project aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (2021–2025)⁵⁵. It contributed to Strategic Priority 2 by developing equitable and universally accessible quality health, social, and protection services. The ET finds that SWSG contributed to collaborative efforts between UN agencies, state institutions, and CSOs to reinforce preventive measures and ensure survivors' access to gender-sensitive services. Similarly, the Project supported Strategic Priority 3, which focuses on cultivating trust and accountability within the framework of law, rights, and civic duties. These efforts involved optimizing public sector governance, enhancing emergency responses, and bolstering civic participation in policymaking, particularly in the realm of urban planning. Moreover, under the leadership of UN Women, the coordination within the UNCT Gender Thematic Group and with various UN agencies ensured that the SWGS was in sync with policy analyses, reports, and manuals that aided the government's accession process and were instrumental in developing Serbia's new Urban Development Strategy. However, stakeholders from various levels noted limited coordination and information sharing among UN agencies during the evaluation. They expressed concerns about occasional overlaps and competing activities, highlighting the need for more structured, transparent communication and collaboration within the UN system in Serbia. This feedback underscores the importance of ongoing refinement in multi-agency collaborations, emphasizing unified and practical approaches to gender mainstreaming and gender equality in Serbia.

F7. The SWGS is fully consistent with the national development strategies, priorities and commitments on GE and EVAWG.

The SWGS aligned with the national development strategies, priorities, and commitments to Gender Equality (GE) and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG). It resonated with the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025⁵⁶,

⁵² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/flagship-programmes>

⁵³ KII notes

⁵⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

⁵⁵ <https://serbia.un.org/en/resources/publications>

⁵⁶ Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the Period 2021-2025, Official Gazette of RS, No. 47/2021. This strategy charts a path toward eradicating gender-based and family violence and highlights initiatives designed to mitigate it through public awareness, educational programs, and community engagement. Victim protection and support are central, delivering a robust safety framework that offers shelter and legal, medical, and psychological assistance. The prosecutorial efforts are aimed at reinforcing the legal apparatus, honing law enforcement procedures, and augmenting judicial efficiency, all the while

focusing on enhancing public space security and advocating for environments free from harassment and aggression. The Project supported the Action Plan for improving public space safety through various measures, including better illumination and law enforcement visibility⁵⁷.

In line with providing Protection and Support to Victims, the SWGS centred survivors in its integrated approach, bolstering specialised support services and emphasising safe houses. This approach was following the strategy's recognition of the critical role of safe houses in offering shelter and essential services for victims of gender-based and familial violence. Despite the Law on Gender Equality⁵⁸ identifying funding sources, concerns arose over the financial viability of these services, given the underfunding of local governments expected to finance Safe Houses and Rape Crisis Centers. The Project addressed these concerns, working on sustainability strategies for these centres⁵⁹.

Additionally, the Project aligned with the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030⁶⁰, aiming to bridge the gender gap as a foundation for societal progress. It addressed priorities such as equal opportunities in human rights, eradicating gender-based discrimination, promoting equal political participation, and upholding the rule of law⁶¹. The Project's coherence was also evident in its efforts to increase the safety of women in both public and private spheres and in its approach to secure enduring support service funding, particularly for marginalised groups like Roma women and those with disabilities⁶².

Furthermore, the ET finds that the SWGS fostered synergies among stakeholders from various structures, aiding Serbia in aligning with EU standards and strengthening its pre-accession reform trajectory⁶³. In this context, the Project addressed areas highlighted by the European Commission, particularly in social policy, employment, judicial and fundamental rights, justice, freedom, and security. The ET finds that the Project contributed to the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025⁶⁴ by mitigating gender-based violence and challenging societal stereotypes. The SWGS paralleled the European Social Fund⁶⁵ (ESF) priorities and the Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values⁶⁶ (CERV) Programme, promoting a society that respects all inhabitants' rights and empowers women economically.

F8. The SWGS Project in Serbia was closely aligned with international normative benchmarks, notably the CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.

The Project supported Serbia's efforts to align national policies and laws with international Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) standards. Specifically, the SWGS supported Serbia's adherence to CEDAW⁶⁷ and the

promoting cross-sector cooperation. Finally, an integrated coordination and monitoring component ensures a synergized, multi-sectoral approach and steadfast strategy execution.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, the Strategy

⁵⁸ Law on Gender Equality "Official Gazette of RS", No. 52/2021

⁵⁹ Autonomous Women Centre (AWC) Contribution for the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention

on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence regarding the 2020 Recommendations for Serbia; March 31st, 2023. More at: [https://rm.coe.int/awc-contribution-to-coe-committee-of-parties-regarding-2020-recommendat/1680aacb24#:~:text=\(specifically\)%3A,Strategy%20for%20Preventing%20and%20Combating%20Gender%2DBased%20Violence%20against%20Women,improved%20opposition%20of%20victims%20and](https://rm.coe.int/awc-contribution-to-coe-committee-of-parties-regarding-2020-recommendat/1680aacb24#:~:text=(specifically)%3A,Strategy%20for%20Preventing%20and%20Combating%20Gender%2DBased%20Violence%20against%20Women,improved%20opposition%20of%20victims%20and)

⁶⁰ The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030; more available at <https://www.rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2022-03/National%20Strategy%20for%20GE%202021-2030.pdf>

⁶¹ These objectives are in line with the objectives and measures covered in other national strategic documents, primarily in judiciary and human rights promotion, as well as other areas covered by this strategic document.

⁶² The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030- Measure 2.3- page 105-107

⁶³ For example, Report 2/2022 on the implementation of the Revised Action Plan for Chapter 23. The Project contributes to Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, supporting the improvement of legal frameworks, judicial processes, and institutional capacity related to EVAWG. Concerning Chapter 24: Justice, Freedom, and Security, the Programme helps improve the overall response to gender-based violence and ensures that victims receive the necessary support and protection by fostering cooperation among law enforcement agencies, judicial authorities, and civil society organizations.

⁶⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>

⁶⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>

⁶⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/justice-and-consumers/justice-and-consumers-funding-tenders/funding-programmes/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme_en#:~:text=It%20was%20created%20along%20with,on%20the%20rule%20of%20law.

⁶⁷ Concluding observations on the 4th periodic report of Serbia: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3801127?ln=en>

Istanbul Convention, particularly addressing GREVIO's key recommendations⁶⁸. These efforts included policy-making enhancements- the ET finds that the SWGS, through its various research and analysis, provided inputs and suggestions for enhancing areas such as urban planning or public space security, traditionally overlooked in gender-based considerations. In addition, the Project addressed structural and functional overhauls of support services for victims, including the nationwide improvement of safe houses.

In this context, the Project awareness activities, especially at the local level, addressed challenging stereotypes and the entrenched patriarchal norms that perpetuate gender-based violence. For example, the EC finds that the SWGS capitalized on the synergistic dynamics between CSOs and local and national authorities. The EC finds that CSO engagement "intensified the integration of globally recognized tools like the WSAT⁶⁹ ", setting the scene for advocacy and lobbying to elevate public space security. The Project enabled critical assessments of current measures and ensured that gender equality and VAW issues were addressed, particularly in urban planning, resulting in policy improvements that reflect international norms and standards.

Partners acknowledged the Project's pivotal role in enriching shadow reports for international legal frameworks such as CEDAW and GREVIO, with evidence-based contributions fortifying advocacy efforts and exerting pressure on authorities at multiple governance levels in Serbia, leading to more informed and effective policy interventions against gender-based violence.

The SWGS also supported various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and contributed to progress under their established targets. Aligned with SDG 5, the Project robustly pursued policy reforms to end discrimination against women and girls (Target 5.1) and eliminate violence against women and girls (Target 5.2). It launched awareness campaigns and built institutional capacities to uproot gender biases and promote gender equality. The Project's strategic interventions and bolstered protection systems and services engaged local authorities and CSOs in prevention efforts, supporting women's empowerment and equal participation in governance (Target 5.5).

In line with SDG 16, which calls for peace, justice, and strong institutions, the SWGS was pivotal in enhancing the capacities of Serbian CSOs, national gender mechanisms, and local authorities to address and prevent gender-based violence. These efforts mirrored SDG 16's targets by creating assessment tools for public safety and improving service accessibility for survivors, ensuring inclusivity and institutional accountability. Additionally, the SWGS contributed to SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities by addressing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable women and girls, removing barriers in safe houses, and implementing inclusive practices (Target 10.2). Furthermore, the Project's contributions in Serbia extended to SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, supporting target 3.7 by providing comprehensive support to survivors of gender-based violence. Through these multifaceted efforts, the SWGS laid a foundation for a society that safeguards the well-being and rights of women and girls, fostering a more just and equitable Serbia.

F9. In the SWGS in Serbia, UN Women's engagement contributes to a transformative advancement in bolstering gender equality and addressing gender-based violence.

Stakeholders, spanning diverse sectors, acknowledge the many distinctive advantages brought by UN Women: through exceptional expertise, unwavering dedication, robust partnerships, and contemporary methodologies, the SWGS offered a multidimensional response to challenges in gender equality and public service enhancement. UN Women's approach in Serbia defies conventional norms, incorporating a holistic view that intertwines various policy fields, setting a new benchmark for gender-responsive urban planning for security in public space and enabling improved provisions of demanded service.

