

GENDER-BUDGET WATCHDOG REPORT

**THE ANALYSIS OF THE GLOBAL
ENVIRONMENTAL FUND (GEF)
PROJECTS IN THE WESTERN
BALKANS AND MOLDOVA**



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSO	- CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION
CBIT	- CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE FOR TRANSPARENCY
GEF	- GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
GRB	- GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING
GRES	- GENDER RESULTS EFFECTIVENESS SCALE
IFAD	- INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
M&E	- MONITORING AND EVALUATION
MRV	- MEASURING, REPORTING AND VERIFICATION
NDC	- NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTION
OFP	- OPERATIONAL FOCAL POINT
POPS	- PERSISTENT ORGANIC POLLUTANTS
SCCF	- SPECIAL CLIMATE CHANGE FUND
SDGS	- SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
UNDP	- UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
UNEP	- UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM
UNFCCC	- UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE
WB	- WESTERN BALKANS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Gender Budget Watchdog Report (hereinafter the Report) is to analyze how Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects have supported countries in the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania) and Moldova in addressing environmental and climate-related challenges through a gender lens. The Report has been divided into the following sections:

1. The general situation regarding climate change and its effects on vulnerable populations, including women;
2. Countries' obligations to respond to climate change both in emergency situations and to ensure compliance with international environmental treaties;
3. Available project funding for climate financing, including Global Environment Facility (GEF) funds to respond to these needs and obligations, GEF's structure and mandate, method of funds disbursement, and project cycle;
4. Gender mainstreaming in GEF projects, including the use of gender tools (such as GRES and gender markers (GEM)) and monitoring progress throughout the project cycle;
5. Specific examples of GEF projects in each country and their analysis through a gender lens using a GRES matrix.

The main focus shall be on specific examples of selected GEF projects in each country and their analysis through a gender lens using a GRES matrix (item #5). This shall provide detailed information on the financing of selected GEF projects, and their impact on women population shall be assessed in line with the GRES matrix.

METHODOLOGY

This methodology provides a structured framework for analyzing how Global Environment Facility (GEF) funds allocated and disbursed in the Western Balkans and Moldova integrate gender considerations. As the financial mechanism serving six multilateral environmental conventions, GEF supports these countries - largely developing or in transition - to meet their climate change, biodiversity, and pollution-related international obligations. The analysis applies a gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) lens to assess whether GEF-funded projects address the needs, vulnerabilities, and participation of women and socially disadvantaged groups.

The approach is designed to guide the development of a Gender-Based Watchdog Report aligned with the objectives of the GBWN network, which promotes transparency and accountability in climate finance through civil society engagement.

SCOPE AND PROJECT SELECTION

The analysis covers GEF-funded projects approved or implemented during GEF-6 to GEF-8 cycles (2018-2026) primarily, reflecting the period when GEF's latest Gender Policy (2017) and Gender Implementation Strategy (2018) became standard in programming. Older projects will also be referenced for comparison. One GEF project per country will be examined, prioritizing sectors where climate change and pollution have significant human impact.

By using gender-responsive budgeting, the analysis shall focus on:

- **Budget tracking:** identifying allocations and executed funds and assessing whether gender-responsive actions are included.
- **Expenditure analysis:** exploring who benefits from GEF disbursements - women, men, and vulnerable groups - based on available project data.
- **Effectiveness analysis:** linking financial inputs to gender-related outcomes, including changes in resilience, participation, and equitable access to opportunities.

In the process of undertaking the Gender Mainstreaming Review, the guiding questions evaluate whether projects: **(a)** identify gender-differentiated needs and priorities, **(b)** ensure equal access to resources, opportunities, and technologies, **(c)** support equitable participation in decision-making, and **(d)** avoid reinforcing gender inequalities. All the above elements are embedded in GEF's Policy on Gender Equality and the Gender Implementation Strategy.

Each selected project will be assessed using the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) as a tool, which classifies gender integration along a five-level scale:

1. Gender Negative
2. Gender Blind
3. Gender Sensitive
4. Gender Responsive
5. Gender Transformative

Methodology Actions

»» Action 1. Mapping GEF Interventions in the Region

- > Presentation on GEF's mandate, method of work and role of its partners (implementing partners, local governments, NGOs, and the public), and key gender documents.
- > Present GEF funds available in the Western Balkans and Moldova and the method of disbursement.
- > Select one recently completed GEF project per each WG country (preferably with the most data available for analysis in sectors of climate change and pollution, as they affect women and vulnerable populations the most).

»» Action 2. Planned vs. Executed Resources

- > Compare planned allocations with executed resources for each project (with a caveat pending the availability of such financial data).
- > Track whether funds earmarked for gender or social inclusion activities were actually disbursed.
- > Highlight discrepancies between financial commitments and delivery.

»» Action 3. Analysis of Planning Processes

- > Review whether the planning stage included a gender analysis or consultation with CSOs representing women's or local populations' interests and gender equality stakeholders.
- > Assess whether project problem statements or baselines reference gender-differentiated needs.
- > Examine whether planning documents included sex-disaggregated data.

»» Action 4. Analysis of Implementation Process

- > Review whether the implementation phase included specifically tailored gender and/or local CSO environmental activities.

»» Action 5. Assessment of Objectives and Indicators

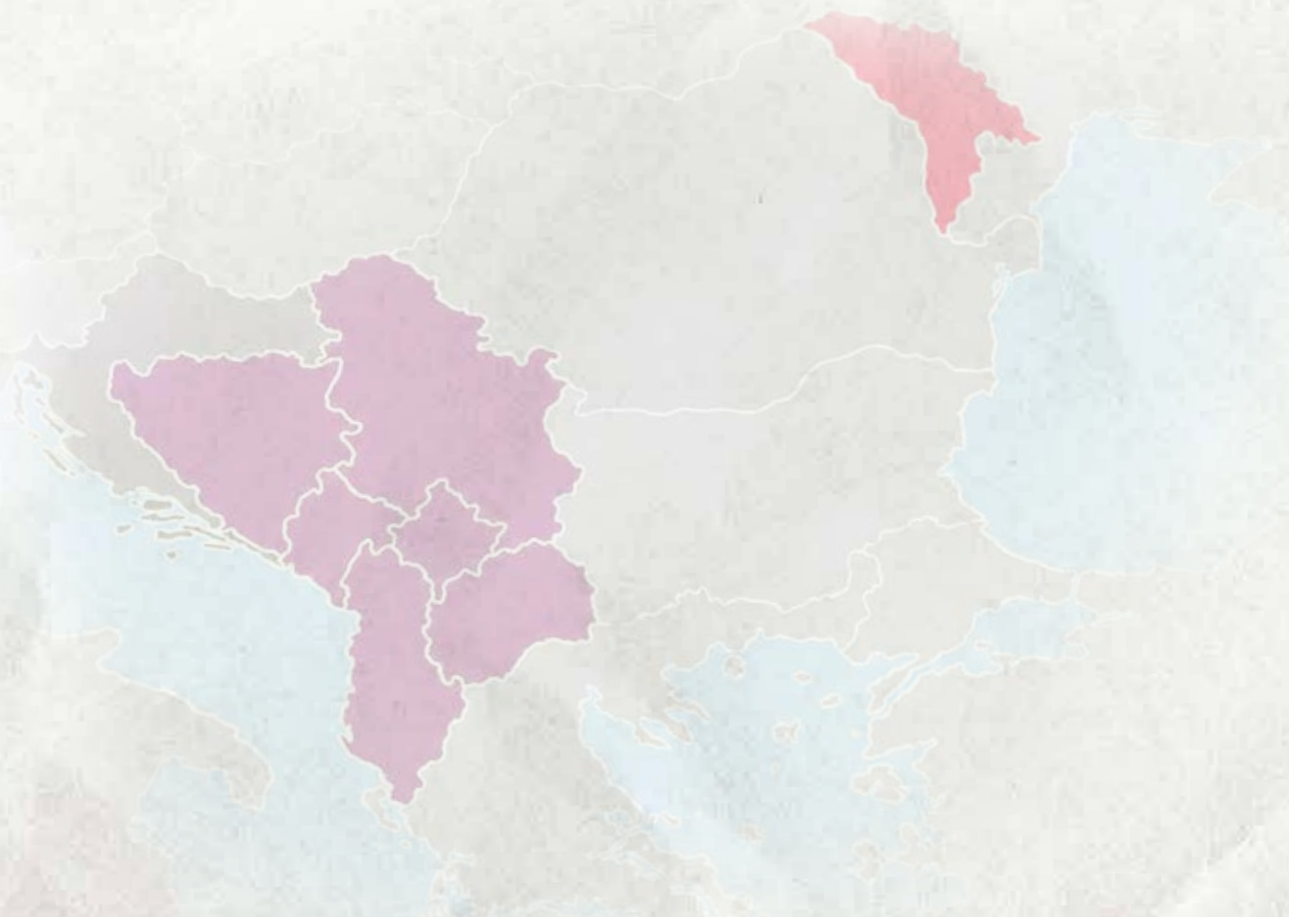
- > Determine whether selected GEF projects include explicit gender objectives in their log frames or results frameworks. Provide examples of them.
- > Review whether indicators are sex-disaggregated and whether they measure qualitative outcomes rather than only outputs (e.g. number of women participants).
- > Assess the quality of baselines and targets attached to gender-related indicators.

