



UN WOMEN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

STRATEGIC NOTE 2021–2025



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service with the participation of more than 170 stakeholders, including UN Women, other United Nations entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, government partners, civil society organizations and programme participants.

The evaluation team comprised Isabel Suarez Garcia, UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist for Europe and Central Asia and the evaluation team lead; and Aleksandar Zivanovic and Marija Babovic, International Evaluation Experts. The evaluation team would like to thank all key informants for their invaluable insights, without which this report and forward-looking recommendations would not be possible.

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Cover photo: ©UN Women BiH/Armin Durgut
Amina Močević from the Ministry of Finance of Sarajevo Canton emphasizes that gender-responsive budgeting is now systemically integrated, supported by staff training and new software that paves the way for long-term results.

Disclaimer: *The analysis and recommendations of this report are those of the UN Women Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women. This is an independent publication by the UN Women Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS).*

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**UN WOMEN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, AUDIT AND INVESTIGATION SERVICES
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ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COVID-19	Corona virus disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
EVAW	Eliminating Violence Against Women
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
Istanbul Convention	Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UN-SWAP	United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Country Portfolio Evaluation is a systematic assessment of the contributions made by UN Women to development results with respect to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level. This evaluation report presents the key findings, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation of the UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office's Strategic Note 2021–2025. The evaluation was conducted between August 2024 and January 2025.

Purpose, objective and scope

The Country Portfolio Evaluation aims to support strategic learning and decision-making to inform development of the next UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Strategic Note 2026–2029, while promoting accountability by assessing the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the Country Office's work between 2021 and 2025.

The evaluation covered UN Women's integrated triple mandate – normative, coordination and operational – across the following thematic areas: Governance, Women's Economic Empowerment, Ending Violence Against Women, and Women, Peace and Security. The evaluation mission mostly engaged stakeholders based in the capital, Sarajevo, and Banja Luka as the administrative centre of Republika Srpska, with field trips to Tuzla and Bijeljina to meet local civil society organizations in the field.

Users

The intended users of this evaluation are UN Women management and Country Office personnel and their local partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The evaluation also intends to serve as an information source for the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women headquarters, the United Nations Country Team, the donor community and other development partners in the country.

Methodology

The evaluation approach was participatory and included a theory-based, mixed-methods approach. The evaluation respected United Nations evaluation standards and incorporated the principles of gender-responsive evaluation, human rights and leave no one behind principles.



Mixed methods data collection

quantitative and qualitative data collected and triangulated

172

Internal and external stakeholders consulted

(84% female) 144 semi-structured interviews and focus groups

5

online surveys

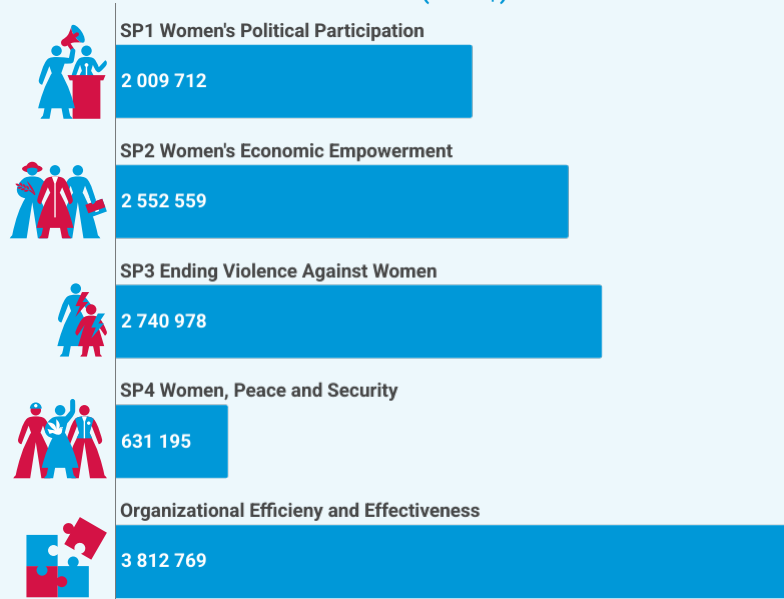
UN Women, UN BiH, governmental and non-governmental organizations, donors

2

case studies

UN Women's coordination mandate and women's economic empowerment

Bosnia Herzegovina Country Office Budget per impact area 2021–2024 (in US\$)



Total Budget in US\$ (2021–2024)

11.75 M

with additional funding
planned for 2025

Total Country Office Workforce

23

in September 2024. There were 18
personnel at the end of the previous
Strategic Note 2015–2020

Country context and UN Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a culturally and ethnically diverse country with a population estimated between 3.2 and 3.4 million, facing demographic decline due to high emigration and low birth rates. The political and social landscape is characterized by the complexity of its highly decentralized governance structure, comprising two entities, 10 cantons and the Brčko District, combined with the legacies of war affecting decision-making and inter-ethnic relations. Despite having a solid legal and policy framework for gender equality and human rights, and being party to key international treaties, the country continues to experience implementation gaps. Women remain underrepresented in political and economic spheres; face widespread gender-based violence; and experience systemic barriers to equality, particularly marginalized groups such as rural women, Roma women and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

UN Women has maintained a presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2008, becoming a full Country Office with a country representative in 2014. The Country Office's current programming framework is the Strategic Note 2021–2025, which is aligned with national strategies and international commitments to gender equality. The Strategic Note is structured around four key impact areas: women's leadership and political participation; economic empowerment and decent work; elimination of violence against women; and women, peace and security (added at a later stage). UN Women implements its triple mandate through technical assistance, capacity-building, knowledge generation, advocacy and strategic partnerships with government institutions and civil society.

KEY FINDINGS

The UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Strategic Note 2021–2025 was assessed as highly relevant and well-aligned with international, local and UN gender equality priorities. It addressed the key issues that women and girls face across the country and supported the evolving needs of governmental and civil society partners through capacity development. The Country Office's programming remained relevant amid emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and a concerning rise in femicide, adapting its approaches to the shifting landscape, while maintaining its commitment to inclusivity and rights-based programming.

Despite its overall relevance, the Strategic Note had design limitations, particularly in its theory of change which did not clearly articulate change mechanisms and leave no one behind principles.

UN Women played a strong role in UN system coordination, actively contributing to gender mainstreaming within the UN Country Team; promoting shared gender equality objectives through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework; joint programming; and promoting UN accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment. Coordination with institutional gender mechanisms and civil society, which had previously deteriorated, began to improve with the arrival of new leadership, reinvigorated partnerships and collective action.

Results were achieved across UN Women's normative, coordination and operational mandates. The Country Office contributed to legislative reforms and increasing the capacities of government and civil society. The Country Office supported care economy policy and legislative measures; income generation for rural women and women entrepreneurs; influenced legal reforms on violence against women; and supported women's specialized services. The Women, Peace and Security portfolio was revitalised only in 2023; therefore, it is still too early to assess its results.

The Country Office expanded its team during the Strategic Note period but struggled with human resource challenges, including high staff turnover, slow recruitment and excessive workloads.

Financial resources increased, and the donor base slightly diversified. However, while donors push for UN joint programming, opening new opportunities, they also place new demands on the Country Office's coordination function.

Monitoring, evaluation and sustainability continue to pose challenges. The Country Office lacks effective tools to capture long-term impacts, and project-based reporting structures do not accommodate interventions that require extended time frames to show results. Partner capacities in data collection and evaluation are also uneven.

The Country Office still managed to support sustainable changes through policy integration, gender budgeting reforms and institutional capacity-building in governmental and civil society sectors.



Photo: © UN Women BiH/Denis Ruvic
Women Leaders' Conference organized by UN Women BiH, in partnership with the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1: UN Women's implementation of the Strategic Note (2021–2025) has proven highly relevant to national and UN priorities for gender equality, effectively addressing critical areas such as women's leadership, economic empowerment and ending violence against women. Despite challenges posed by the context, including political crises, COVID-19, natural disasters, and rising femicide rates, the Country Office has remained adaptive and responsive, ensuring its programming meets the evolving needs of women and girls.

Conclusion 2: UN Women's efforts in UN coordination for gender equality were effective in mainstreaming gender in UN strategic frameworks and joint programmes. As in many areas, coordination remains fragmented and future coordination work should be guided by strategic alignment with mechanisms under UN Women's corporate Coordination Strategy and the UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan.

Conclusion 3: UN Women leveraged its convening role, facilitating collaboration between institutions, civil society and international partners; contributing to the gender mainstreaming of public policies and laws; and strengthening selected services. Structured and sustained coordination – particularly with civil society organizations – requires further strategic thinking.

Conclusion 4: The Country Office was most effective in its normative work, having a significant influence on gender-related legislation and policy through the provision of expertise and capacities to its governmental and non-governmental partners. While the sustainability of the Country Office's work at the policy level is strong, the fragility of institutional ownership, compounded by the complexity of the political system, poses risks for achieved results.

Conclusion 5: Ensuring impact for marginalized groups requires more strategic and long-term engagement as well as integrated approaches to shifting social norms and embedding intersectionality across programmes. Sharing positive experiences in some projects, particularly in ending violence against women, could be helpful.

Conclusion 6: High staff turnover and administrative bottlenecks have affected continuity and strained stakeholder relationships. While efforts are under way to address these issues internally, broadening donor engagement, utilizing the benefits from joint programmes and securing long-term, flexible financing should be prioritized externally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

The next Strategic Note should be co-created with partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to sustain its relevance and consolidate partner relationships. It should clearly articulate strategies and roles for each impact area, with a particular need to strengthen approaches to women's political participation and women's economic empowerment. Approaches for cross-thematic synergies, systematic integration of leave no one behind and sustainability perspectives should be prioritized.

2

Coherence in the theories of change should be supported by effective and efficient internal coordination and coherence mechanisms to support operationalization of synergies in programmes and projects. Adoption of a synergistic approach to programme and project design – ensuring that initiatives are interconnected and contribute to broader strategic goals – and application of cross-cutting strategies, such as gender needs assessments, capacity development, gender-responsive budgeting and others are possible options.

3

Frame UN coordination efforts under the new corporate UN Women coordination theory of change and UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan. To enhance effectiveness, leverage experiences from the Gender Equality Accelerator programme and shift the approach from the passive exchange of information and updates to proactive joint planning, collaboration and shared learning at different levels of the organization. Cross-cutting programmatic successes should be leveraged as strategic assets for deeper coordination and impact-driven action.

4

To ensure effective coordination, UN Women Country Office needs to strike a balance between engagement with institutional gender mechanisms, other government institutions and civil society. While past coordination efforts were overly concentrated on gender mechanisms, currently there is an imbalance in favour of other line ministries and agencies. Coordination with CSOs requires restructuring to be more inclusive, engaging both women's rights organizations and those working in broader development sectors to enhance impact and sustainability.

5

The Country Office should prioritize addressing challenges in retaining and enhancing the capacity of its personnel. This should include deepening expertise in both flagship areas and emerging thematic priorities under the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, while improving results-based management, monitoring, evaluation and learning. A more structured approach to workload distribution is also necessary to optimize efficiency and prevent burnout among personnel.

6

Given the evolving donor landscape and the increasing shift towards joint programming, the Country Office should reassess its resource mobilization strategy to ensure sustained financial support for its key priorities.

1. BACKGROUND

A Country Portfolio Evaluation is a systematic assessment of the contributions made by UN Women to development results with respect to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level. This Country Portfolio Evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service in close cooperation with the UN Women Country Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was the second consecutive Country Portfolio Evaluation of the Country Office's Strategic Note, and the findings and recommendations from the previous evaluation were used as a key reference during this evaluation process. This evaluation synthesis report outlines key findings, lessons learned, conclusions and the recommendations of the evaluation team.

1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope

The evaluation's purpose was to support the Country Office and national stakeholders' strategic learning and decision-making to inform the next Strategic Note (due to be developed in 2025). The evaluation is expected to have a secondary summative (backwards looking) perspective to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The Country Portfolio Evaluation's specific objectives were to:

- Assess the relevance and coherence of UN Women's interventions at the national level and their alignment with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Assess effectiveness and organizational efficiency in progressing towards achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment results as defined in the Strategic Note.
- Support the UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office to improve its strategic positioning to better support the achievement of sustained gender equality and women's empowerment results.
- Analyse how a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated in the design and implementation of the Strategic Note.
- Identify and validate lessons learned, good practices and examples of innovation that support gender equality and human rights.
- Provide insights into the extent to which the UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office realized synergies between its three mandates (normative, coordination and operations).
- Provide actionable recommendations with respect to the development of the next UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office Strategic Note.

The evaluation scope includes all programmes undertaken by the Country Office during the current Strategic Note period 2021–2025, including all pillars of UN Women’s integrated mandate (operational, normative and UN coordination) and its organizational efficiency and effectiveness framework. Programme work was considered in relation to the UN Women Strategic Plan impact areas (gender-Responsive Governance, Women’s Economic Empowerment, Ending Violence Against Women, Women, Peace and Security). The geographical scope of the evaluation included the entire country. The majority of interviews involved stakeholders based in the capital, Sarajevo, and Banja Luka as the administrative centre of Republika Srpska. Field missions were undertaken to Tuzla and Bijeljina to meet the civil society organizations (CSOs) in the field.

The primary intended users of this evaluation are UN Women management and Country Office personnel, and their local partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The evaluation also intends to serve as an information source for the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women headquarters, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), the donor community and other development partners in the country.

1.2 Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation applied a theory-based approach, assessing how, under what circumstances and to what extent UN Women contributed to the identified results and how its interventions interplay with other processes in the country. It used contribution analysis to assess the contribution made towards policy and legislative reforms, effective coordination with partners and improvement in the lives of women and girls. The evaluation applied the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) criteria to assess UN Women’s operational, normative and coordination work, covering relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. A specific criterion on human rights and gender equality examined the alignment of UN Women’s work with international commitments and assessed how interventions addressed the “leave no one behind principle”, with additional reflection on disability inclusion, social norms and discriminatory practices.

The evaluation was guided by six key evaluation questions (see Table 1, a detailed evaluation matrix is available as Annex 4).

TABLE 1: Evaluation criteria and questions

RELEVANCE

Key question 1: To what extent does the Country Office’s Strategic Note (including its thematic focus and strategy for implementation) respond to needs, policies and country priorities for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women considering international commitments, national priorities and contextual developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

COHERENCE

Key question 2: To what extent does Strategic Note implementation align with UN Women corporate and regional institutional frameworks and commitments, and with key interventions implemented by other actors and partners in the country to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women?

EFFECTIVENESS

Key question 3: To what extent has UN Women contributed to the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina during implementation of the Country Office’s current Strategic Note?

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

Key question 4: Has the Country Office’s portfolio been designed and implemented according to gender transformative and human rights-based approaches, considering leave no one behind and disability perspectives, as well as environmental sustainability? (presented as part of the findings on effectiveness)

EFFICIENCY

Key question 5: Does the Country Office have appropriate governance, capacity and capability to ensure good use of resources (personnel, funding and assets) to deliver results?

SUSTAINABILITY

Key question 6: To what extent did the Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office ensure the sustainability of the Strategic Note results by considering both key stakeholders and its the internal organizational capacities?

Evaluation methodology combined quantitative and qualitative research and case studies. Multiple methods of data collection and analysis were carried out using both primary and secondary data to triangulate evidence.

A total of 172 stakeholders were consulted. Figure 2 shows the distribution of stakeholder groups, presented both as percentages and as absolute numbers.

The evaluation process was led by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service and its Regional Evaluation Specialist for Europe and Central Asia. The evaluation team included two independent external evaluation consultants. An external Evaluation Reference Group was established, involving government partners, CSOs, UN partners and donors. The UN Women Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services leadership assured the quality of the report.

FIGURE 1. Evaluation methodology

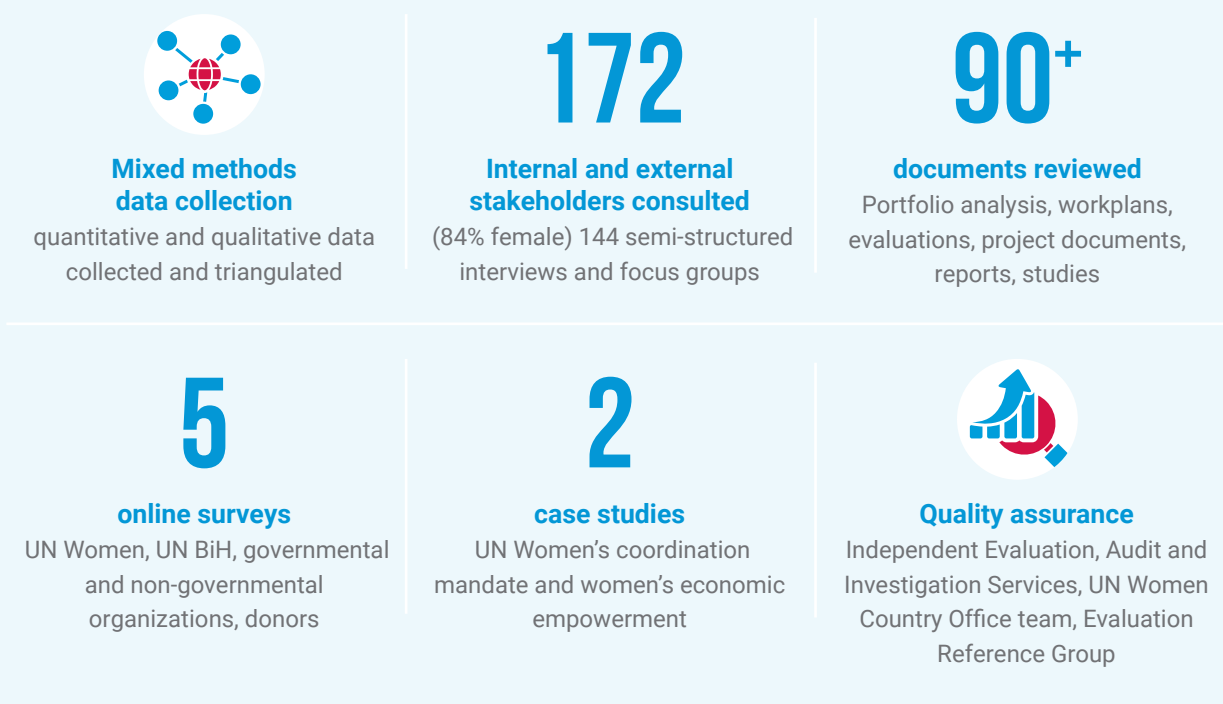
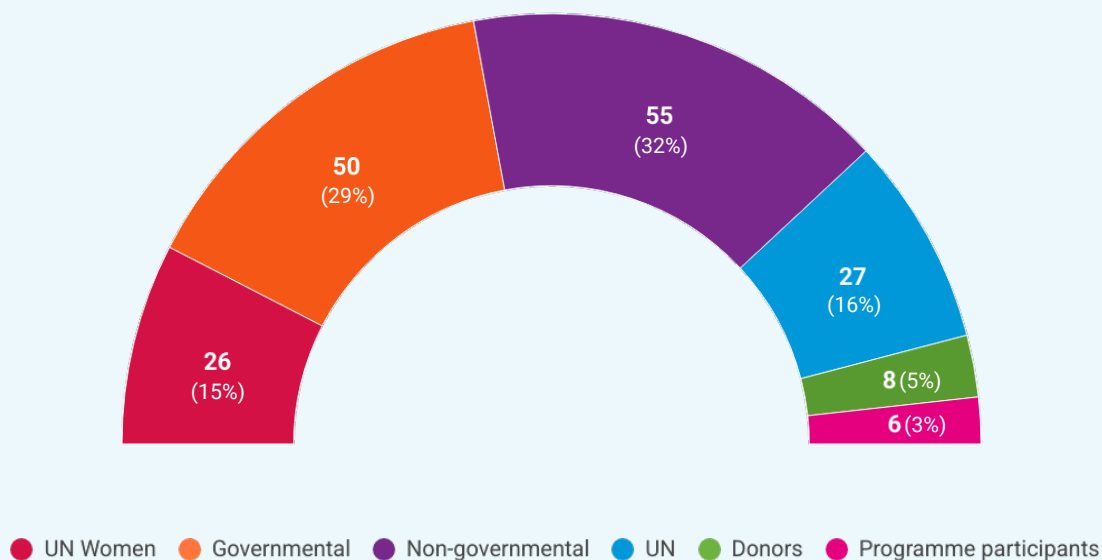


FIGURE 2 Distribution of stakeholder groups Distribution of stakeholder groups as absolute numbers (and per cent)



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team

1.3 Ethics, gender equality and no one left behind

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the UN Women Evaluation Policy, UN Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines and the Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN system. All members of the evaluation team signed and submitted an Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form indicating their individual commitment to these standards.

