



IN BRIEF

UN WOMEN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

STRATEGIC NOTE 2021–2025

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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 brief presents the key findings, 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

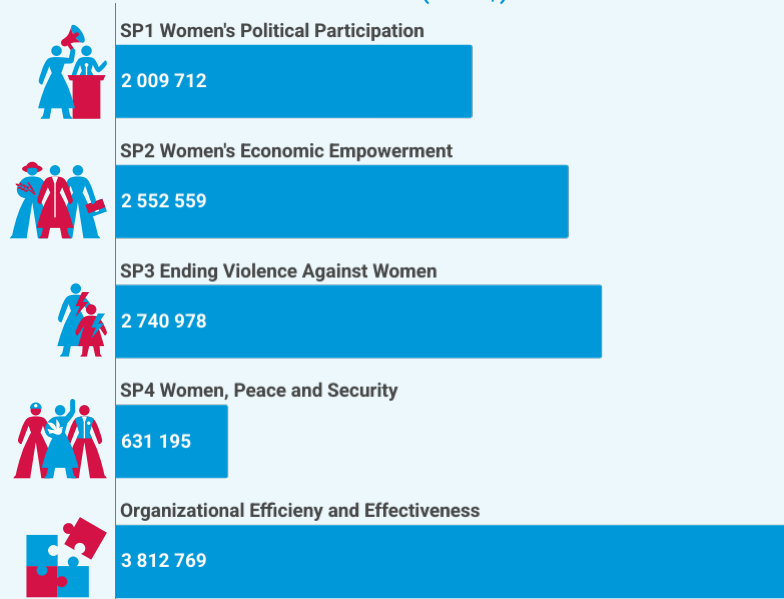
UN Women, UN BiH,
governmental and
non-governmental
organizations, donors

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.