

**Annex I**

**Description of the Action**

**General information**

<b>Name of the applicant</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office United National Development Programme (UNDP)
<b>Title of the action</b>	EU4 Gender Equality – Women’s Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women
<b>Location of the action</b>	Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia)
<b>Duration of the action</b>	36 months



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\* For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For UN Women, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEDAW Committee	United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil society organization
EU	European Union
EVAW	Ending violence against women
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEWE	Gender equality and women’s empowerment
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
ILO	International Labour Organization
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex individuals
LNOB	Leaving no one behind
MT	Management Team
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PUNO	Participating United Nations organization (PUNO)
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, mathematics
TF VAW	Technology-facilitated violence against women
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WED	Women’s Entrepreneurship Development
WEE	Women’s economic empowerment
WEPs	Women’s Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business
WHO	World Health Organization

## 1. Description of the action

In the Western Balkans, women and girls continue to face significant gender-based inequalities that lessen their quality of life, prevent them from realizing their full human rights and hinder economic growth in the region. Underlying obstacles to gender equality include traditional values, perceptions, attitudes and social norms among both women and men. These are deeply rooted and manifest as larger-scale feminized poverty, gender-based violence and discrimination, women's insecurity in the labour market, a growing share of unpaid care work and wide gender pay and pension gaps.

Gender equality and women's empowerment form part of the European Union (EU) accession conditions with which IPA beneficiaries from the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia) must comply. Investing in gender equality is essential not only as an EU requirement, but for an equal society. Enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all the Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries have publicly committed to taking steps to advance this agenda through changes in discriminatory laws and by supporting changes in behaviour, including those which affect economic opportunities and outcomes.

The **economic empowerment of women** continues to be a key driver for improving their position in society. According to a 2022 study by the World Bank, on average, the gross domestic product (GDP) of IPA beneficiaries could be 20% higher if women participated in the labour market at the same level as men.<sup>1</sup> Despite recent improvements in legal frameworks throughout the region, research conducted by UNDP and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) shows that traditional values and norms, along with the low priority accorded to gender equality and women's empowerment, have hampered the implementation of such frameworks.<sup>2</sup> This gap between policies and practices is frequently the consequence of a lack of political will and limited investments in human and financial resources for promoting women's empowerment, as well as other structural impediments such as a poor understanding of gender equality concepts, a lack of evidence-based on sex and age-disaggregated data, and weak institutional oversight.

This implementation gap is clearly reflected in socioeconomic data revealing persistent gender-based inequalities in the region. The women's employment rate in the Western Balkans is only 45%, compared to 65% of men, with the exception of Kosovo which has one of the lowest rates of women labour force participation in the world, 20%, while women perform on average three times more unpaid work than men and spend about half as much time in paid work.<sup>3</sup> Women undertake almost 80% of care work in their families, on average three times as much as men.

Additionally, three in ten women work in the traditionally low-paying social, health and education sectors, while UNDP and RCC data shows that in the Western Balkan region, the share of women in STEM occupations is as low as 14%. Widespread gender pay gaps, unchallenged gender stereotypes, gender bias in technology characterize these sectors in general, resulting in economic losses. Notably, the number of women enrolled or graduating from science related majors, such as mathematics, is higher than that of men across all IPA beneficiaries. However, this does not translate into strong participation in these sectors, a phenomenon known as the "leaky pipeline," or the progressive loss of women and girls at various points along their journey in STEM education and employment. Women are less likely to develop their careers in the STEM fields, whereas those women who graduate from science programmes will typically develop teaching careers in the education sector.<sup>4</sup> Situation in regard to the ICT field sets Serbia apart, especially when compared to broader regional trends. Namely, in Serbia, the ICT sector has demonstrated remarkable

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<sup>1</sup> Western Balkans Regular Economic Report, World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/publication/western-balkans-regular-economic-report>

<sup>2</sup> Women's economic empowerment, UNDP and RCC, <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Western-Balkans-WEE.pdf/b958b34e34b16e1d9572d23b46501fda.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap Report, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Gender Stereotypes and Women Participation in STEM Fields in the Western Balkans: A Scoping Review, <https://lnu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1742376/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

progress in gender diversity, surpassing the European Union's rate of growth. As of 2021, the sector employed 50,000 individuals, with 16,000 being women. The overall participation of women in Serbia's ICT sector, encompassing both technical and non-technical positions, exceeded 32%, a figure notably higher than the EU average of 25%. Over the period from 2017 to 2021, the proportion of women in Serbia's ICT sector has risen from 23% to 32%, and this positive trend is accelerating. Notably, in 2021 alone, women accounted for 40% of newly employed personnel in the sector.<sup>5</sup>

UNDP study on “Women in Western Balkan Economies in Nutshell<sup>6</sup>” revealed that gender segregation is also evident in entrepreneurship, with women setting up businesses in the informal economy and lower-paid sectors, lacking access to credit and networks. Women represent only 27.5% of business owners and no more than 10-12% of start-up founders<sup>7</sup>. Even when women are present in entrepreneurial activities, they are trapped in small and micro enterprises and mostly concentrated in a small fraction of economic activity, such as services. The majority of women in the WB economies engage in entrepreneurship out of necessity rather than opportunity, which could explain their concentration in small and micro enterprises and being concentrated in a few sectors where they are often the only one employed. Women may be reluctant to start their own businesses due to avoidance of risk-taking, lack of available support services, limited exposure to the business world, and lack of access to capital. Women motivated to advance in their careers may sacrifice more.

Furthermore, the number of **women in leadership positions** within companies is disproportionately small, although all WB6 economies have shown considerable improvement in women's representation in mid-to-senior-level positions from 2015-19.<sup>8</sup> However, this representation still falls far below gender parity, with only 29% of managers being female in 2019. Albania has seen the strongest increase in female representation, more than doubling from 19% in 2015 to 41% in 2019. In the same year, Bosnia and Herzegovina remained below the WB6 average, with only a quarter of management staff being female. Kosovo is the lowest performing economy, with 18% of management staff being female in 2018. The 2019 OECD SME Policy Index<sup>9</sup> points out to the low representation of women in leadership positions in private companies or public companies' boards, revealing an evident glass ceiling for women in leadership positions in general. As for managerial positions in higher education institutions, the numbers go as high as 90.9% of shares for men.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, **violence against women and girls (VAWG)**, widespread throughout the region, both contributes to and is exacerbated by women's economic (dis)empowerment. A manifestation of the same inequalities that limit women's economic empowerment, VAWG is costly from both a human and an economic perspective. It disrupts women's employment and education, causing loss of wages and expertise, and incurs both personal and societal costs in the form of health care and social and legal services, often with long-term implications. Economic disempowerment and dependence are also drivers of VAW, making women more vulnerable to abuse and keeping them trapped in abusive situations. In other words, it is a mutually reinforcing cycle and must be addressed as such: VAW hinders women's economic empowerment, and economically disempowered women are at higher risk of violence.

Rapid and ongoing **digitalization** within the region, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdown and restriction measures, provides both opportunities and challenges for advancing women's empowerment and ensuring their safety across the region.

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<sup>5</sup> Women in Serbia's ICT Sector, UNDP Serbia and UNDP Accelerator Lab, [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/istrazivanje\\_eng\\_web\\_26\\_02\\_2024.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/istrazivanje_eng_web_26_02_2024.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Women in Western Balkan Economies in Nutshell: <https://www.undp.org/montenegro/publications/women-western-balkan-economies-nutshell>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Economic benefits of gender equality and women empowerment in the Western Balkans six, RCC, <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/114/economic-benefits-of-gender-equality-and-women-empowerment-in-the-western-balkans-six>

<sup>9</sup> The 2019 OECD SME Policy Index, [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sme-policy-index-western-balkans-and-turkey-2019\\_g2g9fa9a-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sme-policy-index-western-balkans-and-turkey-2019_g2g9fa9a-en)

<sup>10</sup> Mapping of Gender-Related Policies, Programmes and Mechanisms on Gender Disparity in STEM in Western Balkans (RCC), <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/107/mapping-of-gender-related-policies-programmes-and-mechanisms-on-gender-disparity-in-stem-in-western-balkans>

Digitalization brings immense potential to facilitate access to essential information and services, unleashing employment opportunities for women and girls. Also, as the pandemic has shown, digitalization can help business owners become more resilient and foster new economic opportunities. Digitalization and next generation skills can help women businesses operate more effectively by improving their information and knowledge access, facilitating access to finance, capacity development opportunities, digital skills and new markets.

However, digitalization also brings a unique set of challenges. A growing body of evidence sheds light on the ways in which the digital revolution has exacerbated certain forms and dimensions of gendered inequalities and oppression, specifically **technology-facilitated violence against women**. Digitalization has altered the landscape of VAW, facilitating the perpetration of ‘traditional’ forms of VAW in new ways, such as sexual harassment and stalking, and enabling new dimensions of VAW, such as doxing and non-consensual image abuse.

Technology-facilitated VAW occurs as part of a continuum that is often connected to offline violence and can encompass many forms, including sexual harassment, stalking, non-consensual image abuse, deep fakes, and Zoombombing, and these forms continue to multiply in a context of rapidly expanding digitalization. Technology-facilitated VAW shares the same root causes and drivers as offline forms of VAW, reflecting systematic and structural gender inequality. New research from the region shows that 51% of women present online in the Western Balkans have experienced some form of technology-facilitated VAW.<sup>11</sup>

The impact of technology-facilitated VAW has negative effects on the health and wellbeing of women and girls as well as serious economic, social and political impacts. Existing laws, policies, and frameworks to prevent and respond to VAW have not kept pace with technological developments, and there are significant gaps in knowledge and evidence of what works in preventing technology-facilitated VAW, which is crucial to inform evidence-based prevention and response frameworks and interventions. In addition, civil society organizations in the Western Balkans require support to fully understand technology-facilitated VAWG, expand their services to better support survivors, and advocate for stronger legislative and policy frameworks to address technology-facilitated VAW.<sup>12</sup>

Policies and legislation in the region are currently inadequate regarding prevention and response to technology-facilitated VAW, as neither criminal codes nor specialized laws directly address technology-facilitated VAW, with the exception of North Macedonia, where both criminal code and specialized VAWG law do address technology-facilitated VAW. Still, when criminal codes do address technology-facilitated crimes, they are not gender sensitive. On the other hand, laws and policies that directly focus on VAW do not sufficiently address technology-facilitated dimensions of such violence. Some legal provisions may be indirectly applied to technology-facilitated VAW, such as general provisions on stalking and threats. However, considering the inconsistent and often ineffective application of these provisions to cases of offline violence, they are far from sufficient in preventing and responding to technology-facilitated VAWG<sup>1314</sup>.

Furthermore, the growing importance of **digital skills has led to a digital gender divide** that threatens to leave behind women and girls. RCC data indicates that a gender gap in the area of knowledge exists when it comes to above basic digital skills.<sup>15</sup> In 2019, the four Western Balkan economies for which data are available, , i.e. Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia all report lower levels of digital skills

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<sup>11</sup> The dark side of digitalization: Technology-facilitated violence against women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (UN Women, 2023): <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/the-dark-side-of-digitalization-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-in-eastern-europe-and-central-asia>

<sup>12</sup> Country Baseline Evaluation Reports GREVIO, available <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/country-monitoring-work>

<sup>13</sup> The dark side of digitalization: Technology-facilitated violence against women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (UN Women, 2023): <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/the-dark-side-of-digitalization-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-in-eastern-europe-and-central-asia>

<sup>14</sup> Country Baseline Evaluation Reports GREVIO <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/country-monitoring-work>

<sup>15</sup> Economic benefits of gender equality and women empowerment in the Western Balkans six, <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/114/economic-benefits-of-gender-equality-and-women-empowerment-in-the-western-balkans-six>

than the EU, for both genders.<sup>16</sup> In North Macedonia, gender parity in the possession of digital skills exists, while Serbia, Albania and Montenegro recorded a male skill advantage of a small margin. On the other hand, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a gender skill gap of 4 percentage points existed in 2019. Recognizing the significant potential of digital solutions, particularly in the realm of women in STEM, there is a crucial importance placed on fostering regional cooperation and joint initiatives at the regional level. These collaborative efforts have the power to bring about a transformative impact on local communities and significantly improve our current situation. Committed to contributing to the deepening of regional economic integration, the initiative will build on EU rules and standards, with a specific emphasis on fostering women entrepreneurship within STEM fields. By leveraging digital solutions and promoting economic growth, this approach becomes a foundational pillar for creating more job opportunities, especially for women in STEM, thereby advancing their economic empowerment and contributing to the overall prosperity of the region.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the process of digitalization as women's lives shifted online for work, education, access to services and social activities. It also brought the issue of technology-facilitated violence to the forefront; as women's presence and participation in online spaces became increasingly mandatory for their success in academics and employment, the consequences of their exclusion from those spaces have also become increasingly severe. Ensuring that women and girls in the region are able to fully enjoy and equally exercise equal economic, labour and social rights will require a multipronged approach that promotes, and advances women's leadership increases STEM and entrepreneurship opportunities, tackles the growing issue of violence against women, including online and technology-facilitated, and enhances and standardizes efforts regarding data collection and monitoring.