The Project's achievements are primarily linked to "the steadfast commitment of UN Women's staff, who provided a combination of visibility, technical insight, and capacity-building⁷⁰" that exceeded traditional project parameters according to the partners. The ET finds that the SWGS team integrated behavioural science to present and analyse the complex factors underpinning violence, simultaneously working with the partners to grasp these findings and design strategic interventions aimed at the roots of VAWG⁷¹.

⁶⁸ Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) Baseline Evaluation Report Serbia, published 22 January 2020 <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-serbia/t6809987e3> and GREVIO recommendations, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/grevio-publishes-its-general-recommendation-no-1>

⁶⁹ For example, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/womens-safety-audit-in-public-places>

⁷⁰ Kii notes- national partners

⁷¹ KII notes

UN Women demonstrated a keen understanding of the connection between domestic institutions and international gender equality standards in Serbia at national and local levels. The partners, ranging from safe houses and local governments to national agencies, recognized and praised this expertise. As particularly relevant, they mentioned UN Women's ability to align with international norms and tailor them to Serbia's unique setting. On the management side, UN Women's adeptness in handling complex, multi-tiered initiatives stood out. The ET finds that the organization effectively brought together various stakeholders to develop comprehensive strategies and ensure a well-rounded and collaborative approach to EVAWG (as seen in the SWGS's strategies and activities). UN Women's focused commitment to women's rights and empowerment has been a driving force behind the Project, spotlighting the needs and rights of marginalized women, including those in safe houses.

The SWGS's approach was comprehensive, aiming to tackle the complex root causes of VAWG in Serbian society. The ET finds that UN Women designed culturally sensitive interventions and committed to addressing the manifestations of gender-based violence and its foundational causes. The Project's strategic vision and its influence have established a model for upcoming gender equality initiatives, setting a benchmark both within Serbia and in the international arena's fight against VAWG in public space and other overlooked areas concerning gender equality.

5.3 Effectiveness

The EC conducted an extensive review of the SWGS's effectiveness. Initially, it focused on how well the Project was progressing toward achieving its expected outputs and broader goals, assessing the uptake of VAWG prevention measures by national institutions, the improvement of local authorities and women's groups' capacities using globally recognized methods, and the development in the availability and quality of critical support structures, particularly shelters for violence survivors. The evaluation measured the extent of success of the strategies in fostering safer spaces for women and girls. Further aspects of the evaluation explored the factors contributing to and arising from the Project's implementation, examining the Project's response to these dynamics. Additionally, the EC considered unintended consequences and their effects to understand the SWGS's broader implications, providing an analytical view of the Project's reach beyond its central objectives.

F10. The national-level authorities have increased capacities to develop and conduct a national survey on the safety of public places for women and girls, including the prevalence of sexual harassment, stalking and sexual violence.

The SWGS's implementation of a national survey marked a pivotal advancement in understanding the dynamics of VAWG in Serbia's public spaces⁷². The survey, a first of its kind⁷³, addressed a critical data void and provided a nuanced, comprehensive understanding of the prevalence of sexual harassment, stalking, and sexual violence in public spaces⁷⁴. The survey's results were an unsettling confirmation of the daily risks women and girls face in public spaces : a significant portion of women reported feeling unsafe, particularly at night, with fears centred around sexual aggression and insufficient public safety measures⁷⁵. The ET finds that the collected data provided a solid foundation for developing targeted, evidence-based strategies. For example, the survey highlighted the need for improved urban planning, and establishing emergency support services, recommending training of law enforcement personnel to handle such cases with due diligence. The survey underscored the necessity of shifting societal norms that prioritise women's security and emphasise community-based safety⁷⁶.

⁷² The thorough approach adopted for this initiative was instrumental in realising the objectives outlined under Output 1.1.

⁷³ The stakeholders stated that the baseline data was scant and fragmented at the Project's outset, with no unified or comprehensive survey previously undertaken KII notes and problem analysis from the formulation phase

⁷⁴ The SWGS partnered with FemPlatz (<https://femplatz.org/index.php>) a credible and well-established women CSO, steadfast in its mission to cultivate an environment that champions gender equality and the social inclusion of vulnerable women and children, achieved through women's empowerment, informed public policies, and the strengthening of diverse participants' capacities, envisioning a society where every woman and girl is afforded equality, autonomy, social participation, and empowerment.

⁷⁵ The results of the National Survey- Namely, the figures indicate that a staggering 76.7% of women believed they were solely responsible for their own safety⁹. Trust in local and state institutions appears compromised, as evidenced by 71% of victims not reporting incidents to the police, often due to scepticism about receiving adequate support or facing societal stigma. Furthermore, 32.1% indicated that their primary safety strategy was to limit their outings, spending more time confined to their homes, further emphasising existing gender inequalities. One of the survey's critical revelations was the heightened vulnerability of marginalised groups, such as women from rural areas, the young and the elderly, members of the Roma community, and women with disabilities. In addition to the mentioned dangers, these groups often face amplified risks driven by socio-economic inequality, discrimination, and neglect.

⁷⁶ This analysis recognized that public campaigns can also play a role in breaking the stigma associated with reporting incidents of violence, encouraging more women and girls to come forward.

The Project strived to enhance the ability of national authorities to create informed policies for addressing VAWG in public areas, a domain lacking appropriate measures and dedicated bodies. Ambitiously, the Project sought to introduce at least five key measures and form specialised groups to lead these efforts. Utilising national survey results, the Project pinpointed intervention priorities such as sports, public transportation, and higher education, establishing specialised technical groups and tailoring strategies across three main areas: prevention, urban planning, and policy development at the state level.

In addition, the Project prepared recommendations that influenced the Ministry of Construction, Infrastructure, and Transportation, potentially shaping the Urban Development Strategy's Action Plan for 2023-2025, reflecting a high-level validation of the Project's initiatives. The ET finds that the transition from research findings to practical policy was a collective process marked by detailed consultations with various stakeholders. In this context, particularly relevant has been a partnership with the Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia⁷⁷. Jointly with this partner, the Project facilitated strategic workshops to shape action plans, "integrating the nuanced experiences of those affected into transformative urban safety strategies". In addition, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs stated that the Project assisted in fine-tuning the 2021-2023 Action Plan of the Strategy for preventing and combating gender-based violence against women and domestic violence (2021-2025). The Ministry representatives expect that the implementation of the revised Action Plan will enhance protective measures for women and girls against gender-based violence in public space.

The Project implemented a focused advocacy and communication campaign⁷⁸ that supported efforts at the national level. The ET finds that the Project implemented a multi-channel awareness campaign, utilising media and social networks to spread its message widely. The campaign's engagement with social media influencers and strategic digital content significantly raised its profile, promoting a culture of zero tolerance for gender-based violence.

The ET find that the SWGS survey and subsequent recommendations provided critical inputs to address VAWG effectively and create safer public spaces for women and girls in Serbia. The Project's alignment with national priorities and its ability to influence policy reform has been ensured through a successful model that combined strategic planning, targeted advocacy, and data-driven interventions

F11. The Project capacitated local-level authorities and stakeholders in the selected local self-government units to apply internationally validated tools and practices and address violence against women and girls, including in public spaces.

This initiative began with a meticulous process of adapting the WSAT to the specific socio-cultural and administrative landscape of Serbia, ensuring that the tool was fully relevant and functional in the local context. The adaptation process was comprehensive, engaging stakeholders in a dialogue to integrate diverse safety perspectives and to draw on regional and international best practices for public safety and gender-responsive urban planning⁷⁹.

To ensure the success of the WSAT implementation, the SWGS team carefully selected municipalities, Sombor, Kragujevac, Krusevac, Novi Pazar, and Nis, considering factors such as urban characteristics, the prevalence of gender-based violence, and existing commitments to gender equality initiatives. Operationally, the Project's partnership with the Women Architect Society (ZAD)⁸⁰ ensured technical capacities and interdisciplinary insight from various professionals. The EC finds that Project involved various municipal stakeholders⁸¹ in a series of so-called Women Safety Walks across the selected municipalities as "central to the WSAT practical application to address and improve safety concerns for women and girls".

The key informants from the participating local units confirmed solid understanding of the WSAT methodology as a practical tool that could bring about real change in the safety of public spaces⁸². They praised the process

⁷⁷ The informants recognized that this approach encouraged incorporating community feedback into policy development, ensuring the solutions were attuned to local needs, enhancing overall societal well-being.

⁷⁸ Under Output 1.3.

⁷⁹ KII notes and reports from ZAD- Women Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) at the Local Level- Deliverable IV – Report “Women Safety Walks organized in 5 Cities / Municipalities” and the Report on Results of Capacity Development workshop for

⁸⁰ <https://www.zad.rs/o-nama/>

⁸¹ The walks brought together participants from diverse sectors, including local mechanisms for gender equality, urban planning, health, social protection, the police, and non-governmental organizations.

⁸² For example, the analytical document- Cumulative After Safety Walks Report with recommendation for 5 Cities / Municipalities that ZAD prepared.

as comprehensive but adjusted to their needs, stating that detailed report generated from the Women Safety Walks provided a strategic blueprint for these municipalities, filled with findings and actionable recommendations to improve public safety for women and girls. These findings indicate SWGS's efforts in fostering systemic changes at the local level in addressing safety concerns.

The SWGS complemented results in increasing local authorities' capacity to adopt evidence-based and innovative practices in addressing violence against women in public spaces, awarding (autonomous) grants to municipalities and CSOs. This Project approach ensured ownership and broad participation, customising solutions to local unique dynamics and challenges. For example, the stakeholders emphasised the synergy between local authorities and CSOs, highlighting the grants awarded to five standout CSOs⁸³ that prioritised the safety of women and girls in public spaces. These organisations utilised innovative methodologies to gather critical data, strengthen institutional capacities, and champion advocacy efforts to keep the conversation on women's safety at the forefront.

