



EVALUATION BRIEF



Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia



SUPPORT TO PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN SERBIA (GENDER EQUALITY FACILITY / GEF) 2018 – 2021

Photo: UN Women

In the period 2018 – 2021, UN Women Programme Office in Serbia, in close cooperation with the National Coordination Body for Gender Equality (CBGE) and the Ministry of European Integration (MEI) has implemented the project 'Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia' (Gender Equality Facility / GEF), funded by the EU within the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) II. Civil society organisations have supported implementation of the project countrywide.

Total project budget: EUR 2,000,000.

The project supported further advancement of gender equality through:

- support to the main national gender equality mechanisms in implementation of national gender equality policy;
- support to the gender mainstreaming of EU accession process and IPA fund programming and
- support to the civil society organizations to take active role in the implementation of National Strategy for Gender Equality, particularly economic empowerment of women.

TEXT BOX 1

Context

Over the last decade the Republic of Serbia progressed in gender equality in terms of establishment of normative and institutional framework for gender equality, reporting on international commitments and women's participation in Government and National Assembly. Still, institutions mandated for gender equality are in most cases under capacitated and lack adequate financing, gender equality has not yet been firmly established on the political agenda, and inequalities in society are persistent and underpinned by deeply rooted patriarchal social norms and beliefs.

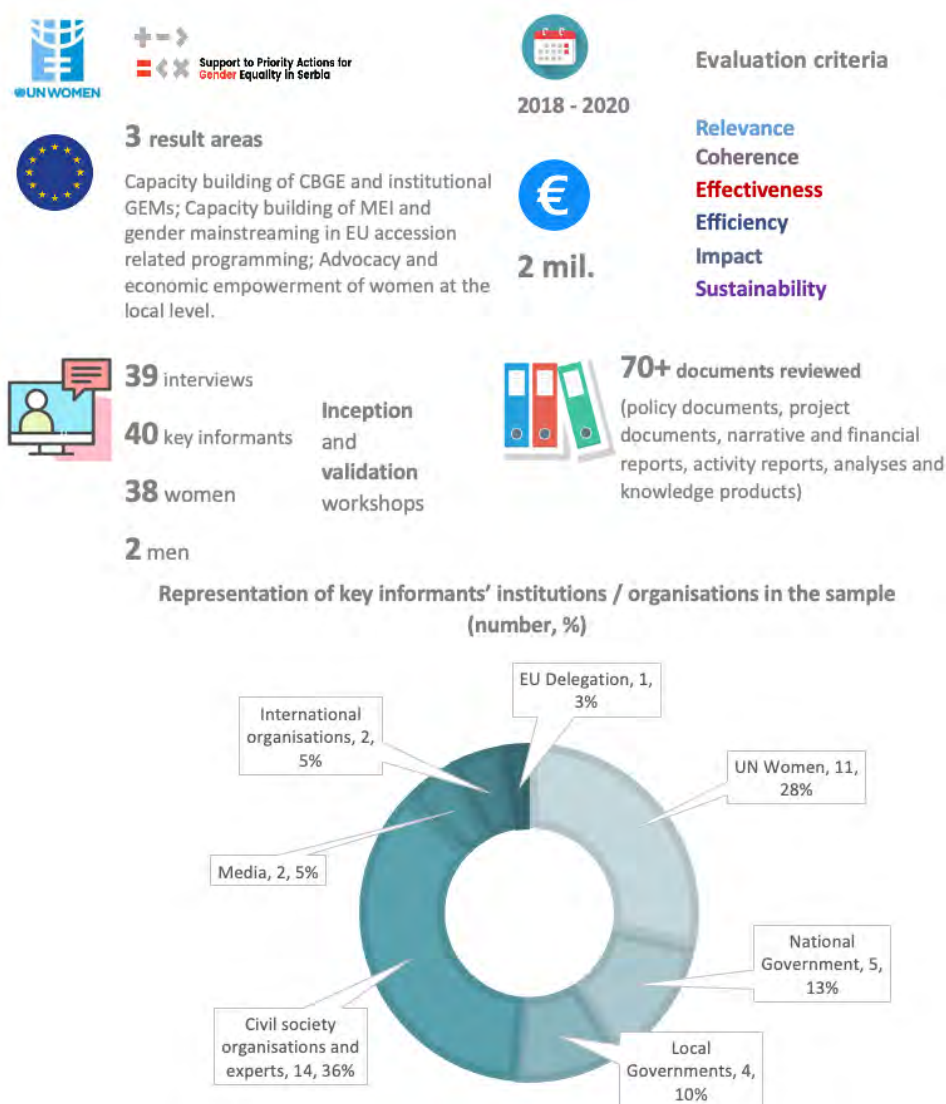
Serbia has European Union (EU) candidate status since 2013 and since 2014, negotiations on EU accession chapters have been opened. Gender equality should be mainstreamed in all reforms aiming at adjusting domestic laws and policies with EU acquis, including in the related EU assistance programming. EU 2020 Report on Serbia calls for efficient institutional set-up of gender mechanisms with adequate resources, adoption of the delayed new Law on Gender Equality and clarification of the roles and relations between the key gender equality mechanisms. Among EC's recommendations important place have measures for reducing gender gap in employment and increasing women's economic participation.