With these issues in mind, the Programme will work across the region toward two main results.

Under **R1: Women's economic empowerment is increased (notably in managerial and leadership roles) and more women and girls enter the STEM, green and digital fields**, the Programme will enhance the capacities of public and private sector actors to articulate and propose solutions to address barriers to women's leadership, entrepreneurship and active participation in STEM, digital and green economic sectors. Also, the Programme will promote women's economic empowerment advocacy, awareness raising, and policy design efforts informed by gender-responsive research, creating enabling environment for empowering women to increase their economic opportunities. It also aims to advocate and provide technical assistance Western Balkan women in STEM knowledge exchange to impact policies, launch innovative initiatives based on mutual support.

Under **R2: Women and girls who have experienced violence including online and technology-facilitated violence and gender-based discrimination have access to and use multi-sectoral, inclusive and survivor-centred offline and digital services**, the Programme will strengthen referral systems for delivery of online and offline services for women and girl survivors of violence in the Western Balkans, including through training of providers and better coordination of relevant state actors (police, justice sector, social services and health care). It also aims to advocate and provide technical assistance for the introduction of specific gender-sensitive legislation on technology-facilitated violence and abuse as well as awareness raising initiatives among youth about the topic, the available services and how to react to incidents. This component crucially extends the remit of the existing UN Women project "Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, Phase II" to include the domain of digital and online violence against women.

A programme that focuses on women and girls participating in society with equal economic, labour, and social rights in a safe and secure environment is essential for societal progress, development, and the achievement of fundamental human rights. It contributes to a more just, equitable, and prosperous world. The issues surrounding women's empowerment in WB6, particularly in the workplace, are complex and multifaceted. To ensure that women do not have to choose between their roles in their households and at

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

work, initiatives need to combine persistent efforts to challenge norms with reshaping the attitudes and policies of financial institutions or employers.

The programme will take decisive actions to economically empower women in the Western Balkans. It aims to create conditions fostering collaboration between public and private sectors to identify and eliminate barriers preventing women from assuming leadership roles, starting businesses, and actively participating in STEM, digital, and green economies. To achieve this, the programme will actively enhance the development of gender-responsive research, knowledge, and awareness initiatives, creating a conducive environment for women's economic empowerment.

The programme will drive tangible improvements in women's access to opportunities in STEM, green, and digital economic sectors by leveraging the combined strengths of professional business and industry associations along with women's networks. This involves boosting women's leadership through coordinated actions that advance economic empowerment across the Western Balkans (WB6) region, fostering cross-border planning, knowledge sharing, and personal growth experiences. A pivotal step includes the creation of the Regional Alliance for Women's Economic Empowerment in the WB6, crucial for advancing gender equality and women's economic participation. Women from the Western Balkans have historically built influential thematic networks—such as the Stability Pact Gender Task Force, Women's Political Network, Balkan Women Coalition, and others—that have driven significant social change. Recently, leaders from civil society, politics, academia, and business have further advanced this legacy with networks like the Regional Women in STEM Network and FAMA, aiming to uphold the women's movement, combat setbacks to gender equality, and engage with evolving fields in jobs, education, and the green and digital economy. Additionally, strategic dialogue platforms in the WB6 with international, regional, and national stakeholders will be established to ensure a commitment to women's economic empowerment. Activities will be developed to assist regional and national entities in incorporating gender mainstreaming standards into their organizational systems, culture, and processes. For women in STEM Network, a comprehensive needs and barriers map will be created to shape a joint advocacy agenda in WB6. This will be accompanied by activities to enhance women's capacities in STEM fields, including digital training modules and mentoring support. The WB Women in STEM Network will receive additional knowledge and resources to address attitudes, influence policies, and initiate creative initiatives centred on regional and EU-oriented cooperation.

Urgent measures are needed to address the shortcomings in preventing and responding to Violence Against Women (VAW) including technology facilitated violence. The current legal frameworks, policies, and evidence-gathering mechanisms have fallen behind technological advancements, creating substantial knowledge gaps. Action is imperative to revamp legal structures, bridge these knowledge voids, and empower civil society organizations in the Western Balkans to effectively understand and combat technology-facilitated VAW. This involves expanding services for survivors and advocating for more robust legislative frameworks.

The Programme will concentrate efforts on enhancing legislation in the region, particularly in areas where criminal codes and specialized laws inadequately VAW and work towards a more comprehensive approach to addressing digital crimes. Moreover, the programme will explicitly include the technological dimensions of violence in laws and policies targeting VAW, recognizing the inadequacies in the current legal landscape. The programme will strengthen the application of existing legal provisions related to stalking and threats, making them directly applicable to cases of technology-facilitated VAW, and finally address the inconsistent and often ineffective enforcement observed in offline violence cases.

## 2. Objective, outcomes, outputs and indicative activities

The **Overall Objective** of this Action is that women and girls participate in society, fully enjoying and exercising equal economic, labour and social rights in a safe and secure environment.

To this end, the action targets two main areas, in order to both build on existing activities in the region and introduce innovative ways to seize new opportunities and tackle emerging challenges.

The **Outcome of the Action** addressing economic empowerment of women is:

### **1. Women's economic empowerment is increased (notably in managerial and leadership roles) and more women and girls enter the STEM, green and digital fields**

The outputs to be delivered by the Action contributing to the corresponding specific objective (Outcome 1) are:

1.1 Capacity built and new and existing networks strengthened in the region, including the Gender Equality Leadership Academy, the Gender Equality Alliance in the Western Balkans and the digital chapter of the Women's Entrepreneurship Expo

1.2 Increased understanding of the main obstacles and challenges creating gender disparities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and ICT education and employment in the Western Balkans and increased opportunities for digital entrepreneurial upskilling of women and girls, including those from marginalised group.

The **Outcome of the Action** addressing safety of women is:

### **2. Women and girls who have experienced violence including online and technology-facilitated violence and gender-based discrimination have access to and use multi-sectoral, inclusive and survivor-centred offline and digital services**

The outputs to be delivered by the Action contributing to the corresponding specific objective (Outcome 2) are:

2.1 Capacity of key stakeholders in the referral system, including government, policymakers, law enforcement officials, the judiciary, the health sector, and civil society organizations, to provide quality, coordinated offline and digital services for survivors of violence, including online and technology-facilitated violence is strengthened.

2.2 Women and girls have the knowledge and tools to recognize and report online and technology-facilitated violence.

#### **Activities under Outcome 1 / Output 1.1**

##### ***Activity 1.1.1 To set up regional Leadership Academy (UNDP)***

The Leadership Academy for women leaders, integrated with existing institutions, capitalizes on the comparative advantages of diversity, taps into an underutilized pool of leaders in the WB6 economies and By collaborating with public institutions, universities, CSOs and chambers of commerce, the initiative will leverage established structures, expertise, and resources for a more effective and sustainable impact on

women's leadership across various sectors (Public and private sectors, Chambers of commerce, Academia, Medai, NGOs, etc.)

Leadership Academy uses an innovative curriculum that integrates cutting-edge leadership approaches, practical applications, and emerging trends, ensuring leaders are well-prepared for the challenges of the future, and addresses specific needs and challenges in changing contexts. Academy will target women leaders in different public and private sectors and will work closely with existing training institutions/structures like public universities and chambers of commerce. The training programmes will be customized and personalized to recognize the unique needs and goals of enrolled leaders, fostering personalized growth and development while key feature is the emphasis on experiential learning, cross-generational exchange, hands-on activities, case studies, and collaborative projects in the region and in each of WB6. The Academy will expose leaders to international viewpoints, cross-cultural communication, and global leadership challenges, preparing them to navigate diverse cultural contexts and lead in demanding and changing contexts.

Recognizing the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion, as guiding principles, Academy will create leaders who are sensitive to social issues and capable of fostering inclusive environments which presents priority for UNDP. Strategic partnerships with current networks of women gathering more than 200 exceptional industry leaders, leaders from academic institutions, and government bodies who will further provide access to diverse expertise and opportunities for collaboration with comprehensive capacity development programme, accelerating creation of cumulative power of empowered women to impact decision makers and united transform systems. Particular attention will be given to UNDP partners that have demonstrated leadership in piloting UNDP flagship initiative Gender Seal for Public Institutions and Equal Future and action will tap into a broader range of expertise and potentially encourage collaborative initiatives, foster synergy, leverage diverse skills, experiences, and perspectives to achieve common goals more effectively.

UNDP will partner with local universities in each out of 6 WB economies to co-develop and host the Leadership Academy. Educational programmes of high quality will be developed with UNDP gender experts and accredited, ensuring that content aligns with global best practices in gender equality and leadership but also directing content towards current context and ongoing initiatives in the WB economies such as UNDP Gender Equality SEAL certification of the institutions, or Women on Boards initiatives following EU Directive 2022/2381 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies, etc.

Leveraging local universities resources, facilities and expertise will provide a strong foundation for the training programme to be offered to next generation of young leaders. Each University will develop and accredit educational module and deliver educational workshops/event that will be organised on rotational basis in one of WB6 economies. Participant recruitment and selection will be organised through targeted outreach and defined criteria in Open call to be launched by UNDP in all WB6 economies to invite women leaders from both the private and public sectors, ensuring diversity in industry, experience, and background. Selection will be done through rigorous process to enrol participants who were or who are current leaders in executive power branches, parliaments, economy, private sector, CSOs and candidates that demonstrate leadership potential and have strong commitment to gender equality.

Leadership Academy will utilize a blended learning approach, combining in-person workshops/events at partner universities with online modules and experiential learning including expected enrolment in work of Regional Alliance on the implementation of the tailored Action Plans to provide hands-on leadership experience and advocacy practice as well as transfer of know-how. Linkage of theoretical knowledge, gender experts guided conversations regarding current setting and demand in the region and EU will be assuring that leaders/participants are up to date, equipped with knowledge and understanding of existing structures and able to translate this theoretical knowledge obtained into practical advocacy effort with transformative impact.

Activity includes following specific tasks: Signing of Letter of Intent with partners in WB6 and set up Leadership Academy; Open call for leaders from Governments, Parliaments, CSO, women's entrepreneurs networks, private sector and chambers of commerce to enrol in Leadership Academy; Development of 6 educational/training modules for Leadership Academy through grant support to universities; Set up Task Forces for cross-border and cross-partner planning, knowledge sharing and personal experience growth.

Activity will enrol at least 6 academic institutions in WB6 and set up partnerships around Leadership Academy having at least 60 participants enrolled in Leadership Academy and at least 6 comprehensive educational modules designed and delivered.