»» Action 6. Application of GRES

- Apply the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) to selected GEF projects (with the caveat that all or most of the necessary data are available and that the project has been completed):
 - » Negative (reinforces inequalities)
 - » Blind (ignores gender)
 - » Sensitive (acknowledges differences)
 - » Responsive (actively integrates gender)
 - » Transformative (challenges structural inequalities)
 - » Use the findings from steps 3 and 4 to justify classification.

»» Action 7. Benchmarking

- Compare results against key frameworks:
 - » GEF Gender Policy
 - » Relevant other national gender equality and climate policies, if applicable



CHAPTER 1. THE GENERAL SITUATION REGARDING CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS EFFECTS ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS, INCLUDING WOMEN

In the last decade, the Western Balkans' countries and Moldova have been facing several climate change crises such as recurring floods, drought, heatwaves, forest fires and landslides. The most severe events resulted with human casualties and enormous material damage, as shown in the table below, which should be the alarm for everyone to take these events seriously.

Major Climate-Related Disasters (2014-2024) in the Western Balkans and Moldova

COUNTRY	YEAR	EVENT TYPE	DEATHS / HUMAN IMPACT	ESTIMATED DAMAGE / IMPACT	NOTES
Bosnia & Herzegovina	2024 (Oct)	Flash floods & landslides	~26 deaths	Severe infrastructure + housing damage, villages destroyed	Very high local impact (bridges, roads, homes) ¹
	2014 (May)	Regional floods	~24 deaths	~ €1.3-2.0 billion damage	Part of the 2014 SE Europe floods
Serbia	2014 (May)	Regional floods	~	~ €1.5 billion	Heavily hit in the 2014 floods
North Macedonia	2016 (Aug)	Flash floods (Skopje)	20-21 deaths	Large urban destruction, many displaced	Severe flash flooding in urban areas
Albania	2015, 2017	Major floods		Significant losses to agriculture, houses, infrastructure	Multiple recurrent flood events; large share of national disaster losses
Montenegro	2017 (Summer)	Wildfires & summer climate extremes	No large-scale fatality spikes documented	Tens of thousands of hectares burned, evacuations, tourism + forest damage	Major wildfires on the coast, forest and property loss
Kosovo	Recurring (2014+)	Floods / Flash floods	Several deaths over events	Damage to roads, homes, agriculture	Flood vulnerability recurrent, though consolidated damage data is sparse
Moldova	2020	Severe drought	~ 20% loss of agricultural jobs; major socio-economic impact	~ 26% drop in agricultural production; estimated economic losses (drought + other disaster) - US\$ 1.2 billion over decade	Droughts every 3-10 years; 2020 especially damaging. ²
	2024 (Sep)	Torrential rainfall / Floods	60 people rescued/affected (dozens rescued)	€ 7.8 million (~US\$ 8-9 m) direct damage (per EU report)	The 2024 floods hit many districts, damaged bridges, public buildings.

¹ REPORT on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the mobilization of the European Union Solidarity Fund to provide assistance to Austria, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Moldova relating to floods occurred in September 2024 and Bosnia and Herzegovina relating to floods occurred in October 2024 | A10-0114/2025 | European Parliament

² World Bank Helps Moldova Build Resilience to Disasters and Climate Risks

Climate change affects all human beings, but poor and socially disadvantaged vulnerable populations are affected more. These may include certain categories of women, such as single mothers, female pensioners, and minority women (e.g. Roma). Due to their social, economic, or family status, they have fewer resources to cope with the consequences of climate change when their homes, assets, and livelihoods (often linked to agriculture and farming) are destroyed or damaged. In addition, due to their status, they are likely to face energy poverty, understood as the inability or hardship to pay electricity and heating bills. Because of their lower average income, women are at greater risk of energy poverty than men and have fewer options for investing in low-carbon measures such as energy efficiency and renewable energies.³

³ https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/environment-and-climate-change?language_content_entity=en

2. COUNTRIES' OBLIGATIONS TO RESPOND TO CLIMATE CHANGE

In light of the Western Balkans and Moldova's increasing exposure to climate-driven floods, landslides, and associated human casualties, prioritizing climate-impact action is imperative for governments. Their actions should prevent or reduce risks, protect vulnerable communities, and avert mounting social and economic losses. The climate change challenge cannot be ignored. It requires not only appropriate policies and legislation but-crucially-adequate climate financing to support science-based mitigation and adaptation measures, as outlined below.

Climate finance⁴ refers to local, national or transnational financing-drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing-that seeks to support **mitigation and adaptation actions** that will address climate change. For example, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement call for financial assistance from Parties (states) with more financial resources to assist those that are less endowed and more vulnerable, such as the Western Balkans and Moldova.

In this regard, international responses to climate change and broader environmental challenges are addressed through a series of global environmental treaties such as those mentioned above. These agreements require signatory states to undertake actions that protect the environment and address climate change, including limiting temperature increases and reducing greenhouse gas (CO²) and other emissions at both global and national levels.

As stated, developed countries with strong economies make financial contributions to global environmental funds (such as the GEF) to support less-developed countries in meeting their international obligations.

Nevertheless, Western Balkan countries also plan and execute allocations for environmental protection or infrastructure upgrades that could be considered climate financing, although they are not usually labeled as such. These may include, for example, the construction or upgrade of infrastructure for flood management (river embankments), closing illegal waste landfills, the creation of protected areas/national parks, or the renovation of public buildings for energy efficiency. However, these domestic funds are often scarce, dependent on loan arrangements and donor preferences, and overall insufficient to address all the challenges and needs stemming from climate change. As stated, international funds such as the GEF, the Green Climate Fund, and others are available to Western Balkan countries to support these efforts further. Specifically, through GEF funds, the Western Balkans may receive assistance in five key areas: climate change, biodiversity, land degradation, chemicals and waste, and international waters (which are regulated by various treaties, as explained below in section 3).

In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and comply with treaty commitments, countries implement mitigation and adaptation measures. Mitigation aims to reduce or prevent emissions across sectors such as energy, industry, transport, agriculture, forestry, and waste management.

⁴ <https://unfccc.int/topics/introduction-to-climate-finance>

In the energy sector, these measures may include transitioning to renewable sources of power generation (solar, wind, hydro, geothermal), improving energy efficiency in buildings, industry, and transport, and phasing out coal and other fossil fuels among others. In the transport sector, mitigation efforts may involve expanding electric and cleaner public transport, improving cycling and walking infrastructure, and shifting freight transport to rail. Agriculture and forestry mitigation measures may include promoting organic farming, encouraging the use of bio-fertilizers, preventing deforestation, and expanding reforestation. Strengthening waste management-reducing waste generation, increasing recycling, improving manure management, and reducing landfill pressures - is also essential, as poorly managed waste systems contribute to rising temperatures. Importantly, the effectiveness of mitigation depends not only on government policies but also on citizen choices, such as selecting cleaner heating fuels, using public transport, and reducing household waste, among other actions. On the other hand, adaptation measures aim to reduce climate-related risks and enhance the resilience of communities, ecosystems, and economies. They include:

- 1. Physical or engineering measures**, such as constructing flood defenses (levees, dikes, embankments), reinforcing climate-resilient infrastructure (bridges, roads, railways), improving drainage systems, and undertaking reforestation.
- 2. Technological measures**, including flood early-warning systems, drought-resistant crops, and modern irrigation technologies.
- 3. Institutional measures**, such as developing national adaptation plans, adopting climate-related legislation, and establishing insurance and risk-transfer schemes.
- 4. Behavioral and social measures**, such as adjusting planting seasons, conserving water, promoting energy-saving practices, and implementing community evacuation planning.

A clear understanding of basic mitigation and adaptation concepts is essential, as these approaches form the foundation of international donor support and environmental funding - such as GEF initiatives - available to developing and transition countries, including those in the Western Balkans.

3. AVAILABLE PROJECT FUNDING FOR CLIMATE FINANCING, INCLUDING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL FACILITY (GEF) FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established in 1994 as an independent financial mechanism that provides several types of funding instruments - primarily grants - to support environmental action in developing countries and countries in transition. GEF is a financial mechanism for six multilateral conventions that assist least-developed countries and countries in transition, including the Western Balkans, in meeting their international obligations with regard to the following:

Climate change:

The UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) is a global agreement under which almost all countries commit to work together to prevent dangerous climate change by limiting greenhouse gas emissions. It is complemented by the Paris Agreement, which aims to keep global warming well below 2°C and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C by reducing emissions. The Paris Agreement also supports countries in adapting to climate change and provides financial and technical assistance, especially for the most vulnerable.