The evaluation was based on gender and human rights principles, as defined in the UN Women Evaluation Policy, and adhered to UN system evaluation norms and standards.

Participation in the evaluation was voluntary and, before collecting any data, the evaluation team explained the purpose and intention of the evaluation and obtained explicit oral consent.

Focus groups, meetings and interview facilitators set a tone of openness and rapport. The conduct of focus groups and round tables aimed to share value through personal validation and encouragement to explore new ideas.

The data provided to the evaluation team remained the property of the person who provided it. All evaluation participants were provided with contact details so that they could request the removal of their data from the evaluation at any time. While in safekeeping, all data were held in accordance with the UN Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles, on secure, password-protected servers and computers that were only accessible to the evaluation team. Reflections in the report were anonymized and personal data were not disclosed.

1.4 Evaluation constraints and limitations

The risks identified in the evaluations' inception phase did not pose major challenges during the evaluation. However, the evaluation team did not reach larger numbers of women and girls programme participants beyond CSOs. The response from female politicians and business women was limited, while the perspectives of survivors of violence were planned to be captured anyway through service providing CSOs participating in the evaluation.



Photo: ©UN Women BiH/Denis Kapetanović
Advanced training on gender-responsive budgeting- part of the regional programme "Transformative Financing for Gender Equality," implemented by UN Women BiH with support from the Embassy of Sweden in Sarajevo.

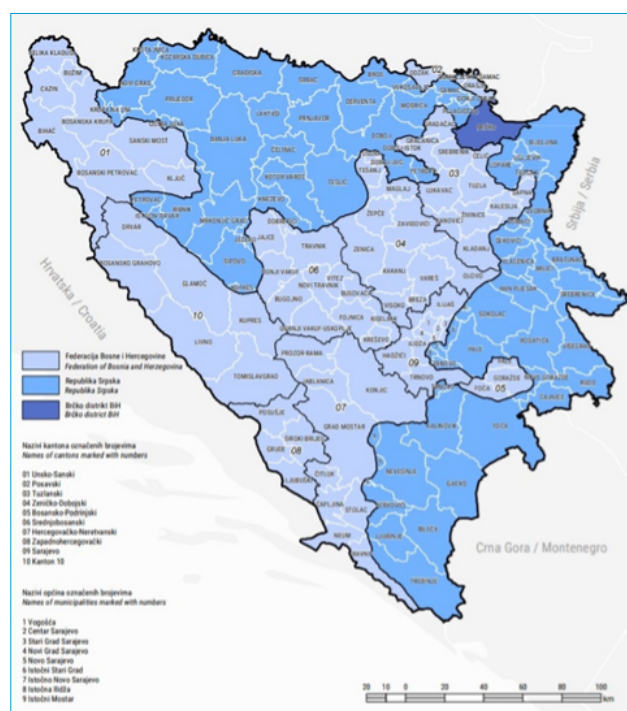
2. EVALUATION CONTEXT

2.1 Bosnia and Herzegovina country context

According to the last census, in 2013, Bosnia and Herzegovina was home to 3,531,159 inhabitants, of which 50.9 per cent were female and 49.1 per cent male.¹ The population is aging and declining due to high emigration and a low birth rate. Currently the number of people living in the country is estimated to be between 3,210,847² and 3,422,000.³ The population is culturally and ethnically diverse, with three major ethnic groups, Bosniaks (50.1 per cent), Serbs (30.8 per cent) and Croats (15.4 per cent) and the remaining percentage of other citizens.⁴

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a highly decentralized country comprising two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with 10 cantons, and Republika Srpska and Brčko District, each with significant autonomy. Governance is complex, with multiple administrative levels, including 14 governments, over 180 ministries and 700+ parliamentarians, requiring extensive coordination to initiate reforms.⁵ One-hundred and forty-two local self-government units manage local development.

The legacy of war continues to affect decision-making, societal dynamics and reconciliation efforts, with the Office of the High Representative still overseeing civil implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.⁶



Economically, the country has experienced slow growth, but remains consumption-driven, with a strong public sector and economic performance lagging behind other Western Balkans countries.⁷ Inequality and poverty remain significant challenges, with 17 per cent of the population living below the national poverty line.⁸

¹ Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2016): [Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini](#)

² World Bank (2023): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=BA>

³ Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2024), [Demografija 2023](#)

⁴ Agencija za statistiku Bosna i Hercegovina (2019): Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini Etnička/ nacionalna pripadnost i vjeroispovijest i maternji jezik

⁵ United Nations Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022) Common Country Analysis Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022, p.11

⁶ [Overview of decisions made by the High Representative in BiH](#)

⁷ OECD (2021) [Bosnia and Herzegovina profile | Competitiveness in South East Europe 2021: A Policy Outlook | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#) and OECD (2024): [Western Balkans Competitiveness Outlook 2024: Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

⁸ OECD (2021): <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/8e6d1ccd-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/8e6d1ccd-en#>.

TABLE 2: Bosnia and Herzegovina factsheet**POPULATION**

Population total (population census 2013) ⁹	3,531,159
Population growth 2020 per 1,000 inhabitants ¹⁰	-5.0
Life expectancy at birth ¹¹	T: 78 M: 75 W: 80

**GOVERNANCE**

Global Democracy Index 2023 ¹²	Score: 5, Rank: 95/167, Type: 'Hybrid regime'
Global Freedom Index 2023 ¹³	Score: 51/100, Political Rights 17/40, Civil Liberties 34/60, Type: 'partly free'
Corruption Perception Index 2023 ¹⁴	Score: 35/100, Rank: 108/180, Score change since 2020: 0

**ECONOMY**

GDP per capita 2023 (current US\$) ¹⁵	8,4261.1
GDP growth rate 2023 ¹⁶	2.4%
Employment rate, population 15-64, 2024 ¹⁷	T: 44.7% M: 55% W: 35%
Poverty rate 2015 ¹⁸	16.9%

**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Human Development Index Value, 2022 ¹⁹	0.779
Human Development Index Rank, 2022	80/193
Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index, 2022 ²⁰	0.677

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on Bosnia and Herzegovina official statistics and global development indexes

⁹ Agency for Statistics Bosnia and Herzegovina, <https://bhas.gov.ba/Calendar/Category/14>

¹⁰ Agency for Statistics Bosnia and Herzegovina, [Demography 2020](https://bhas.gov.ba/Calendar/Category/14), p: 29

¹¹ World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.FE.IN?locations=BA>

¹² Economist Intelligence Unit (2024): Countries classified in hybrid regime are characteristic for irregularities in elections that prevent them from being free and fair; strong pressure on opposition parties and candidates; weaknesses in political culture, functioning of government and political participation; widespread corruption; weak civil society and pressure on the media and judiciary. See 2023 report at: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu>

¹³ 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberty indicators are observed; higher the score, higher the freedoms. Freedom House (2022): [Freedom in the World 2022 – Bosnia and Herzegovina](https://freedomhouse.org/freedom-in-the-world-2022)

¹⁴ The Corruption Perceptions Index is a widely used global corruption ranking by Transparency International. It measures how corrupt each country's public sector is perceived to be, according to experts and businesspeople (from 0 – highly corrupt to 100 – clean). For more see: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/bih>

¹⁵ World Bank, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=BA&year_high_desc=false

¹⁶ World Bank, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?locations=BA&year_high_desc=false

¹⁷ ILO (2024): [ILO in Bosnia and Herzegovina](https://www.ilo.org/publications/ilo-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina)

¹⁸ Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2018).

¹⁹ Human Development Index is a measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. More at: [UNDP Human Development Report 2023-2024](https://hdr.undp.org/en/data/stories/bosnia-and-herzegovina).

²⁰ UNDP (2024): [Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index \(IHDI\)](https://hdr.undp.org/en/data/stories/bosnia-and-herzegovina)

In 2003, Bosnia and Herzegovina was identified as a potential European Union (EU) candidate and has since made slow progress in the reforms required for integration. After applying for membership in 2016, the European Commission outlined 14 key reform priorities in 2019,²¹ focusing on democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and public administration.²² Bosnia and Herzegovina was granted candidate status in December 2022²³ and accession negotiations were opened in 2024.²⁴ While some progress has been noted in the judiciary, security and migration management, in 2024, the country failed to agree on further reforms which led to the loss of EUR 70 million EU funding from the new EU Growth Plan²⁵ for the Western Balkans.

In the period observed by this evaluation, Bosnia and Herzegovina also faced economic and social challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁶ Being on the Western Balkan migration route, the country also recorded over 34,000 undocumented arrivals in 2023.²⁷

2.2 Gender equality and human rights

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a solid legal framework for human rights and gender equality, with protections enshrined in its constitutions and laws across administrative levels. The country ratified 30 international human rights conventions, including Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and regularly reports on their implementation²⁸ with CSOs actively monitoring progress. Key legislation includes the Law on Gender Equality (2003, amended 2009)²⁹ and the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (2009, amended 2016),³⁰ ensuring legal protection against discrimination. Gender equality and women's empowerment work is guided by the Gender Action Plan (2023–2027), strategies for

implementation of international commitments and the Action Plan for Advancement of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of LGBTQI+ Persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2021–2024).

Institutional mechanisms for gender equality in the executive institutions, including the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and gender centres at the entity-level, oversee and report on implementation of gender equality laws and policies; support integration of equality principles into legislation; and handle complaints. Coordination with other institutions is facilitated through gender focal points in line ministries. In legislative institutions, gender equality commissions review draft laws and policies, provide recommendations and collaborate with stakeholders. At the municipal level, in most local governments, gender equality commissions operate within local councils or mayors' offices.

As reported by the gender mechanisms,³¹ in recent years achievements have been made in operationalization of the policy framework in the areas of political life, design of programmes for economic empowerment of women, strengthening support services for survivors of violence and institutional capacity development. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain in implementation of laws and policies, cultural attitudes and accessibility of resources, which continue to hinder progress in achieving full gender equality. Implementation is inconsistent: the Constitution itself lacks gender-specific provisions, while the extent to which provisions of the Law on Gender Equality are extended to specific sectoral legislation and policies varies.³²

Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina remain under-represented in politics and face significant barriers to political participation, despite recent progress, such as the election of the first female Presidency member and Chair of the Council of Ministers.³³

²¹ European Commission (2019): [Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union](#)

²² EC (2024): [Council conclusions on the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for membership of the EU](#) and [EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina relations](#) (Retrieved online on 18/03/2024).

²³ EC: [Enlargement - Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (Retrieved online on 18/03/2024).

²⁴ European Commission (2023): [Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023 Report](#)

²⁵ European Commission (2024): [News Article – Growth Plan for the Western Balkans](#)

²⁶ OECD (2021): [Multi-dimensional Review of the Western Balkans](#)

²⁷ IOM (2025): [Migrant Mobility Situation Report 01/01-31/12/2024](#)

²⁸ Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina: [Okvirni program izvještavanja o provođenju međunarodnih ugovora za period 2020-2025](#)

²⁹ Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina 16/03 and 102/09

³⁰ Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina 59/09 and 66/16

³¹ Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2023): [Završni izvještaj o provođenju Gender akcionog plana BiH 2018-2022](#)

³² UN Women (2021), [Country Gender Equality Profile of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

³³ Ibid.

Following the 2022 general elections, women's representation ranged from 23 per cent in the Parliamentary Assembly to 25.5 per cent in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliament. In the 2024 local elections, women won eight mayoral positions and 22.7 per cent of local councillors' seats.³⁴

Women also face persistent employment discrimination, including unequal hiring, a 9 per cent gender pay gap and limited economic opportunities, especially in rural areas. Violence against women is widespread, with 48 per cent of women experiencing abuse; low reporting rates due to distrust in institutions; and high rates of violence against women in politics (60 per cent).

Women with disabilities, conflict-related sexual violence survivors, women in rural areas and Roma women³⁵ struggle to access services and resources and fully enjoy their rights. The COVID-19 pandemic further deepened gender inequalities, with policies largely failing to address the increased burden on women in both professional and domestic roles.

The Gender Equality Barometer of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2024)³⁶ acknowledged progress over the past 20 years but highlighted ongoing challenges, particularly in achieving de facto gender equality. While attitudes towards the care economy and gender-based violence have improved, persistent stereotypes, discriminatory practices and gender-based role divisions remain. Significant legislative progress was made in aligning criminal laws and protections against domestic violence with international standards,³⁷ but CEDAW committee and Group of Experts on Action Against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence stress the need for stronger institutional resources, intersectoral cooperation,

better data collection and financial sustainability for women's specialized services and the establishment of rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres.³⁸

Concerning trends in the rise in femicide emerged, with 12 women killed in 2024 alone. A pushback against gender equality is also evident, including a withdrawal of the draft law on protection from family violence due to political pressure,³⁹ while the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has yet to introduce similar legal reforms. The LGBTQI rights situation has deteriorated in Republika Srpska, with increased violence and anti-gender mobilization, while progress in ensuring key rights in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina remains stagnant.⁴⁰ A positive step was taken in Brčko District, where the Criminal Code now criminalizes incitement of hatred based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

2.3 UN in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina is represented by 13 resident and 5 non-resident UN entities,⁴¹ working together to deliver as One UN under the 2021–2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) through programming and coordination. The UNCT is the main mechanism for inter-agency coordination, coherence and decision-making. It is led by the Resident Coordinator and comprises representatives of the UN Sustainable Development Group, which are signatories to the UNSDCF. In implementation of the UNSDCF, UNCT coordinates closely with entities that are not UNSDCF signatories, including the Bretton Woods institutions, OCHA, UNDSS, UNIC and UN Peace and Political entities.

³⁴ Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina, www.izbori.ba and Agency for Gender Equality of BiH

³⁵ Association "Bolja budućnost" Tuzla (2023): [Report on State of rights and Position of Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

³⁶ Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and UNDP (2024), [Gender Equality Barometer of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), based on a survey of 1,800 women and men.

³⁷ UN Bosnia and Herzegovina (2023): [Voluntary Review: Implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals in BiH](#)

³⁸ Council of Europe (2022): [Recommendation on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence by Bosnia and Herzegovina IC-CP/Inf\(2022\)7](#)

³⁹ <https://hcnl.org/nasilje-nad-zenama-i-djecom-je-sastavni-dio-tradicionalne-porodice/>

⁴⁰ Sarajevo Open Centre (2024): [Pink Report Annual Report on the State of Human Rights of LGBTI People in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

⁴¹ United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2024): [Annual Results Report 2023](#).

3. PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

UN Women has been present in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2008, first as a project office and later strengthened to a Country Office with a resident country representative in 2014. Its main programming framework is the Strategic Note, aligned with the country's UNSDCF. The current Strategic Note covers the period 2021–2025, designed in support of international commitments and national strategies and the gender equality and women's empowerment efforts led by the governments and CSOs. It is grounded in the standards, principles and obligations of CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Concluding Observations of the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security", CEDAW Concluding Observations on the combined 4th and 5th periodic reports and the Istanbul Convention.

Based on national development priorities and its comparative advantage, the Country Office implements a range of development interventions through synergy of five key approaches: technical assistance, advocacy, knowledge generation and management, coordination and programming.

3.1 The UN Women Strategic Note 2021–2025

The Strategic Note was developed taking into account programmatic, coordination and organizational lessons learned and recommendations stemming from the evaluation of the UN Development Assistance Framework 2015–2020, the previous UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Portfolio Evaluation, and the evaluation of eliminating violence against women (EVAW) and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) programmes implemented in the years preceding design of the current Strategic Note.

These can be summarized as follows:

- Stronger integration of normative approaches is essential for impact.
- Partnerships with governments at all levels and with institutional gender mechanisms, and coherence with priorities increase effectiveness.
- A strategic approach to vulnerable communities is key for inclusion.
- Building of local capacities and ownership is essential for long-term sustainability.
- Gender disaggregated data are crucial for responsive programming.
- Systematic application of the new United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality (UN SWAP) Gender Scorecard can be used effectively to improve the UNCT's focus on gender equality.
- A coordinated UN approach adds value and scale-up of results.
- Strategic Note funding adds flexibility and stability for the Country Office.

Figure 3 details the Strategic Note portfolio along with UN Women's three-fold mandate.

Based on the contextual analysis, discussions with personnel and the original theory of change, the evaluation team reconstructed the theory of change (see Figure 4) to be used in the evaluation. The theory of change integrates diverse interventions from convening and coordination to policy work, capacity development and support to national stakeholders in implementation of norms and standards in selected areas.

The UN Women Strategic Note 2021–2025 focuses on the following four main development results impact areas:

IMPACT 1: WOMEN LEAD, PARTICIPATE IN AND BENEFIT EQUALLY FROM GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS.

The focus is on strengthening government capacities for gender-responsive planning and budgeting; gender mainstreaming in EU integration reforms; and support to women's political participation. Key partners are institutional gender mechanisms, ministries of finance and selected line ministries at all levels, municipalities, institutions coordinating and managing EU-related reforms, parliamentarians and the media.

IMPACT 2: WOMEN HAVE INCOME SECURITY, DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC AUTONOMY.

The Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio focuses on enhancing policies, programmes, and funding to secure income, decent work and economic autonomy for women, particularly those that are vulnerable. Through collaboration with government, CSOs, policymakers, chambers of commerce, businesses and their associations, UN Women supports women-owned businesses, rural women's socioeconomic advancement and recognition of the care economy.

IMPACT 3: ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS LIVE A LIFE FREE FROM ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE.

UN Women plays a central role in addressing violence against women by enhancing legislation, protection and prevention efforts in line with CEDAW and Istanbul Convention standards. These actions are implemented in partnership with the governments, CSOs and media through support to policy development, capacity-building and cross-sector collaboration.

IMPACT 4: WOMEN LEAD THE WAY TOWARDS PEACE AND SECURITY

The Peacebuilding Fund enabled revival of the women, peace and security (WPS) portfolio in 2023 with a joint UN programme to strengthen the capacities of institutions and CSOs in implementing the agenda at local level, addressing key security challenges that affect women in the country.

The Strategic Note was designed in line with UN Women's triple mandate, including normative work (support to implementation of key international and national normative standards), coordination (promoting coherence and the accountability of the UN system in Bosnia and Herzegovina and other development stakeholders on gender equality and the empowerment of women) and operational work (implementing country programmes across four key impact areas). While support to vulnerable groups is explicitly integrated in ERAW programmes, it is less visible in the results framework of other three areas.