In parallel, these same municipalities received grants to develop new policy documents and implement strategies that focused on enhancing public safety from a gender-sensitive perspective⁸⁴. The municipalities used these funds for projects such as the renovation of public spaces in Sombor, the improvement of lighting in Kragujevac's Creative Park, and the adaptation of infrastructure in Novi Pazar, Krusevac, and Nis⁸⁵. The EC finds that these projects improved the physical infrastructure and contributed to a culture of safety and inclusivity.

Overall, the SWGS achieved a harmonious blend of policy enhancement and practical urban development, with local authorities and CSOs working in tandem to create safer public environments for women and girls. This collective effort, supported by the strategic direction and resources provided by the SWGS, marked significant progress towards a more gender-responsive society in Serbia.

F12. The SWGS has supported shelters for survivors of domestic and GBV to improve accessibility to all women and girls exposed to violence. Complementary to this, the Project supported these service providers in increasing capacity and providing quality services (available at safe houses).

The Project embarked on a multi-faceted initiative to bolster safe houses' infrastructure and operational efficacy across Serbia⁸⁶. This effort was rooted in a comprehensive baseline study⁸⁷ that illustrated critical gaps in current practices, including the lack of official licensure for nearly half of the shelters, financial limitations impacting their operational capacity, and a universal absence of accessibility for women and girls with disabilities who are victims of violence. The desk review shows that such shortcomings were compounded by inadequate security measures, notably the lack of protocols for maintaining the confidentiality of shelter locations.

In response, the Project partnered with the Centre for Women Support and Atina to craft bespoke development plans for each safe house; these partners stated, and the EC confirmed that the plans were tailored to the unique challenges of each safe house within the overarching framework of women's safety. Operationally, the ET finds that these plans⁸⁸ encompassed a spectrum of enhancements, from structural renovations to integrating advanced security systems and establishing specialised support services. The

⁸³ In Sombor, FemPlatz engaged citizens in mapping unsafe areas, producing an interactive safety map, and advocating for its integration into local policies. Mikser in Kragujevac harnessed women's experiences, conducting surveys and focus groups, culminating in urban safety strategies and a public awareness campaign. In Novi Pazar, Monitor assessed security needs, championed research-based improvements, and heightened safety awareness. Pescanik in Belgrade spotlighted women's safety, educating officials and fostering collaborative solutions through community engagement. Simultaneously, the Center for Girls Nis in Niš empowered females with self-defence training, executed safety surveys, and advocated for local governance reforms based on detailed risk assessments. Each initiative, though distinct, converged on the collective aim of creating safer, more inclusive spaces for women and girls.

⁸⁴ This planning process (preparation of gender-sensitive Local Action Plans) took place in three municipalities, Krusevac, Novi Pazar and Sombor, while in Kragujevac, the focus was on enhancing local frameworks for gender equality and women's safety, aiming to foster a secure and preventive urban environment.

⁸⁵ For example, this support resulted in renovating Sombor's recreation area, "Rokovačka šumica", improving visibility and illumination of Kragujevac's "Creative Park", and adapting one of the existing Nis' bicycle paths to the needs of the women and girls. Interestingly, in Novi Pazar, the grant served to adapt the yard of the Social Welfare Center, thus "creating an adequate, safe and accessible space for the most vulnerable groups of women and girls who make up the majority of the Center's beneficiaries".

⁸⁶ Output 3.1 - Enhanced Capacity and Service Quality in Shelters

⁸⁷ Reference to the relevance part of this report. The findings were revealing, with accommodations not meeting the Council of Europe's standards and a glaring lack of financial support from local governments.

⁸⁸ The EC finds that two partners played critical role in this process; both organizations faced various obstacles and challenges; however, their professional capacities and dedication to the process have been instrumental in building trust and partnerships with safe houses.

representatives of safe houses agreed and committed to these plans, particularly emphasising the critical aspects of improved safety standards⁸⁹.

Concurrent with these structural upgrades, the EC finds that the Project prioritised the establishment of standardised internal documents and procedures to ensure well-established operational procedures; the partners stated that the intention was to foster consistency and clarity across the shelters, potentially streamlining management practices. In addition, these efforts strived to ensure uniform services and define standards that will enable elevating the quality of services offered. Moreover, the Project's ambit addressed the professional development needs of shelter staff and local stakeholders, such as social work centres and the judicial system. The focus was on enhancing responses to various forms of VAWG that extend beyond traditional scenarios of domestic violence. Specialized support programs were launched to address professional burnout prevention and to foster effective multisectoral collaboration.

Despite these strides, the ET finds that the actual implementation of these operational protocols has been gradual⁹⁰, with a clear need for additional support to secure their full adoption and effective execution. The partners (Atina and the CWS) delivered the initial capacity support to safe houses, aiming to enhance their service delivery capacities.

Training programs designed to empower local stakeholders dealt with underexplored yet critical issues such as stalking and sexual harassment in public spaces. However, the Project's lofty goal of a 30% improvement in professional knowledge fell short, as post-training follow-ups failed to demonstrate clear attainment of this benchmark. Still, the interviews with training participants indicated the relevance and benefits they gained from the capacity development activities, stating they have improved skills and applied some of the new knowledge in day-to-day work. However, the absence of continued support, such as mentoring or on-the-job assistance, was noted as a missed opportunity that could have facilitated more effective practical application of the acquired skills. The representatives of partners' organisations stated that these "support mechanisms could contribute to the sustained application and adaptability of new skills within the professionals' daily activities, ensuring that the improvements in shelter services are immediate and sustainable". The ET finds a generally shared view among the key informants from national institutions that the holistic approach to capacity building is vital to ensure that shelters meet the immediate needs of those they serve and adapt and improve over time, laying the groundwork for a safer and more responsive environment for women and girls affected by violence.

Additionally, the EC finds a chronic deficiency in skilled staff, a shortfall that directly impacts the care and resources available to residents. The limited capacities and quality of services remain pressing problems requiring more comprehensive and tailor-made consideration. Furthermore, in its latest progress report on Serbia, the European Commission (EC) observed significant disparities in capacity across the shelters, underscoring the importance of capacity development in addressing a pressing priority for more comprehensive support systems⁹¹.

F13. The Project facilitated the CoP as a platform to foster self-coordination, peer-to-peer learning, and collaborative planning for future advancements within the network of service providers, including those operating shelters, staff of Centers for Social Work (CSWs), and other relevant institutions.

The EC finds that the CoP meetings had been generally effective, with the first gathering being an important milestone that brought together representatives from ten different shelters and social protection institutions for the first time. This inaugural meeting was critical as it began the process of collecting and verifying data essential for a comprehensive assessment of the costs involved in operating shelters⁹².

Participants saw the CoP as a forum for discussing the initial research findings that the partners organizations-CSO Atina and the CWS prepared. As indicated in other parts of this report, the presented studies focused on structural and functional standards and detailed cost analysis, revealing gaps in meeting international standards and informing the agenda for the necessary resources and strategies. In subsequent CoPs, the network of professionals was strengthened. For instance, the attendance of key figures such as the social

⁸⁹ KII notes and the analysis of achievements

⁹⁰ KII notes

⁹¹ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_695_Serbia.pdf

⁹² Throughout these interactions, the SWGS (and UN Women representatives) gained invaluable insights directly from the practitioners into shelters' operational and financial modalities. This exposure to best practices and existing challenges was instrumental in shaping subsequent steps. For example, it showed that only 11 out of the 15 shelters reported in the last GREVIO report were operational, underlining the stark reality and urgency of the situation in Serbia

protection inspector marked a significant development, enabling direct discussions about regulatory issues, particularly around the crucial licensing procedures.

The partners highlighted the importance of these meetings as drivers for ongoing, joint action. The effects of the CoP were evident in the continued self-coordination and the collaborative planning for future actions.

As the project progressed, the aim was for at least four CoP meetings to maintain engagement, deepen dialogue, and facilitate shared learning among service providers and stakeholders. This ongoing interaction was recognized as critical for building the community's foundational strength. Stakeholders acknowledged the need to capitalize on this momentum to move from capacity-building dialogues to making real improvements in service delivery and ultimately, enhancing the protection and support for victims of violence.

F14. The SWGS Project has highlighted the challenges in ensuring women's safety in public spaces and opened avenues for multi-dimensional strategies encompassing individual empowerment, systemic changes, and urban redesign. Its unintended results provide a nuanced understanding of the issue, offering a foundation for more effective and inclusive solutions.

The SWGS Project has unveiled some complex yet unintended results that offered insights into the challenges of ensuring women's safety in public spaces. The Project's findings have highlighted a pervasive sense of personal responsibility for safety among women and girls, with a large proportion of respondents believing they are solely responsible for their protection. While emphasising self-reliance, this sentiment also pointed to a deeper issue – a potential deficiency in the public safety infrastructure and a lack of confidence in existing protective measures. This sense of personal responsibility has led to certain behavioural changes among women and girls, notably in their freedom of movement. Some have opted to limit their time in public spaces, choosing instead to stay at home more often; this decision has broader implications for their social engagement and quality of life. Such a shift suggests a retreat from public life and a curtailment of their fundamental rights due to safety concerns.

