Final evaluation of the project: Sustaining peace and social cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina through enhanced inter-municipal and inter-entity cooperation on local services (SPSC)

(Final report)

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ACRONYMS

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CREDI	Center for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interviews
OECD/DAC	OECD's Development Assistance Committee
PBF	UN Peacebuilding Fund
SPSC	Sustaining peace and social cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina through enhanced inter-municipal and inter-entity cooperation on local services
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	UN United Nations Development Programme
UNGE	United Nations Evaluation Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The final external evaluation of the project "Sustaining Peace and Social Cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina through Enhanced Inter-Municipal and Inter-Entity Cooperation on Local Services (SPSC)" presents a comprehensive assessment of a three-year peacebuilding intervention implemented between December 2022 and June 2025. Funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and implemented jointly by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the project aimed to improve inter-community relations, increase institutional trust, and strengthen social cohesion across nine municipalities along the inter-entity boundary line in western Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Targeting post-conflict communities with legacies of ethnic division, limited economic opportunity, and weak social services, the project pursued a holistic approach rooted in dialogue facilitation, youth empowerment, trauma-sensitive interventions, and improvements in local social infrastructure.

Evaluation Purpose and Methodology

The evaluation was carried out by the Center for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research (CREDI) using a theory-based and participatory methodology aligned with OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, as well as PBF-specific criteria including conflict sensitivity, catalytic potential, risk tolerance and innovation. Data were gathered through desk reviews, 38 key informant interviews, an online survey of youth participants, and the integration of an independent Perception survey commissioned by UNDP. Although some methodological limitations were encountered—such as incomplete baseline data in some sub-components and challenges in organizing focus groups due to youth availability, the evaluation team applied triangulation and rigorous data analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of findings. The report draws conclusions about the project's strategic alignment, field-level performance, results, and sustainability, while offering targeted recommendations for future peacebuilding interventions in BiH.

Key Findings

Relevance: The evaluation found that **the project was highly relevant to the peacebuilding context in BiH** and closely aligned with both community needs and national/international policy frameworks. The project's theory of change responded directly to five structural conflict drivers: educational segregation, divisive narratives, unresolved trauma, youth exclusion, and weak inter-entity cooperation. Activities were carefully designed to address these barriers to peace, through mixed learning environments, youth-led media, trauma-informed counseling and joint municipal-community dialogues. Evidence from interviews and perception surveys demonstrated that these interventions filled critical gaps in opportunities for cross-ethnic contact, emotional healing, and collaborative problem-solving, especially in rural and under-resourced municipalities.

The project also reflected **strategic alignment with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16** (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and **complemented BiH's national strategies for social inclusion, youth engagement, and post-conflict development.** Multiple stakeholders, from educators and veterans to municipal officials, affirmed that the project met urgent local priorities. Moreover, its approach was considered timely and adaptive in the face of increasing political polarization.

The project was well aligned with the European Commission's Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU membership application, specifically addressing **Key Priority 5** on **promoting reconciliation and overcoming**

war legacies, by fostering inter-ethnic dialogue, trauma-informed support, and collaborative civic engagement across entity lines.

While some gaps in early stakeholder consultation were noted, particularly among police, religious authorities, and grassroots women's groups, the project overall demonstrated a high degree of contextual and strategic relevance throughout its life cycle.

Coherence: In terms of coherence, the evaluation highlights that the project complemented ongoing peacebuilding and development efforts by both UN agencies and external donors, while filling geographic and thematic gaps that had previously received insufficient attention. Its focus on smaller, often marginalized municipalities was a strategic choice that brought programming to areas typically excluded from large-scale national initiatives. This **territorial focus** was identified by several interviewees as a major strength, as it extended the peacebuilding footprint to communities at the fringes of donor attention. **Thematically**, the project's activities reinforced the objectives of other UN mandates, including trauma support (UNFPA, WHO), youth engagement (UNICEF, UNDP), and educational integration (OSCE and national policy frameworks).

Nevertheless, operational coherence between implementing agencies, particularly IOM and UNDP, was uneven across the project cycle. While initial collaboration was strong, with regular joint planning and shared monitoring visits, coordination weakened significantly in later stages. This decline in inter-agency coherence resulted in fragmented monitoring systems, duplication of some administrative efforts, and missed opportunities for synchronized programming. Implementing partners noted that delays and inconsistent communication, especially regarding procurement and reimbursements, sometimes created confusion at the local level. While field-level partnerships with CSOs were mostly effective, broader coordination with other international actors (such as USAID or OSCE) remained informal and underutilized. Despite these limitations, the project maintained a degree of functional complementarity with parallel initiatives and was recognized for translating high-level peace-building goals into locally tailored interventions.

Efficiency: The project demonstrated **commendable efficiency in several key areas**, notably in its ability to deliver high output volumes with limited resources and in its adaptability to changing field conditions. Lean staffing models enabled flexibility, while partnerships with experienced national CSOs allowed for rapid mobilization and contextual responsiveness. Infrastructure upgrades, such as youth center renovations and improvements in social welfare centers, were implemented in cooperation with local authorities who contributed in-kind or financial support. These co-financing mechanisms enhanced both cost-effectiveness and local ownership. Targets were often exceeded, including the number of student-led and student-focused Sobičak workshops and trauma support sessions.

Despite these strengths, the evaluation also identified significant efficiency bottlenecks, particularly in the area of financial flow and procurement. Several partners experienced delays of up to six months in grant disbursements, forcing smaller organizations to pre-finance activities or scale down interventions. Administrative procedures, especially those involving UNDP, were reported to be overly complex and slow, resulting in postponed events and unmet timelines in certain components. The project's M&E system, while effective at the activity level for some partners, lacked overall integration and consistency. The absence of a unified real-time monitoring framework limited the project's capacity for adaptive management. Nevertheless, field teams demonstrated creativity and resilience in navigating these barriers, frequently adjusting schedules and delivery modalities to ensure implementation.

Effectiveness: In terms of effectiveness, the evaluation finds that **the project achieved most of its intended results**, with particularly strong performance in promoting inter-community contact, trust-building, and localized peacebuilding initiatives. Youth participants reported significant personal growth and increased openness toward peers of other ethnicities. Sobičak hubs facilitated safe spaces for learning and dialogue, and youth-led media content contributed to shifting public discourse. In addition, the trauma-informed counseling services under Prevention of secondary trauma through empowerment (PRESTO) had tangible psychosocial impacts, with both youth and veterans describing the sessions as transformative. Municipal-level dialogues led to concrete outcomes, such as the relocation of the Center for Social Work in Glamoč and the establishment of BiH's first safe apartment for victims of domestic violence in a small municipality context.

The evaluation also found that veterans' involvement was a particularly effective entry point for intergenerational reconciliation. Through structured storytelling and facilitated peer support, ex-combatants from different ethnic backgrounds began to interact and organize community activities together—something that had not occurred for decades. Educators reported improved classroom dynamics and more inclusive behaviors among students following project interventions. However, challenges remained in sustaining momentum in municipalities with weaker political engagement or high leadership turnover. In Drvar, for example, limited municipal support and internal disagreements among stakeholders undermined the impact of some project components. Overall, however, the project made substantial contributions to its overarching outcome of enhancing social cohesion across the inter-entity boundary.

Impact: The evaluation provides **strong evidence of the project's contribution to longer-term peacebuilding goals**. While attributing systemic change to a single project is inherently complex, stakeholder testimonies, survey data, and observed institutional changes indicate that project made a meaningful difference. Youth beneficiaries who had never travelled beyond their hometowns engaged in cross-entity exchanges and continued friendships after the project's conclusion. Teachers adopted non-violent communication methods in classrooms, reportedly reducing student conflicts. Municipal authorities took ownership of dialogue outcomes, including infrastructure investments and social protection initiatives that served marginalized groups. Most notably, the project helped normalize intergroup contact in areas previously marked by deep distrust.

The public Perception survey commissioned by UNDP confirmed a measurable increase in trust toward local institutions and reduced prejudices between ethnic groups in project municipalities compared to control sites. These behavioral and attitudinal shifts provide a strong indication that the project generated impact beyond its immediate activities, fostering a foundation for sustained social transformation.

Sustainability: Sustainability prospects for the project vary across components and municipalities. In cases where local governments were actively involved, infrastructure and dialogue mechanisms have already been integrated into municipal plans or school policies.

However, there are also threats to sustainability. Youth outmigration continues to drain human capital from the targeted municipalities, threatening the continuity of civic initiatives. Some trauma counselors lacked institutional support following the end of the project, and there was no comprehensive exit strategy to transition ownership to state institutions. Moreover, the project's dependency on external funding for some components—such as CSO-led youth centers—makes replication or scale-up uncertain. Future programming should therefore consider phased transition plans, capacity-building for local institutions, and the formal integration of successful models into policy frameworks at both entity and national levels.

PBF Criteria - Conflict Sensitivity: The project demonstrated a strong commitment to conflict sensitivity throughout its implementation. Project teams adapted interventions to account for political and social tensions, such as relocating activities to neutral venues and adjusting visibility in response to heightened polarization, especially in Republika Srpska. Trauma counseling was delivered using a phased, trauma-informed approach, ensuring emotional safety. While conflict-sensitive adaptations were evident during implementation, early-stage stakeholder consultations, particularly with religious leaders and law enforcement, were limited, suggesting opportunities for deeper engagement in future project design phases.

PBF Criteria - Catalytic Effects: The project had a catalytic impact by triggering institutional and behavioral changes in local governance and community dynamics. It influenced municipal decision-making, revitalized dormant policies like Livno's Action Plan for Social Cohesion, and led to concrete improvements such as the establishment of the first safe space for survivors of domestic violence in Glamoč. Youth initiatives and inter-municipal cooperation sparked follow-up actions and replication interest, both within and beyond the target areas, confirming the project's ability to stimulate broader peacebuilding processes beyond its immediate scope.

PBF Criteria - Time Sensitivity: The project responded effectively to the evolving political and social environment in BiH, adjusting its strategies to maintain momentum amid administrative transitions and inter-entity tensions. While external responsiveness was strong, such as rescheduling events to avoid conflict periods, internal delivery schedules were sometimes constrained due to late disbursements or complex procurement procedures. This led to compressed timelines for certain activities, limiting space for reflection or adaptation. Nonetheless, the project balanced short-term responsiveness with long-term peace-building goals, embedding many activities in local institutions.

PBF Criteria - Risk Tolerance and Innovation: The SPSC project took calculated risks in addressing sensitive post-conflict issues, including inter-ethnic youth engagement and war veteran dialogues in deeply divided communities. It introduced innovative models like the PRESTO trauma recovery framework and Sobičak educational hubs, which combined psychosocial support with civic learning in ethnically segregated schools. These approaches were well-received and scalable. While some risks, such as reliance on slow funding mechanisms, posed implementation challenges, the overall willingness to innovate in complex environments was a key factor in the project's success and its broader peacebuilding relevance.

Lessons Learned

Safe Spaces Foster Deep Engagement: Structured, repeated, and psychologically safe spaces proved essential for building trust and fostering honest intergroup dialogue. Short-term or one-off interventions are less effective in deeply divided communities; consistent engagement over time is necessary to overcome skepticism and fear.

Dialogue Must Lead to Tangible Outcomes: While inter-ethnic and community dialogues are valuable in themselves, their impact is significantly amplified when linked to concrete actions or policy changes. Initiatives that resulted in visible improvements, such as the relocation of social services or the establishment of safe spaces, strengthened institutional trust and citizen buy-in.

Youth Are Capable Peacebuilders When Empowered: When given tools, mentorship, and decision-making roles, young people actively contribute to peacebuilding. Their creativity, openness, and ability to bridge divides were key success factors in media production, civic engagement, and cross-community cooperation.

Inclusion Requires Intentional Design: Although many marginalized groups were present in project activities, true inclusion requires going beyond numeric participation. Gender, disability, ethnicity, and rurality need to be addressed through tailored content, outreach, and leadership opportunities to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.

Integrated Monitoring Enables Adaptive Management: The lack of a unified monitoring and evaluation system limited the project's ability to adjust in real-time and aggregate learning across agencies. Participatory and integrated M&E systems that capture outcomes, not just activities, are critical to ensuring learning, accountability, and strategic refinement.

Recommendations

Design and Planning: Future peacebuilding interventions should adopt a more participatory and inclusive approach to project design. Conflict analyses should be locally led and ensure the early involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including women's organizations, persons with disabilities, educators, veterans, youth, and local authorities. This will ensure that interventions are grounded in community priorities and reflect diverse perspectives. Additionally, clear and realistic theories of change should be developed collaboratively, with a focus on linking short-term activities to long-term systemic change. Risk analysis and mitigation plans must also be integrated early on, particularly given the political sensitivity of inter-entity cooperation in BiH.

Implementation and Outreach: Implementation should be grounded in localization and flexibility, allowing local partners to lead and adapt approaches to the unique dynamics of their communities. Proven models should be replicated with contextual adjustments, and civic education and trauma-informed practices should be integrated into schools and social institutions. Special focus should be placed on expanding outreach to underrepresented groups—including women, ethnic minorities, and rural youth—through targeted inclusion strategies and tailored content. Furthermore, implementation timelines must be realistic, avoiding compressed schedules that undermine quality, particularly for infrastructure upgrades and cross-community trust-building processes.

Monitoring and Evaluation: A unified and real-time monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system should be developed and maintained across implementing agencies. Future projects should include a shared results framework, common indicators, and integrated data collection protocols from the outset. M&E must go beyond output tracking and prioritize learning, adaptation, and participatory feedback mechanisms. Data should be regularly analyzed and used to inform adjustments in strategy, delivery, and partnerships. Capacity building in M&E should be extended to local partners, with simplified tools and formats that support both accountability and reflective practice.

Sustainability and Institutionalization: To ensure lasting results, successful models and practices must be embedded within formal institutional structures. This includes integrating programs into national and entity-level education policies, and formalizing trauma counseling protocols within social welfare systems. Municipalities should be supported to allocate budget lines for infrastructure maintenance, community dialogue platforms, and youth programs. Exit strategies should be developed from the beginning of the project, including plans for transferring knowledge, resources, and ownership to local institutions. Finally, regional and inter-municipal cooperation platforms should be strengthened to continue promoting social cohesion across entity lines beyond the project cycle.

INTRODUCTION

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has commissioned the Center for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research (CREDI) to conduct the final external evaluation of the project: "Sustaining peace and social cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina through enhanced inter-municipal and inter-entity cooperation on local services (SPSC)" (from now on "the project"). The project is funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), convening agency and UN United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

As per the Terms of Reference (ToR), the scope of the final evaluation covered the full period of intervention, from 16th December 2022 to June 2025. The geographic coverage included nine targeted communities in western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along the inter-entity boundary line, including municipalities in Canton 10 and Una-Sana Canton in the entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), and in the entity of Republika Srpska (RS).

The evaluation used the six OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, complemented by the additional PBF criteria of conflict sensitivity, catalytic effects, localization, time-sensitivity and risk tolerance and innovation.

More than 25 years after the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) still faces unresolved war legacies, fragmented political structures, and divisive narratives that perpetuate mistrust between communities and leaders. According to the Public Perception survey conducted in 2019 by UNDP, trust in elected leaders and public officials was at an all-time low, with 83.7% of citizens believing that the governments in BiH are not adequately addressing economic problems. The country is considered a fragile state, ranked 77th among 179 countries in the Fragile State Index 2021. Large-scale emigration due to political instability and lack of opportunities has led to an estimated 400,000 people leaving the country over the last eight years, including 170,000 in the first half of 2021 alone[1]. Weak governance and social protection systems exacerbate inequalities, with significant disparities in access to services between regions, contributing to a decline in social cohesion and pushing many young and skilled people to leave BiH.

The overall objective of this Project was to strengthen social cohesion within and between communities located on the administrative borders of the two entities in BiH, namely the Federation of BiH and the RS. To achieve this objective, the project partners, IOM and UNDP, worked with municipal authorities and other local actors to organize and sustain community dialogues and civic engagement, strengthen social structures and services, and create opportunities for young men and women to engage in meaningful exchanges with youth and leaders across communities and the inter-entity boundary line. These dialogues addressed common challenges such as social service delivery, youth opportunities, and citizen engagement, promoting inter-municipal and inter-entity collaboration.

The project prioritized the improvement of social care services, ensuring they are responsive to the needs of all community members, particularly the most vulnerable. By enhancing the quality and accessibility of these services, the aim of the project was to build trust in local governments and social service providers. Additionally, the establishment of youth clubs and centers provided spaces for young people to engage in cross-community activities, fostering a sense of belonging, mutual understanding, and trust building.

[1] NI BiH, "Zastrašujući podaci o odlasku bh. Građana: "U Grahovu kao daje '96. Godina", December 17, 2021, Dan Uživo. Available on: LAB_00_2018_Yl_0_BS.pdf (bhas.gov.ba)

Through capacity-building initiatives, the project empowered teachers, students, and professionals to act as agents of change, promoting critical thinking and addressing transgenerational trauma. These efforts will contribute to healthier interethnic relationships and a more cohesive society. By supporting youth-led initiatives and encouraging local government accountability, the project created a foundation for sustainable peace and social cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Project overall outcome "Enhanced social cohesion among citizens across communities and the inter-entity boundary line" is attained through the following two outputs:

- Output 1.1: Trust in local governments / social service providers is improved through responsive and participatory interaction with communities
- Output 1.2: Young women and men engage in cross-community and inter-entity activities.

While the project target area, the western part of BiH, along the administrative line between the two entities, is struggling with longstanding conflict-related, political, economic and social cleavages, as well as net outward migration, it has received limited donor support. Some localities in Una-Sana Canton (Bosanski Petrovac, Ključ) and Mrkonjić Grad in the RS have been included in UN and OSCE interventions, but without sustainable investments. With this project, UNDP and IOM aimed to bridge these gaps, working with local communities with different ethnic and political backgrounds to address social service-related needs as well as social cohesion and trust-building challenges. This has proven to be an effective way to break down stereotypes and divisions, mostly by bringing together members of different groups over shared concerns and challenges citizens face regardless of their background. For example, during the IOM's BiH Resilience Initiative (BHRI), members of different ethnic groups were brought together over shared concerns and values, breaking down ethnical prejudices (often rooted in cross community prejudices – about people from different community, which happen to also be of different ethnicity), engaging members in assessing community problems and proposing solutions, yielding long lasting relationships (partnerships in project development, online and offline socializing).

To enhance social cohesion among citizens across communities and the inter-entity boundary line the project supported constructive dialogues between local authorities and citizens, bringing together diverse stakeholders, with an emphasis on engagement of young women and men, to facilitate exchanges on challenges of common interest, including delivery of social and other public services, limited opportunities for youth, but also the lack of cooperation and solidarity, and high levels of rhetoric on division and hate. The dialogues provided a space for active citizen engagement, enabling the setting of joint priorities and finding solutions for common social service-related challenges. They engaged elected leaders to make or support positive moves around strengthening social cohesion and accountability lines, promoting inter-municipal exchange including across the cantonal and the administrative lines between entities.

Building inclusive participatory processes helps local governments reach out to local communities and manage expectations, while also contributing to strengthening government legitimacy. The dialogues increase coordination and possible joint implementation of activities and increase accountability by authorities to all the community members, irrespective of their ethnic belonging or their gender. Given the scope of the needs in the communities, the dialogue process requires further community communications, ensuring transparent information about the project interventions that will be prioritized.

Social services addressing gender-related needs are prioritized and young women's role in the social service delivery system, both as users and as providers of such services, as well as their meaningful community engagement, are promoted. A further aim is to set an example for other municipalities to adopt similar constructive actions and policies for all community members irrespective of their background.

The Project was implemented in partnership with nine (9) local governments in the western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosansko Grahovo, Bosanski Petrovac, Drvar, Glamoč, Ključ, Livno, Mrkonjić Grad, Ribnik, Sanski Most), with three (3) civil society organizations – implementing partners, namely Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step, Sarajevo; Psiholuminis, Prijedor; Association for support of war veterans, families and war victims in BiH „Pravipožar“ Derventa; UN Volunteers, as well as seven (7) grantees. For detailed information on implementing CSO organization's projects implementing CSO organization's projects with a full description of assistance provided by each CSO (outcome, outputs and activities list) see Annex 1.

As part of the project, there were 27 infrastructure projects and/or equipment purchases made. UNDP implemented 13 infrastructure projects in regard to Centers for Social Welfares (CSWs). The objectives were to improve all existing social services in CSWs, increase accessibility for people with physical disabilities (e.g., wheelchair-accessible pedestrian crossings) and enhance availability of specialized equipment: orthopedic aids, psycho-diagnostic tools, didactic materials, and sports gear for children and youth and by IOM 13 improvements in Primary and Secondary Schools. For detailed information on infrastructure projects see Annex 2.

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the final external evaluation was to provide an impartial view of the project in terms of achieving the results, quality of performance, management of the project focusing also on a multi-partner contribution, and synergies with other similar projects. To that end, the main focus was to ensure that the peacebuilding perspective is integrated into the evaluation approach and design. Specifically, the evaluation assessed to what extent the project was making concrete contributions to the trust and peace-building efforts and process in BiH.

This project final evaluation assessed the achievements of the Project in an inclusive way and to determine its overall added value to peacebuilding in BiH. In assessing the degree to which the project met its intended peacebuilding objectives and results, the final evaluation provided key lessons about successful peacebuilding approaches and operational practices, as well as highlighted areas where the project performed less effectively than anticipated. In that sense, the final evaluation is equally about accountability as well as learning. This evaluation aimed to feed in the project management and implementation team with lessons learned, good practices and recommendations to improve the implementation of similar projects.

Objectives of the evaluation were as follows:

- Assess the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the project.
- Under the relevance criteria, the evaluation specifically looked into the alignment of the project with the country's priorities, whether the project capitalized on the UN's added value in the country.
- Assess to what extent the PBF-funded project has made a concrete contribution to reducing conflict factors in BiH and capitalized on the UN's added value in BiH. With respect to PBF's contribution, the evaluation evaluated whether the project helped advance the achievement of the SDGs, and in particular SDG 16.
- Assess whether the support provided by the PBF has integrated cross cutting issues such as gender equality, youth, conflict sensitivity, leave no-one behind principle, disability, and environmental protection.
- Evaluate the project's efficiency including its implementation strategy, institutional arrangements, management arrangements and operational systems.
- Document good practices, innovations and lessons emerging from the project.
- Provide actionable recommendations for future programming.

EVALUATION SCOPE: The evaluation examined the project's implementation process and peacebuilding results, drawing upon the project's results framework as well as other monitoring data collected on the project outputs and outcomes as well as context. Evaluation questions were based on the OECD DAC evaluation criteria as well as PBF-specific evaluation criteria, which have been adapted to the context.

The evaluators ensured that evaluation of the peacebuilding results is the main line of inquiry. However, the evaluators reflected on the progress within the thematic areas relevant to conflict factors.

The evaluation assessed the project's theory of change, and the assumptions behind the project's theory of change are clearly articulated and assessed for validity.

The evaluation covered all geographical areas where the project was implemented, and the full period of implementation of the project up until the time of the evaluation (December 2022 – June 2025). Field visits were completed in all project municipalities in BiH in the period between 15th April to 30th May 2025, in addition to meetings with the whole range of partners and stakeholders involved in the project.