Photo: © UN Women BiH/Armin Durgut
Almira Prnjavorac from the Municipality of Tešanj highlights how the project "Transformative Financing for Gender Equality in the Western Balkans, introduced a more inclusive approach to budgeting through program analysis and staff training.

FIGURE 3. Strategic Note 2021–2025 by UN Women's three-fold mandate

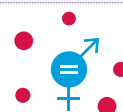
NORMATIVE



Contributed to the advancement of key normative instruments below, through mobilizing relevant partners, providing technical and financial support, and advocacy:

- Development of the framework monitoring system for the follow up on the implementation of key international and national normative standards and support to regular review and consultations between the government and CSOs, including UPR, CEDAW, Istanbul Convention, Beijing +30, CSW subregional consultations, Gender Action Plan for BiH
- Capacity building of the gender institutional mechanisms, line ministries and other relevant institutional actors for monitoring and implementing of international and national normative standards and coordination of development activities
- Capacity building of wide network of CSOs for monitoring of international and national normative standards, advocacy with the government and strategic engagement
- Localization of the Generation Equality Campaign and Action Coalitions for the gender equality and empowerment of women

COORDINATION*



Lead or contributed to the performance of key UN and external coordination groups

Member of the UN Country Team (UNCT)

- Co-chairing of UNCT Gender Theme Group (GTG)
- Chair of UNSDCF Result Group 1 and member of Groups 2, 3 and 4
- Member of Programme Management Team
- Member of Operations Management Team
- Member of UN Communications Group
- Member of SDG/M&E Group
- Member of Hate Speech Working Group
- Member of Youth Advisory Panel
- Member of PSEA Focal Point Group
- Member of Human Rights Task Force
- Co-chairing of International Working Group on Gender Equality (IWGE)
- Consultations with women's CSOs and human rights defenders
- Quarterly coordination with Gender mechanisms (BiH Agency for Gender Equality, RS and FBiH Gender Centers)
- SDG transition/enablers groups related to digital transformation, food security, human capital, social protection, energy and green transition (positioning for SDG funded programs)
- Participation in EU-UN strategic dialogue with 4 priority areas: green transition, human capital (with subsets of education, health, social protection), digital and human rights and gender equality

OPERATIONAL



COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

Impact area 1 – Gender responsive governance

- Towards the SDG Financing Ecosystem in BiH 2020-2024 (Sweden/UNDP)
- Gender Equality Facility 2020-2024 (EU/Sweden)
- Women Lead Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023-2024 (Sweden through HQ, Women in politics fund)
- Transformative Financing for Gender Equality Towards More Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans 2020-2024 (Sweden, extended until 2025)

Impact area 2 – Women's Economic Empowerment

- Women driving resilience in agriculture and rural areas 2022-2025 (Sweden)
- Translating the SDG Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina into sustainable and inclusive growth, Care economy 2022-2025 (UK)
- Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs - Rebuilding Better (August 2021- March 2022) (UK)
- IT Girls (Sweden, UNICEF)

Impact area 3: Women and girls live lives free from violence

- Ending violence against women and girls (Sweden)
- Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds, phase II, 1 February 2020 31 July 2023, UN Women (Regional and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye) and UNDP (Montenegro) (EU)
- Safe cities and safe public spaces (Sweden, SN investment)

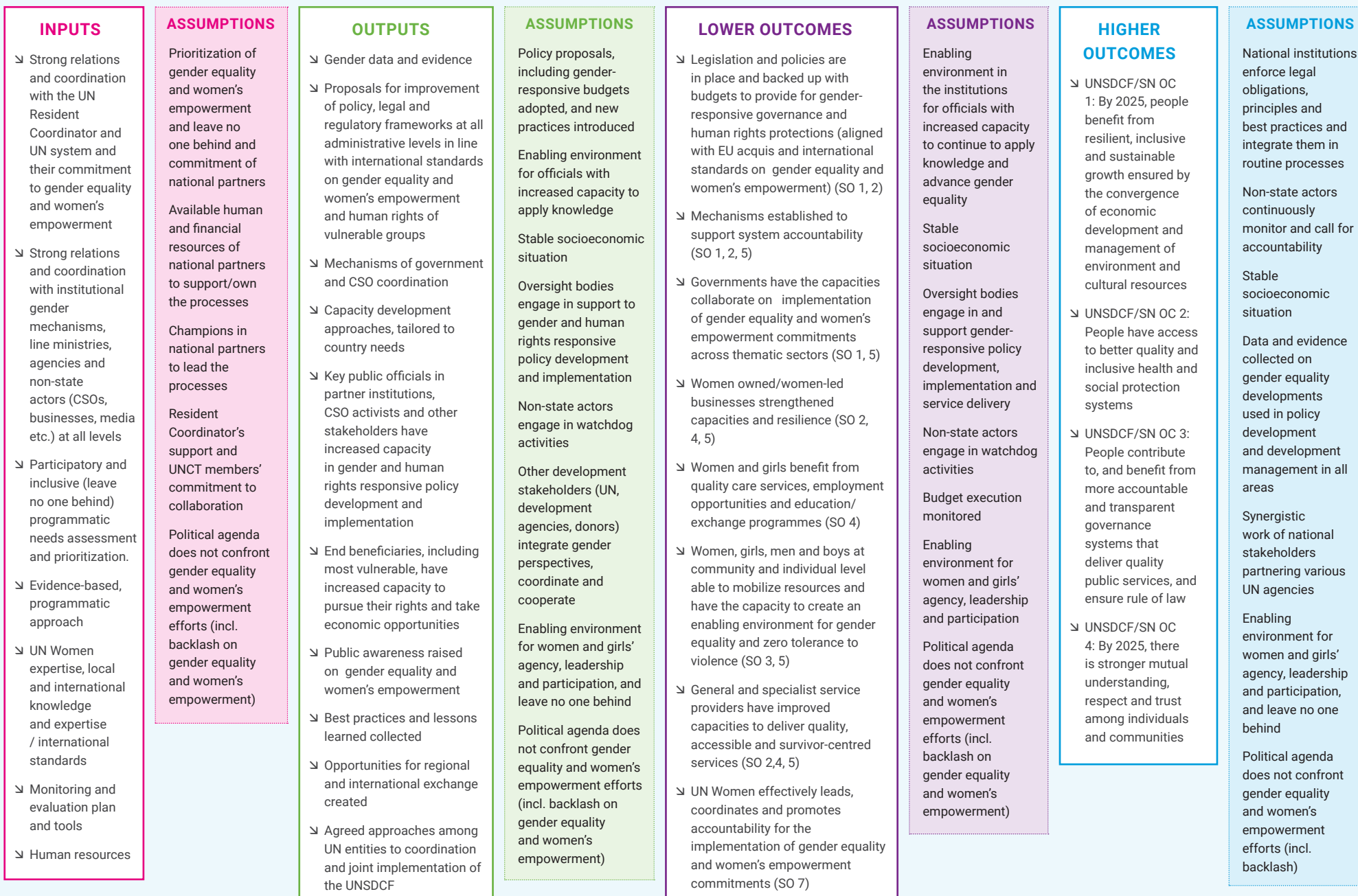
Impact area 4: Women, peace and security

- Women lead the way towards peace and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023-2026 (PBF/IOM, UNFPA)

* full time coordination position is financed by non-core sources (Sida support to Strategic Note)

FIGURE 4: Reconstructed theory of change UN Women Country Office

IMPACT: Discriminatory social norms changed, structural inequalities reduced and women and girls, including those most vulnerable, move towards full inclusion, prosperity, substantive equality and full exercise of their human rights



IF UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office:

- Brings expertise and best practices on international standards, gender equality and the empowerment of women and vulnerable groups;
- Builds the capacities of governments at all administrative levels in the country to integrate gender equality and human rights into policy development and management across thematic impact areas, and provides direct support to selected initiatives;
- Strengthens institutional oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability;
- Supports CSOs and grassroots organizations in advocating for gender equality and women's rights, monitoring policy implementation and providing quality, specialized services for women;
- Helps women access decent employment, entrepreneurial opportunities and fair working conditions;
- Leverages its comparative advantage and added value (expertise and practice on gender equality and women's empowerment) and leads and coordinates gender mainstreaming efforts across all UN organizations in the country;
- Collaborates with donors and development partners to prioritize gender equality and work in synergy; and
- Raises awareness and builds the capacities of non-state actors, such as businesses, the media, academia and community leaders, to promote positive narratives and challenge discriminatory gender norms;

THEN

- **People will benefit equally from resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth, with improved access to high-quality, inclusive health and social protection systems. They will be empowered to contribute to and benefit from accountable, transparent governance systems that provide quality public services and ensure the rule of law; and**
- **Discriminatory social norms and tolerance for gender-based violence will decrease.**

BECAUSE

- Governments will have the knowledge, skills and accountability to adopt and enforce policies that promote equality and protect and empower women and vulnerable groups.
- Oversight institutions and CSOs will push for improvements in policies and practices, ensuring they address the needs of women and vulnerable groups while holding governments accountable.
- Quality care services will be ensured, women and girls will have better access to employment opportunities, while women-led businesses will be strengthened and more resilient.
- An enabling environment will be created for all stakeholders to foster national ownership and the application of the knowledge and skills acquired.
- UN organizations will mainstream gender equality across all development programmes under the UNSDCF.
- Shifts in community and stakeholders' attitudes towards gender roles and women's rights will lead to reduced tolerance for gender-based discrimination and violence.

3.2 Human resources

The Country Office increased its team from 18 personnel at the end of the previous Strategic Note 2015–2020,⁴² to 23 in September 2024.⁴³ These include Country Representative, Programme Specialist, Coordination Associate and Assistant, Programme Analyst, WPS Programme Specialist, Field Coordinator, Outreach Officer and Assistant, EVAW Coordinator, Project Associate and Assistant, Women's Economic Empowerment Programme Coordinator, Coordinator and Assistant, Gender Equality Facility Project Associate, Operations Manager, Finance Associate, Administrative Assistant, Operations Associate and Assistant, Communications Associate and Assistant. (See detailed organization chart in Annex 5)

Six personnel hold fixed-term contracts, 14 hold service contracts, two are UN volunteers and there is one Junior Project Officer. At the time of the evaluation, of the five middle management programmatic positions only two are filled (WPS and Women's Economic Empowerment Programme specialists).

3.3 Financial analysis

Over the last two Strategic Notes, the Country Office gradually increased the budget (see Figures 7 and 8). The total budget for the current Strategic Note period 2021–2024 amounts to US\$ 11.75 million, with additional funding planned for 2025. About 30 per cent of the budget is UN Women institutional, core, regular and extrabudgetary funds.

During the period under evaluation, the Country Office agreed softly earmarked Strategic Note funding with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), based on jointly agreed priorities. This was used to support horizontal positions of coordination and communication associates, bringing stability to these positions. The funding was also used in a catalytic manner to attract support from other donors, such as the EU. In 2024, Sida discontinued this support to the Country Office and decided to invest in joint UN programming. The Joint Gender Equality Accelerator, a four-year US\$ 32 million programme, was prepared with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which aimed to attract funding from multiple development partners. Currently, 50 per cent of the targeted funding is confirmed. According to the Country Office, this acknowledges the validity of joint UN efforts for a transformative programme and increases opportunities to strengthen "delivery as one" and better position UN Women within the UNCT.

Along with these positive developments, risks of funding gaps for horizontal functions and thematic areas are closely monitored. Two major regional programmes (one on EVAW and another on GRB) implemented over the Strategic Note period recently ended.

In general, the Country Office is harnessing donors' increased demand for joint UN approaches and programming and for combining coordination and operational comparative advantages with partner UN agencies.



Photo: ©UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office: The forum "From Commitment to Implementation - Advancing Gender Equality through Gender-Responsive Budgeting in BiH", part of a regional programme implemented by UN Women with support from the Embassy of Sweden in Sarajevo.

⁴² UN Women Independent Evaluation Service, County Portfolio Evaluation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?EvaluationId=11498> and UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina organigram, August 2024

⁴³ UN Women Country Office data.

FIGURE 5. Donor contributions to the Country Office portfolio, 2021–2025

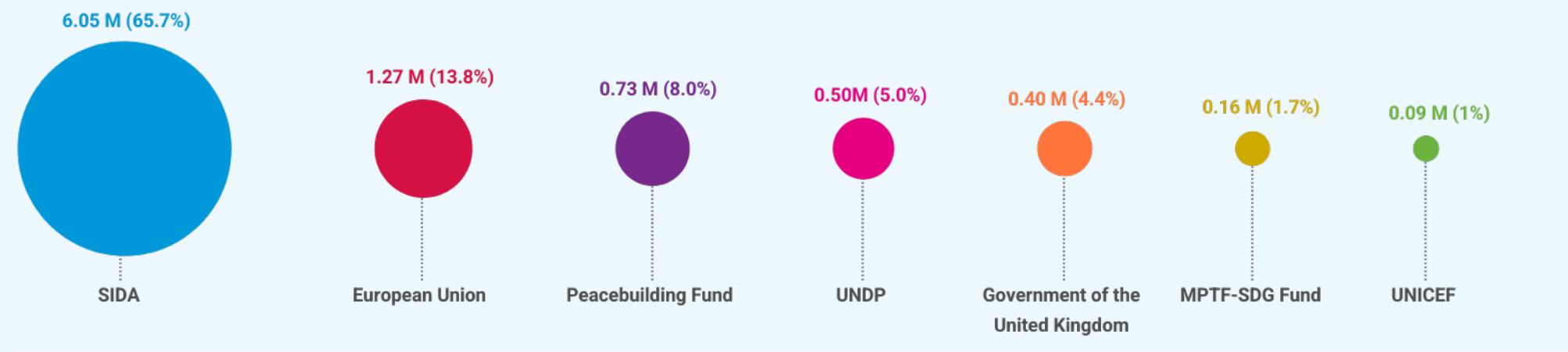
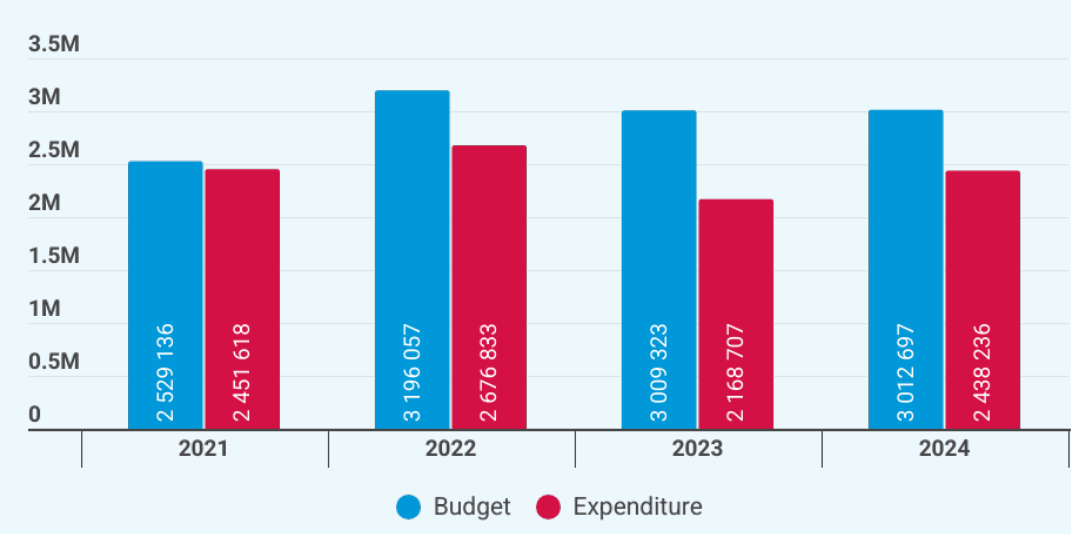
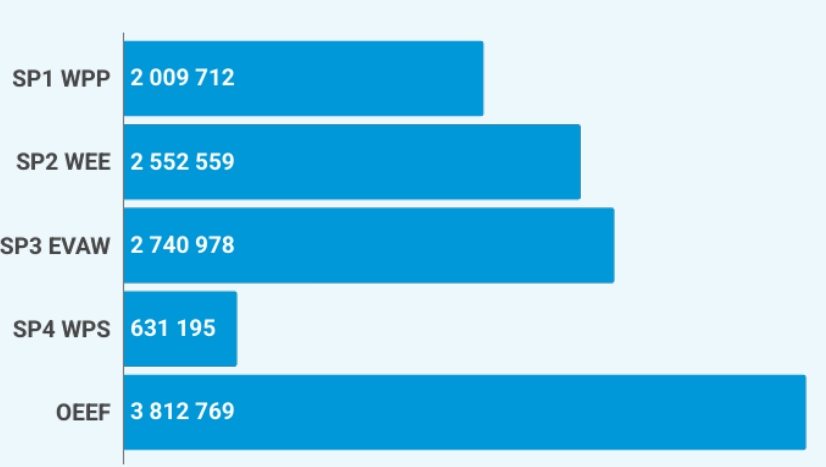


FIGURE 6. Budget and expenditure per year



FIGURES 7. Budget per impact area (in US\$)



Source: Quantum

3.4 Key stakeholders

Key stakeholders were mapped through the review of relevant documents and the inception workshop with the UN Women Country Office team. Through its three-fold mandate, UN Women cooperates with numerous stakeholders and contributes directly or indirectly to the stakeholders belonging to different institutions, organizations or social groups, including:

Governmental and public institutions, including institutional mechanisms for gender equality, line ministries at state and entity levels, parliamentary committees, directorates, agencies and audit institutions, etc. The most engaged were three gender equality mechanisms and three audit institutions at state and entity levels; and ministries responsible for security, justice, finance, employment social policies, education and health at state, entity and cantonal levels. These institutions include a large number of stakeholders due to the complexity of the country's multilayered administration, adding to the intensity of coordination during the Strategic Note cycle.

CSOs primarily include women's rights organizations, but also other human rights defenders, think tanks, business development organizations and other more humanitarian or service support providers, as well as some local grassroots citizens associations. The mapping exercise pointed to more than 30 CSOs that were directly involved in activities implemented by UN Women.

UN system, including the Resident Coordinator's Office, UNSDCF Result Groups, Gender Theme Group, Operations Management Team, Communication Group, SDG Monitoring and Evaluation Group, Youth Advisory Panel, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Focal Point Group, Human Rights Task Force, International Working Group on Gender Equality and individual agencies with whom UN Women cooperated through joint programming, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and IOM, and SDG transition/enablers working groups.

Donors and development partners, including bilateral donors, international and regional organizations, international financial institutions and security organizations.

Different participants groups such as women and girls from the general population, rural women, Roma women, young women and girls, women with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence and domestic violence, etc.

Other stakeholders, including media, influencers, private companies, international financial institutions, international organizations, international non-governmental organizations, etc.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 RELEVANCE

To what extent does the Country Office's Strategic Note respond to needs, policies and country priorities for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women considering international commitments, national priorities and contextual developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

FINDING 1

The UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Strategic Note 2021–2025 is highly relevant and aligned to international, national and UN priorities for gender equality in the country. It addresses critical areas that are essential for advancing gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, responding to the evolving needs and priorities of women and girls across the country. It also responded to the specific needs of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders by supporting capacity development to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through their respective mandates.