The Project's findings about the low reporting rates of violence in public spaces are particularly telling. They reveal a profound distrust in local institutions and law enforcement, suggesting that women may feel that reporting incidents of violence would not lead to meaningful action or support. This lack of trust in the system to provide protection and justice underscored the need for fundamental changes in managing safety in public spaces and addressing gender-based violence. Moreover, the Project highlighted specific public spaces perceived as unsafe, like parks, unlit streets and areas near nightlife venues. This finding has the potential to inform urban planning and public space management, emphasising the need for designs and maintenance strategies that prioritise the safety and well-being of women and girls. The revelation of these unsafe spaces could catalyse rethinking urban environments to make them more inclusive and secure for everyone.

The Project's efforts have been pivotal in raising public awareness and could drive advocacy efforts and policy reforms; its various deliverables have provided valuable data that can inform targeted interventions and policy decisions to create safer public spaces for women and girls. Lastly, the Project's policy and urban planning recommendations have the potential to bring about significant changes in local governance and development strategies. These recommendations, derived from the Project's findings, offer a blueprint for enhancing public safety that could influence future policy-making and urban development, leading to more gender-sensitive and inclusive public spaces.

F15. Implementing the SWGS in Serbia was filled with intricate challenges and significant learning points. One of the most prominent obstacles faced was the dominance of deep-rooted societal norms and biases concerning gender. The traditional perceptions of gender roles are deeply embedded in the Serbian culture, and attempting to shift these views was no small feat. Further complicating the Project's efforts was the noticeable rise in anti-gender sentiment from conservative groups (including some prominent academics and intellectuals) in the country.

Serbia's quest for EU integration has brought about a complex backdrop for social projects, particularly those addressing gender equality. The prevalent scepticism toward the EU and the weariness from the protracted integration process have influenced public opinion, which poses indirect challenges to initiatives like the SWGS. Recognizing this, the SWGS tailored its strategies to Serbia's distinctive socio-cultural and political landscape. The SWGS Team/ UN Women in Serbia was carefully advocating for deep-seated societal shifts in gender roles while staying attuned to what was pragmatically possible within Serbia's context. For example, they conducted and shared findings from a national survey on the safety of women and girls in public spaces,

highlighting the Project's commitment to addressing causes. In parallel, they chose to back smaller, more focused projects in cities and municipalities and foster partnerships with CSOs. The partners praised this approach for being context-sensitive and empathetic, characterized by ongoing conversation and a deep understanding of Serbia's unique environment.

Effective management and stakeholder coordination emerged as critical elements. While the SWGS achieved results in many areas, feedback indicated opportunities for better information sharing on gender-focused urban policies and practices. Stakeholders suggested expanding the gender perspective to sectors like sports, higher education, and public transport. Additionally, there was a call for entities such as UN Women to play a more substantial role in coordinating gender equality efforts, particularly those targeting EVAWG.

Nonetheless, the consensus among the partners and stakeholders (from various governance structures) on the SWGS's performance in Serbia was generally affirmative. This initiative implemented innovative practices, showing adaptability and cooperative spirit. Its flexible yet robust strategies led to concrete improvements in the safety of women and girls in public areas. The SWGS's experience and focus on small-scale projects at the local level could serve as a model for other programs aiming to advance gender equality in contexts with deep-rooted societal norms, with a step-by-step approach. Some of the SWGS's achievements- at the local level, for example, are likely to inspire and inform similar endeavours, leaving a model of gradual and small but positive change in gender equality.

5.4 Efficiency

The evaluation of efficiency focused on two primary dimensions. Initially, the EC assessed the strategic allocation of resources, encompassing financial, human, and technical support, to ascertain their effectiveness in realising the Project's outcomes. This process aimed to determine if the Project channelled resources in the most impactful manner to maximise the desired results. Following that, the EC delved into the leadership and management structure of the Project, analysing the effectiveness of management and administration roles, understanding how these roles contributed to the results, and determining any potential areas for optimisation. Collectively, the evaluation emphasised the importance of resource allocation and effective leadership in driving the efficient implementation of the SWGS.

F16. The SWGS embodied efficient execution and a strategic vision, demonstrating strong delivery speed and an appropriate allocation of resources. These factors contribute to the Project's alignment with the national priorities and needs and purposefully position it to foster gender equality (in non-traditional and often overlooked areas).

The partners planned the SWGS for two years. However, the complexity of this initiative and its multi-dimensional efforts posed a challenge to complete all activities within this (relatively constrained) timeframe. The response from the stakeholders (UN Women and the UK Embassy) to pursue a three-month non-cost extension (until 21 January 2024) was adequate and well-justified. Still, this additional time for implementation allowed the UN Women SWGS Team and its collaborative partners to complete all activities and processes and wrap up the Project activities. This limited timeframe and relatively modest funds limited the focus on genuine transformation and capacity development, pushing the SWGS Team into a "delivery trap" where undue pressure falls primarily on the execution of activities and the disbursement of funds.

The financial support from the United Kingdom Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, totalling 600,000 GBP (approximately USD 720,000), was modest yet strategically allocated. Assessing the Project's cost-effectiveness at this stage might be premature, as many of its elements symbolise long-term commitments, with benefits expected to materialise over time. Nevertheless, early indications of progress were encouraging, particularly in local efforts to enhance public space security for women and girls and promote gender equality in urban planning. These initiatives laid the groundwork for a gender-sensitive transformation. Similarly, the Project's support for safe houses was crucial in addressing security and enhancing organisational and service delivery capacities. However, the full benefits of this support, especially for the safe house residents and victims of violence, are anticipated to become evident in the coming years, following complete implementation of the Project's inputs.

Operational costs were kept low, with a small yet efficient management team consisting of only a project manager and an assistant, a notable achievement for a project of this complexity. The partnership with two prominent women's organisations, CSO Atina and CWS, significantly contributed to the Project's efficiency. These organisations effectively managed the overall support to safe houses, including procurement and

technical assistance. The adaptability of the Project was also evident in the expansion of support from the initially planned seven safe houses to all safe houses in Serbia.

The SWGS Team played an integral role in realising the Project's objectives by developing and executing work plans. Despite working within a complex framework, the team completed planned activities and progressed towards targets within the approved budget. At the operational level, establishing an implementation team laid the foundation for overall coordination, systematic planning, and meaningful interactions with lead national institutions (such as the Coordination body and the ministries) and local-level stakeholders (local self-governments, safe houses and grassroots CSOs.) The Inception Phase was crucial, as it allowed for Project start-up, building working relationships, and refinement of the Work Plans. The role of the Head of the UN Women's Office in Serbia was valuable in shaping the SWGS focus, fostering trust-building and strengthening partnerships with key national institutions. This strategic involvement also contributed to aligning UN Women's initiatives, enhancing coherence and setting extensive support to the needs of women and girls and, broadly, systemic reform priorities.

The partners recognised that the SWGS Team has been focused and dedicated, ensuring efficient implementation and continuity of activities. In this context, engaging experienced and highly skilled professionals with sector-specific expertise, a full-time Project Associate (the Project Manager), and the Project Assistant added strength to the implementation structure. The Project benefited significantly from the Communication Officer's support. UN Women's setup of the SWGS Management team, enriched with technical expertise and providing administrative, financial, and communication support, demonstrated a commitment to excellence and alignment with the staffing arrangements.

The EC recognises that the SWGS was a multifaceted and managerially demanding initiative. Comprising numerous components, engaging various partners, and necessitating specialised skills and expertise resulted in a substantial workload for the Project Team and the Head of Office. This extensive operational demand accentuated the robust management and coordination requirement that UN Women implemented, adhering to defined roles and ensuring specialised skills. The partners recognised that the "UN Women/ SWGS Team's accomplishments result from excellent collaboration, planning, and strategic alignment; these efforts recommend a management model to apply to future initiatives.

The steering structure and coordination mechanism have been timely established and contributed to sound decision-making (on strategic and operational priorities). *The Project Steering Committee (PSC)* ensured planned and transparent coordination of the SWGS's implementation and monitoring. Meeting bi-annually (or ad-hoc), the PSC made key decisions, approved plans, and participated in project strategic decisions and implementation. It provided essential policy guidance, aligning the Project's goals with national gender mainstreaming efforts and the Sustainable Development Goals. The PSC's composition, including UN Women, UN Embassy, national gender mechanisms representatives and local stakeholders, ensured diverse input. The UN Women and SWGS Associate offered technical advice to the PSC. Collaboratively, the PSC members addressed challenges, monitored progress, and steered the Project towards its objectives.

Progress Review meetings between UN Women, the SWGS Team, and the UK Embassy were held periodically, contributing to the Project's strategic alignment and focus. Overall, these coordination mechanisms, fostered collaboration, cohesion, and information exchange among diverse stakeholders, enhancing the effectiveness and impact of the SWGS⁹³

F17. The SWGS had well-established management and operational systems that contributed to delivery of results.

The SWGS adopted results-oriented annual and monthly work plans, providing a solid foundation for scheduling, resource allocation, budget control, and achieving desired objectives. These comprehensive work plans facilitated activities' planning, implementation, and synchronisation, ensuring coherence and responsiveness to identified priorities and needs of partners and participating institutions in Serbia.

The preparation of work plans reflected a feminist approach involving the joint efforts of the Project team and partners. This particularly refers to the Centre for Support to Women, CSO Atina, and the Coordination Body for Gender Equality. They led in planning inputs and scheduling activities for their respective portfolios. The coordination Body for Gender Equality highlighted benefits from this approach, as it facilitated collaboration

⁹³ KII notes and project materials

and synergy with other initiatives in the sectors, helped align with the national policies and reform priorities, and promoted gender mainstreaming in critical sectors.