Hazardous chemicals, pesticides (POPs), and their waste:

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) is a global treaty to protect people and the environment from dangerous chemicals known as persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Its goal is to eliminate or reduce these toxic substances, which remain in the environment for long periods and accumulate in living organisms causing health problems and environmental harm.

Mercury:

The Minamata Convention is a global treaty to protect the environment and human health from the adverse effects of mercury. It regulates mercury mines, phases out and phases down the use of mercury in a number of products and processes, and introduces control measures on emissions to air and releases to land and water.

Biodiversity:

The Convention on Biological Diversity is an international agreement to protect the variety of life on Earth. Its aims are to conserve ecosystems and species, use natural resources sustainably, and ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

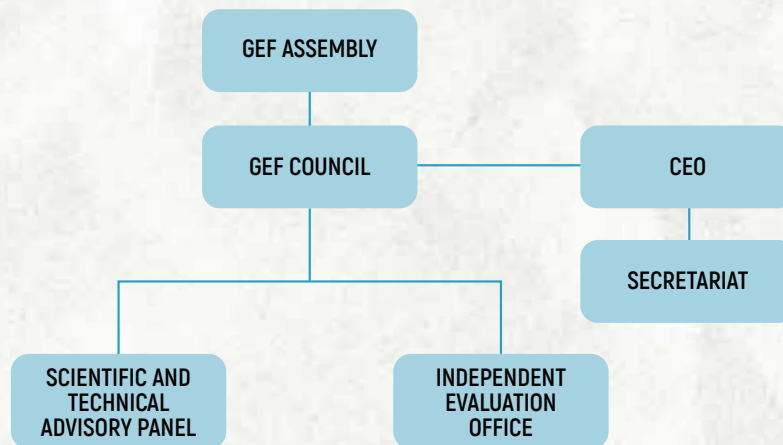
Land degradation:

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is an international agreement to combat desertification and land degradation, especially in drylands. Its goal is to protect and restore land so it can support people, food production, and ecosystems.

International waters:

The BBNJ Convention (UN Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction) aims to protect and sustainably use marine biodiversity in areas beyond national borders. Its goal is to conserve marine species and ecosystems, regulate activities such as fishing and seabed mining, and promote fair benefit-sharing.

The organizational structure of GEF involves several bodies, including the Assembly, Council, Chief Executive Officer, Secretariat, Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel and Independent Evaluation Office. The GEF Council and the GEF Secretariat playing particularly important roles in the processes of project selection and approval.



The GEF Trust Fund is replenished every four years (through cycles) by donor countries. The current projects are approved and financed under the GEF-8 cycle (2022-2026), with a total envelope of USD 5.33 billion provided by 29 donors. Several funding windows operate under the GEF financing architecture, but the following are most commonly applicable for projects in the Western Balkans and Moldova:

- **Global Environment Facility Trust Fund (GET/GEF):** Supports projects related to biodiversity, chemicals and waste, climate change, international waters, and land degradation. The majority of projects in the Western Balkans are financed through GEF/GET grants and are usually valued up to USD 5 million (medium-sized projects).
- **Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF):** Provides smaller grants focused on technology transfer and innovation.
- **Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT):** Supports the development of climate-related data, monitoring, and reporting capacities of the states in line with the Paris Agreement (e.g. development of the state's National Adaptation Plan).

The GEF currently works with a network of 18 partner agencies, comprising a mix of the following institutions:

- (1) United Nations agencies (e.g. UNDP, UNEP, UNIDO, FAO and others);
- (2) multilateral development banks (e.g. the Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, and others);
- (3) other international financial institutions (e.g. the International Fund for Agricultural Development - IFAD); and
- (4) non-UN international organizations (e.g. the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund - FUNBIO, the World Wildlife Fund - WWF-US, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature - IUCN).

Nevertheless, the projects in the Western Balkans and Moldova are implemented predominantly by one of following UN agencies: UNDP, UNEP, UNIDO, FAO as well as the World Bank. Projects are selected, implemented, and monitored in close cooperation with the host country's Designated Operational Focal Point (OFP), typically an employee of the ministry in charge of environment who also endorses the agency that will implement the project. Importantly, national governments endorse (select) an implementing agency for each project.

They are encouraged to provide co-funding to GEF projects, usually in-kind, although this is not a formal requirement. GEF-funded projects follow an established sequence of phases:

Project Development Phase:

This phase begins with the preparation of the Project Identification Form (PIF), developed in consultation with the OFP, who issues a Letter of Endorsement for the particular agency that will act as the project implementer. The PIF is submitted to the GEF Secretariat for clearance and, if cleared, forwarded to the GEF Council for approval. Once approved, the implementing agency (e.g., UNDP, UNEP, or whichever agency prepared the PIF) prepares the full project proposal in close consultation with the OFP. The completed proposal is then submitted to the GEF Secretariat for the GEF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Endorsement. The proposal development stage is the best timing for civil society organizations (CSOs) to get involved and propose activities aligned with the project's objectives. All projects must be developed in accordance with the GEF Gender Policy.

Project Implementation Phase:

Implementation typically lasts between two and five years, and the OFP is closely involved in the process. Each year, the project team prepares a Project Implementation Report (PIR) to track annual progress.

With respect to CSOs, there is a set of eligibility rules for CSO involvement in GEF projects, but it is context-specific: (a) At the policy and engagement level CSOs simply need to meet general non-profit and mission alignment criteria to join the *GEF CSO Network*⁵; (b) for grant funding / project execution CSOs must be registered as non-profit organizations with demonstrated capacity, community involvement, and relevance to GEF focal areas (especially in programs like Small Grants Programs which is the main source of funding for CSOs), (c) for larger GEF projects CSO's participation and eligibility depend on the **lead implementing agency's rules** and project design, often evaluated on capacity and roles defined in each project proposal. If recognized by the implementing agency as a valuable partner capable of contributing to project implementation, CSOs may participate as project sub-grantees entrusted with carrying out specific activities included in the project design. Alternatively, if their internal capacities or skills are being strengthened, they may be project beneficiaries-typically as trainees.

Terminal (Final) Evaluation:

At project completion, a Terminal Evaluation is conducted by GEF-approved evaluators. CSOs may be interviewed or consulted as stakeholders during this process, depending on their actual role within the project.

⁵ <https://gefcsnetwork.org/membership-benefits/>

4. GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN GEF PROJECTS AND MONITORING PROGRESS THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT CYCLE

In respect to gender mainstreaming and the use of gender tools, the GEF adopted its Policy on Gender Equality in 2017, which became applicable as of July 2018. This policy supports gender-responsive approaches to environmental challenges across all GEF-funded projects. Its aims are to: **(a)** support women's improved access to, use of, and control over natural resources such as land, water, forests, and fisheries; **(b)** enhance women's participation in decision-making processes related to natural resource management, positioning women as agents of change at all levels; and **(c)** target women as beneficiaries through opportunities that promote sustainable livelihoods and income generation, including activities linked to conservation, rehabilitation, and restoration.

GEF's Policy on Gender Equality (2017) and the Gender Implementation Strategy (2018) provide a set of principles and guidance for planning and managing environmental projects. According to these policy documents, the standard project design template requires projects to integrate a defined set of measures: a gender analysis or a gender action plan; gender-sensitive indicators where possible and applicable; sex-disaggregated data; actions that strengthen women's empowerment in participation and governance; measures to improve women's access to and control of resources; and equitable socio-economic benefits and services. These requirements form the basis for implementing gender-responsive projects and for ensuring that women and girls are recognized both as agents and as beneficiaries of environmental interventions.

In practical terms, this means that every GEF-funded project must include: **(1)** quantitative gender-sensitive indicators, such as the number or percentage of women beneficiaries; and, where possible, **(2)** qualitative indicators that track socio-economic or gender-related changes if possible. There is no single official "gender-related output table" attached to or prescribed verbatim in the GEF Policy on Gender Equality (2017), or the Gender Implementation Strategy (2018). Those documents require gender-sensitive indicators and outputs, but they do not annex a fixed table. Instead, they expect gender-related outputs and indicators to be presented through: specific project's Results Framework log frame tables, Gender Action Plans (GAP), Monitoring & Evaluation tables used in PIFs and CEO Endorsement documents

Nevertheless, the following table could be used to illustrate measurement of gender related outputs and indicators in the project.