***Activity 1.1.2 To establish an overarching Regional Alliance of existing regional networks and activists to facilitate dialogue and debate on women's economic empowerment. (UNDP)***

The establishment of the women's movement 80 years ago in Western Balkans marked the beginning of the emancipatory journey for women in the entire region. Today, after 80 years since women actively participated in the people's liberation struggle, secured political, social and economic rights, the process of achieving freedoms and full enjoyment of the rights obtained is not complete, especially considering regressive processes and the re-patriarchization of societies. After fall of Yugoslavia women in the region continued to cooperate across the borders, raise voice for peace, stability and to support, share knowledge and work together in the fields of political empowerment, economic advancement and fight against gender-based violence. Therefore, women from Western Balkans traditionally gravitated towards each other and have been establishing thematic networks that had great impact and changes societies, among which are: Stability Pact Gender Task Force, SEE Network for Gender Equality, Women's Political Network, Women's business network, Balkan Women Coalition, Regional network of entrepreneurs in Western Balkans, Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, Women's Chamber of Commerce Network, The Regional Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in South East Europe, etc. Only during last 24 months in Balkans women leaders from civil society, political life, academia, business sector across the Western Balkans established Regional Women in STEM Network and FAMA network with aim to cherish legacy of women's movement and address pushbacks to gender equality and women's rights, and keep the track with new generation of jobs, education and green and digital economy.

All these networks play a pivotal role in elevating women's voices and fostering solutions that increase women's participation in income-generating activities, reform policies, and create an enabling environment for just and equal economies and societies. They are already helping thousands of women through its support to partnering women's associations and chambers of commerce, advocating for locally designed actions and measures to promote gender-responsive institutions and address the needs of women, in all their diversity. Key focuses include tackling systemic barriers to women's political and economic participation and addressing urgent challenges for women in a changing world.

The need for advocacy in women's economic empowerment is pressing. In a dynamic and evolving context, creating synergy and harnessing the power of existing networks to form a forceful Regional Alliance is crucial for sharing experiences, learning from others, and forming a supportive community to advocate for transformational change. As we advance into the digital age, it is vital to stay ahead of technological trends and adapt strategies, advance policies to scale the gender equality agenda. Networking offers a rich pool of knowledge and expertise, enabling us to learn from successes and challenges, explore innovative ideas, and master the changing landscape, offering adequate legal and policy solutions that meet women's needs and addressing key obstacles to women's economic empowerment related but not limited to systemic gender discrimination, limited access to capital and financial services, educational and skills gaps, inadequate work-life balance support, and legal and institutional barriers.

The proposed Regional Women's Network Alliance on Gender Equality represents strategic initiative designed to leverage the current momentum for gender equity, especially amidst rising backlash and re-traditionalization. This alliance aims to unite diverse voices and stakeholders across the region to drive sustainable progress in gender equality in the Western Balkans. By capitalizing on UNDP's position as a

trusted partner and building on existing conversations and demands from the gender community, the alliance will foster essential dialogue and advance the gender equality agenda, leading to impactful change.

Establishing an overarching Regional Alliance of existing regional networks, prominent leaders and female decision makers from the region, presents crucial step for fostering dialogue and debate on women's economic empowerment and marking the entry points to advance position of women. Rather than fragmented efforts, this initiative will provide centralized platform for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and strategic coordination among diverse regional stakeholders. The guarantees for the existence of willingness to join and the later sustainability of the Regional Alliance are evident in the planned wide scope of the activity. For instance, the Leadership Academy activity is designed as an in-depth, narrow approach, aimed more at institutions and established organizations or companies, guiding a core number of 60 participants through a tailor-designed programmes. In contrast, the Regional Alliance will aim at gathering at least 600 participants through at least six meetings during the course of the action in all WB6 IPA beneficiaries, inciting dialogue between actors, organizations, grassroots initiatives, and decision-makers. The Alliance will amplify their collective impact, share best practices, and tackle mutual challenges faced by women in various economic sectors. With dedicated resources, strategic partnerships, and joint commitment, the initiative will build a foundation for enduring success, ensuring that system-level changes are achieved. The hybrid nature of events, a larger number of participants, and increased visibility and impact through advocacy campaigns will ensure this activity's ability to engage stakeholders broadly.

The commonality and ownership over the developed advocacy campaigns on a regional level will further contribute to the platform's sustainability, leveraging as well the work done in the previous decades on gender equality, as well as UNDP's established role as a provider of space and a facilitator of these processes. External expert support will be provided to ensure it aligns closely with the engaged participants, assisting in advocacy campaign design and initiative design, and integrating the experts as part of the Regional Alliance itself. This level of ownership by participants over the process and the sustainability will leverage the existing experience of the networks and actors, engaging a large number of them in dialogue, which will benefit the level of ownership and later sustainability of the alliance.

Activity includes following tasks: Support regular meetings of Task Forces with targeted key national and regional stakeholders and decision makers; Develop detailed Advocacy Plans per thematic area in WB6 economies and support their implementation; Launch of the Regional Alliance for Women's Economic Empowerment in WB6 and present Strategic blueprint including advocacy and communication plans; Monitor progress towards strategic goals set; Support implementation of communication plan and visibility actions of the Regional Alliance.

Activity will gather at least 600 women within the Regional Alliance with around 100 participants per WB economy enrolled in debate about women's economic empowerment policies.

***Activity 1.1.3 To carry out a review of the entrepreneurship ecosystem (support for women in next gen jobs) (UNDP)***

This activity is set to produce new and unique information that no other study has provided to date. It will address a significant gap in existing knowledge by thoroughly examining the rapidly evolving entrepreneurship landscape, with a particular focus on the gender dimensions of new and emerging industries and technologies. As the global economy undergoes significant transformation driven by technological advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI), digitalization, and blockchain, it is crucial to assess how these changes impact women's participation in entrepreneurship. The review will critically evaluate whether the current entrepreneurship ecosystem is equipped to empower women to integrate these new technologies into their business ventures and to thrive in next-generation job sectors.

The primary objective is to determine how existing policies, frameworks, and support mechanisms enable women entrepreneurs to capitalize on AI, digital finance, and ICT opportunities. The assessment will focus not only on barriers but also on the adoption of new technologies among women-led businesses, offering key insights into their challenges and successes.

This review is the first of its kind and will generate new information that is currently unavailable, providing essential insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women in next-gen industries. No other entity has produced such a study, making it an innovative resource for policymakers and stakeholders.

UNDP works closely with governments and the private sector across all Western Balkans to drive economic reforms with women's economic empowerment at the centre of these efforts. This activity forms part of the [UNDP-RCC Joint Action in Western Balkans for women's economic empowerment](#), which targets high-impact interventions to boost women's economic empowerment in the region..

Stakeholder engagement is vital to this process, including women entrepreneurs, networks, chambers of commerce and policymakers is vital to the process. This activity will leverage data-driven decision-making to map opportunities within next-generation job sectors, where women are often underrepresented. The findings will help shape policies and establish baseline metrics and performance indicators to monitor progress over time, ensuring sustainable outcomes.

Understanding the barriers women face in accessing support for next-gen jobs will enable us to tailor programmes that address these challenges effectively and integrate findings into the Regional Alliance of Women advocacy work. A comprehensive review of the ecosystem and support mechanisms is essential for strategic interventions, optimizing resources, and creating an inclusive environment where women can thrive in next-generation industries. This aligns with UNDP and government priorities, including structural transformation and the green and digital agenda.

The methodology will involve identifying key components of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, conducting policy analyses, engaging stakeholders for qualitative insights, and developing case studies highlighting successful solutions. The activity will culminate in a validation workshop and evidence-based recommendations to inform advocacy efforts. It is closely linked with two activities 1.2.6, and 1.2.7 sharing the goal of fostering women's empowerment in STEM, digitalisation, next-generation industries. Insights from the Review of the entrepreneurship ecosystem (support for women in next gen jobs), like AI, digital finance, and ICT, will directly inform Activity 1.2.6 and Activity 1.2.7. by identifying key barriers and opportunities for women entrepreneurs, Activity 1.1.3 will help target gender mainstreaming efforts in Activity 1.2.6, focusing on STEM, the green economy, and digitalization. The findings will help target gender mainstreaming efforts in Activity 1.2.6 and shape the themes for hackathons in Activity 1.2.7, ensuring relevance and impact.

The activity integrates the following tasks: developing and endorsing the methodology, reviewing existing research on support for women in next-gen jobs, and engaging stakeholders for qualitative insights. The validation workshop will gather at least 30 high-level representatives from institutions across the region. The Methodology endorsed by key partners in all WB6 economies will also include 6 case studies per economy presented through visuals.

This initiative complements Activity 1.1.7 (UN Women), which will support national stakeholders (e.g., policymakers, decision-makers, implementing agencies, focal points, employers' organisations, business/sector associations, and women entrepreneurs' associations and NGOs) to identify key, locally adapted, and strategic recommendations to unleash the potential of women's entrepreneurship and women-led businesses to generate "decent jobs."

***Activity 1.1.4 To organise high level strategic dialogue platforms in WB6 with international, regional and national stakeholders to assure commitment to women economic empowerment (UNDP)***

Establishing high-level strategic dialogue platforms in the Western Balkans (WB6) with international, regional, and national stakeholders is crucial for ensuring a unified understanding and institutional pledge to women's economic empowerment of all stakeholders in the WB6. Understanding of structural barriers, advancing commitment to the improved systemic response requires comprehensive approach that is grounded on analytical and overarching partnerships with governments, representatives of chambers of commerce, industries, entrepreneurs and civil society organisations.

These platforms serve as dynamic spaces for key players to engage in collaborative discussions, share insights, and align strategies. By fostering dialogue at multiple levels, from global to local, these platforms create a shared vision for advancing women's economic inclusion in the region. High-level strategic dialogue platforms in the Western Balkans will enable the exchange of best practices, facilitate the identification of common challenges, and encourage the development of coordinated solutions in which UNDP can be of great support. These platforms will involve in dialogue all WB6 economies and Türkiye as well as the EU, jointly reviewing window opportunities for the advancement of gender equality and financial inclusion of women, such as the Invest EU programme and Western Balkans Guarantee Facility. Involving Türkiye brings added value by providing insights from a larger economy with relevant experience in addressing gender gaps and advancing women's economic empowerment, enriching the dialogue with broader regional perspectives. In all targeted IPA beneficiaries, the UNDP will tap on the existing large partnerships and ongoing work on economic reforms, digitalisation, green agenda, and entrepreneurship, supporting overall just and green transitions and gender equality.

Moreover, high-level strategic dialogues will provide a mechanism for accountability, ensuring that commitments translate into tangible actions that positively impact women's economic empowerment and therefore will be directed towards existing and development of new strategic frameworks for women's economic empowerment in the targeted economies. While a Regional Alliance of women presents networking mechanism to address specific needs and foster collaboration among women leaders and networks, the high-level dialogues will complement and inform Regional Alliance efforts in delivering against identified advocacy goals. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, in particular decision makers, to ensure a comprehensive and cohesive approach, enhancing the overall impact of initiatives for women's economic empowerment in the region will have larger impact.

Activity envisages following tasks: Organise 3 annual high-level events in hybrid mode with up to 100 participants to power Regional Alliance advocacy and link with EU integrations and Berlin process; Support visibility actions of the high-level strategic dialogue platforms; Prioritise issues identified by Regional Alliance and integral part of developed Action Plans for advocacy as well as identified issues related to

gender gap in the STEM and green agenda. At least 3 high officials from each WB6 economy enrolled in the discussions at high level forum.

***Activity 1.1.5 To prepare Action Plan to advance women in leadership roles in economic and social sectors (UNDP)***

Developing a robust Action Plan to advance women in leadership roles in economic and social sectors in the Western Balkans requires a comprehensive and strategic approach. By combining needs assessment, stakeholder engagement, a strong understanding of policies and regulations, and setting clear goals, acting in gathered networking forms will be translated into a cohesive Action Plan contributing to advancing women in leadership roles in both economic and social sectors in the Western Balkans.