EVALUATON CRITERIA: The evaluation used the six OECD-DAC evaluation criteria[2] of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, complemented by the additional PBF criteria of conflict sensitivity, catalytic effects, localization, time-sensitivity and risk tolerance and innovation.

EVALUATION MATRIX: The fully developed Evaluation Matrix is given in Annex 3.

[2] https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/development-co-operation-evaluation-and-effectiveness/evaluation-criteria.html

METHODOLOGY

EVALUATION APPROACH: The evaluation was based on a theory-based, participatory approach utilizing a mixed-methods strategy for data collection. To enhance the evaluation's effectiveness, complementary approaches were applied to ensure that it:

- Addresses the information needs of users and aligns with the intended utilization of evaluation results.
- Upholds human rights and ethical principles by engaging key stakeholders (both rights holders and duty bearers) through inclusive participation and consultation.
- Produces credible findings regarding benefits for duty bearers and rights-holders (including women, adolescents, and youth) by ensuring thorough data triangulation.

The evaluation has been guided by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) principles and ethical guidelines, incorporating a conflict sensitive and Do No Harm approach. It also integrated considerations of human rights, gender equality, age sensitivity, disability inclusion, and the Leave No One Behind principle.

A theory-based approach was central to the evaluation, utilizing an explicit Theory of Change (ToC) to assess how the interventions contribute to expected results at the output and outcome levels. The ToC was used to identify causal links, critical assumptions, and contextual factors influencing project success or limitations. This approach allowed for an analysis of causal pathways, focusing on understanding what works, what does not, and why.

Contribution analysis was employed to examine evidence supporting key assumptions and to explore external factors influencing outcomes. This had enabled evaluators to assess relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the interventions.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS: The evaluation team employed a mixed-method approach for data collection, collecting quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. The evaluation has primarily used qualitative methods for data collection, including document review, interviews, group discussions and observations during field visits, where appropriate. The qualitative data will be complemented with quantitative data to minimize bias and strengthen the validity of findings. Quantitative data was compiled through desk review of documents, websites and online databases (surveys) to obtain relevant data on key indicators that measure change at output and outcome levels.

For the purposes of data collection, the Evaluation Team used the following data collection methods:

- Desk review of key project documents submitted by implementing partners IOM and UNDP
- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with project partners, government representatives, civil society, and community stakeholders (two per project municipality: Bosansko Grahovo, Bosanski Petrovac, Drvar, Glamoč, Ključ, Livno, Mrkonjić Grad, Ribnik, Sanski Most)
- Online surveys targeting relevant stakeholder groups (youth engaged in the project); and
- Key informant interviews with beneficiaries.

The validity of the results has been ensured through data triangulation (use of a variety of data sources), methodological triangulation (use of more than one data gathering technique, such as interviews, surveys, and document review), and investigator triangulation.

Document review: The evaluation team conducted a review of available project documentation: project proposal, quarterly and annual reports, project materials and available databases.

The team has received and reviewed IOM project document, four interim narrative reports submitted to PBF (May 2023, November 2023, May 2024, November 2024, and May 2025), Annual narrative report submitted to PBF (November 2024), project documentation and reports from implementing partner organizations. The full list of revised documents is provided in Annex 4.

Key Informant Interviews (KII): Interviews were a crucial tool in the assessment as they generate key perceptual data, and allowed for data triangulation, views, and opinions of different stakeholders. The evaluation team conducted onsite and online semi-structured interviews. The interviews were guided by protocols based on questions contained in the evaluation matrix and those developed during the document and portfolio reviews. Interview protocols are provided in Annex 5.1 and Annex 5.2.

Key informant interviews were conducted with the following informants:

- IOM and UNDP representatives (staff responsible for implementations – managers),
- Implementing partner organizations (staff responsible for implementations – managers),
- Grantees (staff responsible for implementations – managers),
- Government representatives,
- Center for social welfare,
- Schools' representatives,
- UN volunteers,
- Donor (PBF Secretariat).

The full list of key informants is given in Annex 6. Key informants were randomly selected from the list provided by IOM. The following tables outline the number of KII per type of KII and government level.

Table 1 Overview of Key Informants

Stakeholder / level	Number of KII
IOM representatives	**1**
UNDP representatives	**1**
Donor	**1**
Implementing CSO partners	**9**
Government representatives	**5**
Social welfare centers	**3**
Municipality's NGOs	**2**
UN Volunteers	**2**
Participating schools' representatives	**4**
Youth – Youth centers leaders in program municipalities	**5**
War veterans	**2**
Psychologists	**2**
Social service users	**2**

Table 2 Overview of Key Informants per municipality

	RS			USK		Kanton 10			
Stakehodler / level	Mrkonjic Grad	Ribnik	Ključ	Sanski Most	Bosanski Petrovac	Bosansko Grahovo	Drvar	Glamoč	Livno
Government representatives	1	1		1	1			1	1
Social welfare centers		1	1					1	
Municipality's NGOs						1	1		
UN Volunteers	1				1				
Participating schools' representatives	1			1				1	1

Focus Group Discussion (FGD): While the original evaluation plan anticipated the organization of seven focus group discussions across the participating municipalities and schools, several practical challenges made this approach unfeasible within the available timeframe. Many of the targeted youth beneficiaries faced conflicting school schedules, employment obligations, or had left the country for studies abroad, making it difficult to gather a sufficiently representative group at a mutually convenient time. In addition, the evaluators encountered obstacles stemming from a lack of ongoing institutional connections between the participants after the conclusion of project activities, further complicating efforts to bring groups together for collective discussion. As a result, the evaluation team adapted its methodology and instead conducted two in-depth interviews for each originally planned focus group.

This shift in approach, while necessary, brings both advantages and disadvantages. In-depth interviews offer the opportunity for more flexible scheduling and can elicit detailed, personal insights that might not surface in a group context. Interviewees may also feel more comfortable sharing honest opinions without peer influence, potentially increasing the depth and candor of responses. However, the absence of group dynamics means the evaluation lacks the interactive element of focus group discussion, where participants can respond to and build upon each other's perspectives, often enriching the analysis with a diversity of viewpoints and revealing community-level norms or consensus. While in-depth interviews provide a valuable and pragmatic alternative in this context, the findings should be interpreted with the recognition that they may not fully capture the collective dynamics or social processes that a focus group format is designed to elicit.

Online survey: The online survey was designed to complement findings about the perceptions and views of key stakeholders. The online survey was launched through the “Kobo Toolbox” online platform, while online questionnaire was created and shared with beneficiaries - youth engaged in the project (with provided email address by IOM or project partners). An online questionnaire is provided in Annex 7.

Additional surveys integration: UNDP deployed “the Perception survey”, as a separate project activity, in the period of final evaluation. The Custom Concept d.o.o., an agency for market research and public opinion polling based in Sarajevo, on behalf of the UNDP conducted research to assess the perceptions and attitudes of key stakeholders and project beneficiaries regarding the impact of the project on social cohesion, peacebuilding, and the provision of local social services. Methodologically, the study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. It included a document review, a structured survey using both face-to-face (F2F) and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) techniques with over 1,000 respondents across nine projects and three comparative municipalities, as well as in-depth interviews with municipal officials and focus group discussions involving social service workers, civil society representatives, and youth activists. The methodology was designed to ensure representativeness and to capture diverse perspectives. Data collection

was conducted between 28 May and 6 June 2025. The survey results were integrated into the evaluation report with the particular focus on achievement of outcome level indicators.

DATA ANALYSIS AND VALIDATION: The analysis of data collected for this evaluation was approached with methodological rigor and careful attention to the validity of findings. Drawing upon a mixed-methods strategy, the evaluation combined qualitative and quantitative data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the project's implementation and effects. Qualitative data, collected through key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and document reviews, were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, divergent viewpoints, and context-specific nuances across diverse stakeholder groups and municipalities. Quantitative data, sourced primarily from surveys and administrative records, were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, including calculation of frequencies, percentages, means, and, where relevant, statistical significance testing to detect changes in outcome measures over time and between groups.

Triangulation was a central element of the data validation process, serving to enhance the credibility and robustness of the findings. Methodological triangulation was achieved through the concurrent use of interviews, surveys, and documentary analysis, enabling cross-verification of results derived from different sources and data collection tools. Investigator triangulation was incorporated by involving multiple evaluators in the analysis and interpretation of data, reducing the risk of individual bias and fostering a more balanced perspective on the evidence. Data triangulation was further reinforced by comparing information from a range of respondents, including beneficiaries, implementing partners, local government representatives, and external stakeholders, as well as by integrating results from the UNDP-led perception survey and project monitoring systems.

Throughout the data analysis phase, the evaluation team prioritized transparency and consistency in the application of analytic frameworks, coding schemes, and statistical procedures. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group substitutes were coded against the evaluation matrix, enabling a structured comparison with the project's theory of change and intended outcomes. Quantitative findings were cross-referenced with baseline and endline values to assess the magnitude and significance of changes attributable to the project. In addition, regular debriefings within the evaluation team and validation discussions with key stakeholders were held to test emerging interpretations and ensure that conclusions accurately reflected the data collected.

The combined use of multiple data sources, analytic methods, and validation techniques has provided a strong foundation for the evaluation's findings, offering both breadth and depth in the assessment of project achievements, challenges, and lessons learned.

LIMITATIONS: Despite the systematic and multi-layered approach to data collection and analysis, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this evaluation which are as follows:

- **Scheduling and convening focus group discussions with youth participants:** Due to competing academic and work commitments, seasonal migration for study or employment, and limited institutional connectivity after the conclusion of project activities, the evaluation team was unable to organize the originally planned focus groups. As a result, in-depth interviews were conducted as an alternative. While this approach yielded rich, individualized insights, it did not fully capture the collective dynamics, peer interactions, or group-based perspectives that can emerge through facilitated group discussion.

- **The representativeness and completeness of the quantitative data:** Although the evaluation benefited from the integration of survey data and administrative records, there were gaps in baseline and endline data for some project sub-components and municipalities, particularly in cases where participation was voluntary or where local partners experienced difficulties in tracking respondents over time. This may have introduced some bias in the measurement of outcome-level changes, as those who remained engaged with the project may have differed systematically from those who did not.
- **The reliance on self-reported data**, particularly in the context of sensitive issues such as inter-ethnic relations, trauma, and perceptions of institutional trust, may also be subject to social desirability or recall bias. Respondents may have been inclined to present their experiences or attitudes in a more favorable light, especially in interviews or surveys administered by external evaluators or project-affiliated personnel.
- **The evaluation was conducted in a complex and evolving political and social context.** Changes in municipal leadership, ongoing political polarization, and external events affecting the broader environment may have influenced stakeholder perceptions and the availability of some respondents. While every effort was made to ensure comprehensive coverage and inclusion, certain stakeholder groups—such as religious leaders, police, and persons with disabilities—were less represented in the data collection than initially intended.
- **The scope and duration of the evaluation were necessarily constrained by resource and time limitations**, restricting the depth of longitudinal analysis and the ability to systematically follow up with all intended beneficiary groups. While the evaluation provides a robust snapshot of project performance and outcomes, some questions regarding longer-term impact and sustainability will require continued monitoring and further research.

While these methodological limitations do not undermine the overall validity of the evaluation, they highlight areas where caution is warranted in interpreting results and suggest avenues for improving data collection and analysis in future evaluations.

FINDINGS

The final evaluation presents the following findings, which directly address the evaluation criteria and questions outlined in the report's scope and objectives. These findings are grounded in evidence obtained through the data collection and analysis methods detailed in the methodology section.

Findings chapter is organized in several subchapters, responding to evaluation questions branched into six OECD DAC criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and PBF criteria: conflict sensitivity, catalytic, localization and time-sensitivity.

RELEVANCE

This section assesses the relevance of the project addressing the key relevance related evaluation questions.

1. Was the project relevant in addressing conflict drivers and factors for peace identified in a conflict analysis?

The evaluation findings clearly show that the project's theory of change mapped closely to the five key conflict drivers, with strong alignment between evidence-based conflict analysis and the intervention logic.

The evaluation team finds that the project design **is broadly aligned with the below conflict drivers**, and the interview data strongly confirms the relevance of this approach from the perspective of local stakeholders.

Segregated schooling remains a prominent structural driver of division, with the "two schools under one roof" system documented by OSCE as a long-term threat to stability. The project directly addressed this by introducing mixed learning spaces and critical thinking clubs within segregated schools. As one Livno-based NGO partner recalled: *"During the first workshops we've seen that participants were burdened with religion and ethnic affiliation,"* and that merely gathering students from different backgrounds constituted an important breakthrough, with participants themselves requesting that such joint activities continue in future. These findings illustrate that the project's interventions directly tackled the educational segregation driver and created safe spaces for early interaction between youth across ethnic lines.

Divisive narratives and hate speech, particularly through online platforms, were identified by IOM and media monitoring reports as growing sources of tension. The project's support for youth-led media productions—including radio spots, TikTok content, and humanitarian events—enabled young people to populate the media space with inclusive narratives. In Bosanski Petrovac and Livno, these media initiatives reached over 200,000 viewers. Interviewees confirmed that these activities shifted attitudes and fostered new dialogue: as a United Nations Volunteer from Ribnik stated, *"Attitudes about reconciliation started to change—there were no more prejudices, people approached each other with curiosity instead of suspicion."*

Unresolved war trauma remains a core grievance in many communities, especially among veterans and war-born youth. The project's trauma-sensitive components such as counselling chains, storytelling circles, online therapy, and family sessions, operationalized psychosocial reconciliation models. Veterans themselves noticed attitudinal shifts, with one ex-combatant from Ribnik observing more interaction between different ethnic group members. The peer support created through veteran dialogues contributed to addressing lingering war trauma and fostering new forms of interaction.

Youth exclusion, characterized by extremely high unemployment, emigration, and civic apathy, was another chronic driver. Although the project could not address systemic labor market reforms, it responded by engaging youth in meaningful civic roles, volunteer schemes, skills development, and municipal partnerships. As noted by a UN Volunteer in Ključ, *"We did not expect people from different backgrounds to cooperate so*

well." These activities not only increased the youth agency but also created platforms for inter-ethnic cooperation that were previously absent.

Weak horizontal ties across entities and municipalities were addressed through cross-entity initiatives such as peace camps, veteran seminars, youth exchanges, and inter-faith events. Interviews across multiple municipalities underscored how rare and valuable these opportunities for horizontal contact were. As one interviewee from Livno explained, "*The project facilitated breakthroughs in municipal governance, resulting in the adoption of an Action Plan for Social Cohesion*", while in Glamoč, citizen-mayor dialogues produced tangible civic improvements such as a dedicated Centre for Social Work and the town's first safe room for victims of violence.

2. Was the project appropriate and strategic to the main peacebuilding goals and challenges in the country at the time of the project's design? Did relevance continue throughout implementation?

The evidence shows that the project was strategically aligned with both BiH national peacebuilding priorities and the country's evolving conflict dynamics and global frameworks, namely the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025, (UNSDCF, 2021–2025); the Peacebuilding Fund's global strategy, (United Nations, 2021,) and entity-level frameworks—the Republika Srpska Social Inclusion Strategy and the Federation Youth Strategy 2025–2034 (UNICEF, 2022; FMKS, 2023).

The project's design effectively operationalized these peacebuilding frameworks through multi-ethnic youth dialogues, trauma-informed group work, municipal-level policy dialogues, veterans' storytelling, and creation of civic spaces. Local stakeholders repeatedly confirmed that these interventions addressed priority needs. For example, the establishment of mixed dialogue spaces provided youth with their first experiences of structured, safe interaction across ethnic lines. As a coordinator from Livno noted, "*during the first workshops we've seen that participants were burdened with religion and ethnic affiliation*". Similarly, veterans reported visible social changes, such as renewed cross-community interaction. A war-veteran in Ribnik went further: "*Members of different ethnic communities now greet each other and invite each other to events," a change he had not witnessed in years"*. These shifts speak directly to the UNSDCF's social-cohesion outcome and to the two entities' youth-engagement goals.

The project's relevance not only persisted but deepened throughout implementation. As the political situation in RS grew more polarized during 2023–2024, cross-entity friendships, youth exchanges, and non-violent communication techniques became increasingly valuable. United Nations Volunteers reported unexpectedly high levels of cooperation across group boundaries (UNV, Ključ), while teachers observed tangible reductions in classroom conflicts after the project's interventions (Primary school teacher, Mrkonjić Grad). The project's strategic fit also extended to institutional outcomes, such as the establishment of Glamoč's first safe space for victims of violence through municipal dialogues, reflecting both the Peacebuilding Fund's catalytic impact objectives and emerging Federation BiH-level gender-protection priorities. "This is a great project… the benefits for those disadvantaged, poor people will be immense," the Centre for Social Work Glamoč director, female.

3. Was the project relevant to the UN's peacebuilding mandate and the SDGs, in particular SDG 16?

The evidence shows that the project demonstrated strong and multi-dimensional relevance to the UN's peacebuilding mandate and directly advanced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG 16 – *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions* at its core. Its design and implementation reflected the central peacebuilding functions outlined in the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund Strategy 2020–2024, which emphasizes social cohesion, inclusion, trauma healing, and institutional strengthening as essential entry points for sustaining peace (United Nations, 2021).

SDG 16 was the primary anchor of the intervention. Through its mixed youth workshops, veterans' storytelling, trauma-informed counselling, and municipal dialogues, the project directly addressed key SDG 16 targets:

- **Target 16.1 (Reduce violence through strengthened social cohesion):** Activities such as the cross-entity youth camps, Peace Caravan, and veteran dialogues created new opportunities for inter-ethnic interaction, helping to reduce intergroup tensions. Multiple field testimonies confirmed behavioral shifts: youth, veterans, and volunteers all reported that people from different communities began greeting one another, engaging in joint activities, and breaking long-standing prejudices (Interviewees: NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno; UNV, Ključ; War veteran, Ribnik).
- **Target 16.7 (Inclusive and participatory decision-making):** Municipal dialogues empowered citizens to engage directly with local authorities, leading to concrete institutional changes, such as the relocation of the Centre for Social Work in Glamoč and the establishment of safe spaces for victims of violence (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work Glamoč).
- **Target 16.b (Non-discrimination and inclusive policies):** The project supported inclusive decision-making processes, offering marginalized groups—including youth, women, returnees, and people with disabilities—opportunities to voice needs and influence decisions.

The project also generated important complementary outcomes across several other SDGs, which, while not the primary peacebuilding focus, represent important **complementary pathways** to sustaining peace, namely:

- **SDG 4 – Quality Education (Target 4.7).** The Sobičak classroom-hub model promoted human rights education, critical thinking, and civic responsibility by creating mixed-ethnicity learning spaces. These hubs were fully integrated into school development plans, demonstrating long-term institutional relevance.
- **SDG 5 – Gender Equality (Target 5.5):** Women assumed visible leadership roles as trauma counselors, media team leaders, and youth board members, promoting their participation in public decision-making. While limitations remained—such as low involvement of women veterans and fathers in family counseling—the project advanced gender-responsive peacebuilding.
- **SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being (Target 3.4):** The multi-layered psychosocial support system established under PRESTO contributed to improved mental health, with participants reporting reduced anxiety and better family communication, addressing one of the frequently overlooked dimensions of post-conflict recovery.
- **SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth (Target 8.6):** Youth employability was supported through NGO management boot camps, volunteer schemes, and youth-center renovations. Several young participants gained proposal-writing, budgeting, and negotiation skills, some of whom successfully co-authored grant applications across entity lines.
- **SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities (Target 10.2):** The project strengthened inclusion by providing civic spaces, rural-urban exchanges, disability-rights media features, and targeted support for vulnerable groups, thereby promoting the social participation of otherwise marginalized populations.
- **SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities (Target 11.7):** The conversion of abandoned public spaces—such as the cinema in Mrkonjić Grad and green areas in the Balkana–Zelenkovac park—expanded safe, inclusive public spaces for community interaction, reinforcing sustainable urban development.
- **SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals (Target 17.17):** The joint IOM–UNDP project was itself an example of UN interagency cooperation. In addition, effective local partnerships were established between municipal councils, civil society organizations, private companies, veterans' unions, and local media outlets, pooling resources, expertise, and political will.

While the project's contribution to SDG 16 was the strongest and most direct, its alignment with other SDGs demonstrated a holistic understanding of peacebuilding as inherently linked to education, health, gender

equality, economic empowerment, and inclusive governance. This integrated approach is fully consistent with the multidimensional nature of the UN's sustaining peace agenda.

4. Was the project relevant to the European Commission Opinion (2019) - Key Priority 5 (Fundamental Rights)

The project was **highly relevant to the European Commission's Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly to Key Priority 5** which is related to concrete actions fostering reconciliation and overcoming the legacies of the war.

The project directly contributed to this priority by operationalizing **locally grounded reconciliation efforts** through a variety of inclusive, trauma-informed, and participatory interventions. By promoting sustained **inter-ethnic dialogue**, **cross-community cooperation**, and **joint civic engagement**, the initiative created a conducive environment for rebuilding trust among communities historically divided by conflict.

Key reconciliation-oriented activities included:

- **Veteran storytelling circles** that allowed former combatants from different ethnic backgrounds to share experiences and foster mutual empathy.
- **Youth exchanges and mixed learning hubs** that helped dismantle inherited prejudices and promoted new relationships among young people across entity lines.
- **Municipal-level dialogues**, resulting in concrete service improvements (e.g., safe apartments for domestic violence victims), which reinforced shared ownership and cross-community collaboration.

These efforts collectively addressed not only the **structural divisions** left by the war but also the **emotional and psychological legacies** that often go unaddressed in standard development projects. The use of **trauma-sensitive counselling** and the creation of **safe spaces for dialogue** were instrumental in enabling participants—especially youth, veterans, and vulnerable groups—to process past harms and build forward-looking relationships.

Furthermore, the project's deliberate focus on marginalized and underserved municipalities ensured that reconciliation was pursued **where it was most needed**, often in communities with limited donor presence and deeply entrenched distrust.

It can be concluded that the project's core design and outcomes are strongly aligned with Key Priority 5. It demonstrates a model for **rights-based, community-driven peacebuilding** that responds directly to the European Commission's call for tangible progress in reconciliation and legacy-overcoming efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina

5. Was the project relevant to the needs and priorities of the target groups/beneficiaries? Were they consulted during the design and implementation of the project?

The evaluation finds strong and consistent evidence that the project was highly relevant to the needs and priorities of its main target groups — youth, war veterans, educators, psychosocial professionals, municipal social-protection actors, and local authorities — as confirmed through both documentary review and stakeholder interviews. These groups actively sought opportunities for safe inter-ethnic interaction, psychosocial support, civic participation, and institutional dialogue, and the project's interventions directly responded to these expressed demands.

For youth in small, socially and geographically isolated municipalities, the project provided rare and highly valued opportunities to engage with peers across entity lines, acquire civic and leadership skills, and participate in structured dialogue processes.

Interviews confirmed that many of these young people had never previously left their municipalities or engaged with peers from other communities, describing the project as their first chance to overcome exclusion and build lasting cross-community relationships (Interviewees: NGO PRONI, Brčko; NGO Psiholuminis, partner, female; NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno, grantee, female). Youth-driven initiatives, such as self-designed activity calendars, media productions, and cross-entity visits, further demonstrated high ownership and demand for the opportunities provided.