GENDER-RELATED OUTPUT	INDICATOR (QUANTITATIVE / QUALITATIVE)	BASELINE	TARGET	MEANS OF VERIFICATION
Increased participation of women in project activities	Percentage of women beneficiaries	30%	50%	Participant attendance records (sex-disaggregated)
Enhanced decision-making role of women	Number of women accessing project-supported services	0	300 women	Project monitoring reports
North Macedonia	Qualitative assessment of women's participation in decision-making bodies	Limited participation	Active participation in at least 50% of committees	Meeting minutes, stakeholder interviews

Furthermore, this approach aligns with the gender tool known as the Gender Marker, introduced by the UN Country Team (UNCT-GEM), which tracks how resources within each project support gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Accordingly, at the project design stage, each UN agency must assign an appropriate Gender Marker (GEM) rating: GEM 0 - not expected to contribute to gender equality or women's empowerment; GEM 1 - expected to contribute in a limited way; GEM 2 - gender equality and women's empowerment represent a significant objective; GEM 3 - gender equality and women's empowerment constitute the principal objective of the project. For example, each environmental project implemented by UNDP BiH must make effort to gain GEM 2 rating.

5. SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF GEF PROJECTS IN EACH COUNTRY AND ITS ANALYSIS THROUGH A GENDER LENS USING A GRES MATRIX

Six GEF-funded projects implemented across the six countries of the Western Balkans and Moldova shall be reviewed. For better comparison, the selected projects vary in size, focal area (biodiversity, climate change, water conservation, chemicals and waste), and implementation period. Six projects have been national projects, while only the Kosovo project (as the only one in the GEF database) is an add-on project to a regional initiative.

Together, these examples shall demonstrate how gender aspects are integrated into various GEF projects. First, some projects demonstrate a strong gender-responsive approach, visible in planning and implementation: they have developed gender analyses or gender action plans, applied sex-disaggregated indicators, set specific targets, and ensured active engagement of women in project activities (e.g. selected projects in Serbia, BiH-phase 2, Kosovo). The second group includes projects that did not sufficiently incorporate gender considerations at the design stage but attempted during implementation to compensate for this omission and to promote women's participation in activities (selected projects in Montenegro, BiH-phase 1). These are the most recent GEF projects, funded under the GEF-8, GEF-7, or GEF-6 project cycles. The third group is gender-blind: they do not include gender analysis, gender objectives, gender indicators, or tailored actions, treating all beneficiaries as a uniform group, usually these are older GEF projects funded before 2017 (selected projects in Albania, Moldova, North Macedonia).

For easier reference and comparison, this table summarizes all relevant data on the projects with GRES assessment. The first table provides an overview of the six GEF-funded projects implemented across the Western Balkans and Moldova.

Table 2. Summary of Relevant Data per Countries

PROJECT, GEF ID FOCAL AREA	COUNTRY	PERIOD	AGENCY	GEF GRANT USD	CO-FUNDING USD	GENDER GRES ASSESSMENT
GEF ID #6990 GEF 6 Trust Fund Protected Areas Management	BIH	Start: Oct. 2016 End: Dec. 2021	UNEP phase 1	1,39 million	13,5 million	Gender-Sensitive
GEF ID # 10344 GEF 7 Trust Fund Protected Areas Management Biodiversity - on going	BIH	Start: July, 2022 End: June 2027	UNDP phase 2	2.79 million USD	18.5 million	Gender responsive
GEF ID #10029 GEF Trust Fund Establishing Transparency Framework for Republic of Serbia	Serbia	Start: March 2019 End: June 2022	UNDP	1.1 million USD	215 171 USD	Gender responsive

GEF ID # 2875 Hazardous Chemicals PCB/waste Management	North Macedonia	Start: Sept 2008 End: Nov 2013	UNIDO	USD 1 million	2 million	Gender blind
GEF-6 ID # 9121 Integrated water resources management in the White Drin	Kosovo	Start: August 2015 End: August 2019	UNDP	5.5 million	229 million	Gender responsive
GEF- 5 ID # 5342 Climate Change Biomass Energy for Use SMEs in the Olive Oil Sector	Albania	Start: June 2016 End: June 2021	UNIDO	927,000	4.6 million	Gender blind
GEF 4, ID 3719 Climate Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions Through Energy Efficiency in the Industry	Moldova	Start: August 18, 2010 End: Dec 31, 2017	UNIDO	960,000	2,746 million	Gender blind

1a. Bosnia and Herzegovina

ID 6990 UNEP - Achieving Biodiversity Conservation through Creation, Effective Management and Spatial Design of Protected Areas (hereinafter the Project "SPA Biodiversity / Phase 1")

Implementing Agency: UNEP

GEF grant: USD 1,397,260

Project Co-financing: USD 13,528,200 (GEF-6) Trust Fund/ Medium-size project

Project Description

The project's overall goal was to support the expansion of the protected areas (PA) network in BiH, build capacity for effective protected areas management, and develop a biodiversity monitoring system through three components:

Component 1: Establishment and effective management of protected areas and biological diversity;

Component 2: Management effectiveness of the national protected areas system;

Component 3: Biodiversity monitoring.

In the terminal (final) evaluation, the Project was rated as satisfactory, with overall good performance in addressing a genuine need for establishing a nationwide protected areas network and a biodiversity management information system that aligns with national obligations.

Gender Mainstreaming

However, with regard to gender and social inclusion, the project failed to address gender-sensitive activities during the inception (design) phase and contained no gender results framework. During implementation, this shortcoming was partially addressed, as evidenced in the terminal project evaluation⁶ by the evaluator: Whilst gender and social inclusion (GESI) was important (and remains

⁶ <https://wedocs.unep.org/items/af81fd38-2f39-484a-b648-8e2b4744d001>

so), it was not a pivotally focused aspect to consider at the project outset in 2016 (or specifically requested by GEF). Despite this, positive GESI issues can be easily demonstrated." In terms of gender composition of team members, the Project Steering Committee has 50% members that are women (Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Ministry of Spatial Planning, Civil Engineering and Ecology of RS, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry of RS). Attempts were made to embrace gender and social inclusion matters via training, though this proved difficult to respectively inculcate these messages into the work plans. CENER21, for example, carried out a separate socio-economic analysis to help ensure a gender balance. This was useful to help communicate gender and social matters of PAs."

Budget & Expenditures

With regard to funding, the Evaluation Report stated that the total project budget was USD 1,397,260, with co-financing of USD 13,528,200. No division of costs per component was applied during the project, as this was not a requirement for GEF-6 projects. According to the final June 2022 tab of the Project's *Expenditure Statement and Unliquidated Obligations Report*, the final total cumulative expenditures amounted to USD 1,344,031 (95.5% spent), resulting in a cumulative underspend of USD 53,229 (up to June 2022). Annex VIII outlines completed tables of financial expenditure per budget line (Outcome/Output). As no gender-related activities were envisaged, no gender budget line existed. It is most likely that the aforementioned activities - training and the socio-economic analysis implemented by CSO CENER21 - were funded from the general training budget.

The Project had design-phase deficiencies in integrating social and gender issues, as no activities were planned and no gender indicators existed, making it effectively "gender blind." On a positive note, this shortcoming was addressed during the implementation phase as a result of midterm evaluation findings, when the project made efforts to develop gender-related activities, such as training and a socio-economic analysis conducted by its CSO partner CENER21. Accordingly, it became over time "gender sensitive." as the project staff realized its shortcoming in design and during the implementation added additional activities not originally planned such as a separate socio-economic analysis and training by partner CSO to help ensure a gender balance. This was useful to help communicate gender and social matters with respect to protected areas as found by the evaluator. The initial gender deficiency can also be explained by the fact that this was one of the very first biodiversity projects implemented in BiH and, as stated by a UNEP official, by the limited knowledge on how to practically apply gender concepts in specific environmental projects. As the first project in the biodiversity area, it facilitated the design of the subsequent follow-up SPA project, as explained below.

1b. Bosnia and Herzegovina

ID 10344 - UNDP: Improved Financial Sustainability and Strengthened Resilience of Protected Areas Through Development of Sustainable Recreation and Partnerships with the Private Sector (hereinafter "SPA Biodiversity / Phase 2")

(GEF-7) Trust Fund

Medium-size project

Implementing Agency: UNDP

Start date: July 1, 2022

End date: June 30, 2027

Status: Ongoing

Value: USD 2.79 million GEF grant + USD 18.5 million co-financing

Project Description

The Project aims to strengthen the practical management of protected areas (PAs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina through three core components:

- (1) Strengthening Protected Areas (PAs) to address climate change threats;
- (2) Improving the financial sustainability of targeted PAs through sustainable tourism development; and
- (3) Knowledge Management and Communication.

In practice, the project has been providing technical assistance to several institutions and public companies responsible for guarding and managing protected areas - including selected wetlands, mountains, lakes, caves, natural parks, and protected landscapes (26 in total) - by delivering capacity-building support, financial assistance, and joint promotional activities. Its overarching goal is to conserve endangered species in protected areas (flora and fauna) that are vital for climate resilience, while improving the financial viability of the institutions managing these areas.