Policy dialogues and strategic high-level platforms will help in thorough identification of the specific challenges and opportunities for women in leadership roles in the Western Balkans economies. Already engaged networks of women business and entrepreneurship associations in the Regional Alliance and close partnerships with institutions, Chambers of economies, government officials, businesses, NGOs, and women leaders will foster collaboration and seek input to ensure a broad perspective on the challenges and potential solutions.

While UNDP will play a facilitation role, full ownership of the Action Plan will remain with local actors and stakeholders, ensuring that the solutions are context-specific, and that local commitment is guaranteed for the long-term success of the initiative. This ensures that local stakeholders drive the agenda, while UNDP supports by offering technical expertise, access to global best practices, and a collaborative platform.

Bringing together women leaders, women's networks, and engaging in high-level policy dialogues will generate powerful synergies. This collaborative approach ensures a broad range of perspectives and expertise, leading to tailored solutions that resonate locally and regionally. Through focused dialogue,

stakeholders can formulate targeted strategies, leverage collective resources, and garner the political will necessary for effective policy implementation. The key advantage of such an action plan lies in its holistic nature, addressing multifaceted issues and offering tailored solutions that resonate at both local and regional levels. A focus on both economic and social sectors will address leadership gaps in various industries, aligning advocacy efforts with the broader development agenda and the EU growth plan, which is seen as a potential 'game changer' for the Western Balkans.

The Action Plan will be defined and co-designed with partners gathered in Regional Alliance and key national stake-holders based on the discussions and ongoing reforms to tap on momentum crafted with the goal of implementation during the Project cycle, providing a structured framework for driving systemic change and ensuring sustainability. The Action Plan will be implemented during the Project cycle, will offer a structured framework that drives systemic change and ensures sustainability.

By combining these elements into a cohesive Action Plan, regular reviews and adaptations will be essential to address evolving challenges and ensure the plan's continued implementation and effectiveness.

Furthermore, integrating UNDP's comparative advantages, such as its global network, expertise in sustainable development, and commitment to inclusivity, enhances the plan's effectiveness. By fostering collaboration and aligning efforts, this approach maximizes the impact of initiatives, driving tangible and sustainable advancements in women's economic empowerment and leadership with the support of UNDP's unique contributions.

Activity envisages following tasks: Formulate with key stakeholders regional Action Plan based on the demand defined at Leadership Academy, findings from eco-system review, identified needs at strategic and high-level dialogues, outlining specific goals, timelines, and responsibilities; Discuss with regional partners draft Action Plan to advance women in leadership roles in economic and social sectors, focusing on green economies and resilient societies with strong women's leadership and integration in the broader regional frameworks (informing Regional Common Marker Agenda, REA, donor financing strategies, IFI frameworks etc); Support visibility & communication actions.

Development of the Action Plan will have enrolled at least 30 top-notch gender experts from the WB region and will be respectfully endorsed by all 6 economies (Regional Alliance and national stakeholders / Governments)

***Activity 1.1.6 To support key stakeholders in endorsing gender mainstreaming standards into organizational systems, culture and processes. (UNDP)***

To build capacities this activity will be embarking on a transformative journey of endorsement of gender mainstreaming standards by number of partnering institutions, organisations, businesses. This activity encompasses a series of targeted initiatives designed to cultivate a gender-inclusive environment within the organizational systems, culture, and processes, fostering systemic change and utilization of the [UNDP GE SEAL](#) framework that equips public institutions and governments with rules, regulations and knowledge to be more inclusive and working to create societies where women and men have equal opportunities. This involves integrating gender concerns across all aspects of public institutions and governments work and delivering public policies and services for all.

The programme will facilitate awareness sessions and high-level dialogue platforms, engaging key stakeholders to understand the profound significance of gender mainstreaming, presenting comparative advantages of those organisations and institutions applying gender mainstreaming standards to assure buying in. This process will not only educate stakeholders but also emphasize the strategic advantages of gender equality, linking it directly to improved organizational performance and heightened social responsibility. Subsequently, tailored by other project activities under this component, they will serve as a foundation for the development of a targeted initiatives meticulously aligned with UNDP Gender Equality SEAL standards.

Supporting interested key stakeholders in endorsing gender mainstreaming standards into organizational systems, culture, and processes is paramount for fostering inclusivity and achieving sustainable gender

equality. The [Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions](#) presents [set of standards](#) for gender mainstreaming in the work of institutions and has been designed based on many years of experience and validation by UNDP. The result is a tested and practical, which entails working simultaneous across five interconnected areas of performance: Planning and management for gender equality, Gender equality architecture and capacities, Work environments to enable gender equality, Participation, partnerships and accountability and Results and impact of public policies.

By securing the commitment of influential stakeholders, such as leadership and decision-makers, to embed gender mainstreaming principles and standards in the work of institutions and organizations can create an environment that systematically considers and addresses gender equality concerns in the work. This endorsement not only ensures the integration of gender-sensitive policies and practices but will also promote cultural shifts that prioritize diversity and equity.

The importance of this endeavour is underscored by initiatives like the UNDP flagship programme GESEAL (Gender Equality Seal for the [Public](#) and Private Sectors), which provides a structured framework for organizations to systematically mainstream gender equality into their operations. Through the endorsement and implementation of such initiatives, organizations contribute not only to their internal gender equality objectives but also to broader societal goals of empowerment and equal opportunity.

Activity has integrated following key tasks: Advocating incorporation of gender perspective at all levels of the organisational work to transform operations, policies and organizational culture for gender equality; Identifying stakeholders in WB6 to pilot Gender Equality Seal in organisation (such as RCC, WB6 CIF, national Chambers of Commerce, Investment Funds in WB6, councils for competitiveness, etc.); Offer methods, gender mainstreaming tools and knowledge products; Support visibility & communication actions. The Gender Equality Seal (GE SEAL) process is an intensive capacity development programme aimed at fostering gender-responsive transformation within institutions over a period of 18 to 24 months. A key aspect of this programme is the need for contractual services with congress agencies to organize educational activities, such as workshops and training, which are essential for building gender expertise across the institution. Additionally, GE SEAL involves a deep internal transformation, requiring outsourced technical experts to review and overhaul internal rules, leadership, management, and substantive work. Many institutions lack in-house gender specialists, making external expertise critical to successfully embedding gender equality into their operational and decision-making frame-works. Activity outputs will be seen in at least one regional organisation pilot Gender Equality Seal and at least six public institutions adopt methods, gender mainstreaming tools and/or knowledge products.

***Activity 1.1.7. To conduct a comprehensive gender analysis of women entrepreneurs' ecosystem in IPA beneficiaries using Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) Assessment Framework. (UN Women)***

Women run successful enterprises, yet persistent gendered inequalities continue to create major disparities in opportunities to start and grow businesses. In general, women's businesses tend to be smaller than those run by men, are concentrated in sectors with limited potential for value addition and are over-represented in the informal economy. These challenges are compounded by women's care responsibilities, which create additional pressure on women entrepreneurs' time, workload, and well-being, as well as by unfavorable institutional environments that can result in uneven access to land and decision-making roles and inadequate social protection coverage. Women and men entrepreneurs can encounter similar challenges in their economic activities; however, women are faced with an additional set of gender-based barriers that limit their access to resources and opportunities.

This activity will leverage the International Labour Organization (ILO) WED Assessment Framework to produce new, non-existent, and non-available comparable and comprehensive findings and recommendations for improving the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem in the IPA beneficiaries covered by the Action. The ILO Women's Entrepreneurship Development Framework Conditions & National Assessment Methodology is a set of women's entrepreneurship development (WED) framework conditions that can be assessed nationally to develop relevant and locally adapted key policy recommendations for

improving the environment for the promotion of women's entrepreneurship. The WED framework conditions, and assessment methodology provide a comprehensive tool to assist country-level assessors to gather and assess a consistent body of information about the status of WED as well as to identify targeted measures to improve the ecosystem for WED.

The WED Assessment is centred on six framework conditions and 17 sub-conditions that are important to creating a favourable environment for women's entrepreneurship development:

1. A gender-sensitive legal and regulatory system that advances women's economic empowerment
  - a. Labour laws and regulations
  - b. Business registration and licensing
  - c. Property and inheritance rights
2. Effective policy leadership and coordination for promoting WED
  - a. WED as a national policy priority
  - b. Government focal point for the promotion and coordination of WED
3. Access to gender-sensitive financial services
  - a. Participation of women entrepreneurs in generic financing programmes
  - b. Targeted financing programmes for women entrepreneurs
4. Access to gender-sensitive business development support (BDS) services
  - a. Women access mainstream BDS services
  - b. Mainstream BDS services respond to the needs of women entrepreneurs
  - c. Targeted BDS services for women entrepreneurs
5. Access to markets and technology
  - a. Export promotion for women entrepreneurs
  - b. Government procurement targeting women entrepreneurs
  - c. Inclusive supply chains and linkages
  - d. Access to ICTs and technology
6. Representation of women entrepreneurs and participation in dialogue
  - a. Women's representation in business/sector associations
  - b. Presence of women entrepreneurs' associations and networks
  - c. Participation public dialogue.

WED assessment is by now the only methodology for comprehensively assessing the entrepreneurship ecosystem; the results of WED usually feed into the national entrepreneurship policies/strategies and enable comparison of generated data with other contexts where WED has been conducted<sup>17</sup>.

The analysis of women's entrepreneurial ecosystem, to be conducted in all Western Balkans IPA beneficiaries, will inform Activity 1.1.8.

This activity will be implemented directly by UN Women in cooperation with ILO. This activity will require the services of ECA Women's Economic Empowerment Advisor to provide technical support for Programme implementation, strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, regional/international actors and development partners, and quality assurance of knowledge products, international consultant(s) to conduct analysis, and translation audiovisual and printing costs related to the research (see the detailed budget in Annex III).

***Activity 1.1.8 To hold two virtual regional Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO #ConnectToCreate events to provide women, including those from marginalized groups, with mentoring and networking opportunities and connect them with national, multi-national, and global companies and business investors for pitching their goods and services and competing for capital investment. (UN Women)***

Women-owned and -led businesses are gaining momentum in the Western Balkans, presenting benefits for women, marginalised groups, local markets and regional businesses and investors. A huge amount of business potential is waiting to be unlocked, which can lead to greater economic and social transformation. As the region emerges from the impact of COVID-19, boosting women's entrepreneurship is more important than ever. According to UN Women research, in 2020, one quarter of self-employed women

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<sup>17</sup>Some examples of WED can be found here: <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/05/national-assessment-of-womens-entrepreneurship-development-in-georgia> ; more details added to the narrative

across many countries in Europe lost their jobs. Micro, small and medium-sized business account for 70 percent of global employment and the majority of new jobs.

Building on the successes of the first three editions of the Europe and Central Asia Women's Entrepreneurship Expo "Connect to Create," the programme will engage existing, and new partnerships and mentor networks to accelerate women entrepreneurs' access to markets and finance in the Western Balkans. Enhanced focus will be put on the inclusion of women-owned businesses in corporate supply chains. The Expo will provide an interactive and inclusive professional space for women entrepreneurs and business partners to convene and work together to grow and flourish.

The Expo is composed of a series of local and sub-regional business-building, networking activities, and capacity-building workshops, allowing businesses, investors, and women entrepreneurs of the region to learn from and network with each other. It culminates in a virtual event with networking and investor pitching. Opportunities created by the Expo consist of showcasing businesses via an exhibition space, workshops and skills development opportunities, access to business tools, support from mentors, B2B (business-to-business) and B2C (business-to-consumer) networking, masterclasses, and investment pitching and feedback. The Expo will be preceded by satellite expos/events, giving women entrepreneurs, corporations, mentors, investors and other partners an opportunity to gather in person, network, exchange information and lay the foundation for sustainable partnerships, offering peer-learning opportunities and forging connections that last beyond the event.

More specifically, the Programme will launch a call for applications, inviting women entrepreneurs to apply. The selection process will prioritize women entrepreneurs focusing on innovative products/services and tech start-ups. Selected entrepreneurs will join online boot camps, which will be organized by the Programme in partnership with local private sector and state partners in IPA beneficiaries.