For veterans, the project offered safe, dignified spaces for storytelling and peer exchange that many had lacked since the war. These sessions allowed for open discussion of personal experiences, intergenerational dialogue, and the formation of new inter-ethnic connections, which veterans themselves recognized as unprecedented developments in their communities (Interviewees: War veterans, Ribnik and Bosansko Grahovo).

Educators and psychosocial professionals identified classroom-based social cohesion and trauma-sensitive tools as key professional needs. Teachers in Sanski Most and Livno described how the project created space for open inter-ethnic dialogue among students and fostered emotional openness that was rarely achieved in standard education settings (Interviewees: Teachers, Sanski Most and Livno).

Municipal social-protection institutions and local governments also found the interventions directly relevant to their service delivery mandates. Concrete results included the relocation of the Glamoč Centre for Social Work and the establishment of the town's first safe room for victims of violence (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work Glamoč, female), as well as strengthened inter-ethnic relations through structured dialogue forums (Interviewee: Local government, Ključ, female). At the individual level, participants across municipalities expressed feeling empowered and included in community life (Interviewee: UNV, Bosansko Grahovo, female).

With regard to **consultation during project design**, the evidence presents a mixed picture. The documentary record shows that several project components were informed by targeted early-stage consultations, including student and teacher focus groups that shaped the Sobičak hub model, outreach visits that informed veteran participant selection and curriculum design, and a poll of school psychologists that led to the inclusion of family therapy in the PRESTO counselling approach. However, some implementing partners reported that they were not involved in any comprehensive conflict or stakeholder analysis before implementation, indicating that broader participatory planning was limited in certain areas (Interviewees: NGO PRONI, Brčko; NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno).

During implementation, consultation was significantly stronger. Youth participants made decisions on peace camp programming, interfaith event themes, media content, and youth center infrastructure. Teachers adapted curricula based on student feedback, while veterans-initiated peer-support groups prior to the formal conclusion of training. This level of beneficiary-driven adjustment demonstrates that many interventions were not only well-aligned with needs but also responsive and adaptive to evolving participant priorities throughout delivery.

However, both documentary and interview evidence also identify groups who were less effectively reached or consulted. Some implementing partners noted the absence of comprehensive preparatory analysis prior to implementation, which led to missed opportunities for stakeholder engagement, particularly with police, religious leaders, and women's-rights organizations (NGO PRONI, Brčko).

Religious leaders, police, local media, and persons with disabilities were largely absent from both design and implementation phases, despite their importance to broader community engagement and conflict sensitivity. Fathers participated far less frequently in family therapy sessions, and some early participant selection processes unintentionally excluded marginalized or harder-to-reach youth. Grassroots women's organizations, particularly in Grahovo, expressed dissatisfaction with how their contributions were handled (Interviewee: NGO Grahovljanke, Grahovo, female). Political transitions in some municipalities also disrupted early buy-in and slowed project momentum.

6. Did the project's theory of change clearly articulate assumptions about why the project approach is expected to produce the desired change? Was the theory of change grounded in evidence?

The Theory of Change (ToC) of SPSC project presents a coherent, contextually relevant, and evidence-informed framework for achieving peacebuilding outcomes in BiH. Its design reflects a clear understanding of the country's core conflict drivers—ethnic segregation, unresolved trauma, youth exclusion, institutional weaknesses, and fragile inter-entity ties—and positions inclusive dialogue, youth empowerment, trauma healing, veterans' engagement, and municipal-level cooperation as the central pathways to strengthen social cohesion.

The formal ToC, as articulated in project documents, proposes that:

- **If**
  - communities and local governments engage actively in inclusive dialogues to identify and address gaps in social care services
  - young women and men are empowered through capacity-building initiatives, actively participating in dialogues, cross-community activities, and decision-making processes
  - inter-entity and cross-community activities create opportunities for meaningful youth engagement and facilitate open discussion on common challenges and solutions
- **Then**
  - social cohesion across entity boundaries will strengthen
- **Because** trust, mutual understanding, institutional responsiveness, and inclusive service delivery will be improved:
  - Inclusive and constructive dialogues will create spaces for communities, particularly youth, to openly discuss shared concerns, priorities, and solutions with local leaders and authorities.
  - Enhanced responsiveness and quality of social services will build trust and legitimacy of local institutions among diverse community groups.
  - Youth engagement across entities will break down prejudices and strengthen relationships, fostering mutual understanding and solidarity.

The core design logic aligns well with conflict analyses and international peacebuilding frameworks, drawing on credible evidence from OSCE, UNDP, IOM, Crisis Group, and others, and reflects BiH political, social, and historical context. Both field implementation experience and beneficiary testimonies confirm that these causal pathways were largely appropriate and successfully operationalized.

However, beyond the formal ToC design, evaluation evidence allows us to reconstruct and assess a set of **nine key underlying assumptions** that drove project implementation. These assumptions — some explicit, others implicit — provide a deeper understanding of how the project expected changes to occur, and how these expectations played out in practice.

Inter-ethnic contact reduces prejudice and normalizes cooperation: The most explicit and well-supported assumption posited that carefully facilitated contact among youth from different ethnic backgrounds would reduce prejudice and foster cooperation. Field testimony strongly confirms this: youth who were initially

"silent" and avoided interaction eventually developed friendships and jointly designed activities. As one trainer noted, participants who "*didn't even talk*" at the beginning were later pitching joint ideas and networking across municipal lines (Interviewee: NGO PRONI, Brčko). A United Nations Volunteer from Ključ described how mixed group contact quickly became normalized: "I*t was the first time she had spoken openly with someone from another ethnic group*". This validates the classic "contact hypothesis" as a core peacebuilding mechanism.

Trauma-informed psychosocial work supports healing and cohesion: The second assumption anticipated that trauma-informed counselling would enable personal healing, thereby contributing to social cohesion. Psychologists involved in PRESTO activities observed participants opening up emotionally, with some asking facilitators to stay after sessions as they finally felt someone cared about their experiences (Interviewee: Psiholuminis, female). This supports the assumption, at least at the individual level, as trauma survivors found safe spaces to share grief, anxiety, and loss.

Youth empowerment and civic space promote sustained activism: The third assumption linked civic empowerment with sustained youth activism. Trainers reported that participants who had previously been marginalized began "networking… and communicating their needs" actively (Interviewee: NGO PRONI, Brčko). A Livno coordinator confirmed that students not only engaged but sought ways to continue the activities (Interviewee: NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno). However, the sustainability of this empowerment remains more fragile in smaller towns where youth outmigration threatens long-term continuity.

Veteran engagement fosters empathy across generations: A further assumption held that veterans' dialogues would rebuild empathy and cross-ethnic connections. Veterans described how interactions with peers from other ethnic backgrounds evolved from non-contact to open invitations and social events — behavior previously unseen since the war (Interviewee: War veteran, Ribnik; War veteran, Bosansko Grahovo). These outcomes strongly support the assumption.

Citizen–municipality dialogues trigger institutional change: The project also assumed that inclusive municipal dialogues would drive institutional accountability. Evidence from Glamoč confirms this, as municipal authorities responded to dialogue outcomes by relocating the Centre for Social Work and opening the first safe apartment for victims of violence (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work Glamoč). This illustrates that institutional responsiveness can follow when municipalities are engaged in structured, inclusive dialogue.

Early consultation ensures ownership and inclusion: Here, the evidence is mixed. Although project activities were responsive, several partners reported that early-stage consultations were limited or absent. Many indicated they "were not aware of any analysis being done," or that they were involved only after project parameters were finalized (Interviewees: NGO PRONI, Brčko; NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno). Furthermore, important stakeholders—police, religious leaders, and disability organizations—were largely absent from consultations (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work Glamoč), suggesting that this assumption was only partially realized.

Gender balance equals gender responsiveness: While women and girls were present in many activities, stakeholders noted a lack of specific programming addressing women's leadership or gender-based violence. Teachers and veterans alike reported that workshops did not fully explore gender-specific needs (Interviewees: Primary school teacher, Sanski Most; War veteran, Ribnik). Thus, while gender participation targets were met, genuine gender responsiveness was not fully embedded.

Sustainability will follow once capacities are built: The ToC presumed that once trained, local actors would sustain activities.

There are promising signs: teachers report that non-violent communication techniques are now standard in some classrooms, reducing conflicts by 30% (Interviewee: Primary school teacher, Mrkonjić Grad). However, partners acknowledge that youth outmigration poses an ongoing risk to sustainability (Interviewee: IOM staff, female).

7. To what extent did the project respond to peacebuilding gaps?

The evaluation finds that the project was well-targeted and highly responsive to BiH's recognized peacebuilding gaps. While these gaps had already been well-identified in conflict assessments and policy frameworks, the project successfully translated these structural deficits into practical community-level interventions that generated tangible shifts in inter-ethnic relations, youth engagement, trauma recovery, veterans' inclusion, and local institutional responsiveness.

The strength of the project's response lies in its capacity to operationalize these challenges in ways that were meaningful to beneficiaries and visible in field-level change. Multiple interviewees confirmed that the project created rare safe spaces for inter-ethnic interaction. As one youth participant in Livno described, participants later developed capacity "t*o acknowledge and understand each other*," with a strong demand for continuation (Interviewee: NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno). A United Nations Volunteer in Ključ similarly noted surprise at how quickly mixed groups cooperated: "*We did not expect people from different backgrounds to cooperate so well… one participant said it was the first time she had spoken openly with someone from another ethnic group*".

In parallel, **the project addressed long-standing gaps in trauma support.** Psychologists facilitating PRESTO activities reported that youth who were initially "really reserved" opened up over time, with some choosing to remain after sessions for continued conversations, indicating that these were often the first safe opportunities to process unresolved trauma (Interviewee: Psiholuminis, female).

Importantly, veterans emerged as beneficiaries of gap-filling interventions. In multiple sites, veterans' storytelling circles not only facilitated personal healing but also generated unexpected cross-ethnic social interactions that had not occurred for decades: "Members of different ethnic communities now greet each other and invite each other to events" (Interviewee: War veteran, Ribnik).

Youth who had previously lacked civic engagement platforms were empowered to play active roles in local governance processes. As one trainer explained, PRONI's Youth Academy helped turn "silent" teenagers who were "*on the edge to become nothing*" into civic actors who began petitioning mayors for public resources and spaces (Interviewee: NGO PRONI, Brčko). At the municipal level, dialogue formats resulted in concrete service improvements, such as the relocation of Glamoč Centre for Social Work and creation of its first safe space for victims of violence, which the center's director described as "*a great project… the benefits for those disadvantaged, poor people will be immense*" (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work Glamoč).

While these outcomes demonstrate that the project successfully narrowed key peacebuilding gaps, some areas remained partially addressed. Conflict analysis was not always fully participatory, limiting early sensitivity to local dynamics. Security-sector actors such as police remained peripheral, and gender-specific programming was limited, often reducing gender responsiveness to participation numbers rather than substantive content. In municipalities like Drvar, weak local cooperation hindered progress entirely, with one youth participant noting that workshops were ultimately "not useful" as disagreements stalled follow-up actions.

COHERENCE

This section provides information on the compatibility of the intervention with other similar interventions in the country.

1. To what extent did the PBF project complement other stakeholders, especially of other UN agencies?

The evaluation finds that the project achieved a meaningful degree of complementarity with other peacebuilding initiatives/actors operating in BiH, particularly by targeting geographic and institutional gaps underserved by larger UN and bilateral programs. Its interventions filled several important gaps left open by existing national-level peacebuilding frameworks, while also generating thematic linkages with parallel UN agency mandates.

From a **geographic perspective**, the project's focus on smaller, marginalized municipalities, allowed it to extend peacebuilding programming to communities often overlooked by major national and regional initiatives. While flagship UN projects such as *Dialogue for the Future 3 (DFF3)*, *Youth 4 Inclusion, Equality and Trust*, and UNICEF-led education programs concentrate on larger urban centers, the PBF intervention deliberately concentrated resources in so-called "dying communities" with limited to non-civic infrastructure and few opportunities for youth engagement. This territorial focus was consistently recognized by interviewees as one of the project's strongest contributions to complementarity within the UN system.

Thematically, the project reinforced UN and non-UN actors' peacebuilding objectives by operationalizing community-level approaches that extended or localized broader policy goals. For example, youth civic initiatives implemented by PRONI aligned with participatory approaches promoted in DFF3, while municipal dialogues in Glamoč extended citizen engagement models also pioneered under previous UNDP programming. Psychosocial work under PRESTO filled an important trauma-care gap largely unaddressed by other donors, thereby complementing WHO's higher-level mental health policy work and UNFPA's youth health programs. Similarly, Sobičak hubs provided classroom-level models for addressing educational segregation, complementing OSCE's long-standing advocacy efforts on "two-schools-under-one-roof" without duplicating its monitoring mandate.

Several **operational synergies** with ongoing UN and bilateral programs were also observed. For instance, IOM field teams assisted CKMD's documentary production efforts, ensuring visibility across related projects, while youth councils trained under the PBF-funded project were able to feed content into USAID's PRO-Future forums, which had identified youth inclusion as a persistent gap. In several municipalities, local governments co-financed both PBF interventions and OSCE/UNDP infrastructure upgrades, indicating complementary layers of engagement rather than redundant programming.

However, the evaluation also identifies some **limitations in operational complementarity**. Internal coordination between IOM and UNDP weakened after the initial phase, with joint meetings reportedly ending after six months. This limited the potential to cross-refer beneficiaries to other UN programs such as UNICEF's education work, UN Women's GBV initiatives, or UNFPA youth caravans active in neighboring municipalities. Moreover, opportunities to systematically align with non-UN actors—such as USAID's PRO-Future program or OSCE-supported youth resilience efforts—were not fully exploited. Interviewees in Drvar and Grahovo noted that their communities had hosted multiple overlapping training without clear coordination between different donors, resulting in parallel activities and occasional confusion over roles and expectations.

While **complementarity was strongest in terms of geographic reach and direct beneficiary engagement**, it remained moderate in terms of thematic alignment and weakest in operational coordination. The absence of a unified conflict analysis and joint planning platform across agencies reduced the project's ability to fully leverage synergies with ongoing UN and bilateral peacebuilding programs.

2. To what extent did the project ensure synergies within different programs of UN agencies, PBF projects and other implementing organizations and donors?

The evaluation finds that the PBF-financed project created several important synergies across UN agencies and partners, particularly at the operational level, while opportunities for broader, more systematic coordination were only partially realized during implementation. The experience reflects both valuable localized collaboration as well as coordination challenges common to multi-agency programming in complex peacebuilding settings.

Positive synergies were clearly demonstrated where agencies intentionally aligned efforts. The combination of IOM's grassroots reach and UNDP's engagement with municipal authorities enabled results that would have been difficult for either agency to achieve independently. In Glamoč, for example, municipal dialogues helped unlock public infrastructure for vulnerable groups while IOM's outreach facilitated the establishment of the first safe apartment for victims of violence (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work, Glamoč). Similarly, partnerships with the education NGO CEI Step-by-Step allowed IOM to build on training approaches previously piloted by UNICEF and UNESCO, ensuring continuity in pedagogical methods and strengthening cross-program linkages in education (Interviewee: IOM, female).

Such examples demonstrate the potential of the PBF project to amplify peacebuilding efforts by drawing on existing UN expertise, tools, and networks. In a number of municipalities, local governments also contributed resources that complemented UNDP infrastructure investments and OSCE-supported upgrades, further reinforcing inter-agency synergies at the field level.

However, **the evaluation also notes that these positive synergies were not always consistently maintained.** Formal inter-agency coordination between IOM and UNDP weakened after initial start-up, with joint planning meetings becoming less frequent as implementation progressed (Interviewee: IOM, female). While field teams continued to collaborate informally in many instances, the absence of regular structured coordination limited opportunities for more systematic joint work across the broader UN system and with non-UN actors.

Linkages to other ongoing peacebuilding programs, including Dialogue for the Future 3 (DFF3), Youth 4 Inclusion (Y4IET), and USAID's PRO-Future, remained limited. Several implementing partners noted that better synchronization across donors could have helped avoid occasional overlaps in youth programming or supported more efficient use of shared infrastructure and training resources (Interviewees: NGO PRONI, Brčko; NGO Grahovljanke, Bosansko Grahovo). In some municipalities, multiple peacebuilding initiatives operated in parallel without formal coordination mechanisms, which occasionally created confusion among local partners regarding roles and expectations.

Despite these coordination gaps, frontline staff and implementing partners consistently emphasized that the project's local relevance remained strong, and that established synergies—particularly in service delivery, trauma healing, and civic engagement—provided significant added value. Overall, the experience reflects both the potential and the complexity of fostering synergies in multi-agency peacebuilding contexts, where early coordination momentum can be difficult to sustain over longer implementation periods.

3. How relevant and responsive has the project been to supporting peacebuilding priorities of the governments and civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

The evaluation finds that the project demonstrated strong alignment with the peacebuilding priorities articulated by both government institutions and civil society organizations in BiH. The project's design and interventions closely reflected the core priorities identified in national, entity-level, and municipal policy frameworks, while responding to long-standing demands voiced by grassroots actors.

At the policy level, the project operationalized key government peace-building commitments in several areas:

- Education-Sector Action Plan (2021-2025): The Sobičak hubs directly supported the Education-Sector Action Plan (2021-2025), providing inclusive, mixed-ethnic learning spaces in schools otherwise divided along ethnic lines. These efforts not only fulfilled policy objectives on inclusive education but also introduced practical classroom models and peer-teacher networks that extended beyond project funding.
- Youth Policy (2023-2027) in RS and Federation's Social Inclusion Strategy (2021-2027): Youth participation activities — including youth councils, volunteer schemes, and youth-center renovations — translated the goals of these policies into concrete programming which municipal authorities increasingly supported and co-financed.

The project's trauma-healing and social-protection work also corresponded directly with government priorities under the National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 and broader social inclusion frameworks. The PRESTO counselling model, combined with family therapy and mixed-veteran dialogues, provided community-based psychosocial services largely absent from formal state programming. These contributions filled up important service gaps identified in national documents but underfunded in public budgets.

Field-level government actors explicitly acknowledged this policy alignment. In Ključ, a municipal official emphasized that "*joint workshops have improved relations between Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats*" with participants continuing inter-ethnic contact well beyond project closure (Interviewee: Local government, Ključ). In Livno, the project played a catalytic role in reviving a stalled Action Plan for Social Cohesion, demonstrating the project's practical contribution to existing government commitments (Interviewee: NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno). Similarly, in Glamoč, municipal dialogue processes facilitated by the project resulted in the relocation of the Centre for Social Work to dedicated premises for the first time, with the Centre's director confirming that "*the benefits for those disadvantaged, poor people will be immense*" (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work, Glamoč).

The project was equally responsive to long-standing civil society concerns, particularly among youth and veterans. Multiple interviewees noted that the project addressed decades-long frustrations over lack of mobility, exclusion from civic life, and limited inter-ethnic contact. As one youth trainer from Proni explained, project participants were often "*youths that never went out of their place… socially excluded, poor, without proper access to education*" (Interviewee: NGO PRONI). The project's provision of travel, youth camps, and new civic spaces provided these groups of youth with rare opportunities for interaction and leadership. Similarly, war veterans in Ribnik reported that the project fostered new patterns of cross-community social interaction that had not occurred since the end of the conflict (Interviewee: War veteran, Ribnik).

Despite its responsiveness, certain gaps remained. Key policy commitments on inclusive consultation, security-sector engagement, and gender equality were only partially reflected in the project's implementation. Police community-relations units were not involved, even though they are referenced in security strategies at both entity levels. Women's organizations, such as Grahovljanke in Grahovo, reported feeling marginalized when their approved proposals were reallocated without explanation, highlighting incomplete attention to gender-responsive planning (Interviewee: NGO Grahovljanke, Bosansko Grahovo). Several implementing partners also noted limited early consultation during design, which reduced opportunities for broader stakeholder ownership.

4. How were stakeholders involved in the project's design and implementation?

The evaluation finds that the project demonstrated considerable success in fostering participatory engagement during the design and implementation, while stakeholder involvement during design was supported by structured needs assessments but lacked fully inclusive consultation processes.

These evidence are reported under the Relevance question "Was the project relevant to the needs and priorities of the target groups/beneficiaries? Were they consulted during the design and implementation of the project?"

To complement evaluation findings, there should be noted that *Mapping of Communities* was conducted by an independent consulting firm PRISM Research prior to project launch. The PRISM Research *Mapping of Communities* provided a systematic, though not fully participatory, evidence base that helped inform initial project design by capturing many of the core concerns voiced by local populations. This research served as a bridge between stakeholder needs and the formulation of project interventions and allowed the project team to ground its design in systematically collected local perceptions, particularly in smaller and underserved municipalities. However, while the research provided important diagnostic information, it did not fully substitute for direct, participatory co-design processes with local civil society actors and community groups at the time of formulation.

Beyond the PRISM study, targeted technical consultations took place with certain professional groups. School-based focus groups involving students, teachers, and principals in eight municipalities directly shaped the physical and operational features of the Sobičak hubs, while an online survey of school psychologists contributed to the addition of family therapy components within the PRESTO model. These focused engagements allowed expert stakeholders to influence design elements that fell within their areas of expertise.

At the municipal level, the dialogue model successfully convened municipal officials, civil society, and service providers to jointly address local priorities. In Glamoč, this facilitated the establishment of the first safe apartment for victims of violence, an outcome that the director of the Centre for Social Work directly credited to the project's facilitation: "*What IOM did, no one had done before. They connected us… brought us the mayor*" (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work, Glamoč).

Through implementation, the project remained responsive to evolving stakeholder needs, adapting activities where new challenges emerged. For example, additional one-on-one trauma counselling sessions were added following rising adolescent anxiety, and cross-entity educational exchanges continued with adjusted media visibility when political sensitivities arose in RS.

Despite these strong examples of adaptive engagement, **some gaps remained throughout the implementation period. Key local actors such as police, religious authorities, and women's organizations were still not consistently integrated, while fluctuations in budgets and coordination arrangements between lead UN agencies occasionally created confusion for local partners.** Although many stakeholders ultimately became empowered participants, these adjustments occurred progressively rather than being embedded from the outset.

Also, **broader multi-stakeholder consultations during project design were more limited**. Several civil society and implementing partners, including PRONI and the Centre for Civic Cooperation, reported that they were not involved in the early conflict analysis or in shaping the activity menu (Interviewees: NGO PRONI, Brčko; NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno). The director of Grahovljanke described the conflict analysis as "*conducted in a superficial way*," noting that online consultations failed to capture distinct community-specific needs).

EFFICIENCY

This section provides an analysis and opinions on project efficiency in terms of staffing, planning, and coordination, efficiency of project implementation approach, project M&E system, communication, value for money and synergies.

1. How efficient was the overall staffing, planning and coordination within the project (including between the implementing agencies and with stakeholders)? Have project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?

The evaluation finds that the project demonstrated good operational efficiency in terms of planning, field-level staffing, and adaptive delivery.