The Country Office's Strategic Note was designed in alignment with the UN Women Global Strategic Plan 2018–2021, while the Corporate Strategic Plan 2022–2025 was developed at the mid-term stage of the Strategic Note. The Country Office did not conduct a mid-term review of the Strategic Note and alignment to the new seven systemic outcomes in the corporate Strategic Plan was pursued during implementation of projects and in new programming.

At the outcome level, the Strategic Note uses UNSDCF 2021–2025 outcome statements, which do not include a specific gender outcome but gender equality and women's empowerment key priorities are mainstreamed across the different outcome areas. The Strategic Note was designed to support international commitments and national strategies, and efforts led by governments and CSOs.

The document is grounded in the standards, principles and obligations of CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Concluding Observations of the Commission on the Status of Women, UNSCR 1325 "Women, Peace and Security", CEDAW Concluding Observations on the combined 4th and 5th periodic reports and the Istanbul Convention. These frameworks call for the provision of sufficient financial, human and technical resources for effective implementation of the commitments and advancement of intersectoral cooperation for gender equality and the empowerment of women and the elimination of all forms of violence.

The Strategic Note is based on the country's national priorities for gender equality and the empowerment of women, although it was developed with a limited consultative process, due to COVID-19 constraints.

Despite this, sound contextual analysis was undertaken through research and use of lessons learned from implementation of previous programmes; programmatic evaluations; and the review of reports on the country's international human rights and gender equality commitments, and observations of the reviewing committees.

Building on its comparative advantages, UN Women integrated a range of development interventions in its approach, establishing synergies between policy work, capacity development for implementation, knowledge generation and management, and coordination.

TABLE 3: Alignment of Strategic Note 2021–2025 with UNSDCF 2021–2025 outcomes, Bosnia and Herzegovina Gender Action Plan and the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025

Strategic Note impact area	UNSDCF outcome area	Bosnia and Herzegovina Gender Action Plan 2018-22 & 2023-27	UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025 ⁴⁴
Impact 1: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems	Outcome 4: By 2025, people contribute to, and benefit from more accountable and transparent governance systems that deliver quality public services and ensure rule of law	Strategic goal 1: Development, implementation and monitoring of the programmes for advancement of gender equality in priority areas; 1.2: Public life and decision-making	Impact 1: Women fully and equally participate in leadership and decision-making and women and girls benefit from gender-responsive governance
Impact 2: Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy	Outcome 1: By 2025, people benefit from resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth ensured by the convergence of economic development and management of environment and cultural resources	Strategic goal 1; 1.3: Work, employment and access to economic resources; 1.4: Education, science, culture and sport; 1.6: Social protection	Impact 2: Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy
Impact 3: Women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence	Outcome 3: By 2025, people have access to better quality and inclusive health and social protection systems	Strategic goal 1; 1.1: Prevention and elimination of gender-based violence, including domestic violence and trafficking in human beings	Impact 3: All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence
Impact 4: Women lead the way towards peace and security	Outcome 5: By 2025, there is stronger mutual understanding, respect and trust among individuals and communities	Strategic goal 1; 1.7: Gender and security	Impact 4: Women and girls contribute to, and have influence in, building sustainable peace and resilience and benefit equally from the prevention of conflicts and disasters, and from humanitarian action

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on strategic documents review

⁴⁴ UN Women, Revised integrated results and resources framework of the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025 (revised 2024), https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/un_women_sp_irrf2022-2025_midterm_review_final.pdf

The majority of stakeholders participating in the evaluation interviews and survey agreed that UN Women's work in Bosnia and Herzegovina was relevant, and addressed the causes of gender inequality; was aligned to the most pressing needs of women and girls in the country; and had identified and engaged with the most marginalized and vulnerable women and girls (see Figure 8).

A large majority of interviewees and survey respondents from the government and civil society (88 per cent, 44 of 50) highlighted that UN Women's capacity development support was based on a sound assessment of needs and was relevant to their organization (86 per cent, 43 of 50). A large majority of respondents also agreed that

UN Women provides relevant international experience (77 per cent, 7 of 9 UN respondents; 92 per cent, 26 of 28 government respondents; and 87 per cent, 20 of 23 CSO respondents). One specific remark highlighted the need for stronger needs assessment and co-creation of a GRB capacity-development curriculum for supreme auditors; however, the public officials involved agreed that the training's responsiveness to the needs of participants had been improved at later stages of implementation. Eighty-nine per cent of UN respondents agreed that UN Women's capacity development support was relevant to their work (8 of 9).

FIGURE 8: Surveyed non-governmental stakeholders' satisfaction with the relevance of UN Women's work



FIGURE 9: Surveyed governmental stakeholders' satisfaction with the relevance of UN Women's work



Source: Evaluation survey

FINDING 2

UN Women programming in Bosnia and Herzegovina has proven its continued relevance, even during emerging challenges, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and the rise of femicide. The Country Office has remained responsive to urgent and evolving needs, ensuring its alignment with the evolving priorities and the diverse needs of women in the country.

The Country Office has demonstrated strong continuity in its engagement with key reform processes and capacity development initiatives, particularly in the areas of public finance, GRB and EVAW. Following completion of the last phase of the Gender Equality Facility and due to slow approval of next EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), support for integrating gender perspectives in EU reform processes has slowed down.

UN Women introduced an innovative programme on the care economy into its portfolio, which was widely recognized by stakeholders as highly relevant and timely. According to interviewed stakeholders, the overall portfolio maintained its relevance throughout the Strategic Note period.

However, some government and civil society partners reported a decline in communication and coordination with UN Women prior to the change of Country Representative, which reportedly resulted in their limited insight and influence on UN Women's plans. The reasons mentioned were reduced coordination with the institutions directly involved in the projects and closure of some projects, resulting in the ending of activities with partners and grant schemes for CSOs. The situation has reportedly improved, with increased engagement from UN Women leadership.

The Country Office demonstrated agility and was able to promptly respond to the impact of COVID-19, both in terms of mainstreaming gender in UN responses and immediate actions in the field. The Country Office participated in the joint UNCT COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment and Socio-Economic Response Plan in 2020 and 2021.

The Country Office coordinated with all eight safe houses during the pandemic, distributing care packages at a time when continuity of services for women and children survivors was at risk. Women in rural areas and women-owned businesses were provided with immediate short-term support to sustain their work.

In 2024, following catastrophic floods and landslides in the central part of the country, killing 27 people and affecting close to 3,700 people (53 per cent women), UN Women conducted a rapid gender assessment within

a week and was involved in UN-led Multi-Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment, informing the flood response plan. The Country Office provided professional equipment to women in the Mountain Rescue Service.

Together with institutional gender mechanisms and local CSOs, UN Women's communication on violence against women and femicide was intensified, following the sharp rise in femicide in 2024. However, the response to the backlash against gender equality, particularly in Republika Srpska, has not yet been articulated.

The Country Office continued to support women candidates in elections during the Strategic Note period by collaborating with the EU and institutional gender mechanisms. This included capacity-building training for women candidates ahead of the local elections and development of women politicians' networks, which will be further leveraged after the elections.

BOX 1: RESPONSIVENESS AND AGILITY OF THE COUNTRY OFFICE AS REPORTED BY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

UN entities: During the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women swiftly adjusted its Women in Elections project, shifting its focus to grassroots organizations and online platforms to ensure continued engagement. During and after COVID-19 pandemic, an increased focus was kept on violence against women, recognizing its pervasiveness, supporting essential services and advocating for the political will to address the issue. The Country Office also conducted a quick needs assessment following the floods in October 2024, which allowed for an immediate response to the emerging needs of women and girls.

Governmental partners: Support to GRB during COVID-19 helped ensure that crisis and response strategies took gender perspectives into account. UN Women also played a key role in integrating gender considerations into environmental policies, exemplified by the 2022 conference on gender equality in the context of environmental protection and climate change.

CSOs: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization quickly mobilized financial and organizational support for CSOs, ensuring safe houses remained operational and expanding awareness campaigns. Engagement in response to the rise of anti-gender movements has helped CSOs counter regressive policies.

FINDING 3

Although the Strategic Note was highly relevant, certain gaps in its design and theory of change were identified. The theory of change did not sufficiently demonstrate mechanisms of change and limits itself to the projects available at the time of its development. Leave no one behind, intersectionality and social norms aspects were included in the Strategic Note, but were not systematically integrated, either in its design or implementation.

While the Strategic Note and its theory of change were grounded in a thorough contextual analysis, articulation of the theory of change followed a projectized approach, limiting its scope to the programmatic interventions and partnerships existing at the time of its development. This narrow framing hindered its ability to serve as guiding, dynamic and forward-looking strategic framework.

While the EVAW theory of change and approach was the most comprehensive, comprising policy, capacity development of duty bearers and rights holders, women's specialized services and social norms, other thematic areas had shortcomings. For instance, the Women's Economic Empowerment theory of change focused primarily on entrepreneurship and agriculture, failing to capture the full spectrum of possible economic empowerment pathways. The Women's Political Participation theory of change, although broader in scope, in elaboration of partners, risks and opportunities, predominantly reflects the projects in place at the time, namely the regional GRB Programme and Gender Equality Facility Project. The WPS theory of change was not part of the initial Strategic Note theory of change at all, as there was no WPS project at the time and funding for a WPS programme only arrived in 2023.

A critical shortcoming across both the thematic and overarching theories of change is the absence of a clear articulation of how transformative change occurs. The theories of change fail to establish a systemic, multi-level framework that connects interventions to broader structural shifts. Additionally, while the principles of leave no one behind and the inclusion of vulnerable groups were acknowledged in the background analysis, they were not clearly embedded within the theories of change themselves. This weakens the Country Office's strategic ability to drive truly inclusive and equitable transformation across all portfolios.

In practice, the Country Office implemented a far more diverse set of programmes and engaged with a wider array of partners than envisaged in the theories of change. However, the lack of an ambitious and holistic vision prevented the Country Office from guiding and influencing greater synergies to ensure systemic, long-term impact.

The intention to influence social norms seems to have been only implicitly embedded within the EVAW theory of change, while absent in other thematic areas. This underscores the broader challenge relating to the absence of a cohesive, global corporate strategy on social norms change and how it works across all thematic areas of intervention.



Photo: © UN Women BiH/Armin Durgut.
In the Centar Sarajevo Municipality, Amra Hašimbegović-Vučković notes that the project "Transformative Financing for Gender Equality in the Western Balkans," helped systematize gender equality in budgeting, policies, and services for citizens.

4.2 COHERENCE AND COORDINATION:

To what extent does the Country Office align with UN Women corporate and regional institutional frameworks and commitments, and with key interventions implemented by other actors and partners in the country to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women?

FINDING 4

While at the management level there is clear recognition of both the importance of internal thematic coherence and in following a systematic approach to achieving it, the implementation process was inconsistent. Implementation of the Strategic Note was mainly projectized, with some identified synergies (GRB, EU integration, SDG financing). However, these synergies were not systematically integrated or consistently planned and were largely dependent on personnel commitments, which highlights a gap between strategic vision and operational execution.

The Strategic Note was developed under challenging circumstances and with limited consultation due to COVID-19, with gaps in the theory of change design which have impacted the Country Office's ability to implement a cohesive, cross-cutting approach. Misalignment with the UN Women Strategic Plan's corporate timeline further restricted opportunities to fully align with the new strategic approach of cross-thematic outcomes and to leverage synergies across thematic areas. However, some initiatives, such as GRB, gender mainstreaming in programming for EU reforms and SDG financing were recognized as connecting elements that brought coherence to UN Women's programming in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Economic empowerment and climate action were linked through projects that support women farmers with climate-resilient technologies, while addressing unpaid care responsibilities.

Although senior management recognized the importance of coherence and synergies in programming, personnel were often unaware of opportunities in other portfolios, leading to fragmented implementation. Coordination across different thematic areas relied more on individual initiatives rather than a structured, systemic approach. As reported by personnel, internal coordination meetings were focused on implementation updates rather than on strengthening synergies. Frequent personnel

turnover further weakened institutional memory, causing disruptions in cooperation and missed opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration.

Challenges in internal coherence lead to external partners having limited awareness of the full scope of UN Women's work. Many stakeholders perceived projects in isolation rather than as part of a comprehensive strategy to foster gender equality. While institutional gender mechanisms were relatively better informed and play a role in promoting coherence, other partners and consultants engaged in thematic areas had limited knowledge, which weakened efforts to strengthen inter-linkages between programmes.

The relationship between the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office and the Country Office in developing and implementing the Strategic Note was inconsistent. While technical support was provided in specific areas such as GRB and WPS, strategic guidance in planning and resource mobilization was lacking. The absence of clear, strategic leadership and coordination at the Regional Office level further contributed to gaps in achieving a unified vision across thematic areas and in pursuing vertical synergies with regional efforts.

FINDING 5

The Country Office has been a proactive and influential member of the UNCT, contributing to gender mainstreaming across UN initiatives enhancing gender mainstreaming capacities within the UN system; and advancing gender equality priorities through the UNSDCF. Despite challenges and learning-by-doing, joint programming was elevated to a new level during the co-creation of the recent UN Gender Equality Accelerator programme.

The UN Women Country Office plays a strong coordination role on gender equality and women's empowerment in the UN system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, being an active member of the UNCT and 12 UN coordination groups, including all UNSDCF results groups. The Country Office holds leading positions, chairing or co-chairing the Gender Theme Group and UNSDCF Result Group 1 (Sustainable, resilient and inclusive growth), focusing on keeping gender equality central to UN programming.

Among UNCT members, UN Women is recognized for its expertise in gender-responsive governance and provision of gender data; its coordination with government institutions and CSOs; and its contribution to shaping and gender mainstreaming within development and implementation of the UNSDCF and COVID-19 Socio Economic Response, conduct of the UN SWAP and development of the Gender Country Profile. UN Women also co-chairs the SDG transition/enabler group on food security and actively participates in groups on digital transformation, human capital, social protection, energy and green transition, positioning itself for SDG-funded programmes. The Country Office is also involved in the EU-UN strategic dialogue, shaping discussions around four key priority areas: green transition, human capital (education, health, social protection), digital transformation, and human rights and gender equality (with UN Women co-chairing the last group).

Despite these strengths, challenges persist in ensuring the consistent seniority of personnel present in the groups, and the structure and effectiveness of UN coordination meetings, which tend to focus more on information-sharing and reporting rather than strategic collaboration and action planning. More meaningful cooperation often occurs at the project level, driven by individual initiatives of personnel and their relationships rather than formal mechanisms. While joint programming has improved over time, competition for funding, communication gaps and siloed implementation remain obstacles to a fully integrated UN approach to gender equality.

UN Women has been proactive in joint programming, with four major joint programmes currently under implementation: Strengthening the Role of Youth in Promoting Mutual Understanding and Trust (with UNFPA and UNESCO, 2022–2024); Women Lead the Way Towards Peace and Security in BiH (with IOM and UNFPA, 2023–2026); Women Driving Resilience in Agriculture and Rural Areas (with FAO, 2022–2025); and Translating the SDG Framework into Sustainable and Inclusive Growth (with UNDP and UNICEF). During implementation of the Strategic Note, many other joint initiatives were implemented. Two large joint programmes are also currently in preparation – the Gender Equality Accelerator and Green Transition programmes – with funding support from Sida and the EU.

Joint programming has improved over time and has improved relations among UN entities. However, competition for funding, challenges in communication and coordination, and siloed implementation are still present. Interviewed UN agencies acknowledged UN Women's strong contribution to gender equality in programming but still see UN Women as having a specific niche within programmes, rather than mainstreaming gender across the implementation of non-gender focused initiatives. Donors of the two new joint programmes required stronger coordination in both planning and implementation. UN teams responded with strong engagement both at the leadership and operational level, with continuity of exchange and joint strategic thinking. All involved agencies agreed that coordination around the Gender Equality Accelerator programme had improved dynamics and that there are opportunities to maintain this momentum in the implementation phase through a holistic and cross-cutting systems-level approach for transformative change across development areas.

The Country Office assessed progress on UN-SWAP indicators on an annual basis, which maintains continuous attention on gender equality and the empowerment of women issues within the UN. In 2022, all 15 indicators were assessed, with seven making progress, mostly in planning for gender equality and coordination mechanisms.

Each following year, 2023 and 2024, five indicators were reassessed. In 2023, progress was achieved in indicator 1.3 (UNSDCF indicators measure changes on gender equality) where the UNCT now exceeds the requirement. Twenty of 30 work programmes and 35 of 66 outcome and output indicators measure change in gender equality and women's empowerment (53.03 per cent). Regarding indicator 2.1, the UNCT was still approaching minimum requirements as not all joint programmes were properly gender mainstreamed.

On a positive note, the UN Women Country Office developed a gender equality screening tool for joint programmes.

In 2024, progress was made on indicator 4.2 (organizational culture supporting gender equality) and the UNCT met the minimum requirement as 70 per cent of surveyed personnel positively noted the organizational environment for promotion of gender equality and indicator 4.3 (gender parity) where the first-ever System-Wide Strategy for Gender Parity was developed and the Business Operations Strategy includes parity measures. Progress was recorded on indicator 5.2 where a gender equality capacity development plan was prepared, training organized and an induction programme for new personnel developed. There was no change on allocations for gender equality tracking and, in 2023, the targets were not yet endorsed by the heads of agencies.

Following the UN-SWAP findings, UN Women facilitated development of a UN Action Plan for the UNCT to improve performance on gender equality and the empowerment of women for the period 2023–2026. The plan highlights the need for stronger integration of gender analysis and incorporation of gender-sensitive data across all sectors; increased resource allocation for gender equality and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation; stronger partnerships with local government and CSO stakeholders; and more gender-sensitive internal arrangements for personnel within the UN system.

UN Women takes part in several SDG transition/enablers groups related to digital transformation, food security, human capital, social protection, energy and green transition (positioning for SDG funded programmes), which based on the meeting minutes of these groups and key informant interviews focus on the exchange of information and providing updates.

The Country Office has also engaged in EU–UN strategic dialogue in four priority areas: green transition, human capital (with subsets of education, health, social protection), digital and human rights and gender equality, influencing the design of UN programmes. Groups on youth and social protection had some traction in designing the UN position paper on social protection and a plan for youth inclusion in UN programming.

TABLE 4: Overview of UN-SWAP results 2022–2024

2. Programming and monitoring and evaluation				
2.1 Joint programmes contribute to reducing gender inequalities		2022/ 23/24		
2.2 Communication and advocacy address areas of gender inequality				2024
2.3 UNSDCF monitoring and evaluation measures progress against planned gender equality results		2022		
3. Partnerships				
3.1 UNCT collaborates and engages with government on GEWE*				2022
3.2 UNCT collaborates and engages with women's/gender equality CSOs				2022
4. Leadership				
4.1 UNCT leadership is committed to championing gender equality				2022
4.2 Organizational culture fully supports promotion of GEWE*		2022/23	2024	
4.3 Gender parity in staffing is achieved	2022	2024		
5. Gender architecture and capacities				
5.1 Gender coordination mechanism is empowered to influence UNCT for GEWE*			2022	2024
5.2 UNCT has adequate capacities developed for gender mainstreaming		2022/23		
6. Resources				
6.1 Adequate resources for gender mainstreaming are allocated and tracked		2022/23		
7. Results				
7.1 UN programmes make a significant contribution to GEWE* in the country		2022		

* gender equality and women's empowerment

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on annual UN-SWAP Scorecard reports prepared by UN Women

FINDING 6

UN Women has demonstrated a strong convening role, effectively collaborating with a wide range of governmental, non-governmental and international stakeholders. However, some coordination mechanisms require more effective design for results. Systemic coordination with institutional gender mechanisms and civil society that had weakened over time, gradually improved after the arrival of new leadership.