Following the online bootcamps, selected entrepreneurs will join physical events in IPA beneficiaries, which will enable women entrepreneurs to showcase their products/services to the broader local audience<sup>18</sup>. After the physical events, selected participants will participate in the Regional Virtual Event, where, through virtual booths, they will be able to showcase their products and services to the regional/international audience and establish partnerships and networks. At the same time, they will benefit from masterclasses of top experts in the areas related to business development<sup>19</sup>.

Two final steps of the Women's Entrepreneurship Expo are mentorship (online) and a pitch event- physical, when finalist participants meet with investors to pitch the businesses to them. At the pitching stage, the Programme will partner with the European Business Angels Network (EBAN), leveraging the Memorandum of Understanding signed between two organizations which opens access of selected women entrepreneurs to the biggest gathering of angel investors in Europe<sup>20</sup>.

This activity will require ECA Women's Economic Empowerment Advisor technical expertise) to provide support for programme implementation, strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, regional/international actors and development partners, and quality assurance of knowledge products; professional services for organizing three booth camps for selected women entrepreneurs across IPA beneficiaries and in partnership with local private sector and state partners in target economies, one for each language (Albanian, BCMS and North Macedonian); professional services for media communication campaign through request for proposals ; two (2) international consultants for web design and maintenance and content creation and travel (see detailed budget in Annex III).

### ***Activities under Outcome 1 / Output 1.2***

<sup>18</sup> For reference, please see the events from Expo 2023 <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/womens-entrepreneurship-expo-2023#satellite>

<sup>19</sup> For reference, please see the agenda of Virtual Regional Expo 2023 <https://www.unwomenexpo.org/expo-2022-schedule-nov-16th>

<sup>20</sup> For more details regarding Women's Entrepreneurship Expo, please refer to the brochure <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/05/progress-brochure-womens-entrepreneurship-expo>

### ***Activity 1.2.1. To establish and deliver mentorship for women in STEM (UNDP)***

In the pursuit of intersecting objectives encompassing STEM innovation, a green transition, social justice, and gender equality, the mentorship-centric activity emerges as a potent catalyst for transformative change. Within this activity, mentorship serves as the conduit through which STEM disciplines actively embrace environmentally sustainable and socially just practices while concurrently addressing gender disparities. Pivotal to fostering a diverse and inclusive STEM workforce, mentorship ensures the welcome and encouragement of women to thrive in these fields. A gender-responsive approach within these mentorship programmes entails pairing aspiring female STEM professionals with experienced mentors, facilitating knowledge transfer, dismantling gender biases, and creating an environment where women confidently contribute to STEM-driven innovations. As STEM professionals, especially women, advance through mentorship, their impact extends to the green transition, with mentors guiding mentees in developing and implementing eco-friendly technologies and solutions. This mentorship dynamic further contributes to a just transition, instilling values of equity and fairness in the design and execution of STEM-driven environmental initiatives. Mentorship becomes a linchpin in cultivating the necessary skills for a green transition, actively working towards breaking down gender barriers in STEM and promoting inclusivity in green jobs. The gender dimension in mentorship amplifies the societal impact of STEM professionals, as women mentees rise through the ranks, influencing not only technological innovations but also actively engaging in shaping policies that prioritize fairness, inclusivity, and environmental justice.

The grants scheme will be implemented in collaboration with members of the Network of Women in STEM, targeting organizations and institutions focused on supporting women in STEM fields. The selection criteria for the organisations will be predetermined and will require previous experience with mentorship support and licenced mentors while their offer will focus on women currently engaged in or aspiring to enter STEM fields, particularly those who have demonstrated potential or face significant barriers to advancement. Grants will be distributed through a structured process starting with the announcement of funding opportunities, including eligibility criteria and application deadlines. Interested individuals or organizations submit applications outlining their proposed projects, which are then reviewed and evaluated by internal reviewers or external panels based on criteria including feasibility, impact, and budget justification. Successful proposals enter into a grant agreement that outlines the terms and conditions, including funding amounts and reporting requirements. Funds will be disbursed in instalments, as per Grant recipients progress reports and a final evaluation report detailing achievements and outcomes, ensuring accountability and allowing the UNDP to monitor the use of funds. Feedback will be provided to applicants, particularly those whose proposals were not funded, to improve future applications.

Candidates will apply through an open call distributed via the Regional Women in STEM Network and other relevant platforms, ensuring broad outreach across the Western Balkans. Applications will be evaluated based on professional experience, career aspirations, commitment to gender equity, and potential impact within STEM and green transition initiatives. Additionally, the process will prioritize diversity in geographic representation, STEM disciplines, and underrepresented groups, ensuring a wide range of perspectives within the cohort. This approach guarantees that selected women will benefit personally from the mentorship while contributing meaningfully to advancing gender equity and sustainability in STEM.

120 women will benefit directly from this mentorship activity, selected through a structured and transparent process to ensure inclusivity and alignment with the programme's objectives. The selection criteria will prioritize women currently engaged in or aspiring to enter STEM fields, particularly those demonstrating potential or facing significant barriers to advancement. Candidates will apply through an open calls of grant recipients distributed via the Regional Women in STEM Network and relevant platforms, ensuring broad outreach across the Western Balkans. Applications will be evaluated based on professional experience, career aspirations, commitment to gender equality, and potential impact within STEM and green transition initiatives.

The Women in STEM Network initiative has been established in the Western Balkans through the collaborative efforts of the RCC and UNDP. This initiative aims to complement broader regional development objectives by boosting economic opportunities for women and girls in STEM fields.

Recognizing the significant untapped potential of women in STEM, the initiative seeks to drive reforms that will increase women's participation and leadership in the economy. By addressing gender disparities, this activity aims not only to elevate women's roles in STEM but also to contribute to substantial regional economic growth and development. The mentorship scheme propels environmentally sustainable and socially just practices, aligning with the goals of the green transition and fostering the next generation of equitable and sustainable STEM-driven innovations. Embracing gender diversity in STEM enhances innovation and creativity, contributing to the EU's growth framework by fostering a competitive knowledge-based economy.

The mentorship programme under the Women in STEM Network is a key component designed to enhance economic opportunities for women and girls in STEM. By addressing gender disparities and fostering leadership, the initiative recognizes the untapped potential of women in STEM and seeks to boost their participation in driving regional economic growth and innovation. The mentorship programme focuses on eco-friendly and socially just practices, aligning with green transition goals, and fostering creativity and competitiveness. Through strategic pairings, leadership training, and networking, women are empowered to overcome career challenges, build professional skills, and contribute to a more diverse and inclusive STEM environment across the region. This mentorship approach strengthens both individual growth and collective progress toward sustainable STEM innovations in the Western Balkans.

Additionally, collaborative projects between mentees and mentors will provide hands-on experience and exposure to real-world challenges, encouraging mentees to contribute to ongoing STEM projects within the UNDP and EU frameworks. Personalized development plans will be created, setting achievable goals and milestones, with progress monitored through regular assessments to ensure continuous growth and alignment with career aspirations.

Visibility and recognition of women in STEM will be promoted through various platforms to acknowledge their achievements and contributions, showcasing success stories to inspire others to pursue and persist in STEM careers. Mentorship programmes will play a crucial role in breaking down gender barriers, providing guidance, and inspiring young women to pursue and persist in STEM fields. Increased representation of women in leadership roles, enhanced professional skills and confidence among mentees, strengthened networks and collaboration within the UNDP and EU STEM communities—including the digital platform [STEM4ALL](#) and the global [STEMinists Network](#)—are some expected long-term impacts deriving from these mentorship schemes.

Activity envisages set of following tasks: The mentorship-focused activity under the Women in STEM Network will involve several key tasks, with UNDP providing grants to organizations in the network ready to deliver mentorship programmes across the Western Balkans. First, UNDP will issue an open call for grant applications targeting organizations experienced in mentorship support for women in STEM. These organizations will be selected based on their ability to offer structured mentorship programmes and licensed mentors. Once selected, they will deliver at least 120 mentorship schemes, offering up to 4,500 hours of mentorship. Each programme will focus on strategic mentor-mentee pairings, leadership development, skill-building, and eco-friendly innovation. The selection of mentees will prioritize women facing barriers in STEM, ensuring diversity and inclusivity. Personalized development plans will be created, and progress monitored through regular assessments. The programme will also offer networking opportunities through events and workshops. Success stories will be promoted on platforms like STEM4ALL to inspire others, while organizations will provide regular progress reports and evaluations to ensure the programme's impact and accountability.

***Activity 1.2.2 To conduct assessment of public perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes on gender mainstreaming in STEM (UNDP)***

This project activity centres on a comprehensive assessment of public perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards gender mainstreaming in the context of Women in STEM, with the overarching goal of advancing women's economic status in STEM fields. The assessment seeks to identify and address barriers hindering women's participation in STEM, leveraging strategic interventions informed by societal insights. The

assessment will meticulously unveil prevailing gender biases, stereotypes, and societal attitudes that serve as obstacles for women in STEM. This foundational understanding will guide targeted interventions aimed at challenging and dismantling stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive environment conducive to women's economic empowerment.

Informed by insights gained from public attitudes, the project will strategically shape communication campaigns to positively influence public discourse surrounding women in STEM. By addressing misconceptions and promoting the value of women's participation in STEM, the initiative aims to create a supportive societal environment.

The assessment will also serve as a compass for advocacy efforts, helping identify key stakeholders and allies. This strategic approach ensures that advocacy initiatives are tailored to address specific concerns or misconceptions hindering the advancement of women in STEM, facilitating impactful policy changes. The project will extend its impact to educational initiatives, utilizing assessment insights to inform programmes that promote STEM education among girls. By addressing gaps in knowledge and understanding, the initiative aims to encourage more women to pursue STEM careers, equipping them with the skills necessary for economic empowerment.

In collaboration with industries, the project will leverage assessment findings to encourage industry collaboration and create more inclusive workplaces. This initiative envisions an environment where women can thrive, progress economically, and contribute significantly to STEM-related industries. The workplace culture, influenced by societal attitudes, will be a focal point for intervention. Insights from the assessment will guide organizations in addressing gender-related challenges within their structures, fostering a positive workplace culture that contributes to women's professional growth and economic advancement.

Regular assessments will provide benchmarks to measure changes in public perceptions and attitudes over time. This ongoing monitoring will enable stakeholders to identify successful strategies and areas needing further attention, ensuring a sustained effort towards advancing women's economic status in STEM. By promoting positive narratives, highlighting role models, and showcasing success stories identified through the assessment, the project aims to inspire others and contribute to changing societal attitudes towards women in STEM. This holistic approach aligns with the broader mission of societal transformation, creating an environment that values and empowers women in STEM, propelling them towards greater economic success.

Under this Activity, tasks will be: Develop a methodology for perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards gender mainstreaming in STEM in economies of the region; Organise procurement and select a partners to implement assessment of public perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes; Ensure quality and create innovative communication products to inform public and decision-makers about key findings. It is expected that outreach in the assessment will be between 5 and 7,000 people from the region.

### ***Activity 1.2.3 Develop awareness-raising activities showcasing women's potential in the region (UNDP)***

In tandem with the comprehensive project activity aiming to advance women's economic status in STEM through societal transformation, a series of awareness-raising initiatives will be launched to showcase and celebrate the immense potential of women in the region's STEM landscape. These activities seek to shift societal perceptions, challenge stereotypes, and inspire a collective recognition of the invaluable contributions women make to STEM fields.

UNDP will provide grants to members of the Women in STEM Network to support awareness-raising activities as part of Activity 1.2.3, which aims to showcase women's potential in the region and shift societal perceptions regarding their role in STEM. UNDP in cooperation with Regional Women in STEM Network has identified following set of awareness raising activities:

**Inspiring Success Stories:** Through a compelling storytelling campaign, we will spotlight inspiring success stories of women who have excelled in STEM professions within the region. These narratives will not only celebrate individual achievements but also serve as powerful testimonials, demonstrating the diverse roles women play in driving innovation and contributing to STEM advancements.