UN Women commissioned external evaluation to assess the programmatic progress and performance of the intervention from the point of view of relevance, effectiveness, impact, organizational efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation was conducted by two independent evaluators and completed in the period October 2020 - January 2021. The evaluation used theory based and contribution analysis approach, aiming to describe how the project worked and created a desired change, explaining the causalities between resources, activities, short and long-term outcomes. OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence,

effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability)¹ were used to summarise information on relevance and capture results achieved at outcome and output levels, lessons learnt and sustainability perspectives. From a forward-looking perspective, the evaluation aimed to provide action-oriented recommendations to UN Women PO in Serbia with regards to its work on engendering EU integration process and potential internal coordination in UN Women portfolio and external synergies with other development stakeholders.

Figure 1: Evaluation overview



¹ OECD/DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>



Key achievements

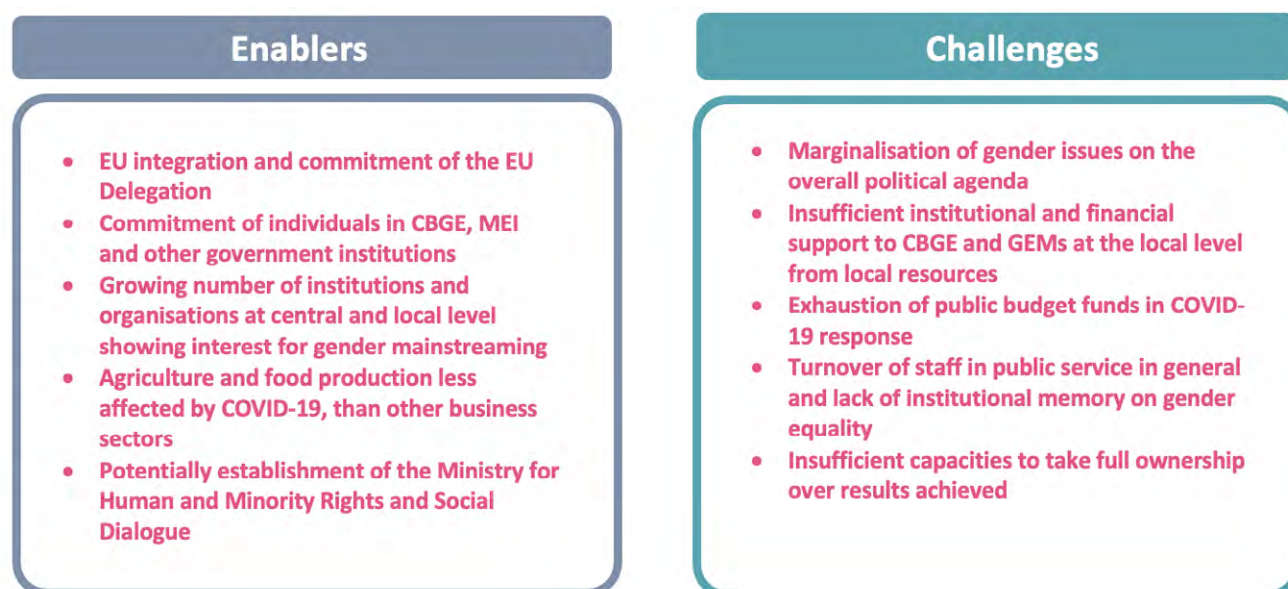
- The GEF project responded to the needs and priorities of the gender equality context in Serbia and international commitments related to EU accession framework and global standards, such as CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Sustainable Development Goals.
- The GEF project integrated well the human rights and gender equality and empowerment of women, including diverse groups of marginalized women: rural, older, with disabilities, Roma and minorities.
- The project supported CBGE in managing and further strengthening their capacities in key strategic processes, such as evaluation of National Action Plan for Gender Equality, drafting the next National Action Plan, vertical and horizontal coordination of gender equality mechanisms and reporting on international commitments.
- Normative and capacity building efforts supporting MEI resulted in increase of knowledge on gender mainstreaming in MEI and IPA units, sectoral analyses (construction, transport, infrastructure sectors, innovation and business development funds, support to civil society organisations) and engendering of IPA action documents.
- Capacity building in gender mainstreaming for more than 270 civil servants, engaged on policy development and implementation, in line-ministries and agencies.
- Strengthening capacities of 28 CSOs in project management and reaching more than 2500 women in cities and municipalities countrywide, including those in rural areas with gender equality and economic empowerment training.
- Contacts and actions with institutions that have not been originally planned have opened (Republic Secretariate for Public Policies, University of Belgrade, several line ministries) leading to opportunities for future collaboration (gender test in adoption of new policies, improvement of position of women in academia and science, involvement of scientists in development planning).