The SWGS demonstrated a high communication standard, effectively disseminating key messages through various channels and tailored approaches. Its communication and visibility strategy provided directions spotlighting the Project's transformative influence on women's and girls' lives, weaving in narratives from international campaigns like UNiTE, Step It Up, and HeForShe. The communication efforts ensured representation of marginalised groups⁹⁴. The EC finds particularly relevant a national campaign focusing on violence against women in public arenas to inform women and girls and acquaint the general public and stakeholders with the gravity of the issue, the roles played by local and national authorities, and the commonality of underreporting by victims. The campaign achieved significant outreach through various media platforms⁹⁵. Another important event was the "Safe Everywhere" immersive exhibition at Kalemegdan Park in Belgrade, underscoring women's safety in public spaces and responding to concerns from a recent safety survey. Concurrently, the campaign capitalised on visual advertising with billboards on public buses across Belgrade, displaying a series of impactful designs related to the campaign's objectives⁹⁶.

Concerning knowledge generation and management, the SWGS excelled in its reporting structure, producing a substantive and informative overview of deliverables. These analytical papers were a virtual knowledge repository documenting practices and results. UN Women implemented a knowledge management plan for the SWGS, functioning as an internal and external tool to foster innovative knowledge generation, organisation, and dissemination. Strategic engagement with partners through dedicated networks was central to this approach, enhancing knowledge access, sharing, and providing advisory support.

Key deliverables included the national survey on assessing public space safety for women and girls, the Women Safety Audit Tool and operational procedures for safe houses. Continuous coordination with the Regional Office ensured effective knowledge dissemination, synthesising findings into accessible products and promoting the widespread distribution of project insights.

5.5 Impact

The primary focus was on assessing if and if which form the SWGS influenced policy changes to improve security in public spaces. The evaluation analyzed how the Project contributed to the broader development discourse within the country. The analysis specifically aimed to understand the Project's importance in addressing violence against women and girls, assessing its ability to combine structured support, informed policy-making, and sustainable practices into a formidable and innovative response to these critical issues.

F18. The SWGS provided inputs for policy changes concerning improved security in the public space, thus contributing to the broader development discourse in the country.

The EC used the policy cycle model⁹⁷ to analyze the Project's achievements and their impact at the systemic level. This analysis focused on how the Project's activities, implemented by various partners, have shaped policies related to EVAWG, particularly in the context of women's and girls' safety in public spaces. The EC examined the effectiveness and accountability of implementation mechanisms formed through partnerships.

The Project played a role in defining issues and setting agendas for policy decisions⁹⁸. A national survey conducted by the Project highlighted the increasing concerns among women about safety in public spaces,

⁹⁴ These groups included Roma and older women, and involved critical stakeholders like civil society organisations, local authorities, and shelters- 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign report, December, 2022

⁹⁵ The campaign resulted in 41 media releases in nationally recognised outlets, reaching over 6.5 million individuals. The Project reported that four appearances on national TV broadcasters and partnerships with three web agencies complemented these efforts. SWGS engagements in print media and OpAds collectively touched millions. Social media also played a pivotal role, with campaign posts on platforms like Instagram and Facebook reaching over 500,000 people. This reach was bolstered by the involvement of over 20 influencers and celebrities, further expanding the campaign's footprint.

⁹⁶ Leveraging TV and social media, the campaign aspired to reach over 200,000 individuals, bolstered by endorsements from notable public figures- 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

⁹⁷ Reference to Guy Peters "Policy Making Cycle- steps and approaches," in "Capacity for Policy- how can we do it better", prepared by Tomislav Novovic, UNDP, Belgrade, 2010

⁹⁸ Priority setting and issue definition are almost inherently complex and involve choosing what issues are essential and inescapable (while many others with greater long-term significance may be straightforward to ignore or define incorrectly). After the identified issues, the next step in setting an agenda is to address them through the actions of the Government, its sub-ordinated units or other stakeholders. The "framing" of issues involves defining particular problems under terms that can help to mobilize political support for their adoption. Ref to Guy Peters "Policy Making Cycle- steps and approaches" and Jon Pierre, B. Guy Peters "Governance, Politics and the State," Macmillan, USA, 2016

with fears of rape, sexual harassment, and assault, especially in poorly lit, isolated areas. This survey informed national authorities, enabling them to adopt preventive and responsive measures against gender-based violence in both public and private spaces. As a result, the Project influenced the problem definition and agenda-setting within the policy cycle.

Furthermore, the Project organized capacity-building workshops for national and local authorities to develop and implement strategies addressing the issues identified in the survey. The EC found these efforts instrumental in policy development⁹⁹. The Project provided detailed recommendations for preventing violence in public spaces, focusing on preventive measures, urban planning, and state institutions. Collaboration with the Ministry of Construction, Infrastructure, and Transportation led to integrating these measures into the 2023-2025 Action Plan for Urban Development Strategy¹⁰⁰.

The enactment of Serbia's Law on Gender Equality¹⁰¹, which prohibits gender-based violence in both private and public spheres, marked a significant legislative advancement. Additionally, the SWGS contributed to amending the Law on Social Care, enhancing standards for shelters serving gender-based violence victims, in line with Serbia's European integration goals (Chapter 23¹⁰²). These changes are set to come into effect in 2024¹⁰³.

Local stakeholders have noted the Project's comprehensive impact, spanning policy formulation and implementation¹⁰⁴. The Project supported the creation of new Local Action Plans (LAPs) for Gender Equality, providing strategic frameworks for local gender equality promotion. These LAPs included topics on urban development and public safety for the first time, guiding municipalities to incorporate gender-sensitive considerations into their planning.

F19. The SWGS demonstrated an effective and innovative approach to addressing violence against women and girls, showcasing how structured support, informed policy-making, community engagement, and sustainable practices can merge to form a formidable response.

The SWGS has made strides in mitigating violence against women and girls in Serbia through an integrated approach of support, policy reinforcement, community involvement, and on-the-community-level actions. The Project has pioneered a path for continual progress by bolstering the capabilities of relevant institutions, solidifying legal frameworks, and fostering a spirit of cooperation among diverse stakeholders. It offers a context-sensitive blueprint for public space safety and gender-based violence prevention.

Practical applications, such as the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT), have been piloted and are poised for replication in municipalities familiar with its implementation. The impact of the sustained use of these strategies is anticipated to progressively improve women's and girls' perceptions of safety in public areas.

The Project's support for safe homes has been comprehensive, bolstering security and infrastructure, thus broadening their service reach. Beyond physical enhancements, the Project has instituted essential regulatory documents to anchor non-discriminatory and effective operational protocols. These advancements are expected to yield increased accommodation and protection for survivors of violence, potentially fostering their economic and social reintegration.

Legislatively, the SWGS's influence is evident in developing Local Action Plans for Gender Equality, which have woven gender considerations into urban planning and safety measures. Aligning with Serbia's legal advances, notably the Law on Gender Equality, the Project has fortified the nation's resolve to curb gender-based violence through its legal system. This synergy is projected to lead to more impactful initiatives and a cohesive

⁹⁹ Ibidem, Jon Pierre, B. Guy Peters "Governance, Politics and the State," Macmillan, USA, 2016

¹⁰⁰ (adopted on 11 November 2018) has been one of the notable achievements, as it reflected the Urban Agenda of the EU (2015), Riga Declaration (2015), as well as Urban Agenda of the EU - Amsterdam Pact (2016). However, the SUDS does not consider gender and the specific needs of women and girls adequately. Namely, under Strategic Goal 3, Social Well-being and its Measure 3.2 Social Inclusion and Poverty Risk Reduction in Urban Areas, planned for activity 3.2.1. that focuses on social inclusion and poverty reduction through improved access and expanded social services networks in communities. The measure highlights the importance of including youth, older people, women, and persons with disabilities in this initiative. However, the specific details and actions related to this measure are unavailable in the Strategy. In addition, Strategic Goal 5, Management of Urban Development, planned for a set of measures for integrated planning of sustainable urban development and improvement of urban planning, enabled for planning that will consider local needs and participation of citizens in decisions.

¹⁰¹ Law on Gender Equality, "Official Gazette RS", nr. 52/2021

¹⁰² Annual Project Reports Q5/6 and K11s

¹⁰³ Serbia 2023 Report, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_695_Serbia.pdf

¹⁰⁴ For examples, in meeting with the representatives of the national institutions and the CSO stakeholders. Analysis of meeting minutes and workshop reports that have been available to the ET.

strategy against violence against women and girls, with the long-term effect of potentially reducing incidents of violence.

In working with safe houses, the Project has considered and actively planned for their operational and financial viability. The enduring impact of these actions lies in securing persistent aid for vital survivor services, ensuring that the supportive framework of safe homes remains robust and responsive to the needs of survivors.

5.6 Sustainability

The EC addressed several critical judgement criteria in assessing the SWGS sustainability. It evaluated the existence of national mechanisms or structures to preserve the outcomes achieved, emphasising the importance of assuring financial and human resource capacities for continuation. Moreover, the EC assessed the extent to which the Project bolstered services, ensured enduring and stable capacities, and gauged the existence of country ownership of the results and its partnerships with relevant stakeholders. Concurrently, the evaluation examined the depth to which stakeholders' capacities at the country level have been developed to ensure enduring efforts and advantages.