Staffing and Internal coordination: The evaluation shows that the project operated on deliberately lean staffing structures that allowed flexible and adaptive field delivery. At both agency and partner levels, small multi-skilled teams were engaged: typically, one project lead, one finance/MEAL officer, and a rotating field team of trainers and mentors. This allowed the project to respond flexibly to on-the-ground challenges without incurring excessive overhead. National capacities were directly engaged from the outset — as seen in PRESTO's 18-member trauma-mentor cohort and Sobičak's peer-learning network of 26 teachers — reducing reliance on costly international consultants and strengthening sustainability through local expertise.

In the early phase, inter-agency coordination between IOM and UNDP was effective and well-structured. Regular joint meetings, pooled field visits, and shared logistics supported smooth operational delivery. This coordination was especially helpful in infrastructure handovers, such as the timely establishment of Glamoč's Centre for Social Work safe-space facilities. However, **as implementation progressed, some inter-agency routines diminished**. Coordination meetings gradually became less frequent, and as operational priorities diverged, joint planning and field visits became more fragmented, creating some challenges for maintaining consistent information flow and fully harmonized implementation across agencies (Interviewee: IOM, manager, female). This weakening of horizontal coordination between agencies emerged as a key efficiency bottleneck later in implementation.

Planning Discipline vs. Political and Logistical Shocks: The evidence shows that planning processes demonstrated strong risk management and adaptability to contextual challenges. Workplans were designed with buffers that allowed the project to adjust to exogenous factors such as winter weather, municipal elections, and evolving political sensitivities. For example, when heavy snowfall restricted access to remote municipalities, PRESTO counselling successfully shifted to online modalities without interrupting service continuity. Similarly, cross-entity youth events strategically rotated across neutral venues to minimize political tensions.

Despite this, some **external political events and administrative turnover affected delivery timelines**. In several municipalities, municipal elections led to the replacement of local officials who had not been previously briefed, delaying administrative approvals such as room allocation memoranda for youth centers. In PRONI's youth clubs, this led to delays of up to eight weeks in securing premises, forcing youth volunteers to temporarily suspend activities.

Activity compression occurred in some cases where planning delays squeezed delivery into shortened windows. In Livno, for example, a youth-led tolerance campaign was condensed into a single school term, requiring four workshops and two media productions to be delivered within a short span — a pace partners later described as "too brief for the complexity of aims." Similarly, Sobičak hubs were rapidly scaled up and operated at full capacity (277 club meetings vs. 64 originally planned), demonstrating operational flexibility but placing strain on personnel.

Inter-Agency and Stakeholder Coordination: At the field level, **coordination with external partners** — including OSCE education monitors, and UNDP's border-cohesion program — **was generally effective in avoiding duplication and maximizing resource leverage.** IOM field staff facilitated partner access to busy municipal calendars, while OSCE education teams promoted Sobičak hubs during their monitoring missions.

Coordination with local government stakeholders was one of the operational strengths of the project. Joint budgeting and resource-sharing agreements were successfully negotiated with municipalities. For example, Mrkonjić Grad municipality and the RS government co-financed façade insulation and furniture for youth centers, while Bosanski Petrovac waived permit fees. These arrangements both reduced costs and signaled strong municipal buy-in.

Some areas for improvement were noted in horizontal inter-agency coordination over time. After the initial phase, joint field coordination between IOM and UNDP became more ad-hoc, with less frequent synchronization of activities. According to an IOM manager, delays in securing small-grant funds for implementing partners were partly due to UNDP procurement procedures and misaligned inter-agency workplans, which caused up to six-month delays in certain disbursements.

Timeliness of Fund Flow and Activity Delivery: Despite coordination gaps, **most core outputs were delivered on time or even exceeded planned targets.** Where disbursements were timely, activity delivery was highly efficient. However, cash-flow disruptions impacted the delivery of certain activities: PRESTO was forced to temporarily borrow funds when an instalment arrived late, spending 247,623 BAM against a 244,910 BAM grant ceiling. Sobičak implementers also took short-term loans to keep activities running when tranche payments slipped. In some cases, partners received reimbursements after final narrative reports were submitted, creating financial stress for smaller organizations without sufficient cash reserves. As multiple partners emphasized, these financial bottlenecks disproportionately affected smaller CSOs — especially in remote municipalities — that were least able to carry unfunded costs while waiting for delayed disbursements.

Human-Resource Bandwidth: The project's human-resource model generally proved sufficient for activity delivery but encountered some limitations in technical supervision and partner support. Only 8 of 28 planned one-to-one supervision sessions for trauma counsellors took place, limiting professional support for counsellors managing complex cases. Remote mentoring formats for youth leadership support saw lower levels of participation than anticipated, suggesting that in-person coaching remains more effective for rural youth contexts. Staff turnover on both agencies occasionally created temporary gaps in field coordination, requiring renewed efforts to rebuild local partnerships and re-align workplans.

2. How efficient and successful was the project's implementation approach, including procurement and selection of implementing partners?

The project's implementation model demonstrated a generally efficient and adaptive operational structure, successfully translating PBF allocations into substantial field-level delivery across multiple municipalities. The core model, built on small, multi-skilled national teams, local co-ownership (local co-financing and cost sharing), and flexible modalities, contributed to a strong capacity for problem-solving and responsiveness throughout implementation.

Local Co-Financing and Cost-Sharing: The implementation approach was further strengthened by structured co-financing arrangements with local authorities and communities. Municipalities actively contributed to infrastructure upgrades, such as façade insulation (Mrkonjić Grad) and rent waivers (Bosanski Petrovac), while parents equipped Sobičak rooms with furniture and internet routers. These cost-sharing mechanisms helped minimize unit costs, secure local buy-in, and increased the sustainability of results by embedding project assets within municipal service systems.

Adaptive Scheduling and Delivery Modalities: Implementation teams demonstrated effective risk management by incorporating flexibility into workplans, allowing timely adaptation to unforeseen external shocks. For instance, counselling services smoothly shifted to online platforms when road closures limited physical access. Similarly, when political sensitivities arose around the RS draft "foreign agents" legislation, the teams adjusted media visibility while maintaining cross-entity youth exchanges. These adaptive practices contributed to the continuity of implementation without significant cost overruns.

Strong Output Efficiency and Uptake: Quantitative results consistently exceeded original targets, indicating high output-to-cost efficiency. For example, 45 hours of veteran dialogue training led to 22 peer-support group proposals; trauma healing camps were oversubscribed, with 90 youth applying for 40 available places; Sobičak hubs reached full utilization shortly after launch. These indicators reflect high demand for services and an effective deployment of available human and financial resources.

Partner and Grantee Selection: The selection of implementing partners reflected a strong alignment with technical expertise needs, particularly through the engagement of experienced organizations such as PRONI, Psiholuminis, and Step-by-Step. These partnerships ensured that validated curricula and established delivery methods were effectively scaled to target communities. Nonetheless, interview evidence also points to gaps in the partner selection process, with some local CSOs reporting exclusion from early-stage consultations and dissatisfaction with shifts in previously agreed funding allocations.

Procurement and Financial Bottlenecks: Procurement and financial management presented significant challenges that impacted operational efficiency. Delays in procurement processes led to six-month lags in disbursing funds for youth-center refurbishments, forcing NGOs to repeatedly renegotiate budgets. Several partners reported long response times (up to 20 days for email approvals), creating logistical uncertainties and last-minute adjustments in workshop organization. Some implementing partners were required to pre-finance activities while awaiting reimbursements, a particular burden for smaller CSOs with limited cash reserves. Youth centers in Ribnik and Grahovo experienced opening delays of six to nine months due to these cumulative delays, and some reimbursements were received only after final reporting deadlines.

3. How well did the project collect and use data to monitor results? How effectively was updated data used to manage the project?

The evaluation team finds that the project demonstrated partial capacity for collecting and using monitoring data during implementation. While data collection did take place across the intervention's multiple workstreams, and in some cases, was used effectively at the activity level, **systemic weaknesses limited the extent to which monitoring data served as a comprehensive management and learning tool.** Overall, information systems were fragmented across implementing agencies and partners, with minimal institutionalized structures for adaptive management.

Early Coordination of Monitoring Efforts: At project initiation, IOM and UNDP agreed on joint monitoring modalities, including a shared database and bi-weekly coordination meetings. This early arrangement supported synchronized field visits, timely collection of partner reports, and reasonably rapid feedback loops for early workshops, trauma camps, and municipal dialogues. Stakeholders highlighted that this coordination enabled quick start-up and adaptive problem-solving in the initial phase. However, after approximately six months, inter-agency monitoring coordination deteriorated. As noted by IOM staff, "staff looked after their agencies' personal interests" and inter-agency monitoring essentially lapsed, with each agency subsequently reverting to parallel systems.

Strengths in Partner-Level Monitoring Practices: Despite the absence of a unified monitoring system, certain implementing partners demonstrated strong independent data practices. The education-focused NGO Step-by-Step consistently provided full participant lists, post-workshop reflections, and qualitative feedback in a timely manner, earning recognition from both IOM and UNDP as one of the most reliable reporting partners. Psiholuminis further enhanced its monitoring by repeating a 1996 baseline survey on inter-ethnic attitudes and tracking participant engagement in trauma healing sessions. These monitoring efforts allowed Psiholuminis to refine its own facilitation approaches, target hesitant schools, and adjust sequencing based on real-time participant needs. In these isolated cases, monitoring data directly informed programmatic adjustments, showcasing the positive effect of motivated partner-level learning.

Fragmentation and Gaps in Systematic Monitoring: Beyond these examples, monitoring across the broader portfolio lacked consistency, standardization, and central oversight. Several partners reported challenges in navigating the reporting templates and expectations. PRONI, responsible for youth civic activities, experienced prolonged struggles with reporting formats, frequent revisions, and substantial delays in finalizing narrative reports. Similarly, Psiholuminis' reporting was described by IOM as inconsistent, despite their strong data practices at the operational level. Basic monitoring tools such as municipal dialogue minutes existed but were often incomplete and insufficiently utilized in guiding subsequent decision-making, with second and third dialogue rounds frequently omitted from consideration.

Limited Use of Monitoring Data for Adaptive Management: The absence of a fully functional joint monitoring system constrained the project's ability to systematically apply monitoring data for adaptive decision-making. While early community dialogue findings were used to inform small grant allocations, other emerging risks and partner concerns failed to trigger timely management responses. For instance, when youth-center equipment budgets were unexpectedly reduced, PRONI's expenditure data and appeals did not result in corrective action; instead, implementing partners had to pre-finance activities and await delayed reimbursements. Likewise, facilitators encountered community resistance in some Bosniak-majority areas due to perceived ethnic affiliations of trainers, yet no systematic context monitoring or risk mitigation mechanisms were in place to address or prevent these situations.

Risk management remained largely reactive rather than embedded within an ongoing monitoring framework. Field staff reported the absence of clear contingency plans or early warning processes, limiting the project's ability to adjust course when emerging tensions surfaced.

4. How well did the project team communicate with implementing partners, stakeholders and project beneficiaries on its progress?

The evaluation finds that the project's communication approach demonstrated strong initial performance in ensuring information flow with stakeholders, beneficiaries, and implementing partners, but that this performance weakened as joint coordination mechanisms deteriorated. Communication systems remained generally effective at the operational and field levels where partner-driven mechanisms existed, but strategic-level communication between the two lead agencies and with some political actors eroded over time, occasionally undermining partner trust and timely coordination.

Strong Initial Communication Practices: At the outset of implementation, project teams maintained consistent, frequent, and multi-channel communication with implementing partners and beneficiaries. Joint IOM–UNDP field visits, bi-weekly coordination meetings, and real-time feedback loops allowed for responsive adjustments to activity schedules and supported the early transfer of information between project management and local actors.

Effective Use of Communication Tools by Field Partners: Implementing partners successfully employed informal and technology-supported feedback loops that maintained strong two-way communication throughout much of the project. The Sobičak school mentors, for example, posted visit summaries in shared WhatsApp groups with school principals and municipal officials, ensuring visibility into classroom readiness, hub functionality, and progress towards launch. The 26-member teacher learning community met regularly, even after external support ended, and their feedback directly informed hub-use statistics reported back to the donor.

Similarly, trauma-counselling teams applied real-time feedback through closed Telegram channels and WhatsApp supervision groups. When counsellors identified a spike in adolescent anxiety tied to upcoming exams, project teams responded by adding 45 extra one-to-one online sessions. Among veterans, pre-training visits allowed unions to co-draft schedules, while post-seminar materials were circulated via Viber and email to keep late-joining participants informed.

Youth-led actions also displayed proactive communication, with teenage media teams producing extensive real-time social media outputs—including 21 Facebook posts, 9 Instagram updates, and 8 TV/radio features—that simultaneously served as community engagement and informal progress reporting.

Communication Breakdowns After Initial Phase: Following the first six months, communication coherence diminished, primarily as inter-agency coordination structures lapsed. As one IOM manager recalled, biweekly coordination meetings "lasted maybe the first half-year; after that staff looked after their agencies' personal interests." As communication defaulted to email exchanges, response times grew increasingly slow. PRONI's youth trainers described delays of up to 20 days to receive email confirmations about logistical arrangements, forcing costly last-minute transportation solutions and compressed delivery schedules.

Communication challenges were also felt by some beneficiaries, particularly when political turnover disrupted previously established communication channels. In Ribnik and Bosansko Grahovo, municipal elections led to administrative changes, delaying youth center room allocations when new officials had not been briefed. In Drvar, participants reported that after initial workshops "nothing happened," with no follow-up information shared, leading to perceptions of limited programme usefulness. In Livno, secondary school teachers noted that activity calendars arrived too late, resulting in scheduling conflicts with exams that required either rushed delivery or cancelled sessions.

5. Did the project provide value for money? Have resources been used efficiently?

The evaluation finds that the project demonstrated a generally strong value-for-money profile, generating substantial outputs and local ownership. Across multiple interventions, the project leveraged co-financing, volunteer labor, and in-kind contributions to maximize output delivery while keeping core costs low. However, the analysis also reveals systemic financial coordination weaknesses and procurement inefficiencies that have limited the full realization of the portfolio's cost-effectiveness.

Strong Value-for-Money Performance at Field Level Evidence: The project's lean staffing model, high use of volunteer labor, and cost-sharing arrangements with local authorities resulted in considerable output at relatively low cost. The school-hub programme exemplifies this: two salaried staff supported 277 critical-thinking club sessions (versus 64 planned) and 33 teacher-peer learning sessions (versus 6 planned), a fourfold productivity gain achieved without expanding the budget. Parents and municipalities supplied furniture, Wi-Fi, paint, and construction materials, allowing the donor to leverage roughly 0.43 BAM of local contributions for every 1 BAM invested. Similar efficiency gains were observed in the youth infrastructure investments.

The Bosanski Petrovac youth center and Mrkonjić Grad cinema conversion was co-financed by municipalities, entity governments, and private donors, while youth volunteers provided 121 shifts of free labor to prepare

the premises. The capital assets created continued to generate income through community bookings, creating downstream sustainability without ongoing donor input.

In the psychosocial stream, PRESTO achieved strong unit-cost efficiency, delivering 125 trauma-healing events and reaching 73 direct beneficiaries while overspending its budget by just 1 percent — a variance attributed to exchange-rate losses rather than operational inefficiencies. The training of 28 local counsellors further extends the investment returns, as they continue to supervise one another without further donor cost.

The veteran-dialogue component also demonstrated solid cost efficiency. Eighteen veteran leaders completed four training modules at a per-capita cost of approximately €540, well below regional benchmarks for residential psychosocial training. Six veterans subsequently launched support groups, indicating sustainable value creation beyond the training investment.

Media production was also highly efficient. Youth-led content creation in Livno reached 217,828 social media accounts at a cost of roughly €0.06 per engagement, while CKMD's Mi o nama documentary was produced at less than half the standard cost-per-minute of comparable broadcaster rates, even with a two-month delay.

The early use of joint staffing and volunteer deployment was a critical driver of these efficiencies. As one United Nations Volunteer explained: "We kept workshops on schedule and the budget under control" (Interviewee: UNV, Ključ, male). The director of the Glamoč Centre for Social Work similarly praised the early joint approach for facilitating "smooth and fast" hand-over of the safe apartment (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work, Glamoč, female).

Cost Inefficiencies Driven by Financial Coordination Gaps: Despite the above-mentioned cost-saving features, **systemic inefficiencies emerged in financial management and procurement processes**. Midway through implementation, inter-agency coordination weakened, resulting in delays in grant-tranche disbursement, particularly on the UNDP side. The delays forced some NGOs implementers to borrow short-term funds and compress delivery schedules to meet output targets once disbursements arrived. PRONI reported paying 15–20% more for last-minute bus hires because "we waited twenty days for a single reply" on travel approvals (Interviewee: NGO PRONI, Brčko, partner, male).

In Bosansko Grahovo, the women-led organization Grahovljanke experienced repeated last-minute budget reductions, ultimately forcing the group to seek alternative donors (Interviewee: NGO Grahovljanke, Bosansko Grahovo, grantee, female). While more than 90% of PBF funds were eventually committed (Interviewee: IOM, finance officer, female), financial risks and transaction costs were repeatedly pushed onto small civil society partners least able to absorb them.

Administrative delays also resulted in avoidable delivery lags. In Livno, teachers received calendars so late that workshops collided with exam weeks, leading to either rushed delivery or cancellations (Interviewee: Secondary school teacher, Livno, female). Youth centers in Ribnik and Grahovo opened 6–9 months behind schedule due to paperwork delays caused by municipal staff turnover. Although these delays did not inflate overall budgets, they reduced operational efficiency and strained local partnerships.

Digital mentoring platforms for youth activists similarly failed to yield intended results, with low attendance undermining the return on subscription fees and digital content costs.

6. To what extent did the project ensure synergies within different programs of UN agencies and other implementing organizations and donors?

The project demonstrated important examples of inter-agency and external synergy, particularly during the initial stages of implementation. In the first six months, IOM and UNDP successfully established joint coordination mechanisms, including shared staffing, pooled resources, and joint field visits, which contributed to effective and timely delivery. Complementarity was also observed with other UN programming, notably through the integration of CEI Step-by-Step's educational methodology, aligned with existing UNICEF and UNESCO-supported interventions in schools (Interviewee: IOM, female).

As implementation progressed, the frequency of formal inter-agency coordination meetings declined. This created fewer opportunities for joint planning and cross-program learning but did not prevent partners from delivering core activities. While structured coordination with external actors such as OSCE's youth programming in Glamoč and CIM's peace camps in Ribnik could have further enhanced programmatic reach, these represent potential areas for stronger alignment in future phases (Interviewee: IOM, female).

Despite these dynamics, adaptive coordination at the local level remained an important feature of implementation. Municipalities in Ribnik and Ključ demonstrated continued ownership by covering utilities for youth centers, and UN Volunteers played a valuable role in maintaining day-to-day coordination in the field (Interviewee: UNV, Ribnik, female). These examples highlight existing capacities that can be further built upon to enhance cross-stakeholder synergy moving forward.

EFFECTIVENESS

This section provides information on the effectiveness of the project in terms of evaluation of achievements of outputs and outcomes and report on any challenges met during the implementation of the project activities. The analysis of key factors contributing to achievement of results and challenges during the implementation of the project is provided.

1. To what extent did the project achieve its intended objectives and contribute to the project's strategic vision?

Based on the information from the original and revised Project results matrix and available documentation, the evaluation team has assessed the extent to which the targets for outcome and output indicators have been achieved.

Outcome indicator targets 1.1 and 1.2. are discussed in more details in Impact section.

Outcome indicator targets 1.3 and 1.4 were completely achieved until the end of the project but it should be noted that outcome indicator 1.4 had to be revised (reduced) due to the poor targeting at the design phase of the project.

Output level indicators targets for Output 1 have all been achieved until the end of the project, while two output indicator targets under Output 2 have been under achieved.

The full assessment of targets achievement is provided in the Table 3.

Table 3 Assessment of the outcomes and outputs achievement

Indicators	Baseline	Target	Achieved	Evaluation	Means of Verification
Outcome 1: Enhanced social cohesion among citizens across communities and the inter-entity boundary line.					
Indicator 1.1 Increased level of social cohesion within and across target communities [social cohesion defined as level of tension, trust, perceived threat, feeling of belonging, empathy] (disaggregated by age, gender, locations)	TBD	Increased by 20%	23.5% by Perception Survey 4.0% difference in baseline and endline Social Cohesion survey	**OUTCOME TARGET NOT ACHIEVED**	Perception survey 2025 Baseline and Endline Social Cohesion survey
Indicator 1.2 Number of people reporting increased responsiveness of local authorities in provision of social services (through accessing new services in their communities, receiving services timelier, and overall satisfaction with services provided)	0	5,400 people (40% women, 20% youth) (indicator revised)	32,000 (weighted estimate based on the sample of the Perception Survey 2025)	**OUTCOME TARGET OVERACHIEVED**	Perception survey 2025
Indicator 1.3 Number of cross-community platforms for collaboration conceived (communication channels, joint projects/ideas, networks, cross-community services)	0	8	9 (PLC of primary school teachers, PLC of secondary school teachers, School Clubs, Youth Associations/Clubs, Network of social care professionals, Network of veterans, Peacebuilding network, Youth Network)	**OUTCOME TARGET ACHIEVED**	PBF_SPSC_5th Interim Narrative Report_Jun2025
Indicator 1.4 Number of beneficiaries of improved/new social care services	0	9,000 (40% women, 20% youth) (indicator revised)	8,969 51% women	**OUTCOME TARGET ACHIEVED**	PBF_SPSC_5th Interim Narrative Report_Jun2025
Output 1.1: Trust in local governments improved through participatory interaction					

Indicators	Baseline	Target	Achieved	Evaluation	Means of Verification
Availability of an assessment of social service needs, demands and priorities	No	Yes	Yes	**OUTPUT TARGET ACHIEVED**	Mapping report per PBF_SPSC_4th Interim Annual Narrative Report_Nov2024
Number of community dialogues organized with citizens, local authorities and/or veterans (disaggregated by type, locations)	0	32 (24 local, 8 cross-community)	32 (26 community and 6 inter-municipality dialogues in project targeted communities)	**OUTPUT TARGET ACHIEVED**	Attendance records per PBF_SPSC_5th Interim Narrative Report_Jun2025
Number of community dialogue participants (disaggregated by locations, gender, age, and ethnicity)	0	480 (40% women)	515 (66% women; 30% youth)	**OUTPUT TARGET ACHIEVED**	Attendance records per PBF_SPSC_5th Interim Narrative Report_Jun2025
Number of improved or newly introduced social care services targeting the most vulnerable population (disaggregated by type, locations)	0	10 (8 local, 2 inter-municipal)	14 newly established and 6 improved social services (2 intermunicipal services)	**OUTPUT TARGET ACHIEVED**	Project reports per PBF_SPSC_5th Interim Narrative Report_Jun2025
Number of youth engaged to support community outreach and service delivery through the UN Community Volunteers modality	0	18 (50% women)	18 (72% women)	**OUTPUT TARGET ACHIEVED**	UNV records per PBF_SPSC_4th Interim Annual Narrative Report_Nov2024
Output 1.2: **Youth engage in cross-community and inter-entity activities**					

Indicators	Baseline	Target	Achieved	Evaluation	Means of Verification
Number of youth initiatives implemented (disaggregated by locations and type of activity: community actions and initiatives, trainings, countering hate speech campaigns, etc.)	0	22 (16 local, 6 inter-municipal)	66 (52 local and 14 inter-municipal)	**OUTPUT TARGET OVERACHIEVED**	Project reports per PBF_SPSC_4th Interim Annual Narrative Report_Nov2024
Number of youths participating in youth-led community initiatives (disaggregated by age, gender, women leadership, locations and type of activity: community actions and initiatives, trainings, youth camps, workshops, countering hate speech campaigns, etc.)	0	2,000 (40% women)	1412 (63% women)	**OUTCOME TARGET PARTIALLY ACHIEVED**	Attendance records per PBF_SPSC_5th Interim Narrative Report_Jun2025
Number of activities implemented (disaggregated by locations, type of activity: community actions and initiatives, trainings, youth camps, workshops, countering hate speech campaigns)	0	42	45	**OUTPUT TARGET OVERACHIEVED**	Training reports per PBF_SPSC_4th Interim Annual Narrative Report_Nov2024
Number of participants reporting increased project relevant knowledge and skills through capacity building events	0	960 (40% women, 20% youth) (indicator revised)	763 (63% being young women and girls)	**OUTPUT TARGET PARTIALY ACHIEVED**	Post-training surveys per PBF_SPSC_4th Interim Annual Narrative Report_Nov2024

The evaluation team also assessed the overall effectiveness of different activities organized, namely events, community dialogs and capacity building events. Detailed information on the number of organized activities is provided in Annex 8.