Gender Mainstreaming

From a gender perspective, the project has ensured strong gender mainstreaming across its design and implementation. As stated in the Mid-Term Review, gender considerations were integrated into the project document and operationalized through a Gender Action Plan developed by an externally hired gender consultant. This plan has been systematically applied, and mid-term gender targets have been met. For example, all nine PA management plans developed with project support now incorporate tourism and socio-economic components that address gender issues.

The project has been assessed according to the GRES methodology as **gender responsive** (GEM 2), based on the following factors. Implementation has consistently promoted gender-balanced participation across trainings, consultations, study tours, and events. According to the Mid-Term Review, 45% of all trainees were women. The project also complied with the BiH Gender Equality Law by ensuring at least 40% representation of the less-represented sex in decision-making bodies. The Project Board exceeded this requirement with 60% women, and women remain well represented across the broader PA system.

The project has achieved several notable results in advancing gender equality in natural resource management. It organized the first national panel discussion on gender equality in this sector, creating an important platform for dialogue on challenges and opportunities. In partnership with the Via Dinarica Project, it produced the photo story *"Investing in Women to Move Mountains,"* highlighting women's contributions to natural resource management in BiH. Most recently, as stated by the Project Manager, the project supported the establishment of a women's section within the future Association of Protected Area Managers, further institutionalizing gender-responsive practices.

Budget and Expenditures

With respect to the budget, it is important to note that in addition to GEF financing of USD 2.79 million, the government and other partners also provide a substantial portion of funding. Together with their contributions, the total project cost amounts to USD 21,153,825. There is no

specific budget line solely intended for gender purposes; rather, gender activities have been funded through specific component budget items, although without clear visibility on the exact allocations. Limited information on budget allocations per group is available on the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office's ⁷ website.

Table 2. Summary of budgets an % distribution by years and Components ⁸

YEARS	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	TOTAL
Total Component 1 Managerial and technical capacities of targeted PAs in place helping ensure resilience of key bio-diversity values to climate change	71,600	283,600	263,000	305,600	209,600	1,134,000 USD
Total Component 2 Improving financial sustainability of targeted PAs through sustainable tourism development		198,600	283,600	294,600	201,600	1,042,000 USD

2. Albania

UNIDO - Biomass Energy for Productive Use for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the Olive Oil Sector

(GEF-5) Trust Fund

Medium-size project, Focal area: Climate Change

GEF Project ID: 5342

Start date: June 2016

End date: June 2021

Status: Completed

Value: USD 927,000 GEF grant + USD 4.6 million co-financing

Project Description

The project aimed to promote the adoption of modern biomass energy solutions in Albania's olive oil sector by introducing biomass-based technologies, strengthening institutional and SME capacities, and improving the enabling environment for renewable energy investments.

In particular, the Project supported 15 olive oil producers (SMEs) with 50% of the funds needed for purchasing biomass boilers to use olive pomace (waste biomass) as an alternative source of energy. Accordingly, the Project contributed to reducing fossil fuel consumption, increasing energy efficiency, and enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs in the agricultural - processing sector.

The project comprised four main components:

- (1) increased utilization of industrial biomass residues through demonstration of modern technologies;
- (2) strengthened capacities of SMEs, financial institutions, and technical actors;

⁷ <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/managementresponses/detail/15094>

⁸ Mid Term Project Review available at <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/23953>

- (3) assessment of national biomass potential and analysis of market barriers; and
- (4) development of replication projects and support to regulatory improvements.

The intervention aligned with national energy strategies and contributed to Albania's obligations under the Energy Community Treaty related to renewable energy uptake and energy diversification.

Gender Mainstreaming

From a gender perspective, it appears that the project design did not include any gender analysis, gender-specific objectives, or gender-responsive targets, with the exception of tracking female participation. Section 3.3.3 of the Terminal Evaluation ("Gender Mainstreaming") records several observations related to women's participation in commendable ways that took place during implementation. These included:

- the collection of sex-disaggregated data for trainings and capacity-building events attended by women;
- the presence of women participants in technical workshops and study visits;
- reported interest from some women-owned or women-managed businesses in biomass technologies; and
- instances where women employees in olive oil SMEs were involved in project-supported activities.

However, these actions were not part of the project's planned outputs or outcomes. They were ad hoc and observational rather than intentional or strategically integrated.

Consequently, the gender-related findings presented in Section 3.3.3 reflect participation rather than mainstreaming. While the project noted that women face barriers in business, high unemployment, and lack access to credit to start enterprises, it missed the opportunity to link these challenges to concrete systemic changes in employment practices - for example, by allocating a certain percentage of support to women-led SMEs.

Although the project provided training to 15 selected businesses and allocated 50% of funds for purchasing equipment for olive pomace (bio-waste), some of which benefited women, it failed to design a truly gender-sensitive intervention where this potential actually existed. Despite formal acknowledgments of gender equality on a few occasions in the proposal, project activities were not supported by a gender action plan, dedicated outputs, indicators, or budget allocation. There were no mechanisms to promote women's roles in clean energy value chains, no efforts to address gender - specific barriers in access to finance or technology, and no systematic engagement with women entrepreneurs. The fact that the project was endorsed in 2014 - before GEF's gender policy - likely explains the insufficient level of gender mainstreaming. As a result, the project can be assessed as gender-unaware at the design stage and **gender-blind** during implementation, although it had the potential to be gender-responsive.

Budget

The project's total cost amounted to USD 5,556,000 (including USD 927,000 GEF financing + USD 4,629,000 co-financing). There were no dedicated budget lines for gender activities, and expenditures related to the limited gender observations made during implementation were not traceable within the financial framework. Gender mainstreaming was therefore not financially resourced.

Budget and project expenditure ⁹

Table 3. Summary of project expenditure (status June 2021) is provided in the table below.

GENDER-RELATED OUTPUT	BUDGET APPROVED GEF	BUDGET EXPENDITURE (as of June 2021) GEF		FUNDS AVAILABLE (total USD) GEF
	Planned	2016 - 2021	% of budget released	
Component 1 Technology demonstration	490 000	502 529.90	103%	-12 529. 90
Component 2 Enabling market environment for biomass	310 000	266 351.14	86 %	43 648.86
Component 3 Monitoring and Evaluation	45 000	38 689.52	86%	6 310.48
PMC Management and Monitoring	82 000	95 387.41	116%	-13 387.41
TOTAL GEF	927 000	902 957.97	97 %	24 042.03

3. Serbia

Project Name: Establishing Transparency Framework for the Republic of Serbia

Type of Fund: CBIT (GEF-6) Trust Fund

Project Size: Medium-size project / Climate Change

Executing Agency / Implementing Partner: UNDP

GEF Project ID: 10029

Start date: March 2019

End date: June 2022

Status: Completed

Value: USD 1,100,000 GEF grant + USD 215,171 co-financing

Total value: USD 1,295,546

Description of Project

The immediate objective of the project is to assist the Government of Serbia in establishing a National Transparency Framework, a mandatory system for reporting on climate change actions and progress under the Paris Agreement. This framework requires all signatory countries to submit regular reports, such as Biennial Transparency Reports, detailing their greenhouse gas emissions as well as mitigation and adaptation efforts taken to reduce CO² emissions. Specifically, Serbia committed to reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 9.8% from 1990 levels by 2030.

⁹ Terminal Evaluation of the UNIDO-supported, GEF-financed project "Biomass energy for productive use for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the olive oil sector"

The main product of the project is the national Measurement, Reporting and Verification Information Technology system on adaptation and resilience actions (MRV-IT) and the delivery of appropriate capacity-building training, as no such system previously existed. The national MRV-IT system covers six modules: GHG Inventory, Projections and Scenarios, Policies and Measures, Climate Change Adaptation, Climate Finance, NDC Module.

Through the CBIT Trust Fund, non-Annex I (developing) countries are supported in meeting reporting requirements, such as the development of Biennial Reports and Biennial Transparency Reports. The Serbia project is one of the first CBIT projects approved globally and therefore can inform other CBIT projects and enhance their implementation.

Gender

The project was assigned a GEN2 marker and therefore includes a gender analysis and Gender Action Plan (Section G), as well as a dedicated "Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women" section. It stipulates that the MRV system - a core project deliverable - will enhance stakeholder engagement, including local governments and the private sector, in a gender-inclusive manner. The project design robustly integrates gender equality, women's empowerment, and gender - climate considerations through dedicated sections on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Gender Mainstreaming. Gender issues are systematically embedded across all project phases-design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. This includes the recruitment and consultations with gender specialists, the development of engagement strategies for women and vulnerable groups, application of the UNDP Gender Marker, and continuous monitoring through annual reporting. The project ensures balanced participation, equitable benefit distribution, gender-sensitive indicators, and gender balance in staffing and capacity-building activities. Special attention is given to gender-differentiated vulnerability assessments, climate adaptation, disaster risk management, and the use of gender-disaggregated data within the MRV system like percentage of women representatives in the NDC platform and in training activities. These actions are operationalized through a Gender Action Plan aligned with UNDP, UNEP, and GEF good practices.