- GEF project opened new areas of interest and put engendering of environment and climate change sectors on the agenda opening opportunities for new programming for UN Women and national counterparts.
- GEF project in Serbia engaged EU Delegations gender focal points from the Western Balkan region and Turkey and GEF project staff in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia in capacity building and sharing spilling the knowledge generated beyond borders of Serbia and getting further political support for GEEW agenda.
- The project remained relevant in the changed context after covid-19 outbreak, thanks to timely research of the emerging needs (women in the labour market, women entrepreneurs, rural women and economy of care), providing immediate humanitarian response (10.000 people from the groups of poor, self-sustaining parents, Roma, persons with disabilities) and adjustment of implementation strategies (moving knowledge sharing to online space and supporting beneficiaries of economic empowerment support in organising their sales online).

TEXT BOX 2

Impact

Based on the interviews and reports of 8 from total of 16 grant beneficiary organisations: 66 women got self-employed or registered businesses, agricultural production or social enterprises (online jobs, kindergartens/playrooms, hairdressing, beauty salons, food production), 11 got employed by other entrepreneurs, while close to 200 improved or legalized their existing home/agricultural production or are working towards registration of their businesses. Status of majority of these businesses is still fragile, some reached only the registration stage, and this area requires further attention. In addition to economic empowerment, many of women engaged in the project state the added value of their participation is improved quality of life, self-esteem and participation in the community.

Figure 2: Enablers and barriers to achievement of GEF Projects objectives



Conclusions:

Conclusion 1 (Strength): The GEF project is highly relevant to the national priorities for GEEW and international commitments of Serbia (particularly Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, SDGs and EU integration).

Conclusion 2 (Strength): The GEF project is designed and implemented with high human right standards, it promotes women's human rights and brings benefits to women from diverse marginalized groups - rural, older, with disabilities, Roma, minorities - in line with principle Leave No One Behind. 1st phase of GEF Project generated extensive learnings from the work with rural women and women belonging to vulnerable groups that can support even sharper analysis and approach to these groups by national and local institutions and organisations in the next stage.

Conclusion 3 (Opportunity, Risk): Results achieved in the 1st phase are still fragile and continued support of all key stakeholders including UN Women, CBGE and MEI and the Delegation of the EU is necessary to strengthen their sustainability perspectives.

Conclusion 4 (Opportunity): UN Women wisely and responsibly manages the GEF project resources investing the most into those areas that are likely to provide long term results and using any savings to expand opportunities for deepening its effects through new co-operations or to address emerging unexpected challenges (e.g. effects of COVID-19 pandemics).