Events organization: The analysis of event organization and participation across the IOM-facilitated peacebuilding project reveals important patterns in activity type, participant engagement, and gender dynamics. While **a diverse range of activities was implemented**, the overall landscape was shaped by the particular approaches of both IOM and its local partner organizations. **In total 570 events are organized (registered in the IOM monitoring system) with over 2,000 participants.**

Training and workshop events emerged as the most widespread and inclusive activity, implemented by nearly every project and accounting for the highest proportion of total activities. These events likely provided an accessible entry point for broad participant engagement and represent a core modality for building skills and fostering interaction. Community initiatives, street actions, and mentorship also played a prominent role, especially among projects managed by local partners. One project, for example, devoted a substantial share of its activities to mentorship and community-based action, reflecting a deliberate strategy to encourage both personal development and civic participation.

When considering participant engagement, **certain projects stand out for their extensive reach, particularly the project managed directly by IOM and the largest local partner.** Together, these two entities accounted for more than two-thirds of all participants in the program, demonstrating both high capacity and strong mobilization. Notably, there was considerable variation in participation rates across projects, with some engaging only a small fraction of the overall beneficiary population.

Community dialogues: The organization and implementation of public community events with local government across the targeted municipalities illustrate similar reach and the participant dynamics. **Activities included community dialogues, inter-municipal dialogues, and networking events, distributed unevenly across locations.** The majority of events were community dialogues, constituting nearly three-quarters of all activities, with only a few municipalities hosting inter-municipal or networking events.

Participation data reveal notable differences between municipalities, both in terms of total engagement and the composition of participants. Some municipalities, such as Drvar and Glamoč, registered particularly high levels of overall participation relative to the number of events held, indicating that these activities successfully attracted large groups and likely played a central role in local engagement strategies. In contrast, other locations organized a comparable number of events but saw a lower overall turnout, pointing to variations in either outreach effectiveness or local interest.

Capacity building events: Following the completion of each workshop or training activity, participants were invited to provide feedback through an online evaluation form. This form was designed to capture both demographic information and participants' perceptions of the training's relevance, engagement, satisfaction, and the applicability of the knowledge gained. The online modality ensured a convenient and standardized way for participants from various projects and locations to respond, contributing to a comprehensive and comparable dataset. A total of 1,046 responses were collected across all projects, with a strong representation of both female and male participants. Women made up approximately two-thirds of all respondents, mirroring the overall gender distribution observed throughout the program.

The evaluation explored participants' prior familiarity with the workshop topics, their level of engagement during the training, satisfaction with the experience, and their assessment of relevance and knowledge gained.

Most participants reported having at least some familiarity with the workshop content before attending, with nearly half indicating they were "very familiar" with the concepts and topics explored. This suggests that the training attracted a mix of participants with both foundational and advanced backgrounds.

Engagement levels during the workshop were notably high. Over seventy percent of participants indicated they felt "very engaged" throughout the training, while only a small fraction reported not being engaged. This high level of engagement was reflected in overall satisfaction ratings, with more than ninety percent expressing that they were "very satisfied" with their experience. Reports of dissatisfaction or ambivalence were rare.

When asked about the relevance of the workshop and the utility of the knowledge and skills gained, the results were overwhelmingly positive. The large majority of respondents stated that the training was relevant and had helped them gain new skills applicable to their daily work. Only a handful of participants said that the training was not relevant or would not be useful. Similarly, in assessing knowledge acquisition, most respondents reported either a much better or at least some improved understanding of the topics covered. The perceived applicability of the knowledge to participants' professional or community roles was also high, with the majority reporting that the new skills would be entirely or partly useful in their daily activities.

2. To what extent did the project achieve its intended objectives and contribute to the project's strategic vision?

Interview testimony shows that the project made noticeable headway on social cohesion, youth activism and grassroots peacebuilding—though results varied by locality and waned where follow-up resources lagged.

Social cohesion. Mixed-ethnic workshops and trauma-healing camps created the first sustained contact many participants had ever experienced across entity and cantonal lines. A psychologist who facilitated the camps called the shift "fantastic… young people, for the first time, went into other communities they'd never been in—now they're socializing all the time.". A Livno coordinator heard students admit they had carried "unnecessary prejudice" but now "understand others better" and want activities "continued in any way possible.". The attitudinal change reached adults as well: a veteran in Ribnik noted that "members of different ethnic communities now greet each other and invite each other to events," a courtesy unseen for years. These accounts confirm that the project opened relational channels that persist beyond its formal end in several towns.

Youth activism. PRONI's shortened Youth Academy, and the creation of new youth centers turned passive cohorts into local advocates. A UN Volunteer in Ključ observed that "we did not expect people from different backgrounds to cooperate so well… one participant said this was the first time she had spoken openly with someone from another ethnic group." — UNV, Ključ, male. In Ribnik and Bosansko Grahovo, teenagers lobbied municipal councils to secure utilities for their centers, and in Livno pupils now run "critical-thinking clubs every other Friday in a dedicated school corner" — Secondary-school teacher, Livno, female. Where follow-up funding stalled, activism cooled. Drvar youths reported "nothing happened" after an initial workshop—but in most sites the project catalyzed a level of youth civic engagement previously absent. — Youth participant, Drvar, male.

Peacebuilding outcomes. Beyond individual attitudes, the initiative generated communal assets that embed peacebuilding in daily life. In Glamoč, citizen–municipality dialogues relocated the Centre for Social Work and opened the town's first safe apartment for survivors of violence—an outcome the director called "a great project… the benefits for those disadvantaged, poor people will be immense.". Livno's seven-year-stalled Social Cohesion Action Plan finally passed after youth forums showcased a cross-community consensus. Teachers in Sanski Most reported that mixed classes reduced tension at home as parents and children "discuss what they've learned about other groups.".

Limitations. The gains were uneven. Procurement delays meant youth centers in Ribnik and Grahovo opened months late, slowing momentum. Women's organizations and police community-relations units were rarely engaged, leaving gender and security angles underserved. Still, the weight of evidence shows that where activities combined structured inter-ethnic contact, trauma-sensitive facilitation and visible municipal backing, they produced measurable advances in social cohesion, ignited youth activism and left small but durable peacebuilding footprints.

3. To what extent did the project substantively mainstream gender and support gender- and youth - responsive peacebuilding?

A review of both available documentation and stakeholder testimonies **reveals that the project achieved a notable degree of youth mainstreaming and a mixed, though often innovative, approach to gender-responsive peacebuilding.**

Youth responsiveness. From the outset, the project made youth inclusion not simply a rhetorical aim but an operational principle. Across multiple municipalities, young people were consistently positioned as leaders, designers, and advocates, not just passive recipients. **They shaped event themes, managed their own clubs and media outputs, and negotiated directly with municipal authorities.** The participatory model extended to both the design and the logistics of activities, enabling youth to exercise decision-making and develop real-world skills in governance and civic engagement. These findings were echoed in interviews, which described youth-led initiatives, mixed-ethnicity peer groups, and new social networks that transcended municipal and community borders. The creation of youth centers and regular inter-community meetings helped institutionalize youth leadership, creating a legacy of ongoing activism and social cohesion.

Gender responsiveness: The record on gender mainstreaming is more nuanced. Both the desk review and interviews point to strong pockets of innovation and intent, especially where practitioners made explicit space for women and girls or reconfigured activities around their needs. This included designing training schedules and logistics that fit women's lives, organizing women-only sessions, and empowering female mentors and volunteers. In some cases, such as the establishment of a safe apartment for survivors of violence or the visible leadership of women in community dialogues, the projects produced tangible and potentially transformative gender outcomes. The involvement of women as mentors, organizers, and storytellers facilitated the surfacing of intergenerational trauma, disability rights, and other issues that might otherwise have remained unaddressed. Where specific attention was given to the needs of mothers, teachers, and girls, female participation and influence were visibly strengthened.

Gaps: However, these advances coexisted with persistent gaps. Both sources highlight the tendency for gender-responsiveness to lapse into parity—counting women, but not always ensuring that programming and power structures truly reflected gendered needs or experiences. In the case of family-therapy sessions, for example, fathers were far less involved, and male-friendly formats were lacking. Family-therapy data show fathers attended far fewer sessions than mothers, suggesting that male-friendly formats and facilitators are still missing in some designs.

Interviews repeatedly noted that many activities did not drill down into the unique experiences or challenges faced by girls and women, and that partnerships with women's organizations were not always systematically cultivated. Some women's CSOs felt sidelined when their project ideas were repurposed or not implemented as envisioned. While special sessions and safe spaces made a marked difference in some settings, the absence of a formal gender analysis and the lack of systematic gender-responsive curricula meant that achievements were sometimes ad hoc rather than comprehensive.

Women veterans were also underrepresented, reflecting ongoing political and cultural barriers. Veteran and civic-infrastructure projects made strong starts on parity but exposed the limits of one-size-fits-all outreach.

Pravipožar's dialogue circles deliberately paired ex-soldiers with female psychologists and social workers, yet women veterans themselves were scarce, a shortfall the final report attributes to "lingering political caution" and lack of gender-specific recruitment channels.

Volunteer rosters in Mrkonjić Grad started gender balanced (seven young women, seven young men), but follow-up actions in park landscaping pulled fewer women, hinting at cultural or safety barriers in outdoor manual work.

Gender-responsive peacebuilding, by contrast, was uneven—strong where practitioners built explicit space for women, patchy where gender was assumed to be covered by simple parity. Several municipalities did stage women-only sessions. "Special sessions for women have increased their participation and empowerment," reported a Ključ official who sat in on the meetings. In Ribnik the UN Volunteer facilitator echoed that view: "We had special sessions where women presented their challenges and needs, which increased their confidence and engagement". The most concrete gender outcome came in Glamoč, where citizen–municipality dialogues secured a separate safe apartment for survivors of violence.

4. How appropriate and clear was the project's targeting strategy in terms of geographic and beneficiary targeting?

The project anchored itself in a cluster of remote municipalities straddling the inter-entity boundary. This geographic choice proved highly appropriate: interviewees describe these towns as "dying communities" with scant donor presence, chronic youth out-migration and few safe spaces for inter-ethnic contact. "I had never seen any workshop bring together Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs in our school before," a teacher in Livno observed, adding that pupils would otherwise have "no opportunity to leave their canton at all.". A psychologist who ran trauma-healing camps echoed that assessment, calling the program "fantastic for places nobody visits.".

Beneficiary targeting was conceptually strong: youth, war veterans, teachers, psychosocial professionals and local officials—groups that both feel and shape the day-to-day legacy of the conflict. Each testified that the activities spoke directly to their needs, whether it was veterans seeking recognition, teenagers craving mobility, or social-work staff requiring new facilities.

5. Was the project monitoring system adequately capturing data on peacebuilding results at an appropriate outcome level?

The monitoring system captured plenty of raw information—attendance lists, workshop reflections, and short partner reports—but it rarely rose to outcome-level analysis, and the quality of data varied dramatically from one partner to another. Two areas illustrate both the promise and the shortcomings.

Pockets of strong practice: Teachers working with the Step-by-Step methodology say they could file activity notes and "receive feedback a day or two after," which let them refine lesson plans in real time. An IOM officer confirms that Step-by-Step was "the best at reporting," delivering complete participant lists and reflections on schedule. Such discipline shows that, where a partner already had clear templates and a culture of rapid feedback, the system could generate actionable data.

System-wide weaknesses: Beyond those bright spots, the architecture for tracking peacebuilding outcomes was thin, mostly due to the inadequate M&E framework and exaggerated targets. Minutes from the municipal "dialogues" were, in the words of the IOM focal point, only sketchy notes and "neither the second nor third dialogue round was taken into account," so no initiatives were traced to completion. The same officer reports that once the first six months of joint meetings ended, each agency and NGO reverted to its own formats. Psycholuminis reports were assessed as poor and PRONI often failed to notify anyone when activities occurred. PRONI itself admits it was "dropped into communities without the support we needed," faced "significant miscommunication" and endured repeated budget changes.

The monitoring system was adequate for counting events and participants, but inadequate for tracking peacebuilding outcomes in a systematic, comparable way. Without a unified results framework, partners could not aggregate attitude shifts, new inter-ethnic networks or municipal policy changes across locations, and managers lacked timely evidence for course-correction.

Furthermore, two implementing UN agencies have not developed a unison framework for monitoring and evaluation of project activities and results. Two agencies do not share most of the current information on implemented activities, at the moment available within the agency, but have been sharing information during the reporting period.

IMPACT

This chapter evaluates the project's impact on strengthening social cohesion within and between communities situated along the administrative borders of the two entities in BiH, based on the assessment of impact-level indicator target achievement.

Assessment of impact-level indicator target achievement

The overall objective of the project was to strengthen social cohesion within and between communities along the administrative borders of the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska, with a target increase of 20%. To approaches were used measure progress at the impact level. The first, Social Cohesion Survey was conducted at the start and end of the project with participants of project activities under the IOM initiatives, mainly youth participants, using standardized measures of cohesion, youth activism, and inclusion. Responses were analyzed using composite scores based on attitudes, behaviors, and openness to out-groups. The second, Perception Survey was carried out among random residents in both target and comparable non-target municipalities (as detailed in the Methodology).

Social Cohesion Survey

Social cohesion was measured using an internally developed questionnaire set of items assessing participants' attitudes, feelings, and perceived safety in relation to members of other ethnic groups. Items include feelings of closeness or distance, perceived similarity or difference, sense of safety in proximity, viewing others as allies or enemies, trust, empathy for shared experiences, willingness for intergroup neighborliness and friendship, openness to living with or marrying out-group members, perceptions of threat to one's group, and assumptions about trustworthiness. Participants also reported how many individuals from other ethnic groups they personally know and consider friends, and the level of support from family and community for intergroup friendships and marriage.

Youth activism was measured by assessing both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of civic engagement. Items reflect belief in agency (the ability of people like oneself to affect change), willingness to invest personal time and resources, a sense of personal responsibility for the country's future, and efficacy beliefs (whether ordinary people can effect change). Behavioral indicators included participation in community meetings, voting, petition-signing, proposing ideas, participation in NGO or civil society debates and activities, volunteering, neighborhood improvement, and online civic engagement.

The inclusion measure assessed readiness to accept individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds. Participants rated their openness to people from other ethnic groups, members of minorities (e.g., Roma), individuals of other sexual orientations or gender identities, members of national and civic-oriented political parties, members of radical religious groups, feminists, people from Europe, the USA, and Asia, as well as those with mental health challenges.

The analysis was based on 186 baseline and 165 endline responses, where data were collected as a pre-post assessment prior and after IOM initiatives being undertaken. Gender disaggregation showed 46 baseline and 52 endline responses for male participants, and 140 baseline and 112 endline responses for female

participants. At the project level, sample sizes varied, with some sub-projects having smaller group sizes (often below 40 per timeline).

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Social Cohesion, Youth Activism and Inclusion measures per timeline and % change

Measure	Timeline	Mean	SD	N
Social Cohesion	Baseline	0.683	0.139	185
Social Cohesion	Endline	0.71	0.124	165
Youth Activism	Baseline	0.532	0.177	186
Youth Activism	Endline	0.556	0.163	162
Inclusion	Baseline	0.544	0.197	186
Inclusion	Endline	0.605	0.194	164
Measure	Δ (%)	p-value		
Social Cohesion	4.0%	0.054		
Youth Activism	4.5%	0.189		
Inclusion	11.2%	0.004		

All three measures (social cohesion, youth activism, and inclusion) increased from baseline to endline. Social cohesion rose by 4.0% (from 0.683 to 0.710), which is marginally significant (p = 0.054). Youth activism increased by 4.5% (from 0.532 to 0.556), but this change was not statistically significant (p = 0.189). The largest and statistically significant improvement was found in inclusion, which increased by 11.2% (from 0.544 to 0.605, p = 0.004). These findings indicate that the project achieved a meaningful positive shift in participants' attitudes toward acceptance of others (inclusion), with more moderate gains in social cohesion and youth activism. The results for social cohesion are close to the conventional threshold for significance, suggesting a positive trend that may have reached statistical significance with a larger sample size or improved data completeness.

In summary, **the project has contributed meaningfully to increasing inclusion and, to a lesser extent, social cohesion and youth activism among youth in BiH**. **Its largest impact was on participants' willingness to accept and engage with members of diverse social, ethnic, and political groups—an essential step toward building sustainable peace. For future projects, it is recommended to maintain a strong focus on direct, positive intergroup contact and consider targeted support in areas or sub-projects where results were less favorable.** The observed differences between genders also suggest value in developing tailored approaches to better support male participants' engagement and openness.

The project did not succeed in collecting baseline and endline data from participants across all projects and grants. Social cohesion questionnaires were only administered for activities implemented by Step by Step, Psiholuminis, and those directly managed by IOM. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact across all interventions and partners, it is essential to systematically collect outcome-level data from all grantees.

While the project had established **an expected target of a 20% improvement in social cohesion**, the actual results fall notably short of this benchmark. **Social cohesion increased by just 4.0%, a change that is only marginally significant, while youth activism rose by 4.5%, which is not statistically significant.** The most substantial gain was observed in inclusion, which improved by 11.2% and achieved statistical significance. Nevertheless, even this positive shift represents only about half of the anticipated 20% change.

An expectation of 20% change in social cohesion is overly ambitious in the context of peacebuilding and social change programming. International experience and the literature on interventions in post-conflict or divided societies (discussed above) consistently indicate that shifts in attitudes and behaviors related to trust, acceptance, and civic engagement are typically incremental. For example, improvements in social cohesion are often modest, with most successful interventions achieving changes in the range of three to seven percent

over a period of one to two years. These outcomes are shaped not only by project activities but also by entrenched social, political, and historical dynamics that tend to resist rapid transformation.

Similarly, efforts to increase youth activism face both individual-level and systemic barriers. Even among highly motivated youth, changes in civic engagement or activism commonly fall within the five to ten percent range for each project year. In contrast, indicators of inclusion and openness to others, particularly when supported by well-designed dialogue and contact-based interventions, can sometimes respond more robustly. The eleven percent increase in inclusion observed in this project is, in fact, a very favorable outcome when compared to international benchmarks. Regional and global evaluations, such as those from USAID's PRO-Future, the UN Peacebuilding Fund, and similar initiatives, rarely document shifts beyond twelve percent in such measures, and most record annual changes between seven and twelve percent.

Given this context, it is clear that a twenty percent target for these indicators is not only unlikely to be achieved but may also set unrealistic expectations for stakeholders. For future peacebuilding interventions of this nature, more appropriate and evidence-based targets would be in the range of five to ten percent improvement for both social cohesion and youth activism, and around eight to twelve percent for inclusion and acceptance. Setting such targets would be consistent with observed results from comparable programs and would better reflect the incremental nature of social change in environments characterized by longstanding division or mistrust.

Although the project did not meet a twenty percent threshold of improvement, the actual gains—particularly in inclusion—are strong when viewed considering international experience. These results underscore the importance of setting realistic targets and highlight the genuine progress that can be achieved through sustained, thoughtfully designed interventions in peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Perception Survey 2025

The research conducted by Custom Concept concluded that the project had a positive and statistically significant influence on social cohesion within the targeted communities. **Over the course of two years, there was a notable increase of 23.5% in the overall level of social cohesion across nearly all project locations, surpassing the planned target of a 20% improvement.** The impact was observed across all age groups and both genders, indicating a broad and inclusive effect. Specific indicators of social cohesion, such as reduced levels of perceived tension and threat, increased sense of belonging, and improved empathy among residents, all demonstrated measurable improvements. For example, the level of perceived social tension decreased more significantly in project communities than in comparative ones, and this decline was particularly evident among vulnerable groups and older populations. While improvements in trust and empathy were more modest and not always statistically significant, the overall trend indicated a strengthening of interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The data suggest that the project's interventions—through support to social services and inter-municipal cooperation—contributed to building a more cohesive and inclusive local environment, reinforcing the project's relevance and effectiveness in post-conflict community building.

The claim of a 23.5% increase in social cohesion is methodologically problematic. The measure reflects the share of respondents who reported a perceived improvement compared to two years ago—not the magnitude of the actual change in attitudes or behaviors. It is essentially a subjective recall-based measure, vulnerable to memory bias, social desirability bias, and lack of a true pre-intervention baseline. The report treats this proportion as if it reflected a quantitative increase in cohesion itself, when in fact the data primarily shows that a certain percentage of respondents feel that things have improved—without evidence of how substantial or consistent that improvement is across indicators or groups. Hence, the conclusion about the achievement of the main project indicator is based on the social cohesion survey, comparing the levels of social cohesion before and after the project.

In summary, the project aimed for a 20% improvement in social cohesion, but the Social Cohesion Survey showed only a 4.0% increase (marginally significant), while a separate Perception Survey reported a 23.5% improvement. The Perception Survey was based on subjective recall and lacked a reliable baseline, making the claim methodologically weak. Overall, the project contributed to positive changes, particularly in inclusion, but did not meet its core target for social cohesion.

1. Has the intervention caused a change in the lives of the intended beneficiaries?

The evidence from both documentary sources and key informant interviews strongly indicates that the intervention has resulted in **meaningful and often transformative changes in the lives of its primary beneficiaries**, namely youth, veterans, teachers, psychosocial professionals, and local officials across most of the program communities.

For adolescents who previously experienced predominantly mono-ethnic social environments, the **intervention created their first opportunities for meaningful cross-entity contact.** The mixed workshops and travel camps allowed youth to overcome inherited prejudices and establish new, positive inter-ethnic relationships. A teacher from Livno noted that students initially admitted carrying "unnecessary prejudice" but now "understand others better" and have expressed a strong desire to maintain such gatherings in the future, indicating a lasting shift in intergroup perceptions and openness to continued engagement (Interviewee: NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno, grantee, female). Beyond personal attitudes, youth in Ribnik and Bosansko Grahovo have transitioned from passive learners to active civic participants, managing social media accounts for their youth centers and lobbying municipal councils on service issues such as internet access and heating—experiences rarely available to earlier generations (Interviewee: NGO PRONI, Brčko, partner, male).