F20. The likelihood of sustainability of the SWGS benefits after completion appears positive, although not without challenges, as various factors could jeopardise the longevity of the Project's effects and achievements.

The EC finds some more positive and "optimistic" indicators. The Serbian government's commitment to international and EU-accession-related standards could boost a supportive environment for ongoing efforts in gender equality and gender mainstreaming. In this context, the SWGS had a supporting role, especially at the local level, demonstrating a positive trajectory in assisting national partners to understand and "nationalise" EU Gender Equality practices and align with international obligations. For example, the testament to the Project's commitment was completing pivotal policy documents to underline the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in urban planning, catering to women's unique needs and challenges in public spaces. An example could be gender mainstreaming in the Sustainable Urban Development Strategy 2019-2030 (SUDS) and its Action Plan. Still, the slow progress in executing policies and legal frameworks on EVAWG, especially against the most vulnerable groups, could affect these efforts and results. For example, the recent EU Progress Report highlighted that the action plan and funding for the Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence from 2021 to 2025 are significantly delayed¹⁰⁵. In addition, this report highlighted the need for improvements in implementing the Law Against Domestic Violence, particularly in setting up an integrated system for collecting and monitoring violence cases¹⁰⁶. A more comprehensive response is required to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, such as rape, stalking, sexual harassment, and forced marriage.

On assessing the results and feedback from local authorities in five pilot local self-government units, the EC finds positive signs about the sustainability of these results. The authorities have recognised that the Project introduced the WSAT, carving a unified method to address public security for women and girls. They have shown an unwavering determination to continue implementing similar activities and measures that further this cause. However, the EC has concerns that despite these successes, the positive SWGS experience and the use of WSAT could be challenging to replicate without (formal) requirements and technical assistance from competent supporters.

Moreover, the local governing bodies have recognised the benefits of collaborating with CSOs, acknowledging their pivotal role in formulating and executing measures outlined in their strategic documents, such as Local Action Plans for Gender Equality¹⁰⁷. These statements on EVAWG activities and views concerning "CSOs' indispensable role in joint endeavours related to gender equality and a more inclusive and safer environment for women and girls" could contribute to sustainability. At the same time, the EC finds that CSOs operate most support services for victims of violence, doing so on limited budgets, emphasising a lack of transparency and fairness in the distribution of local/ public funds for non-government actors. In addition

¹⁰⁵ Additionally, a new action plan for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security is pending since the previous one expired in 2020.

¹⁰⁶ There is a lack of reliable official statistics on such violence in Serbia- the available data indicate that there were 27 femicides in 2022 and 20 in the first half of 2023. The country needs to address GREVIO recommendations (2019 baseline report on Serbia), including amending the definition of rape in the criminal code to comply with the Istanbul Convention

¹⁰⁷ . The EC finds the CSOs participating in SWGS activities well-established, highly skilled and committed to gender equality-.

The EC finds that the SWGS has contributed to transforming the GBV landscape interventions, particularly in supporting safe houses. The Project's focus on enhancing these shelters' operational and technical infrastructure has filled a gap in GBV support systems. Namely, its efforts to improve the capacities of safe houses "offered a strengthened response to victims, aiming for a safer environment that aligns with recognised care standards". In the later phase of its intervention, the Project has worked collaboratively with safe houses to bolster their operational protocols, offering training modules to staff and suggesting infrastructural enhancements. These measures, while incremental, aim to improve the daily experience for those seeking refuge and support in these institutions. Still, the recent EU Progress Report highlighted that safe houses face issues of understaffing, inadequate and unsustainable funding, limited housing capacity, and insufficient geographical spread. Equal access to safe houses for all women, including those from marginalised groups, needs attention.

Additionally, appropriate funding is essential to ensure the implementation of the national program for safeguarding and improving sexual and reproductive health and access to quality services in this area (EU Progress Report). Establishing genuine partnership relationships between CSOs and safe houses creates additional problems. For example, contrary to GREVIO recommendations, the Law Against Domestic Violence does not standardly involve women's CSOs in delivering services of creating individual protection plans and the legal provision¹⁰⁸.

F21. The SWGS has nurtured a strong sense of ownership in gender-related processes, characterised by active stakeholder engagement, alignment with national priorities, and responsive support. However, the challenge remains in building and promoting national leadership and ensuring long-term sustainability, requiring continued efforts from all stakeholders involved.

The SWGS has contributed to the enhanced functioning of Serbia's gender equality institutions, like the Coordination Body for Gender Equality. Central to these activities was to effect transformative change at both national and local levels, explicitly targeting responsiveness to violence against women and girls in public spaces.

A key achievement of the project has been to equip national authorities with the tools and methodologies needed to address gender-based violence proactively, even in less traditional areas such as urban planning. This initiative has set a valuable example, prompting local authorities and stakeholders to implement similar measures. Consequently, local governments have adopted strategies and the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) to improve public safety and the rights of women and girls.

In terms of infrastructure and services for gender-based violence (GBV) survivors, the SWGS has recognised the essential role of safe houses, working to enhance their operational capacities to provide better care and support for survivors. It has strived to ensure these are accessible to all women and girls, emphasising the inclusion of marginalised groups.

The SWGS has also encouraged ownership among local stakeholders, who have actively engaged in implementing WSAT through organising safety walks and workshops. CSOs have also taken a leading role by pinpointing critical areas for intervention and developing responsive strategies. These efforts have notably improved security perceptions and inclusion in society for women and girls. Furthermore, CSOs and local authorities have reinforced their collaborative efforts, particularly regarding the safety of women and girls in public spaces, ensuring that initiatives are well-suited to their needs, including those of vulnerable groups.

Nevertheless, translating this sense of ownership into national leadership in gender equality remains a challenge. National stakeholders must show a sustained and active commitment to gender equality. Continued efforts are needed to foster cooperation among different stakeholders and to shift the perception of gender equality from being an externally driven mandate or merely a funding opportunity to a nationally owned and led priority.

F22. The SWGS has created a multi-faceted, adaptable method to promoting gender equality and addressing overlooked aspects of gender-based violence. Its initiatives spanned from the highly technical to support of unconventional areas- such as security in public spaces, especially for women and girls, offering valuable insights and models for future endeavours and policies. The partners, including high-level officials, recognised that these models and tools, grounded in the Project's successes in the country, hold potential for scalability and replication in diverse settings and sectors and other municipalities in Serbia.

¹⁰⁸ Leaving their participation to the discretion of the prosecutor's office

The partners, including officials, have recognised that the Project has effectively applied methods and tools, highlighting their scalability and replicability in various settings and other Serbian municipalities. For example, the Project has created a practical framework for embedding gender equality into less traditional and overlooked sectors, demonstrating successful, replicable models. The stakeholders emphasised that the Project's innovative methods and broad collaboration have been critical contributing factors.

For policy, the Project took a comprehensive approach to integrate gender considerations into broader policy domains. A national survey on violence against women and girls in public spaces led to detailed policy recommendations. These recommendations were proposed to the Ministry of Construction, Infrastructure, and Transportation and considered for inclusion in the 2023-2025 Sustainable Urban Development Strategy Action Plan. This method can be applied in other regions and sectors to ensure gender considerations are fundamental to policy-making.

The Project also focused on equipping local governments with tools and training to improve public space safety through a gender-sensitive lens. This involved adapting the Women Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) for local needs. The Project chose municipalities based on specific criteria and collaborated with CSOs experienced in gender issues to gain community support. Training for municipal representatives was critical, using a train-the-trainer model to spread knowledge across Serbia. Women Safety Walks and detailed safety reports were part of this standardised process, tailored to each municipality's unique situation.

Exploring unconventional areas, the SWGS looked at the intersection of gender and public space security in domains like sports and tertiary education. The Project showed that even sectors typically not linked to gender issues can contribute to promoting gender equality, such as through initiatives in sports to prevent abuse and challenge gender stereotypes.

Additionally, the Project's approach to supporting the institutional and operational side of safe houses offered a comprehensive strategy for addressing the needs of violence survivors. This dual strategy ensured standard compliance and smooth operation. Creating the CoP fostered a collaborative space where safe house stakeholders could exchange and adapt best practices. This collaborative network increases the potential for positive impacts and replicating successful practices in other safe houses.

6 Conclusions and lessons learned

6.1 Conclusions

The Evaluation Consultant methodically analysed all findings of the SWGS project, organising conclusions around the OECD DAC criteria.

6.1.1 Relevance

C1. The SWGS project has demonstrated relevance in advancing gender equality and addressing violence against women in Serbia (F1). Its participatory and inclusive strategy, involving government bodies, local authorities and CSOs, underscored a comprehensive approach to gender equality and public safety for women and girls in Serbia (F1, F2, F3). This needs-based approach (through a country-wide survey) and a sound priority-setting process in the context of country reforms have been instrumental in ensuring the Project's relevance to its beneficiaries' and key stakeholders' diverse needs and priorities.

C2. The Project has been relevant in supporting national policy-making processes and urban planning efforts. It also responded to the need of local decision-makers and CSOs in designing and implementing strategies and actions against gender-based violence, particularly in public spaces (F3).

C3. The Project addressed the operational and functional needs of the safe houses in Serbia, aiming to enhance the quality and reach of their services. In this context, the SWGS addressed the concerns of marginalised women, including those affected by socio-economic status or disability, enabling them to seek appropriate policies and measures for their safety and well-being (F5). The Project's relevance is also reflected in its contribution to Serbia's efforts in the EU accession process, contributing to the relevant *Acquis Communautaire* chapters (F4).