Conclusion 5 (Opportunity): UN Women Programme Presence in Serbia appears to be a regional leader in GEF, with opportunity to share the best practices and lessons learnt to the countries in the region of Western Balkans and Turkey as well with the EU Delegations in these countries.

Conclusion 6 (Strength, Risk): UN Women is effective in raising interest in new institutions, mobilising and bringing new experts to area of gender mainstreaming of public policies and opening new areas of engagement. While generally positive, diversification of partnerships can also bear risk of overstretching the capacities of UN Women in case new institutions and organisations are slow in taking ownership and responsibility for action.



TEXT BOX 3

Lessons Learnt:

- In a context where gender equality is not at the top of political agenda or is even marginalized, continuous support to institutional gender mechanisms may be beneficial to preserve their coordination role and keep gender mainstreaming in public discourse. This can be further supported by simultaneous mobilization of other institutions for gender equality and spreading a network of supporters.
- GEF project invested significant financial and human resources in production of quality gender analyses. Recommendations from the analysis could be used in future programming by both the Government and by UN Women, or they can become priorities of the public calls for UN Women's grants to institutions and CSOs, so their implementation is taken forward.
- Programmes of economic empowerment of women in rural areas and vulnerable women are not purely entrepreneurship programmes, but programmes of empowerment, improvement of self-esteem, soft-skills, participation and contribution to the community. They are programmes of quality-of-life improvement, that also bring financial income to women and their families. This is how they should be promoted and communicated so their nature is better understood and they are not judged before they have even started.
- There are positive examples of synergies between local gender equality mechanisms and CSOs in supporting reach out to women in rural areas and other vulnerable groups or design of gender-responsive grant or incentive schemes for economic empowerment. This cooperation could be used as one of the criteria for future support to projects at local level.
- There is a solid level of interest of women in academia, experts from different sectors including local development, energy and environment to engage on GEEW that can contribute with evidence-based data and scientific approach to advocacy for gender equality. If there is political readiness, dialogue platforms can be used to bring them together with women's CSOs and human rights organisations as traditional advocates for GEEW and engage a wider community of scientists and practitioners in quality dialogue over policy reforms.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Dialogue with the Government on strengthening the role of the CBGE, its institutionalisation and resourcing should be renewed, as well as on strengthening its horizontal and vertical coordination of gender mainstreaming. Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue should be also involved in order to define and delineate responsibilities between these two entities.

Recommendation 2: UN Women should engage in dialogue with MEI and EU Delegation to discuss how to safeguard the gender measures and indicators introduced at programming stage, up to the stage of implementation that usually comes several years later.

Recommendation 3: Gender mainstreaming capacity building of GEMs at all levels, MEI and other institutions should be continued and involve learnings from GEF phase 1, particularly in terms of addressing women's human rights in general and rights of women belonging to vulnerable groups. This should be coordinated with and the trainings should be accredited by the Academy for Public Administration.

Recommendation 4: Trainings for empowerment of women should be further supported. Learnings from the first cycle of economic empowerment support should be used to further sharpen the approach. Mentoring as a capacity building method should be introduced particularly in running and developing newly established economic activities.



Recommendation 5: UN Women should support initiatives related to the strengthening legal framework for gender equality and anti-discrimination, particularly drafting and adoption of the new Law on Gender Equality and new Strategy for Gender Equality. Strengthening of institutional and financial position of GEMs and should be taken into account.

Recommendation 6: UN Women Programme Office in Serbia and UN Women ECA RO should support more dynamic exchange and discussion on possible ways to achieve more regional coherence and synergy in future GEF activities, or through other opportunities as well as exchange through EU Delegations in the Western Balkans and UN Women in order to consistently support advancement of GEEW in EU accession process.

Recommendation 7: Findings and recommendations from analyses conducted in the GEF 1, particularly those related to development grants and grants for CSOs should be used in future design of activities.

Recommendation 8: In order to increase sustainability of new economic initiatives of women, established through GEF, new GEF project could dedicate a part of the project budget for support to beneficiaries of the previous project cycle. This could be done with small grants, precisely targeting key needs that can secure these economic initiatives, their maturation and sustainability.

Recommendation 9: Dialogue platforms of women in academia and women in CSOs and local GEMs should be further supported.