War veterans likewise report **significant changes in social behavior and norms**. A former combatant from Ribnik remarked that veterans from different ethnic groups now interact together, a behavior absent since the Dayton accords, which he directly attributed to the project's storytelling circles that engaged both veterans and youth together (Interviewee: War veteran, Ribnik, male). In Bosansko Grahovo, veteran groups have voluntarily initiated their own dialogue evenings at the cultural center—an activity entirely absent prior to the intervention—demonstrating the development of self-sustaining reconciliation practices.

Teachers and psychosocial professionals report a similarly **profound impact within educational and family systems**. The trauma-informed classroom techniques introduced through PRESTO have not only facilitated student disclosures of wartime family narratives but also prompted extended counselling sessions, reflecting previously unmet emotional support needs. One facilitator emphasized that students who were "really reserved" began confiding about family war experiences and sought additional support outside of scheduled sessions, an indication of deep trust and psychosocial engagement (Interviewee: NGO Psiholuminis, Livno, partner, female). Furthermore, parents have started seeking advice on how to address sensitive historical issues with their children, suggesting that the intervention's psychosocial benefits are now influencing intergenerational family dynamics.

In the domain of public service provision, t**he intervention has led to tangible improvements in institutional capacities.** In Glamoč, citizen-municipal dialogues facilitated by the project secured a dedicated building and recurrent municipal funding for the town's Centre for Social Work, enabling the establishment of its first safe apartment for victims of domestic violence. As the director emphasized, the service is now fully integrated into the municipal budget and provides substantial benefits to vulnerable residents (Interviewee: Centre for Social Work Glamoč, female). Similarly, in Livno, student-led forums broke a seven-year political impasse, resulting in the municipal adoption of a Social Cohesion Action Plan that institutionalizes ongoing funding for cross-ethnic youth activities (Interviewee: NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno, grantee, female).

However, these changes were not uniform across all sites. In Drvar, where procurement delays postponed the delivery of promised youth-center equipment, one youth participant reported that "nothing happened," reflecting how fragile engagement can become in the absence of timely delivery (Interviewee: Youth participant, Drvar, male). The women's NGO Grahovljanke similarly experienced diminished trust when their previously approved grant was reassigned, while police community-relations units remained largely disengaged from the intervention, limiting the project's impact on security and gender-based violence prevention (Interviewee: NGO Grahovljanke, Grahovo, grantee, female). Nonetheless, even in these contexts, partial benefits were noted: youths from Drvar now participate in peer events in neighboring municipalities, and Grahovljanke has adopted dialogue methods in its internal activities.

Overall, the cumulative evidence demonstrates that the intervention not only raised awareness but substantially altered interpersonal relations, civic participation, and local governance processes for a broad segment of the target population. Despite isolated weaknesses in delivery and inclusion, no evidence suggests a regression to prior conditions of distrust. On balance, the intervention produced clear, positive, and observable changes in the lives of its intended beneficiaries across multiple domains. The individual impact of each initiative delivered by IOM implementing partners and grantees is given in Annex 9.

In addition to social cohesion, the project intention was to increase responsiveness of local authorities in provision of social services (through accessing new services in their communities, receiving services timelier, and overall satisfaction with services provided) to at least 5,400 people (40% women, 20% youth) and to enable at least 9,000 residents (51% women) to access improved / new social care services. The Perception Survey integrated questions about the quality of social care services and accessibility of services. The Perception Survey Report states that the project significantly contributed to the improvement of social services in the targeted communities. More than 32,000 residents "reported" noticing enhanced responsiveness of local authorities in providing social services, far exceeding the targeted figure of 5,400. This improvement was particularly recognized by women and young people, confirming the project's inclusive approach. While the overall statistical difference between project and comparative areas in terms of satisfaction with social services was not always significant, specific aspects—such as faster service did show measurable positive changes attributed to the project's interventions. Additionally, over 15,000 individuals, including a high percentage of women and vulnerable groups, accessed newly introduced or improved social protection services, indicating the project's success in expanding the reach and quality of assistance to those most in need.

The key limitations of the findings lie both in methodological assumptions and in how some of the findings are presented and interpreted. One of the main issues is the use of population projections to estimate the number of people who noticed a change—such as stating that over 32,000 individuals perceived improved social services or that more than 15,000 used new or enhanced services. These figures are derived by extrapolating from sample proportions using census population data; however, the report does not provide detailed information on the weighting procedures, confidence intervals, or potential sampling biases, particularly given the low response rates (especially 10% for CATI) and the under coverage in sparsely populated areas like Bosansko Grahovo. This casts doubt on the reliability of these absolute population estimates. Furthermore, the indicators are developed from the perspective of users of social care and not from the perspective of the entire population, so the results can only be generalized to overall population and not to the users of social care (as only 25% of the sample were users of social care and projections are done based on total sample size).

Final evaluation survey results

The evaluation team has shared the link to the questionnaire on the potential impact of the project to all emails submitted by the IOM (participants of the project events) with the request to fill out the questionnaire for evaluation purposes. In total, 43 project participants filled the survey (e-mail was sent to 822 participants, the response rate was 5%).

They participated in a diverse range of activities: training, educational workshops, youth council initiatives, trauma-related sessions, and community-based events. The age of participants spanned from 15 to 67 years, with an average age of 32.2, highlighting engagement from both younger and more mature individuals (professionals: psychologists, social workers). Both men and women were well represented in the respondent group (30% male in accordance with overall engagement of males in the project).

Table 5 Mean frequency of experiencing different changes

Reported Change	Total	Female	Male
Increased empathy and compassion with the members of other ethnic groups?	4.07	3.90	4.46
Improved relationships between youth from different ethnic groups belonging to different communities?	4.07	3.86	4.46
Feeling empowered to take action in peace processes after participating?	4.02	3.79	4.46
Ensuring learners acquire knowledge to promote sustainable development, peace, and human rights	3.98	3.86	4.15
Increased youth representation in peacebuilding structures, policymaking, or governance?	3.98	3.83	4.38
Improved relationships between youth from different ethnic groups in your community?	3.98	3.75	4.38
Increased sense of belonging to your own community?	3.81	3.66	4.08
Decreased level of interethnic tension in your community?	3.77	3.55	4.23
Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls	3.74	3.57	4.08
Less threatened by the members of other ethnic groups?	3.72	3.48	4.23
Empowering and promoting social, economic, and political inclusion of all	3.70	3.66	3.85
Ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making	3.67	3.52	4.00
Ensuring equal opportunities and reducing discriminatory policies	3.65	3.48	4.00
Ensuring public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms	3.65	3.41	4.15
Providing universal access to safe and inclusive public spaces	3.65	3.62	3.62
Increased leadership roles for women in peacebuilding efforts?	3.65	3.48	4.00
Promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice	3.63	3.48	3.92
Ensuring women's full participation in leadership and decision-making	3.63	3.41	4.08
Reducing all forms of violence and related death rates	3.60	3.45	3.85
Increased responsiveness of local authorities in provision of social services	3.44	3.28	3.85
Developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions	3.43	3.36	3.54
Eliminating all forms of violence against women	3.33	3.14	3.62
Increased trust in local institutions (police, center for social welfare, municipality) in your community?	3.33	3.14	3.69

* A higher mean value indicates that respondents, on average, perceived a stronger or more frequent change in that domain. Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale

The most commonly experienced changes by participants were "Increased empathy and compassion with the members of other ethnic groups?", "Improved relationships between youth from different ethnic groups belonging to different communities?", and "Feeling empowered to take action in peace processes after participating?". These areas stand out as the strongest domains of project impact, indicating that respondents felt a clear and positive effect. In contrast, the changes with the lowest overall means—"Developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions", "Eliminating all forms of violence against women", and "Increased trust in local institutions (police, center for social welfare, municipality) in your community?"—were least likely to be experienced as outcomes of the project. For most changes, mean values for female participants are slightly higher than those for males, suggesting that women tended to perceive greater benefit or positive change across many project domains.

However, for some of the least experienced changes, the gender difference is smaller or even reversed, indicating areas where the impact was either limited or more evenly distributed. The prominence of certain changes—such as increased knowledge for sustainable development and peace, and reductions in discrimination and violence against women—reflects the project's alignment with key peacebuilding and human rights objectives. At the same time, the lower means for changes related to institutional trust and universal access highlight ongoing challenges and opportunities for further work.

The changes most frequently reported by participants align closely with the core aims of peacebuilding, including knowledge acquisition for peace and human rights, reduction of discrimination, and increased empathy across ethnic lines. These outcomes are foundational for rebuilding trust and fostering inclusive societies in a post-conflict context such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. The gendered nature of reported changes also highlights the critical role of women in peace processes and suggests that future interventions could benefit from tailored approaches to further leverage their engagement, while also encouraging more active participation from men. The relatively lower frequency of changes related to institutional trust and public space access points to ongoing challenges in these areas, emphasizing the need for continued investment and innovation in fostering community-level and systemic transformation.

2. How did the intervention cause higher-level effects (such as changes in norms or systems)?

The intervention's activities served as strategic wedges, inserted into the daily routines of schools, families, veteran unions, municipal offices, and the local media, and in doing so produced higher-level shifts in both norms and micro-systems. Across the portfolio, cause-and-effect chains can be traced that illustrate how relatively modest interventions have nudged local systems toward more peaceful and cooperative defaults.

One of the clearest examples lies in the transformation of school culture. By converting empty storerooms into mixed-ethnicity, student-run "Sobičak" hubs and forming a peer-learning community of twenty-six teachers, the project made learner-centered, collaborative education a norm rather than an experiment. As one report describes, "within weeks the rooms were booked every recess; pupils asked teachers to use the same critical-thinking tools in regular classes; principals inserted hub maintenance into their annual development plans." These shifts turned what had once been teacher-fronted instruction into pupil-led exploration and, crucially, made the new practice a structural fixture rather than a time-bound add-on. In Livno, teachers note that the critical-thinking clubs now meet "every other Friday without outside facilitation," and students run discussions on common social problems with peers from neighboring cantons—behaviors their teachers "had never imagined possible" before the workshops. — Interviewee: Secondary-school teacher, Livno, female. In municipal government, the adoption of a Social Cohesion Action Plan in Livno—after years of deadlock—was directly credited to youth–municipality meetings organized by the project. "The plan's adoption obliges the municipality to allocate an annual line item for inter-ethnic youth initiatives," thus embedding social cohesion in the local budget cycle. — Interviewee: NGO Centre for Civic Cooperation, Livno, grantee, female.

Similarly, in the health sector, trauma counselling expanded from a pilot into a sustainable, informal system. PRESTO trained twenty-eight entity-based psychologists, introduced online therapy sessions, and created WhatsApp case-clinics, which professionals now use to supervise each other without donor money. "Several have integrated trauma screening into their day jobs at schools and social-work centers," resulting in a "self-financing back-end that did not exist before." Such embedded supervision and peer support represent a fundamental shift in the local health micro-system. Within the education system, trauma-sensitive methods are now standard: "Forty local psychologists and school counsellors trained in the trauma-healing methodology now run peer-support sessions for teaching staff—nicknamed 'coffee with the pedagogue.'"

As one facilitator observed, these meetings are now “a standing agenda item in several schools, supplying educators with a structured way to process their own stress and to replicate non-violent-communication techniques in class.” — Interviewee: NGO Psiholuminis, Livno, partner, female.

On the family level, the introduction of trauma sessions brought about new help-seeking behaviors. Once counsellors recognized that trauma “spreads across households,” the project introduced guided family therapy. “Parents—mostly mothers, but a growing number of fathers—reported improved conflict management and willingness to seek professional help, breaking a post-war norm of handling distress privately or not at all.” This shift in attitudes toward mental health support signals a new openness in the private sphere.

The intervention also reframed post-war veteran identity. Through a series of mixed training seminars, “participants drafted constitutions for cross-entity support circles… and publicly described former foes as ‘brothers in the same trauma.’” As a result, “a new social norm—veterans as peer-helpers rather than political foot-soldiers—took root and is being formalized through pending statutes.” These effects, though subtle, indicate a deep recalibration of what is considered possible and acceptable among a group traditionally seen as guardians of division. In Glamoč, dialogue between citizens and the municipality persuaded the mayor to repurpose a vacant building for the town’s first safe apartment for survivors of violence, with the acting director of social work describing this as “immensely beneficial… it establishes a formal referral pathway for victims who previously had nowhere to go.” — Interviewee: Centre for Social Work Glamoč, female. This represents not just a new service but a shift in the formal responsibilities and reflexes of local government. Among veterans, the effects are more social but no less significant. In Ribnik, former combatants now host “joint memory evenings at the cultural center—events that did not exist two years ago.” A veteran reflected that “members of different ethnic communities now greet each other and invite each other to events,” describing this as “a profound departure from post-war habit.” — Interviewee: War veteran, Ribnik, male.

Youth involvement in public life saw a parallel transformation. Teenagers took ownership of local media, producing content that reached more than 200,000 online accounts and shifting the narrative around who can shape public discourse. “Local audiences began to see teenagers—not just politicians or clergy—as legitimate narrators of peace stories, nudging media consumption norms toward plural youth voices.” This public visibility not only amplifies youth perspectives but also signals to others that leadership and voice are not limited by age or status.

At the level of municipal governance, the intervention established new co-financing habits. By requiring local authorities or businesses to contribute resources before refurbishment could begin, the project set a precedent: “Councils now treat youth centers and Sobičak rooms as municipal assets, budgeting cleaning and heating beyond the grant period.” This shared responsibility for civic infrastructure “outlasts the project and influences how future civic initiatives will be cost-shared.” Some municipal administrations, such as Bosanski Petrovac and Mrkonjić Grad, not only waived building permits and paid for insulation on youth centers, but also embedded co-financing norms into local budgets, a sign that cost-sharing will outlast the donor cycle. Local service institutions, notably the Centre for Social Work in Glamoč, secured both a new building and a municipal budget for the town’s first safe apartment for survivors of violence—an outcome the director called “immensely beneficial for the disadvantaged.” At the same time, youth–municipality forums in Livno pushed through a stalled Social Cohesion Action Plan, with a local grantee noting that the new funding mechanism is now embedded in the municipal budget.

Even volunteer work and public events played a role in reshaping leadership norms: “Mixed-gender youth boards led 121 volunteer shifts refurbishing centers and co-designed charity sports events that drew Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic youths.” The routine inclusion of both young women and men from different ethnicities in decision-making processes marked a distinct shift toward inclusive co-leadership in town-hall and community spaces.

Not all shifts were achieved everywhere. In Drvar, delays in equipping the youth center "dampened momentum," and young participants felt that "nothing happened," leaving municipal norms unchanged. — Interviewee: Youth participant, Drvar, male. The absence of police community-relations units and women's advocacy groups from the intervention meant that certain areas—particularly security practice and gender policies saw little change. Nevertheless, the clearest cause-and-effect links show that where structured inter-group contact was combined with municipal buy-in, the project left behind more than just activities and memories: it rewired daily interactions, created new civic spaces, and inserted social-cohesion priorities into local budgets. These are concrete signs that higher-level norms and systems have begun to bend toward greater inclusion, resilience, and peace.

3. Did all the intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, benefit from the intervention? How?

The intervention engaged a broad cross-section of Bosnian society, touching at least nine distinct constituencies and tailoring its approach to the stated needs of each group. Students from mixed ethnic backgrounds were among the most visible beneficiaries, as they quickly filled the sixteen Sobičak hubs that replaced unused storerooms. Teachers and school psychologists, many of whom turned project coaching into a self-financing professional community, now supervise trauma-informed teaching as a routine part of school life. The approach was particularly transformative for rural adolescents, who, often feeling isolated from civic life, gained their first cross-entity friendships, travelled outside their home cantons, and began running youth centers and "critical-thinking clubs."

The work also reached groups traditionally left out of peacebuilding. Young women took prominent roles, anchoring Livno's student media team and forming the majority of PRESTO's mentor cadre—a reflection of the project's gender-sensitive scheduling and transport arrangements. Families benefited from the project's responsiveness: when parents explained that trauma was "a whole-house problem, not just the child's".

Among adults, war veterans—usually men aged forty to sixty—became both public participants and community bridge-builders. Through storytelling circles, they gained public recognition, and as a Ribnik veteran described, former enemies now "greet each other and invite each other to events," a marked change in social practice. Teachers, counsellors, and psychologists—predominantly women—benefited as well: "children who were 'really reserved' began speaking openly," a partner from NGO Psiholuminis in Livno explained, underlining the value of trauma-sensitive teaching.

However, the intervention only partially reached some vulnerable groups. Women's advocacy organizations like Grahovljanke in Bosansko Grahovo felt sidelined when their youth-center grant was repeatedly revised, leaving members "strongly dissatisfied." Police community-relations units and religious leaders were "entirely absent," according to Glamoč's social-work director, limiting the reach on gender-based violence and hate-speech prevention. Similarly, people with disabilities, Roma, and LGBTQ+ youth were the subject of radio stories or public events but did not benefit from tailored outreach or access to project spaces. In some remote municipalities, lower enrolment was attributed to the cost and scheduling difficulties of travel, especially for rural girls, students with disabilities, or those with exam conflicts. The gender balance of volunteers tipped sharply toward young men when activities involved manual labor, revealing persistent cultural and safety barriers for girls.

Interviews and project documentation point out ways these gaps might be addressed. Early outreach often relied on pre-existing NGO networks and online focus groups, missing quieter or less-connected actors.

A fully participatory conflict-and-stakeholder analysis, conducted in person, would have better identified which women's, disability, and minority groups were ready to engage in and how police or religious actors could contribute to safer civic space. Publishing clear selection criteria and maintaining a living beneficiary roster, co-validated by schools, social-work centers, and CSOs, would have helped prevent misunderstandings like the one that left Grahovljanke dissatisfied.

For future cycles, a series of adjustments are recommended: evening or weekend family sessions led by male facilitators to draw more fathers; women-only veteran "taster" groups in neutral spaces; safety audits and visible female leaders in construction projects to normalize girls' participation; transport stipends and pop-up workshops to reach the most remote villages; and basic accessibility retrofits—ramps, wide doors, and adapted learning aids—to welcome adolescents with disabilities. Dedicated modules for women and girls, women veterans, and survivors of gender-based violence, developed in partnership with local women's NGOs, would deepen engagement. Micro-grants and mentoring for minority-led initiatives could enable Roma or LGBTQ+ youth to launch their own social-cohesion projects, broadening the intervention's direct reach. Establishing a standing feedback clinic, where each subgroup reviews progress and adjusts activities, would give emerging voices a platform and prevent exclusion before momentum is lost.

In sum, the intervention's flexible, responsive design allowed it to serve a wide spectrum of Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-war society and achieve a degree of inclusion rare in similar portfolios. With a handful of targeted changes, broadening outreach, tailoring content, and lowering logistical barriers, the next phase could draw in those still on the margins, making community-wide gains truly inclusive and sustainable.

4. Is the intervention transformative – does it create enduring changes in norms – including gender norms – and systems, whether intended or not?

The intervention's impact extends far beyond the delivery of services, altering the unwritten rules and expectations that shape how people in Bosnia and Herzegovina learn, heal, lead, and allocate resources. Such changes qualify as transformative because they embed themselves in everyday systems and show real signs of durability.

Within schools, the transformation is most visible in the classroom. The traditional, teacher-centered culture has given way to pupil-led learning. Sixteen Sobičak hubs are now "penciled into annual school-development plans as permanent spaces," while teaching staff have adopted new pedagogical tools such as debate cards, argument maps, and podcast scripts, which are now routine in lessons. Pupils, meanwhile, increasingly expect to work in mixed-ethnicity groups rather than segregated streams. "That norm change is reinforced by a self-organized network of twenty-six teachers who continue to coach one another after project funds expired, indicating that the new pedagogy is no longer donor dependent." This marks a fundamental shift from external, project-driven change to an internally sustained, community-led norm.

At the household level, the intervention has shifted how trauma is understood and addressed. What was once managed in silence is now recognized as a topic requiring professional help. After eighty rounds of guided family sessions, "parents reported using counsellor-taught breathing drills during domestic arguments and have begun contacting psychologists directly for follow-up, behavior that local practitioners say was 'almost unheard of' before the project." Trauma screening has become routine for twenty-eight counsellors, and peer supervision has emerged through a WhatsApp case-clinic, creating an informal but real referral chain inside entity health services.

The transformation extends to veterans, who have begun to redefine their social identity. Mixed seminars led to draft statutes for cross-entity self-help groups, "documents written by the veterans themselves that will give the circles legal standing under municipal social-welfare departments." Veterans who "once described 'the other side' as enemies now use language of shared healing and plan joint outreach," signaling a reframing of wartime roles.

Youth, too, have gained a new place in local governance. In Bosanski Petrovac and Ključ, teenagers have "renovated centers, negotiated utility discounts and submitted budget proposals to their municipal councils; officials who approved those arrangements have since invited the youth boards to co-design 2025 cultural events." Young women and men—many from rural backgrounds—are now involved in decision-making routines previously reserved for adults, changing the age hierarchy of local politics.

Financial norms have also changed. Municipalities that co-financed repairs or waived permits now list youth centers as assets, "committing future budgets for cleaning and heating. That co-funding precedent effectively re-writes local rules about who pays for peacebuilding infrastructure and reduces long-term dependence on external grants.

Some of the most significant transformations were unintended. Teachers reported that "critical-thinking tools originally meant for extracurricular clubs have 'spilled' into core subjects like history and literature, reshaping curriculum delivery beyond project scope." Similarly, youth-made disability-rights videos in Livno triggered a proposal for a day center for persons with disabilities, reaching policymakers even though disability was not an original focus.

Interview evidence reinforces this narrative. Across nine municipalities, participants see changes that are becoming normalized among project beneficiaries and are no longer dependent on external goodwill. "Among young people the project normalized behavior that had previously felt transgressive." As one teacher from Livno recalls, students "now invite classmates from the other entity to birthday parties and online study groups, insisting that 'unnecessary prejudice' no longer guides their choices." Similarly, a UN Volunteer in Ključ shared, "it was 'the first time she had spoken openly with someone from another ethnic group,' yet by the third workshop such exchanges felt 'completely normal." Veterans who once avoided each other now "greet each other and invite each other to events," something "not witnessed for decades."

At the municipal level, youth–council forums have broken through bureaucratic deadlock, obliging councils to support cross-ethnic youth initiatives and citizen forums. In Glamoč, a formerly vacant municipal building is now a Centre for Social Work with a safe apartment for survivors of violence— "a structural response to gender-based vulnerability that will outlive the project timeline."

Gender transformation, while underway, is not yet systemic. Where the project provided dedicated space for women, "confidence and engagement" rose markedly, as noted by a local official in Ključ. The safe apartment in Glamoč is an institutional recognition of women's security needs. Yet, as teachers and veterans in other towns admit, "mixed activities rarely addressed girls' specific experiences," and some women's CSOs felt sidelined when their proposals were repurposed. Without systematic gender analysis and consistent partnerships, patriarchal norms remain only partially challenged.

There are also important but unintended ripples. Peer-support routines like "coffee with the pedagogue" have become standard in some schools, diffusing nonviolent communication norms more broadly. Disability-rights campaigns and curriculum innovations have extended impact to new policy and community domains.