**Visibility through Media Campaigns:** Engaging media channels, both traditional and digital, we will launch targeted campaigns featuring accomplished women in STEM. This multimedia approach aims to amplify their visibility, showcasing their expertise, leadership, and contributions to STEM fields. By creating a positive and empowering narrative, we seek to challenge existing stereotypes and foster an environment that values diversity in STEM.

**STEM Role Model Series:** Establishing a STEM Role Model Series, we will conduct interviews and profiles of exceptional women in STEM, highlighting their journeys, challenges, and triumphs. These profiles will be disseminated across various platforms, providing aspiring women with relatable and inspiring role models who have navigated similar paths in STEM careers.

**Collaborative Webinars:** Collaborating with industry experts, educational institutions, and influential figures, we will organize webinars and workshops addressing the potential and contributions of women in STEM. These interactive sessions will not only showcase women's expertise but also provide a platform for discussions on fostering a more inclusive STEM ecosystem.

**STEM Education Outreach Programmes:** Implementing targeted outreach programmes in collaboration with schools and universities, we will introduce STEM education initiatives that specifically encourage young girls to explore and pursue STEM fields. These programmes will include mentorship opportunities, hands-on workshops, and interactive sessions with women who have excelled in STEM careers.

**Inclusive Events and Conferences:** Promoting inclusivity within STEM-related events and conferences in WB and in the EU, UNDP will actively support the participation and recognition of women experts. By ensuring diverse representation, these events will contribute to dismantling gender biases and showcasing the wealth of knowledge and skills women bring to the forefront of STEM discussions.

**Interactive Online Platforms:** Launching interactive online platforms, such as forums and social media campaigns, UNDP will encourage discussions and engagement around women in STEM in particular with young women. These platforms will serve as spaces for sharing stories, insights, and fostering a supportive community that actively champions gender diversity in STEM.

These awareness-raising activities align seamlessly with the broader project initiative focused on societal transformation. By spotlighting women's potential in STEM through inspiring narratives and collaborative efforts, we aim to shape a cultural shift that recognizes, values, and actively supports women's economic empowerment in STEM fields within our region. UNDP will implement a series of tasks to support NGOs within the Women in STEM Network in delivering awareness-raising activities. These tasks include designing the grant framework by developing guidelines, funding allocation, and application procedures; launching a call for proposals and providing detailed information to applicants; evaluating proposals and selecting recipients based on feasibility, impact, and alignment with the initiative's goals; and formalizing agreements with clear performance indicators. UNDP will provide capacity-building and technical support, monitor project implementation by tracking progress and collecting reports, and disburse funds based on milestones. Additionally, UNDP will ensure financial accountability, promote NGO activities through its channels, conduct final evaluations, and compile lessons learned to inform future initiatives. Through this process, UNDP will ensure NGOs have the resources and support needed to effectively showcase women's potential in STEM across the Western Balkans, driving societal shifts in perceptions and advancing gender equity in these fields.

The comprehensive strategy for promoting women in STEM includes the development of robust communication tools and online profiles for the Regional Women in STEM Network in running e-campaigns and targeting various online platforms, including UNDP STEM4ALL and the EU STEM Coalition.

This activity has envisaged following tasks: Define awareness raising goals informed by the assessment findings; Develop communications tools and online profiles of the Regional Women in STEM Network; The first task regarding grant programme is to define eligibility criteria for organizations to apply, focusing on Women in STEM Network membership and previous experience in awareness-raising initiatives. Next,

funding opportunities will be publicly announced, detailing available grants, eligibility, application processes, and deadlines, ensuring broad outreach through the Regional Women in STEM Network.

The third task involves facilitating application submission, where organizations will submit proposals outlining their awareness-raising activities, objectives, target audiences, and budgets. A structured review process will then evaluate applications based on feasibility, impact, and alignment with project goals, with feedback provided to all applicants, particularly those not funded.

Successful applicants will enter into grant agreements outlining funding terms, reporting requirements, and performance indicators. Funds will be disbursed in installments based on milestone completion and progress reports. Monitoring and evaluation will track fund usage and assess the impact of activities through regular progress reports.

Finally, capacity-building workshops will be organized to support grantees in refining proposals and implementing their awareness-raising activities. These tasks empower organizations within the Women in STEM Network to promote gender equality and celebrate women's contributions to STEM in the Western Balkans.

It is expected that campaign outreach in the region will count at least 500,000 impressions, likes, shares, and comments on the communication content shared and at least 600 participants in outreach events organised. The activity will include organizing approximately 15-20 events, including conferences, webinars, and outreach programmes, across the six Western Balkan IPA beneficiaries. It is expected to engage around 1,500-2,000 stakeholders, including women in STEM, policymakers, educators, industry leaders, and representatives from civil society organizations.

***Activity 1.2.4 To conduct research on gender responsiveness of existing policies and practices impacting economic development and green agenda (UNDP)***

This activity is oriented towards better understanding of the gender dimensions of transition to green economies and climate change in the Western Balkans and to understand shortfalls if economies fail to adopt a gender responsive approach. In order to understand the impact climate change has and will have on our lives – and how it will have diverse impacts on different groups of people UNDP will support this research to create better understanding how the policies implemented to address climate change have an impact on realities of both women and men in Western Balkans. The EU Green Deal covers various areas, including energy, biodiversity, sustainable mobility, food and agriculture, building and renovation and the move towards a circular economy. The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans is the growth strategy for the region that aims to tackle the challenges of climate change and green transition and assist the Western Balkan economies to align environmental regulations with the European acquis. This highly important process needs to have gender lenses and Regional Women in STEM Network and UNDP will conduct research on gender responsiveness of existing policies and practices impacting economic development and green agenda.

This research initiative is designed to conduct a comprehensive examination of existing policies and practices in the realms of economic development, STEM, green agenda, and the gender dimensions of the transition to green economies. The overarching goal is to pinpoint gaps and opportunities for advancing Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) within the intricate context of STEM and green initiatives, taking into account the specific challenges and opportunities presented by the transition to a green economy.

Conducting a meticulous analysis of prevailing national and organizational policies concerning economic development, STEM, green agenda, and the gender dimensions of transitioning to green economies offers WB6 policy landscape. The assessment evaluates the explicit inclusion of gender considerations and women's empowerment within the framework of the green economy. Also, research identifies barriers obstructing women's participation in STEM, green, and green economy transition sectors. The exploration includes understanding how the transition to a green economy impacts women differently and evaluating enablers contributing to their economic empowerment in the context of the green economy and what can be done differently to assure gender-responsive policies and practices on overall economic development, and

sustainability. This analysis delves into how the inclusion of women in STEM, green, and green economy transition sectors contributes to innovation, sustainability, and economic growth.

Research will investigate current practices within STEM industries, green development initiatives, and the ongoing transition to green economies while engaging with government agencies, STEM organisations, environmental NGOs and women's empowerment groups. The focus will include assessing the in-depth understanding of the gender responsiveness of existing policies and practices amid the transition to green economies as well as gender responsiveness of recruitment, retention, and promotion practices, as well as workplace policies that influence women's participation and advancement across these interconnected sectors. Identifying regional and local best practices and success stories showcasing tangible improvements in women's economic empowerment within STEM, green, and green economy transition fields will help extracting lessons learned to inform potential replication in the evolving green economy context.

Research will help identification of gaps and opportunities for advancing women's economic empowerment in STEM and green sectors considering capacity among stakeholders for implementing green economy-responsive and gender-inclusive measures and suggesting policy recommendations that integrate gender dimensions in the context of green economies.

This activity envisages following tasks: Development of comprehensive methodology to conduct a gender gap analysis and its trend under economic development and Green Deal agenda in Western Balkans Six; Procurement selection of implementing agency and monitoring conducting of research in all WB6; Identify areas where existing policies and practices fall short in advancing gender equality against European green deal; Register trends in the period of programme implementation. Research report developed will be covering Western Balkans 6 economies and will have integrated at least 6 succinct policy briefs derived from the research report.

***Activity 1.2.5 To design and organise Thematic Training Programmes on Gender Mainstreaming in STEM focusing on green economy (UNDP)***

Training Programmes on Gender Mainstreaming in STEM encompasses a multifaceted approach to advance gender equality in green economy. UNDP will put emphasizes on the empowerment of women in the transition to green economies and arising opportunities from the Women in STEM perspectives while leveraging existing achievement and partnerships with Regional Women in STEM Network and with different educational structures such as public universities, VET schools, chambers of commerce, but also EIGE adding comparative experiences from EU member states.

This project activity is a natural extension of the previously detailed research on Women in STEM and their pivotal role in the transition to a green economy. Building upon the research findings that meticulously identified both barriers and opportunities for Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in STEM fields amid the green transition, the Thematic Training Programmes on Gender Mainstreaming in STEM are crafted to seamlessly translate these insights into actionable strategies.

The activity begins with curriculum design leveraging the insights gleaned from the research to tailor the training curriculum. This tailored approach addresses the specific challenges and opportunities identified for women in STEM during the green economy transition.

Educational thematic Modules are thoroughly developed and seamlessly integrate the gender dimensions outlined in the assessment of perceptions, research on gender responsiveness of policies within green agenda and assessment of ecosystem for entrepreneurs to offer comprehensive views and analyses. These modules emphasize the unique opportunities and challenges women encounter in STEM fields within the context of the green economy. Thematic content aligns with identified gaps and best practices, fostering practical application. Expert facilitated learning is dominant, involving engaging trainers with dual expertise in gender and a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities pinpointed in the research. Their guidance acts as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation, specifically addressing the nuances of the green economy transition with gender lenses. Case studies and best practices drawn from the research are seamlessly integrated to illustrate successful gender mainstreaming in STEM

projects during the green economy transition and will become integral part of learning module. This contextualized approach empowers participants to apply learned principles in real-world scenarios. Also, the training programmes provide a platform for professionals to collectively explore strategies that align with the green economy transition, fostering a collaborative network. Online learning will be also employed to facilitate dynamic and continuous learning experiences. This ensures that participants actively engage with the thematic content while sharing insights and strategies relevant to the green economy transition, upon the learning events in person. Direct application of research insights to tailor training programmes that specifically address gender mainstreaming challenges and opportunities in STEM during the green economy transition will empower Women in STEM Network with an enhanced capacity to integrate gender-responsive practices aligned with the green economy transition. Practical understanding of gender biases and effective strategies to mitigate them within STEM fields, will help fostering ongoing support and collaboration around new joint actions for Women in STEM Network in particular when it comes to definition of the joint actions towards gender-responsive STEM environment, actively contributing to the goals of the green economy transition.

This Activity envisages following tasks: Assessment of Women in STEM needs in WB6 with focus on green economy, green deal and green transition opportunities; Mapping obstacles and challenges creating gender disparities in education and employment in the spheres of STEM and green economy; Organising two coordination meetings of the Regional Women in STEM Network annually to exchange experience and identify jointly pursued progress, compile findings and prepare advocacy messages and strategies; Capacitate each of the six wings of the Regional Women in STEM Network. At least six coordination meetings of the Regional Women in STEM Network will gather at least 200 members of the Regional Women in STEM Network.

This activity is expected to directly benefit approximately 500 individuals over the course of the programme. This includes 300 participants who will engage in the in-person training sessions and workshops, and at least 200 members of the Regional Women in STEM Network who will take part in the coordination meetings. Additionally, the online learning platform will provide ongoing resources and support to these participants, further extending the impact of the training programmes.

#### ***Activity 1.2.6 To support regional “best idea in action” to mainstream gender into the STEM (UNDP)***

In the dynamic sphere of STEM, women are emerging as pioneers, carving transformative paths, shattering barriers, and serving as inspirations for a future where innovation transcends gender limitations. Collaborating closely with the Regional Women in STEM Network, UNDP and the RCC have borne witness to a plethora of inspirational initiatives. The best practices championed by these trailblazers, now aggregated within the Regional Network, extend beyond mere academic excellence. They reflect a profound commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity, illuminating the way for countless aspiring members within the STEM community.