UN Women's overall image among external partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina is positive and improving, particularly in the years covering implementation of the Strategic Note. Many stakeholders emphasized that the change in leadership had contributed to strengthening UN Women's positioning and credibility. Its role in advocacy for gender equality and coordination is widely recognized, although there is space for further improvements in joint strategic planning, transparency and pursuit of synergies.

The International Working Group on Gender Equality, co-chaired by UN Women and the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is highly valued by stakeholders for facilitating information exchange and programmatic planning. However, there is room to improve the structure and effectiveness of the group's meetings by shifting from reporting-based discussions to action-oriented dialogue and strategic planning around priority gender issues. A good example of action planning was a joint EU–UN initiative on the promotion of gender equality in elections.

Collaboration with international financial institutions, the EU and other development partners could be further optimized through strategic dialogue on priorities. Current Country Office leadership has demonstrated a proactive approach in expanding donor engagement, exploring funding opportunities with non-traditional partners for the Country Office, such as Belgium and Japan.

UN Women's engagement with government institutions has grown over time, particularly through the Gender Equality Facility and GRB programmes, which significantly expanded the pool of institutional partners. Coordination meetings with the institutional gender mechanisms – including the Agency for Gender Equality and Gender Centres of Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – are held quarterly. However,

gender mechanisms raised concerns about transparency and coordination within some projects, indicating the need for more structured and inclusive engagement. Localization of the Generation Equality Campaign and Action Coalitions was highlighted as a success by several partners.

BOX 2: UN WOMEN'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES IN COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

UN Women's comparative advantage in Bosnia and Herzegovina lies in its expertise in gender mainstreaming in public policies; integrating gender perspectives at national and local levels to address systemic inequalities; and GRB, aiming for equitable resource allocation and fiscal policies that promote gender equality. The Country Office drives gender-sensitive data and research production, providing evidence-based insights for decision makers to plan and track progress on gender equality. Some interviewed key informants also identified UN Women's efforts in fostering social norms change through innovative partnerships with sometimes non-traditional local stakeholders, such as religious leaders; challenging harmful gender practices; and ensuring the adaptation of global best practices to the country context. The Country Office was also recognized for its proactive communication and media engagement both within UN efforts and its own programming. Responses to the survey show UN agencies, governments and CSOs recognize UN Women's added value in the thematic areas of EAW and WPS (between 60 and 83 per cent, with the highest recognition from CSOs and the UN), while lower added value is perceived in the areas of women's political participation, women's economic empowerment and humanitarian action, risk and disaster management.

Quote: “By leveraging normative frameworks, fostering national ownership and utilizing its convening power, the Country Office has uniquely positioned itself to drive gender equality and women's empowerment in a complex political environment.”

(representative of international organization)

While UN Women has a strong reputation among **CSOs**, it has not re-established a formalized coordination mechanism with CSOs following discontinuation of the previous Civil Society Advisory Group. However, thematic dialogues and consultations with women's CSOs were conducted in 2024 and 2025. The most recent CSO coordination initiative supports and coordinates human rights defenders, but some CSOs raised concerns about the lack of consultations in its design as it was not built on the momentum created earlier by local CSOs and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There is further space for exploration of the human rights defenders coordination modality, with establishment of synergies with existing CSO efforts, as well as potential to strengthen coordination through CSO networks. Engagement with CSOs in the governance sector remains limited, despite some successful collaborations on GRB.

UN Women has leveraged partnerships with **academia** to expand knowledge and generate evidence on gender equality issues. One such example is UN Women's study on the care economy, which provides valuable insights into gender disparities in unpaid care work.

Cooperation with the **media** has also strengthened over time, through thematic workshops on GRB and tailored communication on EVAW.

While overall positive, stakeholders' feedback on UN Women's coordination role deserves attention to avoid overlaps, clearer demonstration of added value and delimitation of mandates on gender equality among the wider UN system (see Figures 11, 12 and 13).

BOX 3: HORIZONTAL FUNCTIONS AND DIRECT STRATEGIC NOTE FUNDING

Since 2019, the Country Office has been supported by Sida through direct funding for the Strategic Note modality. This is a softly earmarked funding modality aimed at creating stronger partnership relations between Sida and UN Women, and to support Strategic Note priorities rather than a specific project. Priorities were agreed through a continuous strategic dialogue between the two entities. The modality was highly useful for continuity in terms of the Country Office's normative mandate, i.e. in times of limited financing, when horizontal functions such as coordination and communication are hard to articulate within projects, it is difficult to obtain sufficient resources (confirmed by this evaluation as well as the [Evaluation of Country Programme Support to UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women](#) commissioned by Sida in 2022). The funding modality was ended by Sida mid-2024, with transitioning towards support for joint programming. As the coordination function was fully funded through this modality and UN Women is engaged in close to 30 coordination groups (some of which are key for gender mainstreaming in the UN and development programming), this shift poses a risk to sustainability. There are indications that some donors are likely to support joint programmes by focusing on thematic priorities (for example, the EU will most likely prioritize EVAW within the new Gender Accelerator), which shrinks space for obtaining support for wider systemic coordination. Ensuring sustainable funding for the Country Office's core functions will be critical in maintaining momentum and ensuring progress. It will require the strategic integration of coordination and communication into the new joint programmes and follow-up dialogue with Sida at different levels to maintain the results achieved thanks to this flexible funding modality.



Photo: © UN Women BiH/Merima Račić. The focus on psychological support during the Home Care Aids training deeply resonated with Nejra Japić from Cazin, who noted that this aspect is often overlooked.

FIGURE 10. Surveyed UN BiH personnel's satisfaction with UN Women's coordination mandate

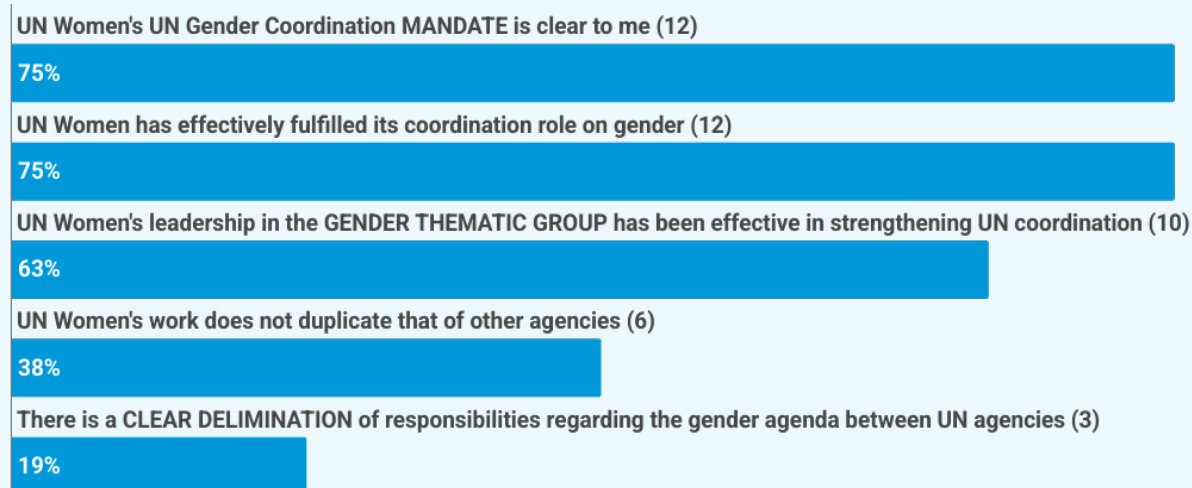


FIGURE 11. Surveyed governmental stakeholders' satisfaction with UN Women's coordination mandate



FIGURE 12. Surveyed non-governmental stakeholders' satisfaction with UN Women's coordination mandate



Source: Evaluation survey

4.3 EFFECTIVENESS

To what extent has UN Women contributed to the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina during implementation of the Country Office's current Strategic Note?

FINDING 7

The Country Office has achieved significant progress across its normative, coordination and operational mandates during implementation of the Strategic Note 2021–2025. Major achievements encompass advancing gender equality through legislative reforms; capacity-building for governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in monitoring and implementation of international and national normative standards; and development of strategic partnerships, advocacy and awareness raising.

During implementation of the Strategic Note 2021–2025, the Country Office has made progress across its normative, coordination and operational mandates. The Country Office has been instrumental in advancing gender equality through legislative reforms, capacity-building, strategic partnerships, advocacy and awareness-raising.

The 2024 Progress Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was successfully disseminated, increasing accessibility, stakeholder collaboration, informed decision-making and advocacy efforts for gender-responsive policies. In 2022, UN Women strengthened institutional capacity for gender equality monitoring and reporting, aligning efforts with CEDAW recommendations and developing a comprehensive gender monitoring framework that integrates treaty obligations, gender indicators and human rights assessments. This framework has empowered employees of 20 government institutions and 18 CSOs in data collection, monitoring and reporting. These achievements are part of continuous UN Women efforts to support the country's monitoring and reporting mechanisms on international commitments.

Key achievements with domestic policy work, include supporting the development and amendment of critical legislation, such as harmonization of the laws on protection from domestic violence in both entities with international commitments; support to social policy and labour legislation development to ensure integration of care economy recommendations; and mainstreaming of gender-responsive resource allocation across institutions and their sectoral programmes.

Notwithstanding challenges related to systematic social norms change, leave no one behind and intersectionality integration, multiple successful initiatives were identified across thematic portfolios such as engagement and empowerment of Roma women and prevention and protection from violence in their communities; support to employability and employment of rural and vulnerable women; and social norms work with men and boys and religious leaders.

The following key **implementation strategies** were identified:

- Research and knowledge generation
- Partnerships with government counterparts and CSOs to extend programme reach and foster local ownership
- Capacity development (including training, coaching and technical assistance) of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders
- Awareness-raising and advocacy
- Collaborating with other UN agencies to pool resources and enhance impact through joint programming.

According to interview and survey responses, capacity development efforts led to the improvement of knowledge and skills, and changes of attitudes in target groups across governmental and CSO sectors. Many respondents reported success in the practical application of their newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Interventions are leading to promising impacts, including improved living conditions for women through economic empowerment; better access to specialized services for survivors of violence; and shifts in norms among youth and religious communities (further explained under each impact area).

Collaborative efforts strengthened institutional support for gender equality and CSOs issue-based engagement, particularly in ERAW, and advanced normative impact through initiatives such as GRB and legislative reforms.

The Country Office has also created a valuable knowledge base for policy development. However, it is too early to fully assess long-term societal impact, as systematic measurement of policy and capacity development outcomes remain limited. While transformative methodologies are evident in some flagship projects (such

as the Care Economy and ERAW in the Western Balkans and Türkiye), traditional approaches still dominate. While women's political participation is progressing, it remains below desired levels. Enhanced monitoring and evaluation are needed to fully capture and scale these achievements.

Inhibiting factors to achievement of results included the complex administrative structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which requires more human and financial resources and time to achieve results across administrative units; unfavourable gender equality and women's empowerment context and backlash against gender equality and shifts in donor priorities and modalities of cooperation.

FIGURE 13. Surveyed stakeholders' satisfaction with UN Women's coordination mandate



Source: Evaluation survey

FINDING 7.1

The Country Office contributed to results in gender-responsive policymaking, budgeting and women's political participation. Gender-responsive budgeting programmes enhanced normative frameworks and built capacities across sectors and administrative levels, with stronger systemic results in the Sarajevo canton and some line ministries within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. Results at the municipal level are still nascent. Engagement on EU integration reforms and programming showed initial gains but seemed to lose momentum.

Through the regional GRB programme, UN Women enhanced institutional knowledge and gender mainstreaming across multiple governance levels. One hundred and thirty-four officials from ministries and agencies at the state, entity and cantonal levels, along with nearly 200 local government representatives, received GRB training, equipping them with the skills to integrate gender considerations into budgetary processes. As a result, 15 of 19 higher-level institutions allocated specific budgets for gender equality in 2023 and 2024. Although the country primarily relies on line-item budgeting, a detailed budget analysis of 2022, supported by UN Women, revealed that gender equality allocations stood at 1.45 per cent at the state level, 5.79 per cent in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 6.39 per cent in Republika Srpska. In the Sarajevo canton, which applies GRB in the most systemic way, allocations are possible to track and reached 14.80 per cent of the total budget for 2024. With programme-based budgeting set to be introduced in 2027, it is expected that more comprehensive and consistent GRB data will become available.

While 12 municipalities signed a Memorandum of Understanding on GRB, progress beyond capacity development remains limited, with only some municipalities incorporating gender considerations into budget circulars and sectoral programmes. UN Women also supported three Supreme Audit Institutions (Bosnia and Herzegovina and entity level) in conducting GRB audits, with Republika Srpska subsequently developing action plans to address the recommendations made.

Efforts to enhance media engagement on gender-sensitive reporting included training for 12 journalists; publication of several human-interest stories; and access to GRB resources and reporting recommendations for over 200 media professionals from 56 media outlets.

In collaboration with UN partners and domestic institutions, and by providing gender expertise, UN Women contributed to the establishment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's first-ever Gender-Responsive SDG Financing Framework. This pioneering initiative outlines funding sources and an action plan for financing the SDGs through integrated sustainable development

programming. Based on the interviews with UN partners and government institutions, while recognized as a breakthrough achievement, successful implementation of the Financing Framework will require sustained commitment and follow-up from both UN agencies and national institutions to translate the framework into effective financing mechanisms.

The Gender Equality Facility Programme focused on mainstreaming gender equality in EU accession reforms through extensive capacity-building efforts. Hundreds of public officials from state, entity and Brčko District institutions were trained on EU gender equality principles and gender mainstreaming in IPA III programming. Based on interviews and reviewed reports, key results included: gender analysis and mainstreaming of eight IPA Action Documents and one Cross-Border Cooperation Programme between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro; amendments to the Law on Statistics; and improving gender data collection and integration in policymaking. However, the practical implementation of IPA programmes remains outside UN Women's control, and data on their effectiveness is unavailable as even key partners that were interviewed lack this information. Delays in IPA programming and approvals and weak institutional ownership over the results of the previous phase pose significant risks, potentially undermining project continuity and sustainability. Republika Srpska withdrew from the project, shifting the programme's focus to other administrative levels.

Ahead of local elections in 2024, with UN Women support, 171 women received training in campaign management and political messaging. According to the Country Office, this contributed to 41 women running for election and 13 being elected. The training involved 11 women from minority groups and 33 young female aspirants. Beyond electoral success, UN Women continued to support the elected women through legislative induction programmes and training on advocacy, strategic communication, political navigation and networking, resulting in some of the participants' effective participation in policy discussions (confirmed by interviews).

TABLE 5: Progress against results in the Women's Political Participation Impact Area

Indicators	Baseline 2020	Targets 2025	Status 2024	Level of achievement
IMPACT 1: GENDER-RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE				
Outcome 1.1: By 2025, people contribute to, and benefit from, more accountable and transparent governance systems that deliver quality public services and ensure rule of law.				
Number of policies, plans, and/or strategies that have been informed by gender data and statistics (CO, RO, HQ)	0	10	3	
Number of central and local level strategic planning and budget documents reflect gender equality concerns	5	15	5	
% of annual budget allocation to Gender Equality in BiH as a result of GRB work	2	7	2	
Output 1.1.2: Relevant institutions in BiH have increased capacities to ensure that gender-responsive policymaking, budgeting and integration of EU gender equality and women's empowerment commitments are implemented across sectors.				
Number of partners that have increased capacities to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through national and/or local (multi) sectoral strategies, policies and/or action plans (CO, HQ)	0	5	20	+
Number of national partners with capacities to apply GRB tools in the budget cycle (CO)	0	10	13	+
Number of government officials with increased knowledge on programme budgeting, GRB, policy making and EU GE knowledge	80	400	445	+
Number of initiatives taken by local government to apply GRB in policy and budgetary making processes	0	12	17	+
Number of councillors that at least completed the basic and advanced training on GRB per year	0	20	31	+
Number of officials from oversight bodies with increased knowledge on GRB	0	20	32	+
Number of human-interest stories related to GRB published by media professionals trained by programme	0	5	5	
Output 1.1.4: Selected government and political institutions in BiH have increased capacities to ensure the necessary regulatory and procedural preconditions for the increased political participation of women				
Number of initiatives developed and implemented to prevent, monitor and mitigate violence against women in politics and in public life (CO, RO, HQ)	0	3	0	
Output 1.1.5: Government institutions and selected CSOs have increased capacities and strengthened collaboration to implement and monitor implementation of international and national normative commitments				
Number of multi-stakeholder dialogue processes to promote engagement of governments with civil society and other partners to advance gender equality and women's empowerment (CO, RO, HQ)	0	4	5	+
Number of CSOs working on gender equality and women's empowerment, especially women's organizations, that have strengthened capacity to exercise their leadership role towards the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment (CO, RO, HQ)	0	20	25	+
Number of countries with national gender equality profiles developed and published with UN Women support and informing national priorities (CO)	Y	Y	Y	
Output 1.1.6: UN Women effectively leads, coordinates and promotes accountability for the implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment commitments				
Number of thematic interagency mechanisms/teams that effectively address gender mainstreaming in priority areas (discontinued for future planning)	6	6	6	
Number of UN system coordination mechanisms in which UN-Women is Chair or Co-Chair that drive progress on gender mainstreaming mandates and commitments at global, regional, and country levels (CO, RO, HQ)	1	1	1	
Number of interagency products or services with a focus on gender equality and women's empowerment developed and made available (CO, RO, HQ)	4	4	5	+
Percentage of UN Joint-Programmes with a focus on gender equality in which UN-Women participates as a Participating United Nations Organization (derived from QCPR indicator 1.4.17) (Desk Review)	2	4	6	+

Source: Swedish Support to UN Women's Strategic Note 2019–2025 Final Narrative Report (reported by management)

FINDING 7.2

In the Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio, the Care Economy Programme gained traction towards introducing care economy models into policy frameworks, while collaboration with the ministries of agriculture and entrepreneurship and CSOs working on business development further contributed to the modernization of processes and strengthened income-generation prospects for women in rural areas. UN Women continued to build the capacities of women entrepreneurs, and pioneered some initiatives in the digital economy and IT sector.

Although lacking an overarching strategic approach, the Country Office has made progress in strengthening women's economic empowerment through implementation of programmes in specific thematic areas. Key intervention approaches included capacity-building initiatives, legislative support and innovative actions in traditional and digital economies. The Country Office has successfully built the capacities of women entrepreneurs; facilitated access to financial and policy support for women farmers; and championed initiatives in digital innovation and IT education. At the policy level, key steps were made in addressing unpaid care work and advocating for flexible workforce protections, improved maternity leave rights and policies that support women's participation in the labour market.

A major focus of UN Women's economic empowerment work was the Care Economy Programme, aligning

care policies with global standards and introducing sustainable care models in both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A baseline study on the care economy provided a foundation for policy reforms, with continued technical support and advocacy efforts to institutionalize care economy models.

The Country Office also provided legislative support to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to improve maternity leave rights, flexible working conditions for parents and workforce protections for women; while the Municipality Centre Sarajevo introduced financial incentives for fathers, encouraging shared caregiving responsibilities. The "gerontodomaćice" (homecare for older adults) initiative, which is part of broader active employment measures, has been discussed in both entities and will be implemented through ongoing care initiatives.