The Terminal Evaluation praised the implementation of gender component in a commendable manner:

"The gender component of the project was well established. Institutionally, the project supported the nomination of an NFP for Gender and Climate Change to the UNFCCC and the creation of a gender network within the Ministry to better coordinate different gender-related activities in the field of environmental protection. Also, a framework for streamlining gender aspects of climate change in Serbia was designed, targeting the following areas: Participation in decision-making and policy design; Access to resources; Economy and employment; Consumption, lifestyles and living conditions; Education; Health and health protection; Climate change knowledge, attitudes and behavior."

As a finding, the project was assessed as **gender-responsive**, although this can sometimes be challenging when project components are predominantly technical in nature (such as IT-related systems). It should also be noted that this was one of the first projects approved under the CBIT Fund, and therefore could not benefit from lessons learned from CBIT projects implemented in other countries.

Project Finance and Co-finance ¹⁰

Table 4.

SUMMARY OF FUNDS (US\$) PLANNED		ACTUAL
GEF	1,100,000	1,080,375
UNDP	68,000 (in kind)	64,371 (cash)
Ministry of Environmental Protection	32,000 (in kind)	32,000 (in kind)
Government of Austria		118,800 (cash)
TOTAL	1,200,000	1,295,546

SUMMARY OF THE PLANNED AND ACTUAL EXPENDITURES (in US\$) OUTCOME	ESTIMATED COSTS AT DESIGN	ACTUAL COSTS (5 May 2022)	FUNDS AVAILABLE (total USD) GEF
ACTIVITY 1 - Strengthening national transparency capacities for tracking NDC progress from mitigation activities	300,000	294,614	98%
ACTIVITY 2 - Strengthening national transparency capacities for NDC tracking and reporting on vulnerability and adaptation	400,000	389,232	97%
ACTIVITY 3 - Development of MRV System for NDC including financing for institutions, local communities and business	300,000	303,039	101%
ACTIVITY 4 - Monitoring & Evaluation and Project Management	100,000	93,490	93%
TOTAL	1,100,000	1,080,375	98%

4. North Macedonia

Project Title: "Phasing-out of PCBs and PCB-containing Equipment"

Implementing Agency: UNIDO

Project area: Chemicals (the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants)

Type of Project: GEF GET Medium-Size Project

GEF Project ID: 2875

UNIDO Project ID: GF/MCD/08/002

Start date: September 2008

End date: November 2013

Status: Completed

Value: USD 1,000,000 GEF grant + USD 2,015,000 co-financing
(Total USD 3,015,000)

Project Description

The project “Phasing-out of PCBs and PCB-containing Equipment in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” was implemented by UNIDO in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, as part of the country’s obligations under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

This extremely technically complex chemical project represents the country’s response to the Stockholm Convention on POPs, which bans the use of certain industrial chemicals known as POPs due to their hazards to the environment and human health. One category of dangerous POP chemicals-polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), widely used in industry (particularly in mining and metallurgy companies such as MEPSO, ELEM, and EVN Macedonia)-was identified as a top priority for urgent action.

Prior to the project, Macedonia lacked adequate regulations, technical capacity, laboratory services, interim storage facilities, and decontamination technologies to ensure the environmentally sound management of PCBs. The overall objective of the project was to reduce and eliminate environmental and human-health risks from PCBs by establishing a national system for the environmentally sound management, decontamination, and disposal of PCB-containing equipment and wastes.

Despite early delays - primarily related to the selection and installation of the PCB decontamination technology - the project ultimately achieved a highly satisfactory level of effectiveness and contributed to long-term compliance with Stockholm Convention obligations.

Budget

Table on Overall Project Financing:

GENDER-RELATED OUTPUT	GEF FINANCING IN USD		CO-FINANCING USD	
	Approved	Achieved	Promised	Achieved
Project Components/Outcome				
1. ESM system established	92.000	92.000	200.000	200.000
2. Implementation of ESM in selected demonstration area	230.000	230.000	614.000	574.000
3. Upgraded Storage Facility and disposal option implemented	470.000	470.000	803.000	1,063.000
4. Capacity Building to Secure financial sustainability	10.000	10.000	5.000	5.000
5. Public Participation and awareness raising	35.000	35.000	43.000	43.000
6. Adaptive monitoring an evaluation	52.000	52.000	32.000	32.000
1. Project management budget/cost	68.000	68.000	88.000	88.000
2. PDF A	43.000	43.000	10.000	10.000
TOTAL PROJECT COST	1.000.000	1000 000	1,795.000	2.015.000

Gender

The Final Evaluation for the Macedonia PCB Project indicates that the intervention did not include any gender analysis, gender-specific objectives, or gender-responsive elements. PCB management is a highly technical and industrial sector, and project documents do not identify women as a specific stakeholder group or beneficiary. The project design (2008) pre-dated the introduction of any GEF gender related documents including 2011/2012 Gender Mainstreaming Policy, 2014 Gender Equality Action Plan and 2017 GEF Policy on Gender Equality¹¹ and therefore did not include such requirements. Given the absence of gender-related planning, tracking, or targeted activities, coupled with the highly technical content of the project, it can be characterized as gender-unaware at the design stage and gender-neutral during implementation, and not aligned with the gender mainstreaming standards that are now mandatory for GEF projects.

Importantly, it is known that PCB contamination poses serious long-term health risks to humans. This occurs due to the biomagnification of chemicals in the human body through exposure to contaminated water, land, or air, or through the food chain. PCBs can also be transmitted from mother to child through breastfeeding. However, the project did not operationalize these health concerns into programmatic measures or awareness campaigns tailored to vulnerable and exposed populations (e.g., female workers, local populations living near factories using PCBs).

Nevertheless, CSOs were not involved in the project, with the Evaluation providing the following explanation: *"This was decided, as the project implementation started, because there was no specialized NGO for dangerous chemicals and hazardous wastes, and POPs Office and the NPC were 100% committed to the project. The role of NGOs was taken over by the POPs Office, which organized training workshops, prepared booklets and raised public awareness activities. During the early phase of project implementation, it was clear that NGOs will not play any role in this project."* Accordingly, this represents a potential niche for CSO action, provided they possess the necessary technical expertise for similar future interventions.

In closing, the Project delivered substantial positive environmental and institutional impacts from a technical point of view. However, it failed to address the practical concerns and health hazards of PCB exposure faced by socially vulnerable groups, such as workers and ten-ants/mothers living in the vicinity of companies handling PCBs. Therefore, it has been considered a **gender-blind project**.

5. Kosovo

Project Title: Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the White Drin and Extended Drin River Basin¹²

Note: *This project is a complementary add-on project to the regional Drin River Basin project previously approved and covering Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro.*

Implementing Agency: UNDP Kosovo, in partnership with the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean (GWP-Med)

Project Area & Convention: International Waters / UNECE Water Convention

GEF-6 Project ID (Kosovo): 9121 [Medium-size project]

GEF-6 Project ID (Regional Project): 4483

Start date: August 2015

¹¹ <https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/publications/GEF%20Guidance%20on%20Gender.pdf>

¹² <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/13373>

End date: August 2019

Status: Completed

Value: USD 5.5 million

Total value: USD 229.679. 092 USD

Project Description

The Kosovo project “Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the White Drin and Extended Drin River Basin” forms part of the regional Drin Full-Sized Project, implemented under the GEF International Waters focal area. The project operationalizes the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2011 by the riparian countries of the Drin River Basin (Albania, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia) to promote joint and coordinated management of shared water resources, as the Drin represents one of the most important biodiversity hotspots in the region.

Kosovo’s inclusion was essential because the country lies entirely within the Drin Basin, and its pollution sources significantly affect downstream ecosystems in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Greece. The add-on project was created to ensure full hydrological coverage of the basin and to support Kosovo’s participation in the Transboundary Diagnostic Assessment (TDA), the Strategic Action Plan, monitoring programs, and basin governance.

Key project activities under the Kosovo project include preparation of the White Drin Basin Management Plan, participation in the Drin Core Group (DCG) and Expert Working Groups (EWGs), water quality and hydrology monitoring, data harmonization, and the demonstration of a constructed wetland for decentralized wastewater treatment in Rahovec/Kramovik.