This project activity is therefore strategically designed to amplify the impact of these ground-breaking initiatives, specifically focusing on organizational and systemic levels concerning women in STEM, green economy, and digitalization. By leveraging the wealth of experience and knowledge amassed within the Regional Women in STEM Network, the aim is to catalyse the sharing of at least 20 best practices throughout the region. These practices, cultivated through collaboration with UNDP and other partners, will spotlight replicable approaches that can be further advanced and scaled. The objective is clear: to illustrate that the future landscape of STEM, digitalization, and the green economy is not only vibrant and diverse but undeniably female.

The core essence of this activity lies in its commitment to spotlighting and disseminating innovative solutions that transcend individual achievements, impacting organizational cultures and systemic structures. By showcasing these best practices, the project endeavours to inspire a ripple effect, encouraging the wider adoption of gender mainstreaming in STEM-related domains. This initiative aligns with the broader vision of creating an ecosystem where women's contributions to STEM, digitalization, and the green economy are not only recognized but actively cultivated and celebrated. Through collaborative efforts, the project seeks

to contribute to a paradigm shift, reinforcing the notion that the future of these critical domains is inherently interconnected with the empowerment and active participation of women.

This Activity envisages following tasks: Establishment of the regional competition for “best idea in action” to support national and/or regional level advocacy initiative to mainstream gender into the STEM with focus on advancement of green economies and boost digitalisation; Identify and promote “Best ideas in action”. At least 20 best practices will be identified and promoted in advocacy and awareness raising work.

***Activity 1.2.7 To organise regional hackathons within an existing structure like an incubator/accelerator or public university aiming to create tools and digital solutions to empower women (UNDP)***

In a strategic endeavour to foster innovation, collaboration, and digital empowerment, UNDP entails organizing regional hackathons within existing structures such as incubators/accelerators or public universities. The primary objective is to bring together a diverse array of like-minded individuals, cultivating an environment that nurtures unconventional ideas with the potential to reshape perspectives, develop technological solutions, and even address global challenges. In alignment with the broader vision of the UNDP, this initiative aims to send a powerful message: women are indispensable contributors in tackling the world's most pressing problems.

Collaboration will be a cornerstone of these hackathons, with the engagement of the Regional Women in STEM Network, academia, Ministries of Science, Technological Parks, Chambers of Commerce, and the private sector. By leveraging the collective expertise of these stakeholders, the hackathons will transcend traditional boundaries, encouraging participants to explore and innovate at the intersection of technology, science, and gender empowerment. This collaborative effort extends beyond the hackathon event itself. Ministries of Science, Technological Parks, Chambers of Commerce, and the private sector will be actively engaged to take forward the incubation and prototyping of solutions identified during the hackathon. This ensures that the innovative ideas generated in the hackathon are not confined to a theoretical realm but progress to tangible prototypes and, potentially, scalable solutions. The project strategically taps into existing acceleration labs and innovative initiatives within the region, synergizing efforts to support the Regional Women in STEM Network in orchestrating these impactful events. By integrating resources from these existing hubs of innovation, the project ensures a seamless and efficient execution of the hackathons, maximizing the potential for meaningful outcomes. Forge partnerships with existing incubators/accelerators, public universities, Ministries of Science, Technological Parks, Chambers of Commerce, and private sector entities to establish a robust ecosystem for the hackathons, providing logistical support, mentorship, and infrastructure. Also, facilitate the transition from hackathon ideas to actionable solutions by involving Ministries of Science, Technological Parks, Chambers of Commerce, and the private sector in the incubation and prototyping phases. Establish mechanisms for ongoing support, mentorship, and potential funding for promising projects that emerge from the hackathons. This ensures sustained impact beyond the event itself and ensures that promising solutions are developed further toward implementation.

Stakeholders from academia, private sector, and relevant ministries to participate as mentors, judges, and supporters. Their involvement adds value by providing guidance, resources, and potential pathways for implementation. Also, close collaboration with the Regional Women in STEM Network to ensure representation, diversity, and inclusivity in hackathon participation, power the network's insights to tailor the hackathon themes to address pertinent challenges faced by women in STEM. Therefore, design hackathons with specific themes addressing gender-related challenges in STEM, promoting digital solutions, and empowering women may span areas such as education, workplace inclusivity, health, and technology-driven entrepreneurship.

Through this well-rounded methodology, the project activity envisions not only creating a platform for innovation and collaboration but also catalysing tangible solutions that empower women in STEM, contributing to a more inclusive and dynamic technological landscape.

Activity has integrated the following tasks: an open call for innovators to participate in two annual hackathons aimed at addressing priority challenges identified by the Women in STEM network; selection of the six best ideas per hackathon based on preset criteria; awarding six grants per hackathon (one grantee

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\* For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For UN Women, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

from each WB6 country) to support the incubation and prototyping of these ideas; organization of two annual hackathon-related events; and ensuring visibility and communication for the hackathons and awarded grants. Activity will gather at least 60 participants from WB6 economies. This comprehensive approach ensures a sustained impact beyond the event itself, fostering a robust ecosystem for continuous innovation and support. The hackathons are strategically designed to foster partnerships with existing incubators, accelerators, and public universities, providing logistical support, mentorship, and infrastructure necessary for success. Furthermore, mechanisms for ongoing support, mentorship, and potential funding are established to ensure promising projects continue towards full implementation, contributing to a more inclusive and dynamic technological landscape.

***Activity 1.2.8 To deliver a mentorship programme to 800 women in the region leveraging UN Women’s partnership with Women in Tech. (UN Women)***

The Digital Literacy Programme aims to empower women and girls from marginalized groups and communities across the Western Balkans through comprehensive digital skills training and advocacy, including programming, website development, technology against gender-based violence, cyber violence, coding, introduction to artificial intelligence, and exploring digital creativity.

This activity will be undertaken through a partnership agreement with Women in Tech within the existing Memorandum of Understanding between both organizations. Women in Tech® Global is the world’s leading organization dedicated to closing the gender gap and empowering women to embrace technology. Women in Tech® Global operates on four pillars: education, business, digital inclusion, and advocacy. UN Women ECARO, Women’s Economic Empowerment Advisor, will conceptualize the activity with Women in Tech and provide technical assistance and oversight to the overall process.

This activity will encompass the technical expertise of the ECA Women’s Economic Empowerment Advisor and the services of Women in Tech (see detailed budget in Annex III).

**Activities under Outcome 2 / Output 2.1**

***Activity 2.1.1 To establish and operate a community of practice on the development, improvement, and management of referral pathways in the region that encompass multi-stakeholder articulated and coordinated dialogue informed by best practices. (UN Women)***

During Phase I and Phase II of the programme “Implementing norms, changing minds,” UN Women supported women’s rights organizations to build the capacities of service providers at the local, country and sub-regional levels to undertake risk assessments, improve case management and provision of services as well as align new and existing protocols on cooperation in response to violence and other by-laws that regulate service provision with existing normative frameworks. “Implementing norms, changing minds” also supported regular consultations of referral mechanisms at all levels level to address gaps in multisectoral cooperation and coordination towards the standardization of service provision.

Specialized and generalized services should address TF VAW, as emphasized in the agreed conclusions of the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. This necessitates 1) the revision of protocols for multisectoral cooperation and the development of capacities for professionals from all sectors involved in EVAW; 2) improvement in knowledge and tools for documenting TF VAW; 3) systematic integration of cybercrime police into multisectoral mechanisms, with their roles in responding to TF VAW clearly defined in bylaws or protocols; 4) guidelines for data protection to accompany any intervention focused on protection of women and girls from VAW; 5) the promotion of greater cooperation and coordination between CSOs through referral pathways; 6) the particular focus of referral pathways on addressing the needs of vulnerable groups of women; and 7) the development of specific protection mechanisms to protect women activists and civil society actors engaged in support services to VAW survivors as they are exposed more to TF violence.

Leveraging best practices from referral systems in the region, this activity will create a community of practice (CoP) to strengthen referral pathways and facilitate exchanges of knowledge and experience related to the delivery of online and offline services for women and girl survivors of violence. The CoP will review protocols for multisectoral cooperation and discuss and outline the required capacity building needs, knowledge and tools for documenting TF VAW. Cybercrime police will be approached to become an integral part of multisectoral mechanisms, and targeted support will be provided to define their roles in responding to TF VAW in bylaws or protocols.

Particular attention will be paid to ensure that support services are designed in line with needs of particularly “minoritized” groups of women, such as women living in rural and remote areas, women with disabilities, women affected by conflict, and refugee and displaced women. The rationale for developing referral systems is to promote a holistic approach to supporting women victims of violence through a range of services including physical safety and shelter, helplines, legal support, health and social services, and psychosocial counselling. They may also include links to services that further women’s education and economic empowerment. A unified database utilized by all parties is essential for oversight and to monitor the support being provided to women; it also provides valuable data on violence for planning and advocacy. Developing a referral system does not necessarily mean establishing new services but rather coordinating information, support and services to women victims of violence by credible organizations that have a competency in providing quality services while documentation is key. The CoPs will be an opportunity for practitioners to share information, learn from each other, and strengthen their practice. First, the Programme will define the purpose and objective of the community, determine who will be part of it (the who of the community, including stakeholders), and practices by which the community will function (how the community organizes itself, its operating principles, its governance mechanisms). The process of defining the community’s purpose will be informed by a desk review of existing mappings and assessments of referral mechanisms models and approaches in the region followed by more qualitative research, with a view to identify the topics that will be addressed by the community of practice.

This activity will encompass Programme staff time, a partner agreement <sup>21</sup> with one CSO/ NGO to coordinate and strengthen the Community of Practice (CoP) (to be engaged through an open call for proposals) (see detailed budget in Annex III).

***Activity 2.1.2 To undertake policy advocacy and provide technical assistance for the introduction and implementation of specific gender-sensitive normative frameworks and services across the region. (UN Women)***

The programme will undertake advocacy and provide technical assistance to adequately address TF VAW in all its manifestations to revise articles that are indirectly applicable in existing normative frameworks and/or introduce new ones. The programme will raise awareness among national stakeholders, including gender equality mechanisms, ministries of justice, and ministries of interior, about the need to enhance the legal and policy framework, and keep them abreast of the global and regional processes related to the topic, such as those undertaken by undertaken by the Council of Europe, EU, UN General Assembly, Secretary General, UNSRVAV and Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), with the support of the UN Statistical Commission,<sup>22</sup> WHO and UN Women.

According to a recent mapping of normative frameworks for combating TF VAW in the region, only a few IPA beneficiaries have incorporated provisions that directly address some forms/dimensions of TF VAW.<sup>23</sup> However, in nearly all cases, these provisions were designed to address general forms of technology-

<sup>21</sup> As per UN Women Programme Partner Management Policy, partner agreement (PA) with NGO/CSO is signed with civil society organizations for the implementation of activities of a project/programme implemented directly by UN Women. As per policy, NGO/CSO is considered a Responsible Party (RP) that has specific specialized and provides services as per signed partner agreement and defined ToR. UN Women is responsible for monitoring implementation, issue and risk management, grievance mechanisms and project reporting, and for obtaining assurance through audits and spot checks. The modality enables strengthening national capacities and promoting national ownership in the delivery of results and activities to support Projects and related activities for sustainable development.

<sup>22</sup> At the 54<sup>th</sup> Session (2023) of the UN Statistical Commission, the need for methodological work to measure technology—facilitated was recognized: <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/54>

<sup>23</sup> UN Women (2023), op. cit.

facilitated abuse (such as identity theft, hacking, abuse of personal data, etc.) without consideration to their specific use against and impact on women and girls. In other cases, references to TF VAW are primarily related to prevention and awareness-raising on the dangers of technology rather than on protection, response or sanctioning.