TABLE 6: Progress against results in the Women's Economic Empowerment Impact Area (reported by management)

Indicators	Baseline 2020	Targets 2025	Status 2024	Level of achievement
IMPACT 2: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT				
Outcome 2.1: By 2025, people benefit from resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth ensured by the convergence of economic development and management of environment and cultural resources				
Number of national and/or local (multi) sectoral strategies, policies and/or action plans that are adopted with a focus on gender equality (CO)	3	15	5	
Output 2.1.1: Governments have improved capacities to promote employment policies that enhance women's access to decent work and promote income security				
Number of institutions with strengthened capacities to improve the provision of essential services, goods and/or resources for women (CO, RO, HQ)	3	15	18	+
Number of legal, regulatory and/or policy frameworks aligned with international standards that create decent work for women developed and/or being implemented with support from UN-Women	3	15	6	
Output 2.1.2: Women-owned businesses and women entrepreneurs have strengthened capacities and resilience				
Number of institutions that have increased capacities to design and implement institutional reforms/strategies/policies that promote women's representation and equal participation in decision making	0	15	13	
Number of women with strengthened capacities and skills to participate in the economy, including as entrepreneurs, with UN-Women's support	0	125	470	+
Output 2.1.3: Women and girls benefit from employment opportunities and education/exchange programmes in tech-driven industries				
Number of women and girls benefiting from networking and mentorship programmes and improved workplace standards	20	50	120	+

Source: Swedish Support to UN Women's Strategic Note 2019–2025 Final Narrative Report (reported by management)

Women's access to financial resources and agricultural subsidies has been enhanced through continued collaboration with Ministries of Agriculture under the "Women Driving Resilience in Agriculture and Rural Areas" programme, implemented with FAO. This initiative ensured that women farmers receive direct subsidies, increasing their participation in climate-resilient agricultural activities and rural economic development.

In parallel, the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO, in collaboration with Foundation 787 and supported by UK funding, emerged as a high-impact initiative, successfully connecting women entrepreneurs with angel investors and fostering a network of local resources to sustain female-led businesses beyond UN Women's direct involvement. As reported by UN Women and Foundation 787, more than 400 women benefitted from capacity development on entrepreneurship and access to finance. An online educational platform for women entrepreneurs was launched, reportedly benefitting over 100 women through enhanced business literacy. Fifteen women mentored through the BizUp programme, strengthened their businesses and resilience, with 73 per cent of women entrepreneurs reporting increased sales and 65 per cent increased revenue as a result of the programme. In addition, four women increased the number of people they employed. UN Women also supported the establishment of an Advisory Board for Women's Entrepreneurship and the first coordinated gender-sensitive mapping of the entrepreneurial ecosystem to foster gender-sensitive entrepreneurship across both entities.

Based on interviews with UN Women personnel and the Results Management System annual reports, the Country Office pioneered several innovative projects in the digital space, most notably the non-fungible tokens for Women initiative, which is the first of its kind in the Western Balkans. The initiative aimed to enable local female artists to participate in the global digital economy by creating and selling non-fungible tokens on an open-source platform and to strengthen their financial independence. The IT Girls initiative, a joint UN project,

has empowered hundreds of young women and girls with IT skills, building their confidence, knowledge-sharing, networking and supporting career growth.

Companies continued to join the Women's Empowerment Principles initiative, and five Action Plans were designed, aiming to ensure gender-responsive HR and marketing practices, workplace health and security, and corporate policies align with gender equality standards. While the initiative supports UN Women's links with the private sector and was acknowledged by the interview and survey respondents, the evaluation was not able to gather more information on its effects on workers and the working environment.

BOX 4: SUPPORT TO RURAL WOMEN IN REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

The Ministry of Agriculture of Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) partnered with the Gender Centre of this entity and UN Women over the last two phases of the regional GRB project and the Women Driving Resilience in Agriculture and Rural Areas, resulting in economic empowerment of women in rural areas. The actions were inspired by gender analyses of the position of rural women and the Action Plan for Improvement of the Position of Rural Women 2011–2015, which was followed by gender mainstreaming in the more recent Strategic Plan for Development of Rural Areas (2021–2027) and Programme of Economic Empowerment of Women in Rural Areas (2021–2025). During this period, officials from the Ministry of Agriculture took part in more than 10 training sessions organized by UN Women and other development partners, and pursued development of gender-responsive subsidy programmes, which became sustainable over time. Based on the Ministry's data, financing obtained by women still represents only 12 per cent of the amount granted to men and the average subsidy per user is lower for female than for male beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the programme increased the number of women receiving the subsidy, reportedly reaching more than 9,000 directly, and supported them with the amount of BAM 30 million (US\$ 17.4 million) over the last four years. The amount disbursed to women producers significantly increased from BAM 5 million in 2020 to close to BAM 13 million in 2023.

FINDING 7.3

In the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) portfolio, the Country Office and its CSO partners supported the development and amendments of key legislation, such as the Laws on Protection from Domestic Violence and the Criminal Codes; strengthened service provision; and influenced public awareness. The Country Office also supported governments' reporting on international commitments on EVAW.

In terms of the EVAW portfolio, the Country Office's main contributions were in collaborating with CSOs and governments in legal reforms; strengthening institutional capacities; and implementing innovative prevention initiatives. In 2024, key achievements were the legislative framework on domestic violence in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; support to drafting the new Law on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women (adopted in March 2025); and amendments to the Criminal Code.

In Republika Srpska, amendments to the Criminal Code were developed and adopted in 2021. These legal changes align more closely with the Istanbul Convention and strengthen protections against sexual harassment, particularly in cases involving digital technologies. The reforms expanded the definition of sexual harassment, ensuring that institutional responses are proactive rather than victim dependent. Additionally, eight public institutions in Banja Luka, including the City Administration, adopted workplace policies on sexual harassment, creating a protection framework for 2,400 public employees. Despite these advances, political resistance and anti-gender movements in Republika Srpska hindered progress on the most recent domestic violence legislation, with proposed laws being removed from the agenda.

In collaboration with gender centres, Minimum Standards for Crisis Centres for Victims of Sexual Violence and Standard Operating Procedures for Multisectoral Response to Sexual Violence were developed. Additionally, 10 cantons and 29 municipalities adopted local protocols of conduct in cases of violence against women.

Interviews with UN Women, CSOs and government institutions confirmed the Country Office enhanced the operational capacity of institutions responding to gender-based violence through training, coordination support and community engagement of 25 multisectoral teams in municipalities. The Republika Srpska Gender Centre developed a General Protocol on Conduct in Domestic Violence Cases, endorsed by six ministries, ensuring a more consistent and survivor-centred response; while

the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Interior adopted a new standardized police response model for domestic violence cases. Cooperation with the police reportedly led to a 59 per cent increase in protective measures within 10 months, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted institutional interventions.

In terms of EVAW, CSOs continued to play a key role in both advancing legislative advocacy and support services for women survivors. The Country Office continued to support existing women's specialized service providers and safe houses during a major part of the Strategic Note, which was confirmed by all interviewed stakeholders (UN Women, government and CSOs).

A gap appeared as EVAW projects ended in 2023 and new EU IPA funding has not yet been approved.

UN Women supported a CSO to mobilize close to EUR 120,000 and negotiate support for the opening of a safe house in Trebinje, one of the regions without a shelter for women and children survivors of violence.⁴⁵ With UN Women's support, the Safe Network (CSOs focused on combating violence against women) established a centralized database for tracking gender-based violence survivors, while CSOs engaged in research-driven campaigns to push for legal and policy reforms. CSOs acknowledged the Country Office's support in awareness-raising and innovative prevention programmes using a moral reframing methodology when working with religious leaders and their communities on EVAW. As reported by UN Women and its partner CSO "Institute for Population and Development", 200 religious leaders and 10 inter-religious local committees were involved in awareness-raising and capacity development on prevention of violence against women. Messages from religious leaders reached their congregations through 32 mosques and two Orthodox churches. The Women's Chain of Support initiative empowered marginalized women, including war survivors, to publicly share their experiences and advocate for change.

⁴⁵ Women from this region are referred to other safe houses in Republika Srpska.

TABLE 7: Progress against results in the EVAW Impact Area (reported by management)

Indicators	Baseline 2020	Targets 2025	Status 2024	Level of achievement
IMPACT 3: WOMEN AND GIRLS LIVE LIVES FREE OF VIOLENCE				
Outcome 3: By 2025, people have access to better quality and inclusive health and social protection systems				
Number of laws that were adopted, revised or repealed to advance gender equality and women's empowerment (CO)	8	10	8	
Number of institutions putting in places policies and practices to address gender-based discrimination and/or combat gender stereotypes (CO)	77	100	118	+
Number of countries where multi-sectoral systems, strategies or programmes are implemented to advance women's equal access to and use of services, goods and/ resources, including social protection (CO)	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Number of normative, policy, peace and humanitarian processes influenced by civil society organizations (CO, RO, HQ)	3	5	5	
Number of supported service providers/first responders who provide quality services for survivors of violence against women (VAW) in line with standards of Istanbul Convention	1400	4000 (2025)	1862	
Output 3.3.1: Legislators and institutions have capacities to incorporate the highest level of international standards on EVAW in legislation, policies and budgets				
Number of partners that have increased capacities to promote/influence GRB legislation (Country Office, headquarters)	5	18	68	+
Number of VAW laws, policies and monitoring reports developed/ revised, supported by UN Women	5	17	16	
Output 3.3.2: Women, girls, men and boys at community and individual level are able to mobilize actors, resources and capacities to create an environment for zero tolerance to violence				
Number of countries with a process to design and implement VAW prevention interventions based on global norms and standards	Y	Y	Y	
Output 3.3.3: General and specialist service-providers have improved capacities to deliver quality, accessible and survivor-centred services				
Number of institutions with strengthened capacities to improve the provision of essential services, goods and/or resources for women (CO, RO, HQ)	82	140	157	+
Number of countries supported to revise, develop, or implement guidelines, protocols and standard operating procedures to improve EVAWG services in line with the global Essential Services Package (CO)	Y	Y	Y	
Amount of funding disbursed annually in support of civil society organizations, especially women's organizations, working towards the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment, through UN-Women programmes and grant-giving (CO, RO, HQ)	241000	225000	250000	+

Source: Swedish Support to UN Women's Strategic Note 2019–2025 Final Narrative Report (reported by management)

The Country Office prioritized the inclusion of Roma women and other marginalized groups by ensuring greater access to essential services and advocacy platforms. As confirmed by both UN Women and its CSO partner, Roma Association “Bolja Budućnost”, thanks to direct cooperation with the Roma Women’s Association, 171 Roma women and girls across four communities (Tuzla, Kakanj, Prnjavor, Vukosavlje) accessed education, health, housing and legal documentation support; while 80 service providers were trained to provide victim support to Roma women survivors of violence; and close to 400 Roma women gained better information on their rights and the protection services available in their communities. Two key Roma inclusion policies (the Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma 2021–2025 and the Tuzla Action Plan for Roma Inclusion 2023–2026) were revised with gender-sensitive provisions, including gender-based violence prevention measures.

One hundred and twenty-seven representatives of state and non-state service providers in four locations were reported to have increased their capacities to provide

services to Roma women survivors of violence. After participating in capacity development programmes, they are now better equipped to deliver services to Roma women survivors of violence.

BOX 5

Quote: “There is a sense that things are moving forward in collaboration with UN Women. We felt ownership over the process. Participation ensured that the strategic priorities of the state were a mix from both top-down and grassroots levels. The highest involvement was in the implementation of EVAW. There was an affirmation of specialized support services. The biggest change was felt on the ground. Institutional attitudes have shifted to be more accepting of organizations that provide services, integrating them into the system. This started earlier, it wasn’t part of this strategic note, but it was a focus during this period and yielded results. There were challenges, such as the pandemic. UN Women played a significant role in adequately addressing issues related to the vulnerability of women and exposure to violence. UN Women provided a platform for our voices and enabled them to be heard.”

(CSO representative)

FINDING 7.4

The WPS portfolio was re-established in 2023 through the “Women lead the way towards peace and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina” programme supported by the Peacebuilding Fund and implemented with IOM and UNFPA. The programme focused on strengthening the capacities of institutions and CSOs in implementing the WPS agenda at the local level, but it is still early to assess the results.

UN Women’s work on WPS was re-established in 2023 following development of a new joint programme “Women lead the way towards peace and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (2023–2026). The programme is supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, and UN Women has a leading role, in partnership with IOM and UNFPA. With this project, the fourth outcome was introduced to the Strategic Note (the UNSDCF Outcome 5): *By 2025, there is stronger mutual understanding, respect and trust among individuals and communities*). As reported by UN Women and partner agencies, UN Women has coordinated efforts across multiple UN agencies, strengthened institutional capacities and expanded advocacy efforts at local, national and international levels. The WPS programme aligns with the Bosnia and Herzegovina 1325 National Action Plan, integrating key priorities such as women’s protection and security sector reform. According to UN Women’s Results

Management System, in 2024, 580 representatives from government institutions, CSOs and local communities enhanced their skills to implement gender-responsive policies and practices in this thematic area. According to UN Women and interviewed government representatives, these capacity-building efforts aim to ensure stronger coordination between CSOs and government institutions; enhanced monitoring mechanisms to track WPS-related commitments and their implementation; and localization of the WPS agenda.

To further embed WPS priorities into Bosnia and Herzegovina’s policy frameworks, UN Women conducted research on the 15-year implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the country,⁴⁶ providing evidence-based recommendations for sustainable funding, institutional coordination and accountability. These findings will inform revision of

⁴⁶ United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2025): [15 Years of Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in BiH: Lessons learned and recommendations](#)

the delayed National Action Plan 1325 for 2025–2030, which is expected to be adopted in 2025 with substantive technical inputs from UN Women.

UN Women reported engagement of youth in peace dialogues to promote sustainable social cohesion and gender equality. Through the regional UN Joint Programme “Youth for Inclusion, Equality and Trust”,

funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, youth from Bosnia and Herzegovina were trained with their peers from the Western Balkans on the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. The programme organized public awareness campaigns, such as the “12 Days of Activism for Peace”, which reinforced positive narratives about women’s contributions to peace.

FINDING 8

Through strategic media engagement, joint UN communications and partnerships with CSOs, youth organizations and universities, UN Women has increased its media coverage and public reach on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Strategic media engagement and engagement with CSOs and other stakeholders, such as youth organizations and universities, has resulted in a steady increase in media coverage and reach with gender equality and women’s empowerment content. The number of media articles on UN Women and its partners’ activities and its social media following has grown over the Strategic Note period. The Country Office continuously engages in dialogues, training and podcasts with key media outlets in Bosnia and Herzegovina contributing to the effectiveness of its campaigns. More than 100 videos and web stories were produced in the reporting period, strengthening the Country Office’s engaging audio-visual and storytelling potential.

UN Women has continuously engaged in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaigns, with strong participation from UN partners and embassies, focusing on tackling sexual violence, femicide and protecting women’s rights. The campaigns reportedly reach hundreds of thousands of people online and around 2,000 people directly every year. Women’s CSOs, youth and local communities played an essential role in designing ERAW awareness initiatives across 10 local communities, reportedly reaching close to 10,000 people. Collaboration with the EU Delegation and members of the International Working Group on Gender Equality supported a joint advocacy campaign on women’s political participation ahead of the 2022 elections. According to management, the Generation Equality campaign featured youth voices on popular podcast platforms with a reach of 20,000, while the WPS project produced two podcasts, reaching audience of 5,000.

In general, UN Women’s partners are positive about the Country Office’s communications, with CSOs and government expressing slightly more overall recognition of these efforts, while UN partners mostly focused and positively commented on joint communication efforts.

TABLE 8: UN Women communication indicators

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Media reports	567	617	543	602
Followers on social media platforms	15.874	17.826	20.471	21.994
Articles on UN and UN Women web sites	11	29	16	14
Press releases	11	12	14	17

Source: UN Women Results Management System reports 2021-2024

Interviewed stakeholders highlighted several campaigns, such as 16 days of activism, “Nemam ti kad” (*I have no time for that*), and engagement with Sarajevo Film Festival, as very effective and generating public engagement.

In 2023 and 2024, the “Nemam ti kad” campaign was implemented through various activities with the aim of increasing citizens’ understanding of the care economy and paid and unpaid work; the disproportionate responsibility for care between men and women as a source of gender inequality; and to encourage social norms change.

In 2024, UN Women collaborated with the Sarajevo Film Festival, organizing panels on feminism, femicide and gender equality in the Balkans, and trained 25 emerging film professionals on intimacy coordination for safer working conditions in the film industry.

UN Women also engaged in training of media professionals and journalism students on gender-sensitive reporting, with two universities committing to enhancing their journalism curricula to include responsible reporting on violence against women.

FIGURE 14. Surveyed UN BiH personnel's satisfaction with UN Women's approach to communication

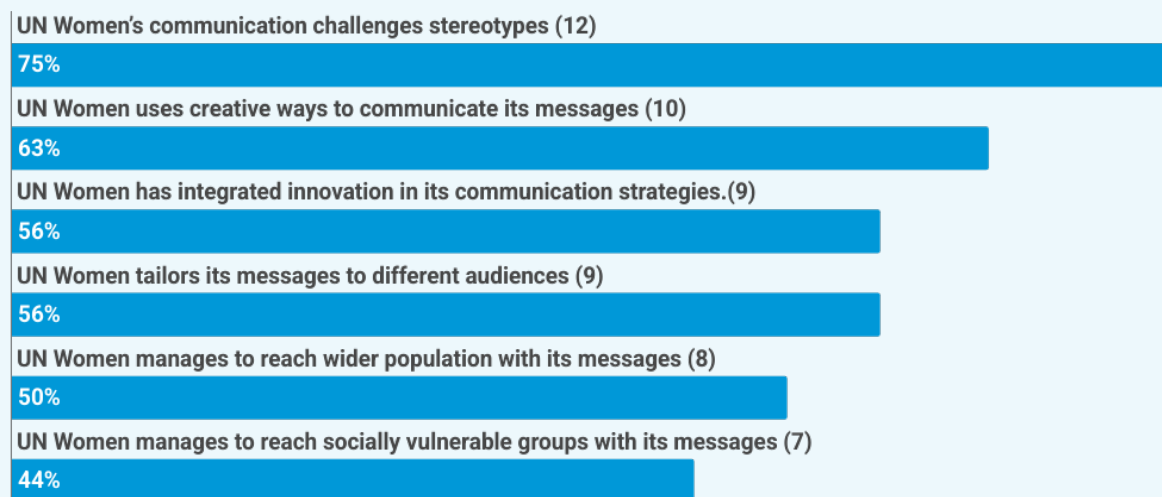


FIGURE 15. Surveyed governmental stakeholders' satisfaction with UN Women's approach to communication



FIGURE 16. Surveyed non-governmental stakeholders' satisfaction with UN Women's approach to communication



Source: Evaluation survey

4.4 HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Has the Country Office's portfolio been designed and implemented according to gender transformative and human rights-based approaches, considering leave no one behind and disability perspectives, as well as environmental sustainability?

FINDING 9

The Country Office has made efforts to integrate human rights and leave no one behind perspectives into its programming, particularly in terms of women survivors of violence, rural and unemployed women, and Roma women. However, integration remains inconsistent, with limited targeted support for LGBTQI+ individuals, elderly women and women with disabilities. While engagement with these groups exists, their full inclusion in programming was not present, partly due to funding gaps.