However, several bottlenecks could stall or reverse these gains. Political turnover threatens to break promises for funding or space, while short, unpredictable funding cycles exhaust volunteers and staff.

Entrenched patriarchal expectations keep fathers and women veterans at the margins of change, and parallel curricula and segregated school regulations can still recast new norms as exceptions. Economic pressures and youth emigration also threaten to drain the energy of new leaders. The lack of institutionalized supervision for peer mentors means quality and support remain fragile and dependent on volunteerism.

In sum, the intervention has not only filled immediate gaps but recalibrated fundamental expectations about who belongs in classrooms, who seeks help, who speaks publicly, and who shapes local policy. These changes are increasingly carried by school statutes, municipal budgets, professional networks, and new social identities. They meet the threshold of transformative, system-level impact, even as remaining gender and inclusion gaps point to the areas where future programming should be pushed further. As one interviewee concluded, "these anecdotes suggest that the project rewired everyday scripts about who can talk to whom, a foundational change in communities long governed by implicit separation."

5. Is the intervention leading to other changes, including "scalable" or "replicable" results?

A review of both documentary sources and interview evidence makes it clear that the intervention is already generating outcomes that are not only transformative in their original settings but are also spreading or poised for broader replication. Several components of the project have moved decisively beyond the pilot stage, becoming living models for neighboring communities, and some show clear potential for entity-wide adoption with only minor refinements.

The most visible example of scalable change is the Sobičak hub model. What started as a single classroom experiment in Bosanski Petrovac has evolved into a network operating across sixteen schools, collectively logging 277 mixed-ethnicity club meetings in just one year. As the desk review notes, "three additional principals have asked the teacher peer-learning community for floor plans and lesson templates so they can replicate the hub without new donor money." The only adjustments needed for further expansion appear minor: a short "mentor-of-mentors" training and a small municipal matching fund for basic costs such as paint and Wi-Fi. This model, designed for sustainability, has already drawn demand from other municipalities with minimal financial input.

The trauma-counsellor WhatsApp case-clinic provides another example of organic scale-up. Initially conceived as an emergency measure, it now operates as a cross-entity supervision group that trades anonymized case notes weekly. The approach has piqued interest from counsellors in non-project areas, indicating its scalability: "Scaling would require the Ministry of Health to endorse the format, add a modest data stipend to counsellors' pay, and schedule quarterly in-person retreats to keep quality high." With the digital infrastructure already in place, nationwide adoption would require little more than formal endorsement and modest operating costs.

Youth-run civic centers are similarly becoming blueprints for replication. After the Bosanski Petrovac renovation, Ključ councilors offered an empty fire-station wing for a similar project, conditional only on youth raising part of the costs. A PRONI trainer explains, "these centers run on volunteer energy and a basic municipal line item, proving the model can work in any small town if the mayor chips in for heating and Wi-Fi." This approach demonstrates how volunteerism, light administrative support, and practical municipal buy-in can create durable change.

Media and educational innovations have also proven portable. Livno's student media team, for example, has franchised its anti-hate-speech podcast model to another canton, with the only modification being a checklist for fact-checking ethnic terms—a tweak the original team developed in a single afternoon. This suggests that the underlying content format is "inherently portable" and can be widely adopted.

Institutional reforms are spreading in parallel. Livno's Social Cohesion Action Plan now obliges its council to fund cross-ethnic youth initiatives annually, and officials from Tomislavgrad have already requested the plan's template, recognizing it as "a fast track to meet central-level 'youth engagement' benchmarks."

The Glamoč safe-apartment for survivors of violence is another tangible model drawing direct interest from neighboring municipalities, with social-work directors requesting floor plans and budgeting guidance. As the Glamoč director put it, "showing mayors that reallocating one disused building can change everything."

The impact extends to veteran circles as well. Veterans in Ribnik who began hosting monthly "memory evenings" have shared their facilitation guides with colleagues elsewhere, betting that this "no-cost, story-circle format will travel more easily than large commemorative events."

The intervention's legacy already includes a suite of scalable and replicable models in school reform, trauma support, youth-led civic engagement, municipal co-financing, and veteran peer support. What makes these changes durable and portable is not just the content of the practices, but the systems put in place to support them: mentorship ladders, simple documentation, and municipal ownership. As one interviewee suggested, the next step is "a single online repository of step-by-step guides…the raw ingredients are already proving themselves on the ground; systematizing them is the next logical move." At the same time, careful attention must be paid to abandoning or redesigning those approaches—like digital mentoring without connectivity, generic outreach, and compressed calendars—that consume resources without yielding proportionate or sustainable gains. The portfolio thus provides not only a record of early impact, but a living toolkit for scale and adaptation across Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond.

SUSTAINABILITY

This section provides an assessment of financial, institutional, technical, and environmental sustainability of project intervention.

1. To what extent did the project contribute to the broader strategic outcomes identified in nationally owned strategic plans, legislative agendas, and policies?

The evidence shows that the interventions have collectively provided practical demonstrations that advance Bosnia and Herzegovina's national policy frameworks, EU accession priorities, SDGs, and UN peacebuilding objectives, although gaps remain in full political uptake, financial sustainability, and systemic integration at national and entity levels. The intervention contributed significantly across several nationally defined strategic frameworks related to peacebuilding, education, youth empowerment, social inclusion, trauma healing, and gender equality.

The *Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step* successfully integrated mixed-ethnicity learning spaces (Sobičak hubs) into segregated schools, directly supporting priorities from the ***Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education (2003)*** **and entity-level** ***Education Sector Action Plans (2021-2025)***. The sustainability of these pedagogical reforms is evidenced by their incorporation into schools' annual development plans and the ongoing operation of peer-learning communities with 26 teachers across multiple cantons.

Psiholuminis contributed directly to the implementation of **Bosnia and Herzegovina's *National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS 1325)*** and **entity-level *Social Inclusion Strategies*** by training 28 psychologists and social workers in trauma-informed care. The creation of peer supervision structures through WhatsApp and quarterly case clinics demonstrates embedded national capacity aligned with the **WPS agenda and SDG 16.1** on reducing violence through strengthened psychosocial services.

Pravipožar's Veteran Dialogues 4.0 advanced social cohesion objectives under the **WPS plan** by involving war veterans in dialogue and reconciliation processes, while also aligning with national objectives under **SDG 16.7** (inclusive decision-making). Peer-support groups are emerging, although geographic coverage and inclusion of women veterans remain challenges for full sustainability.

The *Youth Council Bosanski Petrovac* and *PRONI Center for Youth Development* operationalized youth participation goals set forth in the ***Republika Srpska Youth Policy 2023-2027*** and ***Federation BiH Youth Strategy 2025-2034*.** Young people engaged in designing and managing youth centers, budget planning, and co-applying for external grants, indicating both financial and leadership capacities consistent with national youth development objectives.

The *Center for Peacebuilding's Invest in Youth – Invest in Peace* initiative built cross-entity youth relationships while promoting tolerance and inter-ethnic friendships. These grassroots reconciliation processes reflect broader policy priorities under SDG 16.1 and **entity-level *Social Inclusion Strategies***, although formal club registration and integration into municipal budgets remain pending.

Youth organization "Centar" Mrkonjić Grad demonstrated tangible political commitment through cost-sharing agreements with Republika Srpska government and local authorities, contributing to the financial sustainability of the youth center, while highlighting opportunities for deeper gender-inclusive outreach to fully align with WPS mandates.

The *Center for Civic Cooperation, Livno* produced one of the clearest cases of institutional sustainability by successfully advocating for the adoption of Livno's *Social Cohesion Action Plan*, securing recurrent municipal funding for youth-led cross-ethnic initiatives, directly embedding peacebuilding into local governance and aligning with **UNSDCF 2021-2025** objectives.

2. Did the intervention design include an appropriate sustainability and exit strategy (including promoting national/local ownership, use of national capacity etc.) to support positive changes in peacebuilding after the end of the project?

The evaluation team finds that the intervention operationalized many sustainability principles in practice. Embedded sustainability mechanisms included:

- Early transfer of implementation roles to local actors (teachers, youth leaders, psychologists, veterans)
- Co-financing arrangements with municipal governments for youth centers, Sobičak hubs, safe spaces and social welfare centers
- Hand-over of assets (e.g., municipal ownership of Glamoč's Centre for Social Work safe apartment);
- Creation of peer-learning, peer-support, and professional supervision networks (e.g., Psiholuminis, veteran peer-support groups).

The following table summarizes the sustainability of IOMs implementing partners and grantee initiatives.

Table 6 Sustainability Evaluation by IOMs Implementing Partners

Implementing Partner	Project Title	Sustainability Assessment
Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step	*Schools as Agents of Change / Enabling Sustainable Transformation of Schools*	High sustainability at institutional and pedagogical levels. Refurbished Sobičak rooms are integrated into school development plans and daily school life (study clubs, parent-teacher meetings, podcasts). Peer-learning network of 26 teachers self-organized and meeting without donor support. Financial sustainability remains fragile due to earlier cash flow problems that forced short-term borrowing; liquidity gaps remain a threat if not addressed through multi-year frontloaded funding.
Psiholuminis	*Prevention of Secondary Trauma through Empowerment (PRESTO)*	Strong technical and social sustainability: 28 trained psychologists and social workers maintain peer supervision via WhatsApp and quarterly case clinics. Family therapy sessions have an extended impact across households. However, lack of ongoing professional supervision (only 8 of 28 sessions realized) creates vulnerability to staff turnover and burnout. Municipal health center agreements and supervision stipends would strengthen long-term resilience.

Pravipožar (Derventa)	*Veteran Dialogues 4.0*	Promising social sustainability: mixed veteran-professional peer networks continue informally, planning new support groups in Livno and Sanski Most. However, political and gender sustainability remain weak: women veterans are largely absent, and participation from some municipalities remains limited. Small funds for travel, honoraria, and women-led groups would enhance representativeness and stability.
Youth Council Bosanski Petrovac	*You(th) Can Build Peace*	High local ownership: youth renovated and now operate both urban and rural youth centers (Bosanski Petrovac and Bravsko), negotiated utilities with municipality, and initiated inter-municipal grant applications. Financial vulnerability persists due to lack of stable operating funds; hybrid municipal subsidy + commercial subletting models are recommended to ensure sustainability.
PRONI Center for Youth Development	*Youth Activism Focus*	Institutional sustainability remains precarious: youth training complete, but election-season turnover stalled room allocation and formal club registration. Youth remain motivated but lack physical premises. Livestreamed signing ceremonies with new mayors and small micro-grants for interim activities would help stabilize momentum.
Center for Peacebuilding	*Invest in Youth – Invest in Peace*	Strong social sustainability: 78% of youth campers maintain cross-entity friendships; initiatives like PetrovACT continue independently. Institutional fragility persists as no youth club has yet formalized registration, and Ključ center remains informal. Registration drives and municipal budget proposals for utilities are needed to institutionalize these activities.
Youth organization Centar (Mrkonjić Grad)	*Opportunity for Youth, Path to a Better Future*	Infrastructure sustainability is strong, with visible municipal and RS government co-financing for facility renovations. Social inclusion gaps remain, particularly in low female participation. Targeted outreach via schools and girl-led design sessions recommended to improve representation and stability.
Center for Civic Cooperation Livno	*Together for a Better and More Tolerant Community*	High content and relational sustainability: teen-produced media reached over 200,000 viewers; youth formed new alliances with NGOs. Vocational school disability proposal submitted to cantonal authorities. Weak political sustainability: only 2 of 31 city councilors attended youth dialogues. Embedding youth observers into council committees is essential for systemic political uptake.
Center for Cultural and Media Decontamination (CKMD)	*Chain of Change (Mi o Nama)*	Content sustainability is strong: 9 short films and 1 feature documentary freely available online and used by schools and NGOs. Marketing sustainability is weak due to the compressed promotional period. Partnerships with public broadcasters and licensing under Creative Commons would prolong visibility.

However, the absence of a comprehensive exit framework left some local partners exposed to political, financial, and administrative uncertainties once the donor-funded phase concluded. While many elements of local ownership and sustainability were embedded, the intervention lacked a fully formalized, jointly owned exit strategy, such as:

- No comprehensive, shared withdrawal roadmap or clear sustainability matrix was established across agencies and partners.
- Delays in procurement and fund disbursement (e.g., Drvar youth center delays) undermined timely ownership transfer.
- Inconsistent engagement of critical actors such as police, women's groups, Roma associations, and minority organizations limited the breadth of social inclusion and cross-sector buy-in.
- Absence of a light post-project accompaniment mechanism (e.g., quarterly troubleshooting clinics, WhatsApp support for implementing partners) weakened institutional continuity.
- Many promising initiatives (e.g., PRONI's youth activism, CIM's peace camps) were left in fragile institutional states, without sufficient bridging resources for legal registration or securing premises.

3. How strong is the commitment of the government and other stakeholders to sustaining the results of PBF support and continuing initiatives?

The evaluation team finds that the project demonstrated solid sustainability pathways in social, pedagogical, institutional, and localized financial terms. Many interventions have already been absorbed into municipal budgets, school timetables, and peer networks, creating strong grassroots resilience. However, sustainability remains vulnerable in political, structural, and fiscal terms where higher-level policy actors, formal exit planning, and comprehensive stakeholder inclusion were absent. Addressing these vulnerabilities would allow the strong community foundations built under the project to evolve into fully integrated, scalable pillars of long-term peacebuilding architecture in BiH.

The commitment of government and stakeholders varies across levels:

- **Strong local government commitment**: In municipalities such as Livno, Glamoč, Ribnik, Ključ, Mrkonjić Grad, and Bosanski Petrovac, councils demonstrated financial ownership through budget lines, co-financing, and assumption of recurring costs (utilities, maintenance, staff salaries). Youth councils, veterans, teachers, and local CSOs have continued activities without ongoing donor support.
- **Partial entity-level commitment**: Republika Srpska and Federation authorities demonstrated indirect support by aligning project outcomes with their respective *Youth Policies* and *Social Inclusion Strategies* but provided limited direct budgetary or institutional support for scaling-up. Participation was pragmatic but not proactively leveraged for long-term public service integration.
- **Limited national-level commitment**: Despite alignment with national policy frameworks (e.g., WPS NAP, UNSDCF, EU accession priorities), state-level ministries provided no direct financial or institutional inputs into scaling or mainstreaming project achievements. National political leadership largely remained distant from project operations.
- **Strong frontline and civil society commitment**: Teachers, municipal officers, youth leaders, veterans, and CSOs exhibited high ownership, as demonstrated by continuation of peer networks, cross-entity collaborations, self-organized programming, and external grant applications (e.g., EU youth hub proposals).
- **Weakened commitment where implementation gaps occurred**: Delays, revised grants, or coordination failures (e.g., Drvar youth center, Grahovljanke dissatisfaction) eroded trust and weakened some partners' willingness to remain engaged in future peacebuilding programming.

PBF CRITERIA

This section addresses the PBF's criteria, namely Conflict-sensitivity, Catalytic, Localization, Time-sensitivity, and Risk Tolerance and innovation. Please note that localization and robustness of the monitoring system are discussed in the impact and relevance section, hence not repeated here.

CONFLICT - SENSITIVITY

This section addresses PBF's conflict-sensitivity criteria evaluation questions.

1. Did the project have an explicit approach to conflict-sensitivity?

Conflict-sensitivity was intentionally integrated into the project's daily management and implementation, though not fully formalized as a standalone conflict-sensitivity strategy. At design stage, each project team prepared a **"tension map"**, explicitly assessing political, ethnic, gender, and inter-municipal risks. This assessment was not a one-off exercise but revisited at quarterly intervals, allowing teams to respond dynamically to emerging tensions. These tension maps provided a practical though limited substitute for a fully participatory and jointly owned conflict analysis.

This intentional integration of conflict sensitivity is reflected in several operational choices:

- **Adaptation to political sensitivities:** When discussion of the draft foreign-agent law in RS raised tensions, Sobičak activities continued without public media coverage, preserving trust while maintaining mixed-ethnic programming.
- **Do-No-Harm design of veteran dialogues:** Rotating venues across municipalities, mixed seating arrangements of ex-combatants and psychologists, and clear confidentiality protocols allowed difficult conversations to take place safely.
- **Trauma-informed flexibility:** PRESTO added online counselling after girls expressed discomfort being seen at clinics, directly responding to community-specific sensitivities.

Although conflict-sensitivity was not embedded as a comprehensive design framework, the project consistently demonstrated awareness and adaptive management of sensitive issues across ethnic, political, and gender lines.

2. Were funds' recipients' internal capacities adequate for ensuring an ongoing conflict-sensitive approach?

The implementing partners demonstrated generally adequate internal capacity to handle conflict-sensitive programming. Many NGOs (e.g., Psiholuminis, Step-by-Step, CKMD) brought previous experience from OSCE and other UN-supported Do-No-Harm training, which equipped frontline staff with necessary reflexes to adjust programming responsively.

Field mentors and facilitators actively gathered real-time feedback during site visits, not only monitoring project activities but also scanning for rising tensions. Several adaptive decisions—including rescheduling filming of Mi o nama in response to pre-election hate speech—were made directly by field teams based on mentor risk logs.

However, capacity was uneven across partners. PRONI, for example, indicated that they entered some municipalities without adequate local support or conflict analysis, requiring them to reconstruct youth lists and adapt without comprehensive initial guidance. While individual facilitators were often skilled, some gaps in formalized protocols limited consistent capacity across all implementing partners.

3. Was the project responsible for any unintended negative impact?

No significant unintended negative impacts were recorded, though two incidents illustrate how quickly risks were identified and mitigated:

- In veteran dialogues, a heated discussion on battlefield responsibility led facilitators to split groups temporarily, recalibrate ground rules, and reconvene under improved facilitation—transforming a near-conflict moment into deeper trust-building.
- In Livno, local political backlash arose when youth-produced radio segments addressed disability rights. Rather than escalate, the team invited the critic into a public dialogue, successfully defusing the tension while broadening public discourse.

Other instances, such as discomfort triggered by facilitator ethnicity (e.g., a Serb surname in Bosniak-majority villages), demonstrate that identity markers were not always adequately anticipated. However, such situations remained isolated and were generally contained without serious escalation.

In regard to conflict-sensitivity criteria, the evaluation team finds that the project operated with a strong culture of conflict awareness and adaptive management that successfully mitigated potential tensions in BiH fragile post-war setting. Internal capacities were generally sufficient to ensure responsive adjustments in real time, and no significant unintended harm occurred.

However, conflict sensitivity remained largely operational rather than fully institutionalized. The absence of a jointly owned conflict analysis, formal stakeholder-wide monitoring systems, and comprehensive inclusion of sensitive identity groups created gaps in prevention and early warning capacity. Future programming would benefit from formalizing these successful adaptive practices into a systematized conflict-sensitivity framework that includes live conflict mapping, participatory risk-monitoring dashboards, and structured stakeholder inclusion across all identity groups.

CATALYCTIC

This section addresses the PBF's catalytic criteria evaluation questions.

1. Was the project financially and/or programmatically catalytic?

The project demonstrated strong catalytic effects, both financially and programmatically, fully aligning with the PBF's expectations for catalytic interventions.

On the financial side, the project consistently leveraged additional resources from local stakeholders who took ownership of the newly created or refurbished spaces. Several municipalities moved from initial passive endorsement to active financial participation once first-round activities showed visible results. For example, Mrkonjić Grad municipality allocated 18,000 BAM for additional refurbishment of the youth cinema, while Bosanski Petrovac waived permit fees and included a 3,000 BAM utility subsidy into its 2025 budget—local financial commitments that were created directly in response to PBF activities. Similar patterns were observed in the Sobičak hubs, where parental donations of equipment encouraged neighboring schools to self-finance similar learning spaces without further donor support.

At the sectoral level, the PRESTO trauma-support model generated catalytic public sector buy-in, three cantonal ministries of health offered clinic rooms and data plans to integrate the WhatsApp case-clinic model into their districts, effectively transforming a small-scale pilot into a public good. The veteran peer-support circles also demonstrated strong organic replication potential; veterans in Ribnik and additional veteran unions drafted their own peer-support statutes, extending the model without further donor expenditure.

On the programmatic side, the project produced a suite of scalable models now being adopted or requested by other actors. OSCE has incorporated Sobičak footage into its national teacher-training curriculum as a practical example of integration in segregated schools. Two cantonal pedagogy institutes have requested the critical-thinking lesson plans for in-service training, extending far beyond the original sixteen schools. CKMD's "Mi o nama" films, originally piloted in a few communities, have since been packaged for wider dissemination on public television, and paired with educational guides requested by NGOs.

At the youth level, PRONI graduates have co-designed new EU-funded grant applications based on their learning, demonstrating the project's catalytic effect on youth activism. Similarly, Livno's Social Cohesion Action Plan, passed after years of inaction, is now serving as a template for neighboring municipalities like Tomislavgrad.

2. Has PBF funding been used to scale-up other peacebuilding work and/or has it helped to create broader platforms for peacebuilding?

The project has clearly contributed to the creation of broader peacebuilding platforms that extend beyond the initial grant scope. By developing low-cost, highly adaptable models—such as the peer-led trauma-support circles, mixed-ethnicity youth centers, and veteran storytelling methods—the project generated replicable approaches that are already being scaled up both vertically (into government systems) and horizontally (across municipalities).

These catalytic processes were supported by several key factors: **the visible success of early pilots, low operational costs, strong municipal buy-in, and the creation of easily transferable manuals and facilitation guidelines.** For example, the youth-led civic spaces—once minimal municipal co-financing was secured—became self-managed, hosting debates and cross-entity exchanges without continuous donor involvement. Similarly, the trauma-sensitive pedagogical approaches pioneered by Psiholuminis have been sustained independently by school staff and are being requested by other cantonal education authorities.

However, the catalytic effect was not universal. For example, in municipalities like Drvar, procurement delays and broken commitments resulted in lost momentum and discouraged replication. Evidence shows that where local ownership, early success, and consistent support structures were present, the project successfully triggered organic replication and positioned itself as a launchpad for broader peacebuilding platforms. Where those elements were absent, the catalytic potential remained untapped. The evidence suggests that the catalytic spark ignited by the PBF investment has already extended well beyond the initial sites but would benefit from more systematic inclusion of key actors to sustain and multiply these gains.

In regard to catalytic criteria, the evaluation team finds that the project demonstrated a strong catalytic effect in both financial and programmatic terms. It successfully mobilized local co-financing, inspired replication across municipalities and sectors, and generated scalable models now being adopted by other peacebuilding actors, education authorities, and veterans' associations. While some replication gaps emerged in locations where delays and weakened trust limited uptake, the overall design proved capable of generating durable, multiplier effects well beyond the original grant envelope. This catalytic dynamic fully aligns with the PBF's strategic objective of using relatively small investments to unlock broader systemic and community-level change.

TIME-SENSITIVITY

This section addresses the PBF's time-sensitivity criteria evaluation questions:

1. Was the project well-timed to address a conflict factor or capitalize on a specific window of opportunity?

The PBF-financed intervention demonstrated a high degree of time sensitivity in both its design and operational phases, effectively aligning its activities with several evolving conflict factors and policy windows in BiH. The timing of the project coincided with multiple overlapping dynamics that heightened both the relevance and traction of its interventions.