6.1.2 Coherence:

C4. The Project demonstrated coherence, aligning with UN Women's objectives and external strategic priorities. Internally, the Project linked its objectives, activities, and outcomes logically, ensuring cohesive integration with UN Women's activities in Serbia. At the same time, the Project aligned with the UN Women

Strategic Plan and national development strategies for addressing gender equality and EVAWG in Serbia (F6, F7). Furthermore, the Project aligned with international benchmarks like CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention and various Sustainable Development Goals, reinforcing Serbia's commitment to international standards on gender-based violence (F8) and, operationally, targeting the EVAWG and promoting gender equality (F11).

C5. UN Women's expertise and partnership-driven approach facilitated transformative changes in gender-responsive urban planning and practices to enhance security in public spaces (F9). Its role in Serbia was pivotal in advancing gender equality and addressing gender-based violence, with the ability to align with international norms and adapt them to Serbia's context. The Project's comprehensive strategy, focusing on the root causes of violence against women, set a benchmark for future gender equality initiatives in Serbia and beyond.

6.1.3 Effectiveness

C6. The effectiveness of the SWGS in Serbia is evident through several key achievements. The project conducted a national survey on women's safety in public spaces, influencing national strategies and action plans. This initiative marked a pivotal shift towards evidence-based approaches to public safety and gender equality (F10). In addition, the SWGS adapted and implemented the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) in select municipalities, enhancing local capacities to address violence against women in public spaces. This strategic move contributed to safer environments and tailored community-specific solutions (F11). Furthermore, the project effectively strengthened the infrastructure and services of shelters for survivors of gender-based violence. Through strategic partnerships and development plans, the SWGS addressed critical needs, showcasing its role in improving support systems for survivors. (F12) Establishing the CoP fostered effective collaboration and dialogue among service providers, enhancing shared learning and planning for future actions. This initiative contributed to a stronger, more cohesive network of support for victims of violence. (F13)

C7. One of the most notable aspects of the SWGS was its ability to adeptly navigate the challenges posed by deep-rooted societal norms and biases concerning gender in Serbia. The project tailored its strategies to the local context and engaged in targeted advocacy, making significant strides in shifting societal views and enhancing public space safety for women and girls. Collectively, these efforts underscore the effectiveness of the SWGS in addressing VAWG, contributing to enhancing policy frameworks, local capacities, and support services while adeptly handling complex societal challenges. (F14)

6.1.4 Efficiency

C8. The project was efficiently implemented: the strategic resource use and effective management, adaptability, collaborative engagement, and robust communication and knowledge management were critical elements that contributed to this (F15, F16, F17).

The project adeptly aligned its resources with national priorities and gender equality goals, demonstrating delivery speed and appropriate resource allocation despite budgetary and time constraints (F15). The decision to extend the project timeline illustrated an adaptable approach focused on impactful outcomes. The leadership and management structure critically contributed to efficiency, steering the project within budget and time constraints (F16). The Project has aligned the project with systemic reform priorities and fostered solid partnerships. This effective stakeholder engagement ensured comprehensive strategies reflective of diverse perspectives that facilitated the overall implementation (F17). The Project has implemented a communication strategy using various dissemination and mixed outreach methods to amplify impact and reach. In parallel, a comprehensive knowledge management approach has been established, highlighting the project's commitment to sharing insights for long-term influence (F17).

6.1.5 Impact

C9. The SWGS project in Serbia has demonstrated a possible impact on policy changes to improve security in public spaces. The results and recommendations from the Project's supported national survey reflected on the critical concerns around women's safety, which influenced the agenda-setting and policy formulation related to EVAWG. These efforts have led to the adoption of preventive and responsive measures at both national and local levels, showing the Project's effects in driving policy change and contributing to the broader development discourse in the country (F18).

C10. The Project's possible impact could be recognised by integrating its recommendations from the survey and activities into the Urban Development Strategy's Action Plan for 2023-2025, indicating the Project's role in policy development and execution. Legislatively, the SWGS has provided inputs to enhance standards for

shelters serving GBV victims, such as in the case of Serbia's Law on Gender Equality and amendments to the Law on Social Care. The Project's impact is visible locally in formulating and implementing new Local Action Plans (LAPs) for Gender Equality. For the first time, these plans include urban development and public safety considerations, incorporating gender-sensitive perspectives in municipal planning. Impact at the local level could be observed through practical applications of WSATs, enhancing the consideration of safety for women and girls in public areas and potentially improving the feeling of trust and safety (F18)

C11. The Project's support for safe houses has an impact on improved security, infrastructure, and operational protocols, increasing the effectiveness and quality of services. The impact could be expected through more unified and sustainable services. Still, the delay in adopting policies and measures and continuation of processes could affect the full realisation of the Project's potential impact. The required knowledge and skills for effectively delivering quality services and sustainable functioning of safe houses remain in progress. The country needs to consider and work on systematic and sustainable support for GBV victims, especially for the most vulnerable groups(F19).

6.1.6 Sustainability

The SWGS holds the potential to sustain its benefits beyond its conclusion, yet it faces particular challenges that could influence its lasting success:

C12. The results and capacities developed by the SWGS have been effectively integrated into national gender equality mechanisms and structures, indicating a potential for lasting influence. The Project has underscored the urgency of implementing policies and laws more rapidly and effectively to safeguard women and girls from violence. A critical need exists to refine national legislation to align it with international standards, particularly the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO, and to support the execution of these policies. The Project has also focused on enhancing capacities at the local level to sustain gender equality initiatives. However, these capacities' consistent application and structured use remain challenging, particularly amidst political changes and shifting priorities (F20). Additionally, the institutionalisation of the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT) is essential for its wider adoption and impact across more municipalities (F15-F19). Despite improving the services and capabilities of Safe Houses, concerns about their long-term financial sustainability remain, emphasising the need for stable funding to continue providing high-quality support services to violence survivors (F20).

C13. The Project has successfully fostered country ownership and engagement with local partners, which are important sustainability indicators. However, sustaining this momentum will require active leadership and a clear strategic direction from national partners, which needs improvement (F21).

6.2 Lessons learned

The EC has identified the following lessons that emerged during the SWGS implementation:

Availability of data and in-depth problem analysis is required for tailored interventions: The data-driven approach has significantly contributed to SWGS's results in addressing women's and girls' security and safety in public spaces. The national survey and analytical studies conducted under SWGS provided crucial insights into the specific challenges and negative experiences women and girls face. A similar approach- through the application of the WSAT- emphasised the necessity of basing interventions on comprehensive, localised information. Effective planning and programming of such initiatives must prioritise the collection of data and in-depth problem analysis. These inputs have been vital to developing well-targeted policies (as in the case of the new Urban Development Strategy that reflects gender equality) and interventions at the local level (in targeted municipalities) that accurately address the needs and experiences of women and girls.

Tailor-made tools could create sustainable and positive results, addressing pressing problems: The practical application of the WSAT illustrated the importance of its adaptation to reflect local cultural, social, and administrative context, ensuring community ownership and contributing to its practical application. The positive results of WSAT in Serbia confirmed that international "best practices" are not blueprints for replication. Instead, these tools and practices require effective adaptation to address local needs and specific manifestations of violence against women and girls.

Building strong partnerships is critical in the successful EAWG efforts: SWGS effectively created collaboration channels between local authorities, government entities and CSOs, showing the power of partnership. This approach has been critical for sustainable results and follow-up planning (especially at the local level). Future initiatives must consider these achievements and expand the environment conducive to

multi-stakeholder participation. This approach will allow each group to bring in their expertise, share ownership of the process, and contribute to the successes.

Continued and well-planned capacity development supports sustainable changes: Addressing immediate training needs helps resolve some of the most prominent problems; however, these one-off programs are insufficient for sustained effects and application of knowledge. Capacity development efforts should be continuous, with regular updates and refresher programs to ensure that stakeholders, primarily service providers, remain familiar with the latest knowledge and best practices. Ongoing support and learning opportunities for professionals addressing VAWG lead to improved service delivery and are essential for maintaining momentum in combating gender-based violence.

Financial sustainability of safe houses and services is vital: The Project emphasised the importance of financial predictability and sustainability for safe houses and continuity of services. Despite these efforts, there is a high degree of uncertainty regarding the financial future of safe houses; hence, these inputs could be a solid starting point to develop robust financial strategies that secure long-term operational funding for safe houses and sustainability of support services.

Following the principle that "no-one is left behind" has been a critical element of the SWGS: The comprehensive analysis of safe houses revealed their inaccessibility or limited accessibility for the most vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities who are victims of violence. The Project and its partners recognised that inclusivity and accessibility are central elements to development. Thus, accessible and available services and equitable support to all women and girls, including those with disabilities, have been considered from the initial phase. The principle of "no-one is left behind" must be central to all initiatives and activities in planning, especially during implementation.

In addition, the SWGS proved that in parallel to these efforts, it should focus on addressing societal norms and stereotypes that underline gender-based violence. The Project has shown that a comprehensive approach combining educational programs, advocacy, and local-level engagement can transform public attitudes and behaviours.

A well-balanced combination of data inputs and advocacy could influence the policy-making process: The Project's critical results under its outcomes, high-level advocacy efforts, and long-lasting partnerships could influence national policy-making processes. The SWGS ensured that its objectives aligned with national priorities, expanding focus to some crucial areas with fewer activities and support. These efforts have been critical for generating inputs and data for policy making, while clear advocacy channels and strong partnerships facilitated policy changes.