While the Country Office has made efforts to include human rights and ensure that marginalized and vulnerable groups are included in its programming, this happens at the project or activity level, rather than strategically as an integral part of the theory of change. Through multiple initiatives, the Country Office has strengthened institutional responsiveness; increased awareness of women's rights; and supported social norms change. Challenges remain in fully integrating some groups, such as LGBTQI+ individuals, elderly women and women with disabilities, whose needs were not consistently addressed.

Some positive examples included engagement with Roma communities and institutions, fostering dialogue and enhancing institutional support and services. Initiatives such as the Roma Women's Network strengthened

advocacy for Roma women's rights and improved their access to essential services. The formation of an inter-sectoral commission to address discrimination and violence against marginalized groups has also enhanced coordination among stakeholders, ensuring better institutional responsiveness to the needs of vulnerable populations.

UN Women's collaboration with rural women's cooperatives and small-scale entrepreneurs through joint projects with FAO has provided economic opportunities for women in agriculture, particularly those in remote and rural areas. These initiatives facilitated greater access to financial resources, markets and training opportunities, ensuring that rural women can sustain and expand their businesses, strengthening their economic resilience.



Photo: ©UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office. A free screening of the film about the determination and strength of a woman experiencing domestic violence, "Uvijek postoji sutra", organized by UN Women BiH in Gradačac, in cooperation with the Embassy of Italy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Center for Social Work Gradačac.

4.5 EFFICIENCY

Does the Country Office have appropriate governance, capacity and capability to ensure good use of resources to deliver results?

FINDING 10

The number of Country Office personnel increased over the Strategic Note period; however, the office faced significant challenges in human resource management, including high turnover of personnel, lengthy recruitment processes and work overload. Efforts were made to transition personnel to fixed-term contracts, but these efforts were yet to show results.

One of the Country Office's most pressing challenges has been high personnel turnover, leading to a loss of institutional knowledge, weakened stakeholder relationships and a negative perception among partners. Personnel handled multiple portfolios, creating unsustainable workloads and contributing to burnout. Recruitment processes, when dependent on headquarters, were in some cases excessively long, taking up to eight months to fill vacancies.

Although the number of personnel employed by the Country Office has grown from 18 in 2020 to 23 in 2024, with two additional vacancies to be filled, the increasing scope of work has not been met with a proportional investment in staffing. The impact of frequent personnel changes has not gone unnoticed by external stakeholders. Government partners expressed concern over the constant turnover of personnel, emphasizing that relationships with key institutions suffer when trained personnel leave, requiring newly hired personnel to rebuild trust and networks from scratch. This instability undermines long-term programmatic effectiveness and creates uncertainty regarding the sustainability of partnerships. Over the last two years, staff turnover has mainly been related to funding gaps between projects and contract modalities (i.e. competitive offers by other organizations with higher salaries, better terms of service, longer-term perspective or fixed-term contracts).⁴⁷ UN Women struggles to establish fixed-terms contracts

due to the requirement not to exceed 20 per cent threshold of programme management/staff costs under programmes.

In Interviews, some programmatic personnel reported that excessive administrative and bureaucratic burdens consume more than 50 per cent of their time, significantly slowing programme implementation. A disconnect between Programme and Operations teams has led to delays in execution, while operational bottlenecks prevent smooth delivery across other areas: partnership management, Regional Office and headquarters approvals, procurement and internal approvals were the most frequently reported in the personnel survey. The Quantum system roll-out, intended to streamline financial processes, instead created delays due to inadequate training and adaptation challenges, adding further inefficiencies.

Although standard operating procedures were developed for finance, human resources and procurement, the absence, in some areas, of corporate-level standard operating procedures and alignment with global UN Women frameworks has limited their effectiveness.

There are different perceptions of the role of the Operations team, expectations and efficiency within programmatic and operations units, which continue to hinder timely programmatic execution, leading to frustration among personnel and stakeholders alike.

⁴⁷ The evaluation team had the opportunity to interview former personnel who have recently moved to other UN agencies.

FINDING 11

The Country Office's financial resources have increased over time and the donor portfolio has diversified to some extent, although there is still significant over-reliance on Sida funding. However, unearmarked Strategic Note funding from Sida was discontinued and replaced by multi-donor support to UN joint programming on gender equality. This new modality requires intensive and effective coordination efforts with other UN agencies in programming and resource mobilization.

Despite the challenging environment and shifting donor priorities, the Country Office successfully increased its budget over the last two Strategic Notes, with the total budget for 2021–2024 reaching US\$ 11.7 million, with additional funding budgeted for 2025. This included softly earmarked Sida's Strategic Note funding, useful to support horizontal positions of coordination and communication associates, bringing more stability and catalytic support for further development of the portfolio. Two major regional programmes, one on Eliminating Violence Against Women and another on GRB implemented, over the Strategic Note period are also due to end.

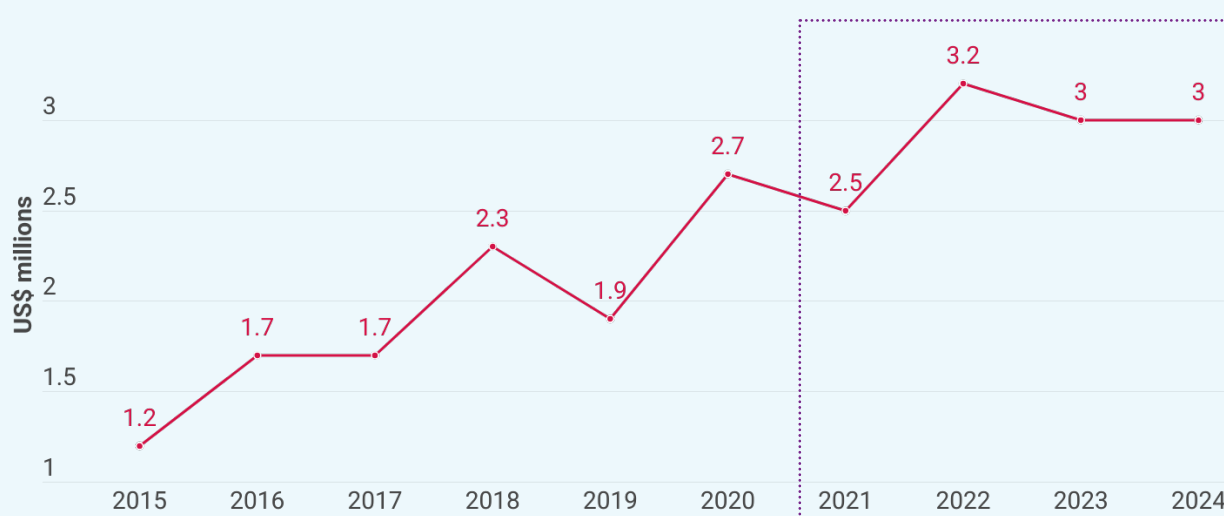
A significant issue is the over-reliance on a single donor, Sida, which represented 66 per cent of the donors' portfolio. The direct Strategic Note funding provided by Sida, which allowed for more flexible funding for Strategic Note implementation ended in 2024, with Sida shifting its priorities towards joint UN programming. While this transition offers opportunities to integrate with broader UN efforts – such as the US\$ 32 million Gender Equality Accelerator Programme (with UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF) and the US\$ 45.6 million joint Green Transition Portfolio (led by

UNDP) – it also brings risks of funding gaps for areas that are harder to finance through project-based funding, including normative work, policy engagement and horizontal functions such as coordination and communication. This risk is further compounded by delayed government approval of EU programmes in the country, which was a source of Gender Equality Facility financing.

In general, the County Office is harnessing donors' increased demand for joint UN approaches and programming and for combining coordination and operational comparative advantages with partner UN agencies.

Given the termination of direct Strategic Note funding, there is an urgent need for new donor discussions to explore similar funding models. Dialogue with Sida should continue, particularly regarding sustaining normative work, innovation and cross-cutting functions, and taking into account the modality has not been discontinued in other countries. Engagement with other donors who support similar flexible funding modalities will also be critical to ensuring the stability of key programmes.

FIGURE 17: Country Office budgets over the last 10 years (US\$ million)



Source: Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Portfolio Evaluation 2020 Report and Quantum for the period 2021–2024

FINDING 12

The Country Office lacks capacities and tools to capture impacts across its portfolio and current corporate reporting frameworks do not encourage collection of such data are not supportive. While monitoring and evaluation are usually conducted within the project duration, capturing results of interventions and processes that require time to materialize require different approaches. The monitoring and evaluation capacities of government and CSO partners vary and further limit UN Women's ability to demonstrate results.

The Country Office has made strides in documenting and reporting programmatic results, gathering some higher results data and presenting it through the corporate Results Management System. However, gaps remain in systematically capturing and assessing progress over longer periods of time. While output-level and some outcome-level results are well-documented, conclusions at the impact level often rely on anecdotal evidence and human-interest stories rather than structured data and comprehensive evaluation frameworks.

A major challenge stems from the nature of UN Women's programming, which focuses on systemic change, legal reforms, capacity-building and shifting social norms which require decades of work. Results from these areas of work are often not under UN Women's control and are influenced by multiple contextual factors, making quantifiable impact assessments difficult. The Country Office does not have dedicated monitoring and evaluation personnel; therefore, the work is carried out by

programme managers, who are already highly overload with work and affected by turnover. Investment in this horizontal function and systematic follow-up, monitoring and in-depth evaluation mechanisms are necessary to track progress over extended periods and measure the effectiveness of interventions beyond immediate outcomes.

The challenge extends beyond UN Women, as government partners have limited monitoring and evaluation capacities, further complicating impact assessments. Several government institutions highlighted that while they collect substantial data from the field, they lack the technical expertise to analyse, interpret and translate this data into meaningful insights. This weak institutional capacity hinders not only their own accountability but also limits UN Women's ability to fully understand how its programmes affect women, girls and broader societal norms in the country.



Photo: © UN Women BiH/Nezir Rujanac
Biljana Marić leads the cheese production efforts on the farm, and visitors from around the world come to purchase their celebrated cheese.

4.6 SUSTAINABILITY

To what extent did the Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office ensure the sustainability of the Strategic Note results by considering both key stakeholders and its internal organizational capacities?

FINDING 13

The Country Office has strengthened the sustainability of its interventions by supporting policy development; integrating gender-responsive budgeting into public finance reforms; advocating for sustained funding of gender mechanisms; and building institutional capacities. Innovative practices, such as co-creation workshops and certified trainer pools, have fostered ownership and continuity. However, building ownership requires time and continuity and sustainability remains at risk. This is further compounded by the high turnover of public officials; backlash against gender equality; and reliance on individual champions and external support.

The Country Office has taken strategic steps to enhance the sustainability of its interventions by strengthening institutional capacities; embedding gender-responsive policies into governance structures; and fostering local ownership of gender equality initiatives. Efforts such as integrating GRB into public finance reforms; institutionalizing gender-sensitive criteria in agricultural subsidies; and advocating for sustained funding of gender mainstreamed programmes at various governance levels have contributed to systemic change. Embedding care provision models into social policy frameworks has also laid the foundation for new service models to support long-term job creation, work–life balance for women and their overall economic empowerment.

Innovative approaches have further enhanced sustainability by fostering local ownership and capacity-building. In women's political participation interventions, local experts were trained, ensuring their leadership continues beyond UN Women's direct involvement. Similarly, within economic empowerment projects, particularly in agriculture and entrepreneurship areas, UN Women contributed to institutionalization of gender-sensitive public grant-making criteria, creating a lasting effect on women's access to resources. These structural reforms provide a foundation for long-term sustainability, ensuring that gender equality remains embedded in the country's development frameworks.

However, sustainability remains vulnerable due to multiple external and institutional challenges. The high levels of personnel turnover in public institutions disrupts institutional memory and slows the adoption of gender mainstreaming practices, often requiring repeated capacity-building efforts. Backlash against gender equality policies and reliance on individual champions also pose risks to sustained progress. While financial institutions and government bodies have increased their engagement with gender-sensitive reforms, full ownership and accountability of these processes are still evolving. Continued advocacy, institutional partnerships and formalized agreements between ministries, agencies and gender oversight bodies will be essential to prevent regression and ensure long-term impact.

The Strategic Note funding from Sida has been instrumental in maintaining continuity of support for policy development, UN coordination and rapid emergency response for women and vulnerable groups. The change of funding modality needs to consider appropriate new approaches to sustainability. Preserving flexible funding mechanisms in future donor agreements is critical to maintaining institutional credibility and responding to emerging needs.

5. LESSONS LEARNED AND PROMISING PRACTICES

FACTORS OF SUCCESS

LESSONS LEARNED



Building relationships with diverse stakeholders fosters effective implementation.

Strategic dialogue, transparent and participatory programming allows buy-in, ensures expectations are realistic, promotes the development of common understanding of objectives and opportunities, and fosters strategic coordination in implementation. This relates to the whole spectrum of partners, from governments to civil society, UN partners to donors. While UN Women engaged intensively across diverse partner groups, at certain stages women's rights CSOs and institutional mechanisms for gender equality were unaware of all UN Women's programmatic efforts, which should be rectified in the future. Government engagement was stronger, with balanced partnerships among institutional gender mechanisms and line ministries, agencies and oversight institutions. Formalized agreements, cross-ministry collaborations and continuity in collaborations helps sustain gender mainstreaming efforts beyond project and political cycles.



Donor flexibility enables effective response to challenges.

The flexibility allowed by Sida's direct funding of the Strategic Note was helpful in addressing chronic internal challenges, such as:

- maintaining continuity of support to policy development processes (development and consolidation of legal frameworks and alignment with international commitments require longer-term engagement and continuity, which Strategic Note funding in synergy with other project funding allowed);
- supporting horizontal functions, e.g. coordination and communication (which are otherwise hard to fund through regular projects and to ensure continuity);
- ensuring timely response to women, girls and the most vulnerable in crises and emergency situations (such as COVID-19, the floods in 2024 or the sharp increase of femicide in recent years).

Consequently, Strategic Note funding supports reputation and credibility by allowing UN Women to be agile and present when most needed. Preserving space for flexibility in the new Strategic Note and joint programme arrangements with donors is of utmost importance.



Cross-cutting systemic solutions contribute to stronger results.

Cross-cutting systemic interventions through multiple programmatic areas, such as GRB, have the potential for stronger results. This requires thoughtful articulation of how UN Women establishes and develops synergies across portfolios; at the design of the next Strategic Note; oversight in implementation; and clear communication of such a strategy within the Country Office and with its partners.



Effective coordination is key to success in highly competitive environments.

In a highly competitive environment, coordination requires a strategic approach, and dedicated human and financial resources to show results. Coordination has to go beyond information-sharing and updating, towards articulation of joint interests and action planning, not only at the programme design stage, but throughout implementation and in monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts.



Engaging with non-traditional stakeholders increases the chances of effective implementation and stronger impact.

Engagement with CSOs beyond the women's movement (e.g. organizations working with religious leaders and other non-traditional stakeholders in civil society, youth organizations and economic empowerment organizations, grassroots religious groups and communities, and agricultural cooperatives) provides added value, wider reach and tailored messaging to diverse societal groups.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Before moving to key conclusions, Table 9 summarizes how the Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Office addressed the recommendations from the previous Country Portfolio Evaluation. The evaluation team used this assessment to inform the conclusions and recommendations of the current evaluation.

The conclusions and recommendations arising from the current Country Portfolio Evaluation should be interpreted and applied taking into account the complex internal and external contextual factors UN Women is facing in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The evaluation covered a critical transitional period for the Country Office, characterized by changes in staffing, funding and organizational structure in a complex political context. Donor priorities are shifting and there is a strong push for joint UN programming, which requires new strategies and approaches to UN coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment. Even with these challenges, the Country Office had had some successes, strengthening its portfolio and footprint in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in its relations with diverse stakeholders.

TABLE 9: Assessment of implementation of the previous Country Portfolio Evaluation recommendations

Country Portfolio Evaluation Recommendations (2015-2020)	Assessment of implementation
Recommendation 1: The Country Office to underpin the next Strategic Note with a clear theory of change that leads to a set of cross-thematic advocacy strategies and an agenda for leveraging its programme and policy knowledge base and convening role.	The theory of change had improved, with thematic theories of change developed. However, limitations remain with regards to a comprehensive approach beyond the projects available at the time of Strategic Note development and the inclusion of leave no one behind principles.
Recommendation 2: The Country Office to develop an engagement strategy for its stakeholders that transcends individual programmes or thematic areas to highlight its strengths and increase its credibility as a thought leader and influencer in the country.	Progress has been made and focus placed on key reform issues in addition to traditional UN Women thematic areas. Examples include: EU accession, financial management reform, SDG financing and the care economy. Efforts should be continued and internal and external synergies strengthened.
Recommendation 3: The Country Office to develop an inclusive, consultative and transparent approach to strengthening its relationships with CSOs, to support their efforts to advance normative and policy transformation by ensuring civil society participation in programming in all thematic areas; re-establishing the coordination of civil society through the Civil Society Advisory Group or an alternative structure; and supporting the advocacy agenda of civil society networks.	While the advocacy agenda of civil society networks and individual project-level engagements were significantly strengthened, a solution has not yet been found for overarching systematic coordination with CSOs.
Recommendation 5: Through its coordination mandate, the Country Office, in conjunction with the Resident Coordinator's Office and key UN partners in the country, to identify targeted means of optimizing its comparative advantage and complementing the expertise of other UN agencies to strengthen the overall implementation of the Bosnia and Herzegovina normative framework related to gender equality and the empowerment of women.	UN Women's image, credibility and comparative advantage strengthened within the UN system as evidenced by positive reflections, increased engagement with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and in coordination platforms, and increased engagement and leadership in joint programmes. Efforts should be continued.
RECOMMENDATION 6: The Country Office to build on the momentum created by its leadership and creativity in the COVID-19 response to showcase its technical expertise in gender mainstreaming, data analysis and advocacy to donors and stakeholders.	UN Women strongly contributed to the UN COVID-19 socioeconomic response and other emergency responses, followed by actions supporting rights holders across portfolios.
RECOMMENDATION 7: The Country Office to maximize the value of its workforce and enhance the knowledge management, monitoring and reporting capacity of its personnel and partners.	Personnel turnover, capacity and workload challenges persist, with increased efforts being made by leadership and personnel to collectively address these challenges.
RECOMMENDATION 8: The Country Office to ensure that a gender-transformative lens is applied to the Strategic Note, including the incorporation of human rights; fundamental UN principles related to gender equality and the empowerment of women; and a cross-portfolio strategy targeting women and girls experiencing social disadvantage.	Perspectives have been strengthened, but require further systematic integration across thematic portfolios.

CONCLUSION 1

UN Women's implementation of the Strategic Note (2021–2025) has proven highly relevant and is aligned with international, national and UN priorities for gender equality, effectively addressing critical areas such as women's leadership, economic empowerment and ending violence against women.

(based on findings 1-8)

Despite challenges posed by the context, including political crises, COVID-19, natural disasters and rising femicide rates, the Country Office has remained adaptive and responsive, ensuring its programming meets the evolving needs of women and girls.

Engagement with governmental institutions and CSOs, particularly through a combination of policy work, capacity-building, GRB and implementation of field actions via partnerships and strategic collaboration with UN agencies and other development partners, are effective approaches to implementation. Operationally, the Country Office demonstrated agility in crisis response and integrated some notable innovative approaches to implementation.

However, there is an opportunity to start the next Strategic Note with a clearer articulation of the theory of change; how these proven implementation strategies interplay with the context; and how they crosscut thematic areas of work. This also includes integration of leave no one behind and intersectionality perspectives in the theory of change, which was present in implementation.