Budget

Table on Project Budget and Expenditures ¹³

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT FACILITY (PDF)/PROJECT PREPARATION GRANT (PPG)	AT APPROVAL (US \$)	AT PDF/PPG COMPLETION (US \$)
GEF PDF/PPG grants for project preparation	100,000	100,000
Co-Financing for project preparation	120,000	120,000
PROJECT	AT CEO ENDORSEMENT (US \$)	AT TERMINAL EVALUATION (US \$)
[1] UNDP Contribution	5,364,221	5,364,221
[2] Government	1,260,000	1,260,000
[3] Other multi-/bi-laterals	222,841,371	222,841,371
[4] Private Sector	0	0
[5] IGO/NGOs	213,500	213,500
[6] Total Co-financing [1+2+3+4+5]	229,679,092	229,679,092
[7] Total GEF Funding FSP	4,500,000	303,039
Total GEF Funding MSP	1,000,000	4,500,000
[8] Total Project Funding [6+7]	1,000,000	235,179,092

¹³ Source: Terminal Project Evaluation <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/195561>

The Terminal Project Evaluation stipulates: *“No financial audit has been conducted as part of this evaluation and the financial summaries reviewed were provided by the UNDP - Country Office in Albania. However, the MTR states that a full financial audit for FSP was conducted by KPMG in March 2018.*

The review of financial records, as recorded in the UNDP Atlas system, indicates that, by the end of July 2021, USD 4,369,192 have been expended by the FSP, which is 97.1% of the entire GEF grant (USD 4.5M). The 2021 PIR states that by 30 June 2021, the total of US\$4,277,801 was spent making it around 95% of the total FSP GEF grant, which is very close to previous figure and the difference is probably due to the accounting process only. As of 30 July, 2021, when the project is closing down, it is expected that 100% of the FSP GEF grant will be expended. Within the MSP project, US\$979,242 (98.0%) has been spent until now. It is expected that 100% of the MSP GEF grant will be spent when the project will be closed. The breakdown of project expenditures per year is presented in the table 3 (FSP) and table 4 (MSP) below. FSP PIMS 4482 REGIONAL PROJECT - Planned and actual expenditure table in US\$ (only GEF grant)

Gender

Gender mainstreaming was integrated into the regional project and applied in Kosovo through stakeholder engagement processes, gender-focused capacity building, and the participation of women in technical working groups. Initially, the draft Gender Mainstreaming Strategy was presented and approved at the 3rd Project Board meeting in Pristina on 15 December 2016] and it guided both national and regional activities to the end.

Women represented approximately 30% of Drin Core Group delegates and around 60% of Expert Working Group members. It should be noted that the Drin Project was not intended to contribute directly to the improvement of the economic status of women in riparian countries, but rather aimed to increase stakeholder participation with an enhanced role for women in that process.

Women professionals from Kosovo institutions participated actively in ecological monitoring campaigns, laboratory training, hydrological fieldwork, and stakeholder consultations. Throughout awareness-raising activities, such as the annual Drin Day, the participation of women's NGOs in activities related to recycling, ecotourism, and similar initiatives was promoted. The Terminal Evaluation report ¹⁴ praises the gender component: *“Gender mainstreaming was addressed in the ProDoc in Component 5. Gender was mainstreamed in the project design following the two-pronged approach by (1) mainstreaming gender in the project execution; and (2) by integration of gender perspective into water policies. Gender action plan was not prepared during the ProDoc preparation phase, but the gender issues were integrated in the project's strategy and rationale, though not specifically mentioned in the ToC. In early 2018 a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy was produced by the external consultancy firm with assistance from the GWP-Med. Out of 5 experts participating in the development of the study, three were women. The document is extensive and covers all the gender-related issues at national and regional level and provides a wider international perspective. The Gender Action Plan, contained in the document is well articulated. The TE finds that the gender mainstreaming component of the Drin Project is well developed and feasible.*

Accordingly, it can be concluded that this project is **gender-responsive**.

¹⁴ <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/19556>

With respect to CSO involvement, environmental NGOs and civil society organizations participated actively in stakeholder consultations, TDA/SAP discussions, and national workshops. The project included a budget line for intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations (for example NGO Finch had been listed as one of main Kosovo stakeholders involved in the project implementation). The Terminal Evaluation report praises the CSO work with regard to the Drin Day. From 2016 to 2021, Drin Day (5 May) celebrations were implemented annually by 6-8 NGOs selected through a competitive grant process. Each year focused on a key priority issue for the Drin Basin, such as waste management, floods, plastic pollution, or water quality. The activities achieved broad public engagement and strong media visibility, with over 500 direct participants each year across the Drin sub-basins - from Lakes Prespa and Ohrid to the Adriatic coast- and outreach reaching tens of thousands of people. Their role was advisory, participatory, and capacity-oriented, but they were not primary project implementers. Implementation remained with GWP-Med, UNECE, UNDP, and national institutions.

6. Montenegro

Project Title: "Promoting Protected Areas Management through Integrated Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Protection in the Coastal Area of Montenegro"

Implementing Agency: UNEP

Project area: Biodiversity (the Convention on Biological Diversity)

Type of Project: GEF Trust Fund Medium-Size Project

GEF Project ID: 9762 (Medium-Size Project)

Start date: October 2017

End date: June 2024

Status: Completed

Value: USD 1,602,940 GEF grant + USD 12,198,675 co-financing (in-kind)

Total value: USD 13,801,615

Project Description

The Project aimed to improve the conservation and sustainable use of coastal and marine biodiversity by establishing Montenegro's first national system of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas. Its primary objective was to strengthen conservation and promote the sustainable use of coastal and marine biodiversity through effective management of the coastal and marine protected areas subsystem. Activities were undertaken under two project components:

1. Protection of coastal and marine biodiversity, and
2. Establishment of critical land/seascape protected areas.

The Project addressed weak institutional capacity, lack of scientific data, and threats from unregulated tourism, destructive fishing practices, and climate-induced pressures. Strategic achievements include the proclamation of the first three coastal and marine protected areas (Platamuni, Katić, Stari Ulcinj), ecological surveys covering a surface area of 106,822 ha, strengthened institutional capacities, and alignment with targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and Montenegro's EU accession processes.

Budget ¹⁵

Overall, the financial execution appears strong, the total expenditures amount to US\$ 1,399,641 out of the US\$ 1,602,940 total budget allocated by the GEF, reflecting an overall delivery rate of 87%. According to the below, the cumulative unspent balance is US\$ 203,299, with the majority of the unspent funds concentrated in the Miscellaneous, Training, and Equipment and Premises components.

Table on project expenditures per budget components

	TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET	TOTAL CUMULATIVE EXPENDITURES TO DATE	CUMULATIVE UNSPENT BALANCE TO-DATE	DELIVERED RATE
Project Personnel Component	321,602	306,686	14,916	95%
Contract Component	402,030	402,030	-	100%
Training Component	411,218	351,231	59,987	85%
Equipment & Premises Component	369,532	320,461	49,071	87%
Miscellaneous Component	98,558	19,233	79,325	20%
TOTAL COSTS	1,602,940	1,399,641	203,299	87%

Furthermore, below Table 6 represents the co-financing report presents contributions from UNEP Regional Office for Europe (RoE) and the Ministry of Ecology, Urbanism, and Spatial Planning, tracking both planned and actual commitments in cash and in-kind contributions. Overall, the total co-financing delivery rate stands at 98%, indicating strong adherence to financial commitments. UNEP RoE committed an in-kind contribution of US\$ 250,000, of which US\$ 245,000 (98%) was delivered. The slight shortfall of US\$ 5,000 may be due to minor adjustments in administrative or operational support. This is a negligible variance and does not significantly impact overall project financing.

The Ministry was the primary co-financier, committing US\$ 12,203,675 in in-kind support, of which US\$11,953,675 (98%) was realized. The US\$ 250,000 variance may stem from adjustments in project activities, staffing, or operational costs that resulted in slightly lower-than-anticipated contributions. This represents a relatively small gap given the overall scale of the commitment. Overall, the cumulative co-financing performance is satisfactory, with nearly all pledged resources delivered.

Table 6. Source of Co-financing

	CASH COFINANCE		IN-KIND COFINANCE		CUMULATIVE		%
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Actual	Actual Total	
UNEP Regional Office for Europe (ROE)	-	-	250,000	245,000	245,000	245,000	98%
Ministry of Ecology, Urbanism and Spatial Planning	-	-	12,203,675	11,953,675	11,953,675	11,953,675	98%
TOTAL	-	-	12,453,675	12,198,675	12,198,675	12,198,675	98%

¹⁵ Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP-GEF Project: Promoting Protected Areas Management through Integrated Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Protection in Coastal Area of Montenegro (GEF 9762)

In closing, it is evident that this Project received a substantial share of in-kind co-funding from the Government. The budget is not sufficiently broken down per activities to determine if any specific gender budget line exists. Likely as with other GEF UNEP projects the funds were utilized from project activities.

Gender Mainstreaming

The project lacked a stand-alone Gender Action Plan, but some gender considerations were taken into account at the initial design stage, as demonstrated in the project outputs (e.g., Output 1.2.1: Capacity and governance needs-including technical needs, human resources *including gender considerations*, and legislative needs-for successful management of C/MPAs identified; Output 1.4.2: Consultation process ensuring gender balance provided prior to the adoption of acts on establishing three new integrated protected areas, etc.).