The Sobičak school-hub program was launched at a moment when public and institutional debate on the "two-schools-under-one-roof" segregation model was re-energized, with OSCE calling the practice a "long-term threat to stability." By introducing mixed-ethnicity learning spaces at this point, the project offered principals a practical, low-risk demonstration of integration within an otherwise contentious policy environment. This allowed for piloting inclusive practices precisely when policy discourse was active, maximizing visibility and stakeholder interest.

Similarly, the PRESTO trauma-healing program capitalized on post-pandemic spikes in adolescent anxiety, flagged by WHO and local clinics in mid-2023. The swift addition of family therapy sessions and online counselling directly responded to these emerging mental health concerns, demonstrating agile programming that effectively filled service gaps before entity health systems could scale up comparable services. The strong uptake—90 applicants for 40 camp slots—further validates the program's timeliness in addressing escalating psychosocial needs.

The project also successfully aligned with new policy openings. The RS Youth Policy (2023–2027), adopted in early 2023, created political momentum for youth engagement and civic-space expansion.

The PBF youth-center renovations and management training arrived within months of this policy pledge, allowing municipal actors to demonstrate quick compliance through co-financing, such as RS government support for building renovations in Mrkonjić Grad.

Moreover, the project adeptly navigated political sensitivities during the RS debate over "foreign-agent" legislation, which threatened to chill foreign-funded initiatives. In response, Sobičak staff suspended public media coverage of cross-entity education activities while maintaining core programming behind school walls, preserving both program integrity and stakeholder trust.

Election cycles were also tactically leveraged. The 2024 local elections posed both risks and openings, but youth-led volunteer actions—park clean-ups, inter-faith sports events, and ribbon-cutting ceremonies—were timed to generate positive political visibility for mayors, many of whom signed funding commitments in exchange for participation in high-visibility events.

At the veteran level, story-circle activities were scheduled to coincide with the 30-year anniversaries of key war events (1993–1994), turning what could have been polarizing media cycles into moments for healing and cross-community engagement. The fact that veterans initiated their own peer-support statutes during this period underlines the catalytic benefit of this timing.

2. Was PBF funding used to leverage political windows of opportunity for engagement?

PBF resources were deployed with strong tactical awareness, exploiting both local and entity-level political cycles. Municipal budget preparations for 2024–2025 were directly influenced by youth dialogues and action plans, resulting in hard-wired co-financing commitments for youth centers and social cohesion activities. Livno's Social Cohesion Action Plan, passed after seven years of gridlock, represents a concrete example of how PBF-funded platforms converted temporary political openness into durable governance outputs.

At the policy level, the intervention generated practice-based models that directly informed ongoing entity-level policy development. The Federation's Youth Strategy 2025–2034 and the RS Social Inclusion Strategy's mid-term review incorporated references to peer-support models, trauma-sensitive pedagogy, and municipal co-financing mechanisms piloted through the project, thus extending the project's relevance beyond its original geographic footprint.

Where opportunities were less fully seized, limitations stemmed from stakeholder exclusions. The absence of police community-relations units and religious leaders limited the project's ability to capitalize on national-level discourse around hate speech and public security that flared during renewed secessionist threats in 2023–2024. Similarly, limited engagement with women's and disability organizations restricted the project's ability to influence concurrent revisions of gender-equality policies.

In regard to time-sensitivity criteria, the evaluation team finds that the project demonstrated strong time sensitivity throughout its life cycle, effectively aligning its interventions with multiple conflict factors, policy debates, and political cycles. By combining careful timing with adaptable programming, the project maximized the relevance and uptake of its activities. Its ability to translate fleeting policy windows into concrete institutional and behavioral outcomes stands out as a key strength. While certain stakeholder gaps left some opportunities only partially leveraged, the program consistently demonstrated strong tactical agility, suggesting a highly time-sensitive peacebuilding investment overall.

RISK-TOLERANCE AND INNOVATION

This section addresses the PBFs risk-tolerance and innovation criteria evaluation questions.

1. If the project was characterized as "high risk", were risks adequately monitored and mitigated?

The project was correctly characterized as medium-to-high risk at design stage, given its focus on cross-ethnic youth engagement, veteran dialogues, trauma-sensitive work, and dependency on local political support. These activities directly touched sensitive identity and political issues in post-conflict municipalities.

Risk monitoring and mitigation were built into daily operations rather than treated as one-off planning exercises. Each project maintained an active "risk log" reviewed during biweekly team calls, and frontline mentors were authorized to make tactical adjustments when emerging tensions were detected. Concrete examples demonstrate that these mechanisms were functional:

- **Political sensitivities:** When school principals in Republika Srpska expressed concern over the proposed "foreign-agents" law, the Sobičak programme reduced public visibility in RS while continuing mixed-ethnic activities within school facilities, preventing political escalation while preserving core program objectives.
- **Psychosocial risks:** Following an anxiety spike triggered by a nearby school shooting, PRESTO quickly added 45 extra one-to-one counselling sessions to address emergent trauma symptoms.
- **Veteran dialogues:** Heated discussions during early seminars were immediately defused through temporary group separation, followed by renegotiated ground rules, ultimately strengthening trust among participants.
- **Financial risks:** Late disbursement of some grant tranches forced a few grantees to resort to short-term borrowing, but delivery schedules were largely maintained, and these disruptions were documented and escalated through the risk logs.

While tactical field-level risk mitigation proved effective, systemic and shared risk-monitoring protocols across implementing agencies weakened after the initial six-month period. Implementing partners noted the absence of a unified risk-monitoring system or rapid-alert mechanisms for identity-based sensitivities, which resulted in ad hoc rather than systematic responses to emerging tensions. Despite these gaps, no serious unintended negative impacts were reported, and the program successfully managed risks within acceptable limits.

2. How novel or innovative was the project approach? Can lessons be drawn to inform similar approaches elsewhere?

The project introduced several innovative operational and programmatic features that hold strong replicability potential for similar fragile and divided contexts:

- **In-school integration through "third spaces":** The Sobičak hubs provided neutral, mixed-ethnic spaces inside segregated schools without directly challenging formal administrative structures, allowing pupils from different ethnic groups to interact safely and organically. This indirect approach fostered behavioral integration while circumventing political deadlock.
- **Low-cost peer-supervision model for trauma counsellors:** PRESTO's WhatsApp-based case-clinic allowed trained counsellors to exchange anonymized case notes and maintain professional support across cantonal boundaries with minimal financial input—an efficient solution for rural and under-resourced mental health systems.
- **Municipal cost-sharing as a sustainability mechanism:** By linking facility upgrades to small municipal budget contributions (e.g., utility payments, furniture costs), the project secured long-term local financial commitments, embedding ownership at the municipal level.
- **Youth-led counter-speech production:** Youth groups, supported by volunteer journalists, produced widely viewed radio and video content that reached over 200,000 social-media accounts, demonstrating how low-cost, youth-driven media campaigns can achieve broad peace narrative dissemination.
- **Family-inclusive trauma care:** The adaptation of trauma healing to include family therapy acknowledged the intergenerational nature of conflict trauma while maintaining low delivery costs.

The project's most transferable lessons emphasize the value of **minimal-cost, high-ownership models** that leverage local political buy-in, low-tech facilitation methods, and scalable peer-support structures. These formats have already spread organically within BiH and present a viable model for adaptation in similarly fragile environments elsewhere.

In regard to risk tolerance and innovativeness criteria, the evaluation team finds that the project demonstrated a commendable level of operational risk tolerance, successfully managing high-contextual exposure through flexible field-level mitigation and adaptive decision-making. Real-time monitoring systems allowed the teams to respond quickly to political sensitivities, trauma-related concerns, and intergroup tensions, preventing any significant unintended harm. While a more systematic, inter-agency risk-monitoring mechanism would have further strengthened risk governance, the project's field-based reflexes kept risks contained within acceptable parameters throughout implementation.

Innovatively, the project introduced several low-cost, high-ownership models that directly addressed long-standing structural and relational gaps in peacebuilding. Approaches such as in-school "third spaces" for integration, peer-supervision models for trauma counselors, municipal budget co-financing, and youth-led media production demonstrated strong catalytic potential. These innovations have already shown organic replication within Bosnia and Herzegovina and offer transferable lessons for other fragile or divided contexts. The combination of adaptive risk management and highly pragmatic innovations positions the project as a valuable learning model for peacebuilding programming in complex environments.

CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation set out to assess the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the "Sustaining Peace and Social Cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina through Enhanced Inter-Municipal and Inter-Entity Cooperation on Local Services" (SPSC) project, implemented by IOM and UNDP with UN Peacebuilding Fund support. The evaluation examined how the project contributed to peacebuilding objectives across nine municipalities along the inter-entity boundary line, with a particular focus on youth engagement, trauma healing, institutional dialogue, and social service delivery.

The evidence demonstrates that the SPSC project successfully addressed some of BiH's most persistent conflict drivers by fostering cross-ethnic contact, building trauma-sensitive support systems, and creating inclusive platforms for dialogue between citizens and local authorities. The project filled critical gaps in social cohesion efforts, particularly by targeting smaller, often overlooked municipalities. Its interventions catalyzed behavioral change: young people previously isolated within their ethnic communities formed lasting cross-community friendships; veterans engaged in unprecedented inter-ethnic storytelling and peer support; and municipal governments implemented tangible service improvements directly linked to community dialogues.

The project's trauma-informed counselling programs offered healing spaces for youth and veterans, while civic empowerment initiatives enabled young people to participate actively in decision-making and local governance. Institutional responsiveness improved, as evidenced by new municipal action plans, the relocation and upgrade of social welfare centers, and the creation of safe spaces for victims of violence.

However, the project fell short in fully reaching marginalized, including persons with disabilities, religious leaders, security actors, and some grassroots women's organizations. Gender equality was often addressed in terms of numeric participation rather than comprehensive gender-responsive programming. Despite these gaps, the project's holistic and multi-sectoral design demonstrated an effective model for operationalizing peacebuilding at both the community and institutional levels.

In a complex post-conflict setting like BiH, direct attribution of peacebuilding outcomes to a single intervention is inherently challenging. Nevertheless, triangulated evidence from diverse data sources suggests that the SPSC project made a meaningful contribution to both individual empowerment and systemic shifts in social cohesion. The intervention's flexible, locally anchored approach allowed it to respond to evolving conflict dynamics and strengthen cross-community ties.

At the same time, several limitations temper the breadth of these conclusions. Incomplete baseline and endline data for some components, especially where participation was voluntary, constrain precise measurement of change. Gaps in early participatory conflict analysis led to missed opportunities for fuller stakeholder inclusion. Furthermore, youth outmigration poses a continuing challenge to sustain the project's gains, particularly in smaller, economically vulnerable municipalities.

Relevance: The project was highly relevant to BiHs peacebuilding needs, directly addressing key conflict drivers such as ethnic segregation, divisive narratives, unresolved trauma, youth exclusion, and weak institutional trust. Its alignment with national priorities, UN peacebuilding frameworks, and the SDGs, particularly SDG 16, demonstrates its strong contextual fit and responsiveness to the realities on the ground.

Coherence: The SPSC project complemented and extended existing UN and bilateral initiatives by focusing on underserved municipalities and target groups often neglected by larger programs. While thematic and geographic coherence was strong, operational coordination across agencies and programs was more limited, highlighting the need for improved joint planning and resource sharing among UN entities and partners.

Efficiency: Despite some challenges in internal coordination and partner communication, the project demonstrated generally efficient use of resources. Activities were delivered within reasonable timeframes and budget constraints, and adaptive management approaches allowed flexibility in response to unforeseen challenges.

Effectiveness: The project effectively achieved its intended outcomes, particularly in fostering cross-ethnic youth engagement, establishing trauma-informed support systems, and facilitating citizen-municipality dialogues that led to tangible institutional changes. However, effectiveness was moderated by gaps in gender responsiveness and by the limited engagement of certain marginalized stakeholders.

Impact: While attribution remains complex, evidence suggests the project made a substantive contribution to improving social cohesion, reducing prejudice, and enhancing local governance capacities. Changes in attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices were observed across multiple stakeholder groups, indicating meaningful progress toward the project's peacebuilding goals.

Sustainability: Elements of sustainability were embedded through capacity-building, institutional and policy change, and local ownership of initiatives. However, risks to sustainability persist, particularly related to youth outmigration, limited municipal budgets, and the need for ongoing institutional commitment to maintain the gains achieved.

The evaluation highlights the critical importance of participatory design, localized ownership, and adaptive management in peacebuilding programming. Interventions that combined trauma healing, civic engagement, and institutional capacity-building were most effective in fostering durable social cohesion. The experiences of youth, veterans, educators, and municipal authorities demonstrate that carefully facilitated spaces for dialogue and cooperation can disrupt entrenched patterns of ethnic division.

However, the persistence of gender and inclusion gaps signals the need for more deliberate outreach and programming that systematically addresses the needs of marginalized groups, including women veterans, persons with disabilities, and religious communities. The project also underscores that while community-level progress is achievable, long-term sustainability depends on embedding these approaches within national and municipal policies and securing ongoing institutional commitment.

Moving forward, future programming should prioritize deeper participatory conflict analysis at the outset to ensure more inclusive stakeholder engagement. Strengthening coordination among UN agencies, donors, and national actors will be essential to maximize synergies and avoid duplication. Targeted investments are needed to address gender-specific needs, expand trauma-informed services, and build the institutional capacities of local governments to sustain peacebuilding outcomes beyond project cycles.

Co-financing mechanisms with municipalities and stronger partnerships with civil society and marginalized groups can further enhance ownership and sustainability. Moreover, preserving spaces for youth leadership and veterans' engagement remains vital to consolidating the social gains achieved.

In summary, while challenges of inclusion and sustainability remain, the SPSC project has made significant contributions to strengthening peace and social cohesion in divided communities. Its integrated, community-driven approach offers a scalable and contextually relevant model for sustaining peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and provides valuable lessons for future peacebuilding efforts in similarly fragile and divided contexts.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lessons learned

The experience of the SPSC project offers rich insights into the complexities and opportunities of peacebuilding in divided post-conflict societies like BiH. The project demonstrated that carefully structured cross-community engagement can generate meaningful behavioral change even in areas where ethnic division, political polarization, and collective trauma remain deeply embedded. Facilitated spaces for youth interaction across entity lines proved particularly effective in reducing prejudice, fostering dialogue, and creating personal relationships that challenge inherited narratives of division.

At the same time, the project's trauma-informed psychosocial support for youth and veterans emerged as a critical pillar of the intervention. Many participants described these safe spaces as their first opportunity to process painful memories or fears in a structured, supportive environment. This experience confirms that in post-conflict societies, addressing unresolved trauma is not only a humanitarian imperative but also an enabler of wider peacebuilding efforts. However, the project also revealed that trauma-healing interventions require careful adaptation to local sensitivities, as certain communities displayed heightened emotional vulnerability to external facilitators, underscoring the need for highly localized conflict and trauma mapping at project design stage.

A major lesson lies in the importance of inclusive participatory design processes. While the project made significant efforts to consult with some stakeholder groups during implementation, the absence of a fully participatory conflict analysis at inception limited the project's ability to identify and engage certain marginalized actors, including persons with disabilities, religious leaders, women's rights groups, and police representatives. As a result, some potentially valuable partners were not fully integrated into the project's peacebuilding platforms. The experience demonstrates that a thorough, inclusive conflict analysis—conducted with broad stakeholder involvement—is not only a diagnostic tool but a critical foundation for building trust, identifying sensitivities, and ensuring the credibility and inclusiveness of programming from the outset.

The project further demonstrated the catalytic power of municipal dialogues in translating community grievances into institutional responses that address local need. Several municipalities adopted concrete service improvements, including new social welfare facilities and safe spaces for victims of violence, as a direct result of these dialogues. This experience illustrates that peacebuilding interventions which simultaneously strengthen both horizontal (community-to-community) and vertical (citizen-to-government) relationships have the greatest potential to generate durable, systemic change. However, this approach also requires sustained political will, clear accountability frameworks, and ongoing mentoring for local institutions to prevent regression once external support diminishes.

One of the recurring challenges involved the difficulty of embedding gender responsiveness beyond basic numeric representation. While women participated actively in many project components, gender dynamics and the specific needs of women veterans, survivors of gender-based violence, and women caregivers were not systematically addressed. This highlights the need for future programming to integrate gender-sensitive conflict analysis and to design tailored interventions that elevate women's leadership and address gendered dimensions of trauma and exclusion.

The project also demonstrated both the potential and fragility of youth empowerment in the peacebuilding process. Youth participants repeatedly expressed a desire to continue their activism beyond the life of the project, and some demonstrated new skills in proposal writing, public speaking, and leadership. Yet, youth outmigration remains a significant obstacle to sustaining these achievements, particularly in smaller municipalities.

This underscores the importance of pairing civic empowerment with broader socio-economic opportunities, such as entrepreneurship, and employment pathways, to retain young people as active agents of change within their communities.

Finally, while the project achieved meaningful synergies with certain UN agencies and civil society actors, coordination across the broader peacebuilding ecosystem remained inconsistent. More deliberate, structured coordination platforms at both national and municipal levels would allow partners to share data, align program activities, and reduce duplication. Such mechanisms would be especially valuable for harmonizing training content, sharing trauma-healing curricula, and jointly monitoring evolving conflict dynamics across agencies.

Delays in reimbursements placed a significant financial burden on smaller civil society organizations (CSOs), many of which lacked the cash reserves to pre-finance activities. This dynamic not only created operational stress but also risked excluding grassroots actors who are often best positioned to work with vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities. The lesson learned is that peacebuilding initiatives must align financial procedures with the realities of diverse implementing partners by integrating cash flow considerations into project design. Simplified funding mechanisms, timely disbursements, and options for advance payments are essential to ensure equitable participation, avoid implementation delays, and maintain trust and engagement at the community level.

In sum, the SPSC project demonstrates that peacebuilding is most effective when it is locally rooted, participatory, and multi-sectoral, integrating psychosocial healing with civic engagement and institutional capacity-building. Yet, for future programming to fully realize the transformative potential of such approaches, they must invest early in inclusive conflict analysis, deepen partnerships with marginalized groups, strengthen inter-agency coordination, and explicitly address the structural barriers that undermine sustainability, particularly for young people and vulnerable populations.

Recommendations

Building on the evaluation findings, this consolidated set of recommendations integrates evidence from field practice, stakeholder feedback, and the lessons emerging from the SPSC project's implementation. These recommendations aim to strengthen design, delivery, coordination, monitoring, and sustainability of future peacebuilding interventions in BiH and comparable fragile contexts.

Design and Planning

The foundation of effective peacebuilding lies in robust, inclusive, and participatory design processes. Future projects should prioritize structured, field-based conflict and stakeholder analyses at the municipal level, engaging a diverse range of actors—youth, veterans, teachers, social service providers, women's organizations, disability groups, religious leaders, police, and municipal authorities. This participatory approach ensures contextual relevance, fosters stakeholder ownership, and mitigates social and political sensitivities by mapping conflict dynamics, trust levels, and identity-based risks early in the process. The Theory of Change (ToC) must be refined to explicitly articulate the interplay between trauma healing, inter-ethnic contact, youth civic empowerment, municipal responsiveness, and institutional reform as interconnected pathways to peace. The ToC should also account for systemic risks such as youth outmigration, gendered vulnerabilities, political turnover, and resource constraints, proposing tailored mitigation strategies. To deepen inclusion, beneficiary selection frameworks should prioritize underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, women veterans, survivors of gender-based violence, ethnic minorities, and socially isolated youth, with rolling inclusion mechanisms reviewed collaboratively by implementing partners and municipal stakeholders.

Gender responsiveness should be embedded from the outset, moving beyond numerical participation to incorporate gender-sensitive conflict analysis, leadership tracks for women, and modules addressing gender-based violence and family-centered healing.

Implementation and Outreach

Implementation strategies should build on the SPSC project's multi-sectoral approach while refining activity sequencing and expanding outreach to diverse groups. Trust-building periods should be extended prior to cross-community exchanges, particularly for traumatized participants, to create safe and supportive environments. Youth civic leadership programming should be scaled up by integrating practical skills such as project management, grant writing, fundraising, advocacy, negotiation, and digital activism. Microgrant schemes for youth-led peace initiatives can sustain engagement momentum, while veteran programming should expand to include family-inclusive trauma recovery and intergenerational dialogues. Outreach efforts must actively target marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities through partnerships with local associations, religious leaders and police as conflict mediators, and women's organizations as full partners in civic engagement. Communication systems should be strengthened with monthly electronic progress updates, updated stakeholder contact lists, and mandatory onboarding briefings for new municipal leaders to ensure continuity during political transitions. To enhance financial stability, front-loaded grant disbursements for smaller NGOs, pre-qualified vendor frameworks, and rapid-response financial troubleshooting teams should be introduced to prevent delivery bottlenecks and support grassroots organizations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is critical for adaptive learning and capturing transformative outcomes. A unified M&E framework, managed by a single coordinator and shared by IOM, UNDP, and other partners, should integrate a single results framework that captures outcome-level changes in attitudes, behaviors, and social norms, beyond mere activity delivery and including adequate baseline data collection. Simplified risk registers and conflict sensitivity reporting templates should be adopted, with quarterly joint learning reviews at municipal and programmatic levels to ensure emerging findings inform program adjustments. Periodic "context pulse-checks" should be deployed to track evolving tensions in real-time, enabling facilitators to respond proactively. Gender-sensitive indicators should be embedded into monitoring frameworks to assess the impact of interventions on women's leadership and gendered dimensions of trauma. Conflict sensitivity must be institutionalized through a dynamic conflict-risk monitoring dashboard, mandatory quarterly conflict-risk reviews, and the inclusion of underrepresented groups (police, religious leaders, disability groups) as permanent stakeholders in decision-making platforms.

Sustainability and Institutionalization

Sustainability requires embedding peacebuilding into local systems and addressing structural barriers. Municipal ownership should be institutionalized by requiring co-financing commitments, supporting formal social cohesion action plans within annual development budgets, and establishing permanent citizen-municipality dialogue platforms. Peer-learning exchanges across municipalities can foster replication and innovation, while advocacy for national-level policy frameworks can anchor peacebuilding mandates within BiH governance structures. To address youth outmigration, programming should integrate partnerships with private sector employers, entrepreneurship programs, diaspora business networks, and vocational training centers, alongside digital peace activism platforms and career-pathway mentoring to link civic leadership to economic stability. Inter-agency coordination should be strengthened through a standing mechanism involving IOM, UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, OSCE, EU, and bilateral donors to synchronize activities, share resources like training curricula and trauma-healing manuals, and maintain a joint knowledge repository.

These efforts ensure that peacebuilding interventions remain locally rooted, inclusive, and resilient to political and economic challenges.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 - Information on implementing CSOs projects

ANNEX 2 - Overview of UNDP and IOM implemented infrastructure projects

ANNEX 3 - The Full Evaluation Matrix

ANNEX 4 - List of submitted project documents

ANNEX 5.1 - Guidelines for the key informant interviews with implementing partners

ANNEX 5.2 - Guidelines for the key informant interviews with government officials

ANNEX 6 - List of key informants

ANNEX 7 - Survey with the beneficiaries

ANNEX 8 - Detailed information on the number of organized activities

ANNEX 9 - The outline of the individual impact of each initiative delivered by IOM implementing partners and grantees