



## EVALUATION BRIEF



# FINAL EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT 'PROMOTING GENDER RESPONSIVE POLICIES AND BUDGETS: TOWARDS TRANSPARENT, INCLUSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA (2018-2022)'

Photo: UN Women

## About the project

The Republic of North Macedonia has invested significant efforts to promote gender equality through the application of Gender Mainstreaming (GM) and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) as key instruments. The project "Promoting Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets: Towards Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Republic of North Macedonia" (2018-2023) was implemented by UN Women Programme Office in North Macedonia with financial support by Switzerland and Sweden. The project supports Government stakeholders at central and local levels (in 31 local communities) in the implementation of gender responsive budgeting, and civil society organizations and oversight bodies in strengthening the accountability towards gender equality commitments.

The overall goal of the Project is to improve women's lives and support the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups through integration of gender perspective at all stages of national and local policy-making and budgeting processes.

The project planned to contribute towards achieving two outcomes:

1. The Government's public finance management and the strategic planning processes respond to the different needs of women and men through effective application of gender responsive budgeting
2. Civil society organizations, women, including the most vulnerable, actively participate in planning and decision-making mechanisms, and benefit from public policies and budgets.

Project target groups include budget and finance unit of the Ministry of Finance, finance units of central and local level budget users, civil servants in selected line ministries and local self-government units, gender machinery in the country which includes at central level department for Equal Opportunities, line ministries' coordinators for equal oppor-

tunities and municipal coordinators for equal opportunities, Members of parliament and local councillors in 31 targeted municipalities. Civil society organizations (CSOs) of different types were important project beneficiaries, including grass-root and local women's organizations, watchdog organizations, experienced advocacy and activist organizations. The project supported more than 60 CSOs initiatives, mobilized more than 4000 women to become agents of change, including women from vulnerable social groups (rural, minorities, socially excluded, etc.).

## About the evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by two independent evaluators, between May and October 2022. Evaluation purpose was to assess the programmatic progress and performance of the intervention, as well as alignment with human rights and 'Leave No One Behind' principles. The findings of the evaluation should contribute to organizational learning, future decision-making and effective programming and accountability and will be used by UN Women and its partners for future engagement in the promotion of gender responsive policy and budget planning at national and local levels.

The evaluation used theory based and contribution analysis approach, aiming to describe how the project was implemented 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)<sup>1</sup> were used to summarize information and capture results achieved at outcome and output levels. Based on the evaluation findings, lessons learned and recommendations for future engagement of UN Women in this area were produced.

The evaluation methodology employed mixed methods including quantitative and qualitative. Over 80 key informants (89% of women) were interviewed and more than 70 key documents, including project documentation, research, analyses and legal and policy documents were reviewed.

The evaluation adhered to UN Women and UN Evaluation Group standards and policies. Conclusions and recommendations are based on gender related data and gender analysis. Evaluation took into account UN commitment on disability inclusion and covered disability through evaluation questions.

## Evaluation findings

**Relevance:** The project was undoubtedly relevant and remains relevant as important part of the broader public finance management reform, national priorities related to the advancement of gender equality and empowerment of women and national obligations related to GEEW stemming from important international conventions, such as CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, Istanbul Convention and others. It responds to the needs of national and local governments and budget user institutions which needed to adjust to new responsibilities, methods and procedures to implement GRB. It responds to needs of CSOs which act as watchdogs of the budget processes or mobilizers of local women. It responds to the needs of local women to actively influence local policy making and budgeting processes.

**Coherence:** The project was fully aligned with UN Women strategic priorities, other national and regional UN Women initiatives related to the GEEW in the area of gender responsive public policies and budgets. The project manifested the unique expertise and comparative advantage of UN Women vis-à-vis other international and bilateral stakeholders engaged in the promotion of gender equality and public policy and finance reforms. It is complementary with other interventions implemented by International Financial Organizations in regard to the public finance management reform, as well as initiatives by other international organizations focused on political empowerment of women and strengthening gender equality mechanisms and policies at national and local levels.

**Effectiveness:** The project was effectively implemented, results achieved to the greatest extent and processes were advanced in many ways, particularly in regard to the awareness of GRB importance, skills and motivation of various stakeholders to apply GRB practices in their work, mobilization of women to request local policies and measures in line with their needs, capacities and mobilization of civil society to promote and safeguard GRB processes. The effectiveness of the implementation was to a large extent enabled by a combination of adequate strategies, which managed to overcome hindering factors, such as delayed legal reform, political instability, and high turnover in ministries and LSGs, weak capacities of local GE mechanisms, lack of funds and very low capacities for implementation of programmes in some municipalities, lack of gender disaggregated data and still overly prevailing gender stereotypes, and COVID-19 related restrictions.

**Efficiency:** The project was efficiently implemented with strategic allocation of financial resources to achieve planned results, with effective management and leadership of the project and an efficient and reflexive monitoring system.

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

## Recommendations

**Impact:** Although it is too early to estimate full impact of the project, the evidence points to important achievements that will eventually lead to the full-scale impact in terms of establishing the system of gender responsive policy and budget planning at central and local level from which women benefit, thus contributing to the promotion of gender equality. The impact is visible at policy, institutional, community and individual level. It manifests as established foundation for GRB (legal, human resource and procedural), new institutional forms and practices, new dynamic in local decision making between women and LSGs and visible gains that women achieved in terms of infrastructure projects, new or improved services, as result of local planning more aligned with women's needs. The project has visible impact on women from various vulnerable groups, such as rural women, women from underdeveloped and remote communities, economically deprived women, and Roma women. The project applied intersectional approach having LNOB as a central principle, but disability inclusion per se was not a specific objective.

**Sustainability:** The project has successfully built capacities of rights-holders and duty-bearers. However, the sustainability of these newly gained capacities will depend on the turnover of public administration staff, capacities of institutions to transfer knowledge and procedures to new staff. It will also depend on the capacities of NGOs to perform their watchdog role and readiness of women to continue to play active role in local budgeting and policy planning processes.

**Gender Equality and Human Rights:** Gender and human rights principles and strategies are in the core of the GRB Project, which is reflected in the initial conceptualization and design of the Project all the way through its implementation, monitoring and reporting.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATION** is to continue with the project as clearly GRB institutionalization in North Macedonia is at a turning point. There is finally a legal ground for instituting the GRB in planning and financing policies and measures, but further operationalization of legal framework and different forms of support directed towards diverse stakeholders will be needed in order to ensure that system is fully in place. Employees in the respective institutions need to reach certain routine in its implementation and monitoring, while civil society watchdogs need further support for monitoring budget implementation and advocating its revision, if needed. Following recommendations point to more specific areas of future needed interventions in this regard.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Contribute with expertise and other means to further developments of normative framework for systematic implementation of GRB, and at all levels in line with PFM reform.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Enhance existing and develop new partnerships and alliances in order to contribute to the synergy in various efforts to effectively implement GRB and direct financial flows to the GEEW priorities in line with authentic needs of women.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Support further stakeholders in their capacities to implement fully GRB at national and local level by providing expertise and adequate resources.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** Maintain and expand processes which are not fully sustainable at this point without further support and are crucial for the needs based and transparent GRB processes, particularly mobilization and coordination of local women and their engagement with local budget planning and execution, as well as budget watchdog initiatives which still need expert support and guidance.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** Continue to take care of LNOB expanding outreach to more diverse groups of vulnerable women, increasing importance of disability inclusion in the implementation of outreach activities.