During implementation, the Project ensured meaningful participation of women. Approximately 45% of participants in consultations, trainings, and awareness-raising activities were women. Gender-disaggregated data were collected consistently. Although no targeted gender activities or budget lines existed, the project demonstrated gender-sensitive participation processes and inclusive stakeholder engagement, and therefore can be graded as **gender sensitive**.

7. Moldova

Project: Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions Through Improved Energy Efficiency in the Industrial Sector

Medium-size project

Area: Climate change / Energy efficiency

UNIDO Project ID: 103043

GEF ID: 3719 (GEF-4) Trust Fund

Implementing Agency: UNIDO

Executing Partners: Ministry of Environment (Climate Change Office), Ministry of Economy / Agency for Energy Efficiency

Start date: August 18, 2010

End date: December 31, 2017

Status: Completed

Value: USD 960,000 GEF grant + USD 3.3 million co-financing (pledged)/actual co-financing **2,746,924**

Project Description

The project aimed to reduce energy-use-related greenhouse gas emissions in Moldova's manufacturing sector by improving industrial energy efficiency and strengthening national systems for industrial energy management. The specific objective was to increase the energy efficiency of Moldovan industries, contributing to reduced global environmental impacts and improved industrial competitiveness. The Project consisted of three components:

Component 1 - Legislative: Policies, regulations, and national programs to increase energy efficiency. Its purpose was to establish an enabling policy, legal, and regulatory framework and to initiate national programs to support industrial energy efficiency.

Component 2 - Capacity building and tools for energy management: Strengthening national technical capacity and industry adoption of ISO 50001 and steam system optimization (SSO). Activities included training Energy Management experts (14 qualified) and SSO experts (13 certified), developing practical guides for energy management, and training over 200 participants on ISO 50001.

Component 3 - Industrial energy efficiency pilot projects: Support to selected enterprises in implementing demonstration projects. Activities included conducting energy audits, procuring and installing energy efficiency equipment and metering systems, and supporting the establishment of energy management systems in participating companies.

The primary project beneficiaries included Moldovan industrial enterprises (food processing, manufacturing, energy-intensive SMEs), the Technical University of Moldova (training partner), the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Economy (policy beneficiaries), and the National Energy Efficiency Agency (MAEE) as the future system owner.

Budget

PROJECT	GEF FINANCING IN USD	CO-FINANCING USD			
		Planned	Approved	Actual	Promised
1. Development, formulation and implementation of policies, regulation to promote and support sustainability IEE	240,000	n/a	188,500	169,000	
2. Capacity building development of tools for implementation of industrial systems optimization	410,000	n/a	1,340,500	1,227,990	
3. Industrial energy efficiency pilot projects	200,000	N&A	1,670,500	1,229,934	
2. M6E final evaluation	17,000	N&A	10,000	15,000	
3. Project management	93,000	N A	93 000	105.000	
TOTAL	35.000	35.000	43.000	43.000	
	960,000	960,000	3,302,500	2,746,924	

Gender Mainstreaming

It should be noted that the project was designed under the GEF-4 cycle, which did not require gender mainstreaming measures at the time of formulation (2009-2010). As a result, no gender analysis, Gender Action Plan, or gender-specific indicators were included at the design stage. During implementation, some efforts toward gender inclusion were made, as reported in the Terminal Evaluation: "Since 2011, when training activities of IEE Moldova had intensified, the Project had strived and proactively worked to ensure the highest possible participation of women, to identify and train Energy managers and other Steam System Optimization SSO expert candidates through encouraging enterprise management to appoint women for this training. This is evidenced through the observations of the evaluation team of the presence of women as Energy Managements experts (2 out of 13 qualified experts) and Steam System Optimization experts (4 out of 13 qualified

experts). With the implementation period of the Project extending into the periods of GEF-5 and GEF-6, where monitoring of these gender mandates was better defined after 2014, gender monitoring for IEE Moldova only commenced in 2015.

The results presented in the PIRs of 2015 and 2016 show an outcome below expectations, with women's participation in the project ranging from 10% to 15%, with participation slightly higher for Energy Management System-related activities, despite the higher number of qualified SSO women experts than Energy Management Experts."

It can be assessed that women's participation in project activities was incidental, as demonstrated by the low participation figures above. The absence of structured gender components (e.g. gender analysis, GAP, sex-disaggregated indicators, gender-responsive budgeting) limited the project's gender responsiveness. Accordingly, in line with the GRES methodology, this project is assessed as **gender blind**.

KEY FINDINGS

- »» Over the last decade, countries in the Western Balkans and Moldova have faced several climate-related crises—including recurring floods, droughts, heatwaves, forest fires, and landslides, among others. Some of these events resulted in human casualties and caused enormous material damages.
- »» Climate change affects ecosystems and all human populations; however, poor and so-cially disadvantaged groups (including women) suffer disproportionately.
- »» International responses to climate change at the global level include several environmental treaties. The fundamental instruments are the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement. Their primary goal is to stabilize global greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the environment and prevent further temperature rise.
- »» The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a family of environmental funds that assist the least-developed countries and countries in transition - including the Western Balkans and Moldova - by providing grants for the environment in primary areas: climate change mitigation, biodiversity, land degradation, and waste pollution (mercury, persistent organic pollutants), as well as marine biological diversity.
- »» Each of these areas is regulated by respective UN treaties. Accordingly, GEF is a financial mechanism for six multilateral conventions governing the above-mentioned areas, assisting countries in meeting their international obligations.
- »» GEF projects in the Western Balkans and Moldova include projects in the above-listed areas. The majority fall under the category of medium-size projects worth up to 5 million USD.

»» Donor countries provide funding to GEF in so-called replenishment cycles. Each cycle lasts four years. At present, the GEF-8 cycle (2022–2026) is underway, worth 5.33 billion USD with 29 donors, although many projects from the GEF-6 and GEF-7 cycles are still under implementation.

»» Depending on the actual field of action, grants are disbursed through several GEF funds applicable to the Western Balkans and Moldova, including the GEF/GET Fund, SCCF Fund, or CBIT Fund.

»» GEF projects are implemented predominantly through one of 18 implementing agencies, but most frequently in the Western Balkans and Moldova the implementers are UN Agencies such as UNDP, UNEP, UNIDO, IFAD as well as the World Bank. Governments, through their Operational Focal Points, decide on the executing agency for each project.

»» Host/recipient countries are encouraged to provide co-funding, which usually takes an in-kind form.

»» With respect to gender, each GEF project must comply with the GEF Policy on Gender Equality and the Gender Implementation Strategy adopted in 2017/2018, which require the inclusion of a gender analysis or gender action plan and the use of gender-sensitive indicators, such as sex-disaggregated data.

»» As outlined in the methodology, this Report shall use the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) matrix on selected projects to track planned vs. executed resources (subject to the availability of financial data). This shall assess who benefits from projects and link spending to gender-related outcomes. It shall attempt to assign to each project an appropriate rating - gender-negative, gender-blind, gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, or gender-transformative. Additionally, in line with their standards, implementing UN agencies are required to assign the appropriate Gender Marker (GEM), ranging from 0 to 3, to each project to track how UN resources are allocated toward gender equality and women's empowerment. These two instruments help assess the gender responsiveness of the project.

»» Recent projects funded under cycles GEF-6 to GEF-8 are usually gender mainstreamed, mainly with gender action plans or other tools to measure gender impact, and are usually gender responsive or at least gender sensitive. "Older" projects, before the adoption of 2017 GEF's gender strategy, are mostly not gender sensitive.

»» In this respect, out of the seven projects that are the subject of this analysis using the GRES tool, three are gender responsive (BIH/Phase 2, Serbia, Kosovo), two projects are gender sensitive (Montenegro, BIH Phase I), and two are gender blind (Moldova, North Macedonia). None are gender-negative or gender-transformative.

»» Gender-responsive projects have developed a gender plan or gender analysis, created quantitative and/or qualitative gender indicators as part of M&E and project design, which are regularly monitored during project implementation. Gender-blind projects do not include any gender analysis nor track gender-disaggregated data.

»» In gender-responsive projects, female beneficiaries meet or even exceed quantitative objectives set (for example, 50% or more beneficiaries are women). On the other hand, gender-blind projects do not create gender-sensitive activities nor keep records of sex-disaggregated data.

»» According to available data, it seems that none of the selected projects had a specific gender budget line within their respective budgets. Gender-related activities have been embedded into regular project components (e.g. training sessions, public events). Some agencies (such as UNDP BiH) take a step further by requiring their environmental projects to achieve "gender equality and the empowerment of women as a significant objective" (Gender Equality Marker 2 - GEM 2). They often hire an external gender specialist to assist with drafting a tailored gender analysis to be incorporated into project design. Accordingly, this approach yields good results even without a specifically assigned gender budget line. When the project design disregarded the gender perspective and provided no funding, gender-blind practices were more pronounced.

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