Community of Practice is a platform that could facilitate peer-to-peer communication and exchange of expertise: The SWGS support for creating a CoP generated a powerful mechanism for enabling service providers to share knowledge and learn from each other. Maintaining and strengthening the CoP can help build a collective body of expertise and encourage the development of innovative, practical solutions.

7 Recommendations

In crafting its recommendations, the Evaluation Consultant (EC) undertook a thorough analysis of findings and conclusions, focusing on preparing actionable and meaningful recommendations responsive to the needs and goals of those affected by violence against women and girls. This process encompassed comprehensive data collection, deep stakeholder engagement, and a detailed review of the project's achievements. Essential to this process was the active participation of stakeholders whose first-hand experiences and insights were pivotal in shaping the recommendations. The EC ensured the recommendations' relevance and efficacy by engaging in an iterative validation process, incorporating stakeholder feedback and aligning the final recommendations with the experiences and priorities of the beneficiaries. This collaborative approach guaranteed that the recommendations were robust and resonated with the needs and aspirations of those most impacted by the project.

Recommendation 1:	The EC recommends that UN Women continue technical assistance, including capacity building for relevant institutions and stakeholders involved in addressing aspects of violence against women and girls in various critical areas. UN Women should prioritise several critical activities to advance its mission effectively. Firstly, the EC recommends promoting research and data collection on
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<p>For: UN Women – Country Office in Serbia</p> <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>violence against women and girls across various domains, including less traditional areas, is essential. As shown in the SWGS analysis, this approach can uncover a range of potential interventions by providing evidence-based insights for policy-making and response design.</p> <p>The EC recommends UN Women support the development and implementation of national action plans or sector-specific strategies for ending violence against women and girls, supporting national partners to assign roles and responsibilities to all stakeholders. Drawing from the experience in providing inputs for the Sustainable Urban Development Strategy 2019-2030, UN Women should assist in introducing effective monitoring systems and reporting practices to facilitate implementation and track progress. Furthermore, the EC recommends that UN Women continue developing and delivering needs-based capacity-building programs for stakeholders in specific sectors, targeting government officials, CSOs, and service providers. These programs should enhance their knowledge, skills, and understanding of gender-based violence and gender equality issues relevant to their sectors. Lastly, the EC recommends that UN Women and its development partners consider a longer-term framework with appropriate resources for implementing activities related to EVAWG. This longer-term planning and resource allocation are vital for sustaining efforts and achieving impactful results in the fight against gender-based violence.</p> <p>(C1, C2, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8)</p>
<p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p>For: UN Women – Country Office in Serbia</p> <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>The EC recommends that UN Women advocate for sufficient resources to support institutional mechanisms and services addressing violence against women and girls. The priority is to ensure longer-term commitments and increase funding from governments (and other development partners) for EVAWG prevention, protection and support measures and services.</p> <p>The Evaluation Consultant's analysis leads to the recommendation that UN Women should continue and intensify its support for safe houses. This involves strengthening partnerships with national and local authorities, civil society organizations, and other development actors, with a focus on enhancing capacities and establishing sustainable funding. Ensuring equal access to safe houses for all women, including those from marginalized groups, remains a priority.</p> <p>Leveraging gender-responsive budgeting as an advocacy tool for essential service financing is also suggested, alongside improving resource mobilization strategies and exploring innovative financing for safe houses and EVAWG-related services.</p> <p>The continued support of the Community of Practice is vital for fostering cooperation, coordination, and capacity development. Institutionalizing the CoP as a regular peer-to-peer support mechanism, with options for hosting by different safe houses and online meetings, is recommended. Additionally, advocating for increased domestic funding for EVAW initiatives is essential, emphasizing the social benefits and importance of investing in gender equality and violence prevention.</p> <p>(C6, C7, C12, C13)</p>
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>For: UN Women – Country Office in Serbia</p> <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>The EC recommends that UN Women continue its activities at the local level, and promote benefits of the WSAT. There is a need to institutionalize the WSAT to ensure its expansion and broader adoption across various municipalities, enhancing its overall impact. The local authorities need to link these actions with Local Action Plans for Gender Equality to strengthen its relevance and application.</p> <p>UN Women should focus on expanding partnerships with new municipalities for the adoption of the Women's Safety Audit Tool (WSAT). The EC recommends organizing workshops and presentations and sharing success stories from</p>

	<p>municipalities that successfully piloted WSAT. Concurrently, the EC recommends, as a necessary step, developing a Standardized WSAT Implementation Guide, including user-friendly, step-by-step procedures for WSAT implementation, best practices, and support mechanisms to facilitate its broader adoption. Additionally, UN Women needs to work with local stakeholders to ensure that the findings from WSAT implementations are well integrated into Local Action Plans for Gender Equality (LAPs). This process might involve modifying existing plans to include specific priorities identified from public space safety analysis. In parallel, the EC recommends that UN Women conduct training sessions and workshops for local stakeholders on effectively integrating WSAT into their LAPs. The EC recommends establishing an online training program to provide flexible access for stakeholders. Furthermore, establishing a system to monitor the long-term impact of WSAT, even after the project's completion, is essential. This system should track the continued use and effectiveness of WSAT in improving the safety of women and girls in public spaces.</p> <p>The EC recommends that UN Women formulate strategies to engage with political entities to ensure the continuity and institutionalization of the capacities developed. This method might involve advocacy, awareness campaigns, and building relationships with key political stakeholders to make gender equality a consistent priority, regardless of political changes. Such efforts can enhance the sustainability and impact of the SWGS, ensuring its benefits are sustained across municipalities and resilient to political shifts.</p> <p>(C6, C10, C12)</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: For: UN Women – Country Office in Serbia Priority: High</p>	<p>The ET recommends that UN Women leverage its comparative advantage to support EAW-related activities in the country</p> <p>The EC recommends that UN Women harness its technical know-how, leadership qualities, and partnerships to offer guidance, develop capacities, and support its implementing partners in addressing EAW priorities. This role includes facilitating knowledge exchange and sharing best practices nationally and among stakeholders engaged in EAW initiatives. Additionally, the EC recommends that UN Women broaden and fortify its collaborations with other UN agencies, international financial institutions, and development partners. This expanded network will be instrumental in resource mobilization and supporting the implementation of EAW activities.</p> <p>Moreover, UN Women should enhance its support to authorities in integrating and coordinating various interventions within the EAW framework. A comprehensive and holistic approach should be maintained, with a focus on coordinated and joint efforts to tackle the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV) in diverse areas. This approach involves continuously assessing and adapting interventions to meet the changing needs and challenges women and girls face.</p> <p>(C1, C2, C3, C5, C9, C10, C11, C12)</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: For: UN Women – Country Office in Serbia Priority: Medium</p>	<p>The ET recommends that UN Women uphold the "leaving no one behind" principle in all activities.</p> <p>The EC recommends that UN Women continue advocating for integrating GE and EAWG priorities into national development plans and policies. Particularly relevant will be to incorporate gender perspectives into areas like urban planning, sports, and education, enhancing the safety and inclusivity of these environments for women and girls. Such a comprehensive approach that SWSG tested is crucial for the initiatives to remain a pivotal contributor to Serbia's efforts in eradicating violence against women and girls.</p> <p>Simultaneously, the EC recommends bolstering partnerships with national governments, international organizations, and civil society to align and optimize</p>

	<p>efforts and resources in achieving gender equality-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regular assessments are necessary to understand the unique needs and vulnerabilities of marginalized and vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, rural populations, refugees, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Advocacy for these groups' rights and inclusion in national policies, legislation, and development initiatives is highly recommended.</p> <p>The ET recommends that UN Women support partners and ensure integrating disability inclusion into all aspects of the EAW and other interventions, including policy development, service provision, and awareness-raising initiatives. In this context, the ET recommends collaborating with organizations representing women with disabilities to develop targeted interventions that address their specific needs and challenges- there is a need to facilitate partnerships between disability organizations, women's organizations, and relevant government entities to strengthen collaboration and ensure the participation of women with disabilities in decision-making processes.</p> <p>(C1, C2, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C13)</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: For: UN Women – Country Office in Serbia</p> <p>Priority: Medium</p>	<p>The ET recommends that UN Women consider a coherent EAW framework, with vertical integration of outcomes and interventions, and horizontal integration of activities, and use of realistic indicators and targets will ensure a strategic and well-aligned approach to addressing VAW and promoting gender equality.</p> <p>The EC recommends that UN Women develop a comprehensive and long-term framework to address VAWG. This framework should clearly and logically connect objectives, outcomes, outputs, and activities, laying a solid foundation for effectively implementing and monitoring various interventions within a broader context. Furthermore, the ET emphasizes the importance of horizontal integration within UN Women's portfolio. By implementing interconnected and complementary initiatives rather than isolated interventions, UN Women can enhance the synergy among its components, maximizing impact and avoiding redundancy in efforts.</p> <p>Lastly, the ET recommends defining realistic indicators and targets that directly reflect the Programme's objectives and areas of intervention. Such an approach will facilitate the explicit demonstration of the Programme's contributions and provide opportunities to attribute observable changes to its efforts. This strategic focus on realistic and relevant indicators will strengthen the overall efficacy and impact of the Programme's activities.</p> <p>(C 4, C5, C9, C10, C11, C12, C13)</p>