EVAW was the most comprehensive portfolio, incorporating policy reform, capacity development, service provision and social norm transformation. Other thematic areas, such as Women's Economic Empowerment and Women's Political Participation, lacked a broader, forward-looking vision; while the vision for WPS was only articulated with the start of the "Women lead the way towards peace and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina" programme in 2023.

CONCLUSION 2

While resource and time intensive, coordination efforts with United Nations entities contributed to the credibility of UN Women and the effectiveness of its programming.

(based on finding 5)

The Country Office has played a crucial role in mainstreaming gender equality within the UN system, including the UNSDCF, COVID-19 socioeconomic response and joint programmes. The UN-SWAP and capacity development on gender equality in the UN system gained traction, with continuous assessments and follow-up improvements on an annual basis.

UN Women's proactive role in joint programming has fostered stronger inter-agency collaboration and improved mutual understanding. UN Women's expertise in GRB, EVAW and policy work in general has positioned it as a valuable technical partner.

However, despite these strengths, challenges persist in ensuring structured and strategic coordination across UN agencies and external partners.

UN Women is actively involved in numerous coordination groups, the Gender Theme Group, UNSDCF results groups and some thematic groups such as youth and social welfare, which had clear effects (although to different extents). Most of the other group meetings were limited to thematic exchanges and updates, and were rarely followed up.

Framing and strengthening of current UN coordination processes under the corporate UN Women's Coordination Strategy⁴⁸ framework; and strategic review of the Country Office's involvement in all groups, including any adjustment of membership required and in terms of senior leadership or practitioners, should be planned for the next Strategic Note. Design of group meetings also requires transition from information-sharing platforms towards action-oriented spaces, which should further be expanded, owned and operationalized by a wider number of personnel in each UN agency. This could be helpful in addressing the fragmentation of UN gender initiatives, where gender considerations are often treated as an isolated niche rather than being fully mainstreamed across broader programming.

⁴⁸ UN Women (2024): [UN Women Coordination Strategy](#)

CONCLUSION 3

Even in a highly complex context and with challenging dynamics, UN Women maintained a strong convening role, coordinating efforts between government institutions, CSOs and international stakeholders to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This allowed implementation across the government sector, policy development and reaching those most in need.

(based on finding 6)

Challenges remain in ensuring structured and sustained coordination, particularly with CSOs. UN Women engages with numerous non-governmental organizations, beyond women's rights organizations, including grassroots organizations, business organizations and creative groups. While individual engagements within projects are fit for purpose, there is an opportunity to use the momentum from the relationships established and add greater strategy and structure to these engagements at the wider, collective level.

The International Working Group on Gender Equality is a useful platform for fostering dialogue, together with the Agency for Gender Equality, for stronger strategic coordination, particularly in collaboration with the EU and international donors.

UN Women's engagement with the private sector, academia and the media has contributed to raising awareness and expanding the knowledge base on gender equality issues, such as unpaid care work and economic empowerment. Strengthening joint strategic dialogue and ensuring a more action-oriented coordination framework across platforms will be critical to maximize impact.

CONCLUSION 4

Across its thematic portfolios, the strongest results were in the Country Office's normative areas of work in terms of strengthening legal and policy frameworks for gender equality.

(based on findings 7-9, 13)

Shifts from isolated training towards technical assistance and ongoing mentoring and piloting enhanced implementation of policies, effectiveness and resulted in some promising impacts for women and girls.

There is space to strengthen the Women's Political Participation and Women's Economic Empowerment portfolios which remain projectized and require attention, while all impact areas require further efforts in terms of sustainability and ownership-building strategies, particularly at the local level.

Through its legislative and policy advocacy efforts, the Country Office has significantly influenced legal frameworks on GRB, gender-based and domestic violence, and women's economic empowerment. UN Women's support for GRB has led to the allocation of gender-specific budgets across multiple levels of government, and its engagement in EU integration reforms has ensured gender mainstreaming in IPA programming. However, the sustainability of these efforts remains dependent on building institutional ownership, political will and continued financial support from international partners. Similarly, while progress has been made in advancing women's political participation, the impact of candidate training programmes and governance capacity-building initiatives will require long-term monitoring to assess their effectiveness in enhancing women's representation in decision-making roles.

The Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio brought initial impact through employment and employability strengthening, with promising initiatives on the care economy gaining recognition across the social welfare sector.

Similarly, while the Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO and non-fungible tokens for Women initiative successfully empowered female entrepreneurs, their long-term impact on women's economic security and market access needs further assessment. Strengthening the private sector's role in gender-responsive economic policies will be essential to ensure sustainable and equitable economic opportunities for women.

The EVAW portfolio yielded notable successes in legislative reforms, institutional capacity-building and survivor-centred service provision, with solid sustainability perspectives. UN Women's support for women's specialized services, standardized institutional responses and judicial training has improved survivor protection mechanisms, survivors' safety and enhanced institutional accountability. The revival of the WPS agenda, backed by the Peacebuilding Fund, is a positive development but the results are yet to be seen.

CONCLUSION 5

The Country Office has made a significant contribution to promoting human rights and the leave no one behind principle, particularly through its engagement with marginalized groups such as Roma women, rural women and survivors of gender-based violence.

(based on findings 8-9)

The Country Office's approaches cover direct work with right holders, combined with institutional dialogue and policy advocacy (this is more comprehensive in the EAW thematic area, with some achievements in Women's Political Participation/GRB). The integration of leave no one behind principles remains inconsistent across all programming areas, with LGBTQI+ individuals, elderly women and women with disabilities receiving less targeted support. This gap highlights the need for a more strategic and systematic approach to ensuring intersectionality in all UN Women initiatives.

Continuous strengthening of UN Women's media engagement and partnerships with CSOs, youth organizations and universities significantly amplified gender equality messaging and public awareness on women's rights. Together with partners, the Country Office is able to mobilize wider audiences through large-scale campaigns, such as the globally renowned 16 Days of Activism, Generation Equality and thematic campaigns such as "Nemam ti kad" (both online and offline). Further continued investment in strategic media engagement, particularly on social norms issues, is needed to sustain momentum.

CONCLUSION 6

Organizational and structural challenges threaten the sustainability of UN Women's achievements. The combination of previous high personnel turnover, administrative inefficiencies and operational bottlenecks had weakened institutional continuity and stakeholder relationships.

(based on findings 10-12)

Country Office leadership is aware of these challenges and has already taken steps to address the issues, such as increasing the number of fixed-term contracts, improving dialogue between Operations and Programme units, and through intensive communication with partners. Given the Country Office's ambitious plans and its growing scope of work, these changes should be continued and prioritized.

The transition from direct Strategic Note funding from Sida to multi-donor, joint UN programming reflects a shift in funding modalities that could enhance inter-agency collaboration but also poses risks to core functions such as policy advocacy, coordination and normative work. Exploration of funding for horizontal positions from the institutional budget; broader donor engagement; and advocacy for sustainable financing mechanisms, which recognize the long-term nature of UN Women's transformative work on gender equality and women's empowerment will be essential. Proactive resource mobilization strategies, beyond traditional donors, have already been recognized as needed and will be critical in maintaining momentum and securing financial stability.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this section are to be addressed by UN Women in partnership and consultation with relevant national stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Presentations of the evaluation's preliminary findings, discussion of lessons and high-level recommendations, along with final sessions to validate the report, took place with the Country Office and recommendations and feasibility for implementation were validated. The Recommendations section of this report includes potential suggested actions by the Country Office, based on feasibility within its current programme of work. The level of assessed priority, difficulty and suggested timeframe for implementation are indicated below each specific recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The next Strategic Note should be co-created with partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina to sustain its relevance and consolidate partner relationships. It should clearly articulate strategies and roles for each impact area, with a particular need to strengthen approaches to women's political participation and women's economic empowerment. Approaches for cross-thematic synergies, systematic integration of leave no one behind and sustainability perspectives should be prioritized.

Priority: HIGH /LOW/MEDIUM	Timeline: SHORT-TERM / MEDIUM-TERM/LONG-TERM
Suggested steps to be taken: • In collaboration with partners, refine the theories of change by incorporating successful cross-cutting interventions with high transformative potential, such as GRB, engagement with women in legislative and executive institutions, gender mainstreaming and capacity development for gender equality and women's empowerment. Ensure that theories of change reflect a systemic, long-term vision rather than being constrained by existing funding limitations. ➤ Design theories of change based on strategic needs rather than solely on available funding. Ensure that programmatic design includes all necessary elements for success, allowing for greater flexibility in resource mobilization and long-term impact. • Enhance cross-thematic synergies and sustainability in the next Strategic Note to maximize impact. Strengthen integration across portfolios, such as embedding GRB in all thematic areas; expanding oversight roles of audit offices, parliamentarians and CSOs; grounding interventions in integrated development strategies alongside gender equality policies; linking WPS to economic resilience, sustainable livelihoods and regional economic networking; utilizing lessons from SDG financing analysis across portfolios; and engaging Women's Empowerment Principles signatories in supporting results across all thematic areas. ➤ Further deepen policy engagement in Women's Economic Empowerment and WPS by going beyond employment, employability and income generation to drive systemic policy change. Expand efforts to strengthen institutional frameworks, advocate for structural reforms and establish long-term mechanisms for gender-responsive policymaking in economic and peacebuilding sectors. • Ensure effective implementation of policy interventions by complementing advocacy with hands-on technical assistance and institutional capacity-building. Provide practical guidance to governments, institutions and CSOs to support the translation of gender equality policies into tangible, lasting results. • Advance gender-transformative approaches and social norms change by embedding these strategies across all portfolios. Leverage ongoing work with men, youth and non-traditional actors such as faith-based organizations, business associations and trade unions. Promote equal pay, care economy models and diverse communication channels to challenge harmful norms and drive behavioural shifts. ➤ Expand strategic and synergistic thinking in joint programming to ensure greater synergies across thematic areas in UN collaboration.	
To be led by: Country Office, informed by strategic processes at the regional level and headquarters	
Impact: High	Difficulty: Medium
If not implemented: Risk of ad hoc, opportunistic and incoherent approaches to programming, decline in credibility.	

RECOMMENDATION 2

Coherence within the theories of change should be supported by effective and efficient internal coordination and coherence mechanisms to support the operationalization of synergies in programmes and projects. Adoption of a synergistic approach to programme and project design – ensuring that initiatives are interconnected and contribute to broader strategic goals – and application of cross-cutting strategies, such as gender needs assessments, capacity development, gender-responsive budgeting and others are possible options.

Priority: **HIGH**/LOW/MEDIUM

Timeline: **SHORT-TERM**/ MEDIUM-TERM/LONG-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Formalize coordination between thematic portfolios through internal mechanisms to prevent fragmentation, foster knowledge-sharing and optimize impact.
- Establish a structured, internal learning framework that promotes continuous cross-team collaboration, exchange of best practices and adaptive learning.
 - Shift internal coordination meetings from information-sharing to strategic planning and learning-focused discussions, emphasizing cross-sectoral linkages and innovation.
- Further strengthen strategic alignment with governments and CSOs by focusing on broader gender equality objectives and ensuring that all interventions are integrated into a cohesive national framework.
- Strengthen intersectional approaches in implementation by increasing targeted programming and budget allocations for vulnerable groups, including Roma women, women with disabilities and other marginalized communities. Leverage insights from existing partnerships to address overlapping vulnerabilities, such as the experiences of Roma women with disabilities or elderly survivors of violence, ensuring more inclusive and responsive interventions.
 - Explore possibilities to engage consultants across projects to further support synergies and efficiency.
- Develop scaling-up strategies for existing activities and results within and across portfolios.

To be led by: Country Office in coordination with the Regional Office and headquarters

Impact: **High**

Difficulty: **Medium**

If not implemented: Siloed implementation, projectized approaches, lost opportunities for synergies, ineffectiveness and inefficiency, partner fatigue, decline in credibility.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Frame UN coordination efforts under the new corporate [UN Women coordination theory of change](#) (focused on thematic coordination, UN accountability and promotion of financing for gender equality) and the [UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan](#). To enhance effectiveness, leverage experiences from the Gender Equality Accelerator programme and shift the approach from the passive exchange of information and updates to proactive joint planning, collaboration and shared learning at different levels of the organization. Cross-cutting programmatic successes should be leveraged as strategic assets for deeper coordination and impact-driven action.

Priority: HIGH /LOW/MEDIUM	Timeline: SHORT-TERM / MEDIUM-TERM/LONG-TERM
Suggested steps to be taken: • Strengthen strategic collaboration by identifying and formalizing key areas of thematic partnerships with other UN agencies, such as SDG financing, integrated development planning at all levels, green transition and social welfare system interventions, or by addressing common social challenges such as femicide and gender-based violence, and backlash against gender equality to drive systemic change. • Redesign Gender Theme Group meetings to focus on action-oriented planning, identifying synergies and fostering joint implementation. Facilitate structured follow-up that engages programmatic personnel at the operational level to ensure sustained progress. • Continue the annual review of UN-SWAP indicators, with a particular focus on tracking resource allocation and results, to ensure UN system accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment. • Adopt a synergistic approach to programmatic design, drawing from lessons learned in preparation of joint programmes such as the Gender Equality Accelerator programme (closer collaboration at leadership and operational levels, dialogue with donors, strategies to avoid siloed implementation) to ensure coherence, effectiveness and efficiency across initiatives and to strengthen resource mobilization. • Discuss findings on uneven gender mainstreaming within the UNSDCF 2021–2025 (UNSDCF evaluation finding) for stronger positioning in the next Cooperation Framework, particularly given the context of backlash against gender equality in the region. Consider a twin-track approach, i.e. gender mainstreaming and a stand-alone gender equality outcome.	
To be led by: Country Office	
Impact: High	Difficulty: Low
If not implemented: Siloed approach, inefficiency and lack of accountability for gender equality, missed opportunities for results in areas in which UN Women does not have a strong footprint.	

RECOMMENDATION 4

To ensure effective coordination, UN Women Country Office needs to strike a balance between engagement with institutional gender mechanisms, other government institutions and civil society. While past coordination efforts were overly concentrated on gender mechanisms, currently there is an imbalance in favour of other line ministries and agencies. Coordination with CSOs requires restructuring to be more inclusive, engaging both women's rights organizations and those working in broader development sectors to enhance impact and sustainability.

Priority: HIGH /LOW/MEDIUM	Timeline: SHORT-TERM/ MEDIUM-TERM /LONG-TERM
Suggested steps to be taken: • Strengthen strategic coordination with institutional gender mechanisms by establishing structured discussions on both UN Women's Strategic Note and broader gender mainstreaming efforts within the UNSDCF. Ensure that gender mechanisms are well-integrated in both policymaking and implementation, while also deepening engagement with line ministries and agencies at the project level to foster gender-responsive governance. ➤ Strengthen support and networking opportunities for female decision makers in legislative and executive government to foster policy development and implementation. ➤ Re-discuss coordination mechanisms with CSOs. Consider including both women's and human rights CSOs and those with expertise in specific development areas, as well as coordination with issue-based networks. Areas of particular interest could be the normative area, capacity development and service delivery as strengths of the civil society sector. While support to human rights defenders should be continued, it may need reshaping to include assets created by previous CSO initiatives. ➤ Broaden engagement with underrepresented groups by fostering structured partnerships with their organizations (for example LGBTQI+ organizations, elderly women, women with disabilities – following the example of work with the Roma Women's Network). Ensure their meaningful representation in programming to reflect diverse perspectives and needs in gender equality initiatives. ➤ Integrate sustainability considerations and ownership building into coordination discussions at all levels to ensure long-term, institutional ownership of gender equality strategies. Promote sustainability-driven approaches by linking policy dialogue with resource mobilization and long-term capacity-building efforts across institutions and civil society actors.	
To be led by: Country Office in coordination with the Regional Office and headquarters	
Impact: High	Difficulty: Medium
If not implemented: Tensions and competition among institutional gender mechanisms, CSOs and UN Women, unsustainable results.	

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Country Office should prioritize addressing challenges with retaining and enhancing the capacity of its personnel. This should include deepening expertise in both flagship areas and emerging thematic priorities under the next UNSDCF, while improving results-based management, monitoring, evaluation and learning. A more structured approach to workload distribution is also necessary to optimize efficiency and prevent burnout among personnel.

Priority: HIGH /LOW/MEDIUM	Timeline: SHORT-TERM/ MEDIUM-TERM /LONG-TERM
Suggested steps to be taken: • Identify and/or develop opportunities for all personnel to strengthen their expertise in flagship and in-demand thematic areas, such as public finance management, GRB, green transition, care economy, digitalization etc. • Establish and coordinate a pool of experts across key areas to facilitate continuous knowledge exchange, cross-sectoral learning and collaboration, ensuring that the Country Office remains at the forefront of gender equality interventions. • Explore opportunities to take part in other UN agencies' capacity development initiatives on relevant thematic topics, maximizing resource efficiency and learning synergies. ➤ Strengthen collaboration with the Regional Office to identify and facilitate regional learning exchanges, peer learning opportunities and technical capacity-building initiatives tailored to Country Office needs. ➤ Explore possibilities for the establishment of a dedicated monitoring, evaluation and learning position. If not feasible, in the absence of such a position, a collective approach could be institutionalized by integrating monitoring, evaluation and learning discussions into internal coordination platforms, ensuring that progress tracking and results measurement become a shared responsibility. ➤ Design and implement workload distribution mechanisms to optimize team efficiency, prevent burnout and ensure sustainable engagement in programmatic and operational functions. Align staffing needs with strategic priorities to maintain productivity, while safeguarding personnel well-being.	
To be led by: Country Office in coordination with the Regional Office and headquarters	
Impact: High	Difficulty: Medium
If not implemented: Low morale and burnout, personnel turnover.	

RECOMMENDATION 6

Given the evolving donor landscape and the increasing shift towards joint programming, the Country Office should reassess its resource mobilization strategy to ensure sustained financial support for its key priorities.

Priority: HIGH /LOW/MEDIUM	Timeline: SHORT-TERM / MEDIUM-TERM/LONG-TERM
Suggested steps to be taken: • Reevaluate and enhance the resource mobilization strategy to align with the reality of decreasing flexible funding and the increasing preference for joint programming among donors. Identify funding gaps and opportunities for diversification. • Strengthen strategic donor engagement through thematic dialogue, ensuring UN Women's leadership in shaping funding priorities and securing long-term commitments. ➤ Clarify future funding prospects with the Regional Office and headquarters, particularly regarding the status of direct Strategic Note funding from Sida and its application across UN Women Country Offices. Advocate for maintaining funding streams for areas that are difficult to finance under joint programming approaches, such as normative and policy work, and pursue efforts for institutional funding for horizontal functions such as operations, coordination and communications. ➤ Expand funding avenues by exploring potential financial contributions from national governments, the business sector and private foundations. Develop tailored engagement strategies to position UN Women as a key partner for advancing gender equality in both public and private-sector initiatives.	
To be led by: Country Office in coordination with the Regional Office and headquarters	
Impact: High	Difficulty: High
If not implemented: Opportunistic resource mobilization, funding gaps for programmes and key functions, personnel turnover.	

Annexes are available in Volume II of the report.

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The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service is co-located with the Internal Audit and Investigation Services under the Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS). The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service's main purpose is to enhance accountability, inform decision-making, and contribute to learning about the best ways to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through the organization's mandate, including its normative, operational, and coordination work. The Independent Evaluation Service also works to strengthen capacities for gender-responsive evaluation within UN entities, governments, and civil society organizations.

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

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



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