The 67<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women has delivered a number of agreed conclusions on technology-facilitated violence against women and recommended actions that should be adopted by international and national stakeholders in order to improve legal and policy framework in response to TF VAW. Among other things, state parties are urged to develop, amend and expand policies and legislation and strengthen their implementation to prevent, eliminate and respond to TF VAW; develop effective gender and age responsive strategies for preventing and combating the sexual exploitation and abuse of girls in digital contexts; and strengthen the capacity and improve policy coherence and coordination of government actors to develop knowledge, skills and digital expertise to prevent and elimination TF VAW. The Commission also calls on UN Women to play a central role in supporting governments and national gender equality mechanisms to address these recommendations.

Further analysis of the normative frameworks might be required to develop concrete measures for improvement. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 and Istanbul Convention Recommendation No. 1 will also inform concrete measures.

This activity will require Programme staff time, a partner agreement with a CSO/ NGO to advocate for the introduction and implementation of specific gender-sensitive normative frameworks related to TF VAW (to be selected through an open call for proposals), and the services of an international consultant to provide support on normative frameworks (see the detailed budget in Annex III).

***Activity 2.1.3 To undertake capacity building for women’s civil society organizations about TF violence against women definitions, current state, normative frameworks and key stakeholders. (UN Women)***

This activity will encompass a comprehensive capacity-building programme for CSOs (targeting at least 50 CSOs and 10 CSO networks) on TF VAW, including the concept, terminology, prevention and response measures, advocacy tools, involvement of men and boys, and participation in regional and global processes related to developing or enhancing legal instruments. It will also provide support to engage them in these processes.

This activity will encompass Programme staff time, a partner agreement with one CSO/NGO to be selected through an open call for proposals and a consultancy for delivering online training to reduce costs (see detailed budget in Annex III).

***Activity 2.1.4 To organize two regional forums on EAW in the region to convene local, national and regional stakeholders to accelerate the GE agenda and EAW commitments informed by national and subregional and global frameworks and to contribute to intergovernmental processes with a focus on the latest developments on violence and gender-based discrimination in digital contexts. (UN Women)***

This activity builds upon the well-received Regional Forum within the UN Women programme “Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye: Implementing norms, changing minds” Phase I and Phase II,” funded by the European Union, to include the domain of technology-facilitated violence against women.

According to the final programme evaluation of Phase II, “there is a need for a formalized regional cooperation mechanism (...) at the regional level, strengthening networks and partnerships are crucial, including regular forums, conferences and exchanges to facilitate dialogue, knowledge-sharing and joint learning among participating IPA beneficiaries, national and regional organizations, and stakeholders working on ending violence against women. Engagement with international institutions such as the EU, the Council of Europe and other critical entities involved in ending violence against women is recommended to leverage their expertise, resources and commitment to promoting human rights and gender equality. Strengthening country-level coordination efforts and fostering partnerships with other initiatives, organizations and projects on gender equality and violence against women will contribute to a more

comprehensive and sustainable approach.”<sup>24</sup>The Forum will advance the development of comprehensive policies and inclusive partnerships for the prevention of and response to TF VAW. The Regional Forum is the only of its kind in the region, convening key stakeholders on gender equality from the Western Balkans and facilitating a space for dialogue and exchange among civil society, government, and regional institutions. The Forum is an opportunity for IPA beneficiaries to set a common agenda and explore partnerships and synergies to address common challenges in the region. The event also enables cross-border cooperation on advancing the gender equality agenda such as effective cooperation among national police forces so victims are able to report violence to the police in their own jurisdiction rather than in perpetrators' jurisdictions. The Forum speaks to UN Women's convenor role within the UN System, government partners, women's rights and other CSOs, the private sector, and other stakeholders for awareness raising, knowledge sharing and capacity building and support towards implementing comprehensive approaches to EVA.

This activity will be implemented directly by UN Women through technical staff support and against conference services, IT support audiovisual services (international consultant for Web design and development, graphic design, and content creation), translation services, and travel and accommodation budget lines. The activity will require, inter alia, developing a concept note and annotated agenda with all co-conveners (including the IPA beneficiary hosting the Forum), undertaking all required logistical preparations, and developing communications and visibility materials (see detailed budget in Annex III).

## **Activities under Outcome 2 / Output 2.2**

### ***Activity 2.2.1 To foster collaboration between the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem, tech companies and VAWG service providers to develop innovative tools to prevent and respond to violence with a focus on TF VAW (UN Women)***

The programme will foster a space for partners to brainstorm insightful and forward-thinking solutions to design, develop and implement solutions to prevent TF VAW by bringing together IT companies, women's entrepreneurs, and service providers to socialize each group's knowledge, understanding and expertise. All three parties will meet at least twice a year.

The programme will provide a fora to exchange ideas, strengthen relationships with the Programme partners, and have the chance to challenge each group to think about what is needed and how to shape it. This activity will be implemented in partnership with Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO #ConnectToCreate and it is expected to benefit around 400 women.

This activity will require Programme staff time, the professional services of a tech company to utilize artificial intelligence customized to the region and its local languages to prevent online violence (the company will be hired through a request for proposals) and a partner agreement with one CSO/NGO to co-develop and test innovative tools to prevent and respond to violence with a focus on TF VAW, through an open call for proposals as per ToR to be developed.(see detailed budget in Annex III).

### ***Activity 2.2.2 To undertake regional communications and behavioural change initiatives among targeted populations to raise awareness, nudge behavioural change and provide information on rights and available services. (UN Women)***

Numerous programmes designed to prevent VAW have raised awareness and shifted attitudes about abuse, but far fewer have successfully reduced violent behaviour. This has led researchers and practitioners to explore whether and how behaviour change theories and approaches might be applied to support the development of more effective VAW prevention programmes. The nature of VAW, the contexts in which it occurs, and the populations affected vary. Approaches to understand and address VAW therefore need to

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<sup>24</sup> Final evaluation of the regional programme on ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds, Phase II. Available at: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/final-evaluation-of-the-regional-programme-on-evaw-in-the-western-balkans-and-Türkiye>

be flexible enough to respond to this diversity. Contemporary behavioural change theories do not assume humans are rational beings or that we always make decisions we know are best for us. Instead, they encourage context-led analysis of the drivers of harmful behaviours in order to devise solutions to change those behaviours. There are many different theories about and approaches to behaviour change processes, but they all have a common focus on factors that can hinder or enable behaviour change. Understanding these factors can support the design of more effective interventions and strategies to change the targeted behaviours. The programme will partner with a CSO(s) to undertake five step process: Identify the specific behaviour(s) of specific actors they are trying to change; understand the main drivers of the behaviour(s) in the specific context; design interventions to address the drivers of the identified behaviour(s); include strategies to reinforce and embed behaviour change(s); and monitor if and how the intervention(s) lead(s) to the desired behaviour change(s) (beyond the duration of the programme). In addition to the behavioural change initiatives, this activity will also increase the general awareness of target populations, particularly adolescents and young adults, of TF VAW as a phenomenon, how to protect oneself when using technology, and how to respond to incidents of violence. The partnership with a CSO will be reinforced by an expert on behavioural approaches to gender equality.

This activity will require Programme staff time, the services of a company to undertake the communication campaign (selected through a request for proposals), and a partner agreement with a CSO/ NGO to be selected through an open call for proposals (see detailed budget in Annex III).

***Activity 2.2.3 To train media outlets and monitor media reporting, publish investigative articles and develop broadcasting standards on reporting TF VAW (UN Women)***

The Programme will empower citizens of the Western Balkans to access accurate, reliable and relevant information by working with media on reporting related to TF VAW. The Programme will monitor media reporting on TF VAWG and create a pool of 36 skilled that will learn about the implementation of journalistic and broadcasting standards specifically related to media coverage of various facets of TF VAW. The journalist will be selected through a call for applications.

This activity will require Programme staff time and a partner agreement with a CSO/ NGO specialized in media reporting as a pillar of democratic citizenship. The CSO/NGO will be selected through an open call for proposals (see detailed budget in Annex III).

***Activity 2.2.4 To partner with technology companies to regulate and monitor TF VAW(UN Women)***

The prevention and mitigation of TF VAW cannot succeed without the cooperation of technology companies, who control the platforms, devices, and technologies through which violence occurs. This activity will encompass advocating and partnering with at least one technology company to explore the use of artificial intelligence and other machine learning techniques to more effectively identify, respond to and remove incidents of gender-based harassment and violence.

The activity will also strengthen the companies' rules and guidelines related to TF VAW and align them with international legal frameworks and norms, including investing in training for moderators to understand and apply these guidelines. The Programme will also advocate for other policy changes that would improve complaint mechanisms and enhance cooperation with law enforcement agencies to better respond to reports of TF VAW. The Programme will engage with platforms operating in the region to raise awareness and agree on realistic and feasible immediate measures in collaboration with law enforcement bodies.

This activity will require Programme staff time, the professional services of a tech company (service to be procured through a request for proposals); and the services of an international consultant to provide expert technical support on TF VAW (see detailed budget in Annex III).

***Activity 2.2.5 To conduct research on women's participation in the digital economy and violence against women, including TF VAW (UN Women)***

To increase women's participation, the digital economy must be a safe environment for women and girls. This requires actively fighting TF VAW and fixing emerging discriminatory practices, stereotypes, and

biases associated with new digital technologies and tools. The Programme will undertake action-oriented research to unveil how TF VAW prevents women from participating in the digital economy and lay out concrete recommendations to address the issue.

This activity will require Programme staff and the support of an international consultant to undertake the research (see detailed budget in Annex III).

***Activity 2.2.6 To pilot and evaluate prevention and response interventions to tackle VAWG, including TF VAW, to generate knowledge on what works (UN Women)***

Building on the successful implementation of the GenderLab (a space to design and pilot innovative EVAW interventions) undertaken in Phase I of the regional EVAW programme “Implementing norms, changing minds,” and also informed by behavioural change science outlined in Activity 2.2.2, the Programme will create a space for innovation, learning, and evidence production on prevention and response to TF VAW.

This activity will encompass Programme staff time, entering into a partner agreement with one NGO through a call for proposals per the TOR to be developed, and hiring an international consultant to deliver the training. To reduce costs, the training will be delivered online.

### 3. Methodology

UN Women and UNDP will ensure regular coordination and synergies of all interventions undertaken in the framework of this action with both agencies' other work in the areas of ending violence against women and women's economic empowerment as well as with the work of government and NGO partners in this area.

In order to achieve transformative results for GEWE, the action takes a holistic approach by simultaneously working for women's economic empowerment and EVAWG, two mutually reinforcing thematic areas that hinder GEWE. Economic empowerment enables women to leave abusive relationships and make choices free from economic coercion. In parallel, improving the prevention and response to technology-facilitated violence reduces the costs for women and girls – in terms of time, financial resources, energy, psychological well-being, etc. – associated with gender-based violence victimization.

A **human rights-based approach (HRBA)** will be at the heart of the action. The HRBA is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress and often result in groups of people being left behind.<sup>25</sup> A human rights-based approach will be applied to align programme implementation with the international human rights framework and treaty body recommendations, particularly the CEDAW concluding observations, relevant Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions, GREVIO Recommendations, IPA beneficiaries' legal frameworks and stated commitments, as well as relevant ILO standards. The capacities of both duty bearers and rights holders will be strengthened. Activities will support rights holders at the grass-roots level to effectively claim their rights, and the capacities and awareness of duty bearers will be strengthened in central and local government institutions to effectively fulfil their obligations and increase their accountability to gender equality and women's rights commitments. All programme activities will be based on and will apply universal human rights principles such as equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability and the rule of law. Further, the programme is designed on the premise that gender equality and women's rights are integral and fundamental parts of human rights; thus, the programme addresses the developmental and human rights' goals and challenges of Western Balkan states.

The **Leaving No one Behind (LNOB) principle** is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. The LNOB agenda has been increasingly recognized as intersectional, targeting all women and gender non-binary people. Within the context of international development, intersectionality is the idea explaining how sustainable development is intertwined with systems, experiences and identities and how what occurs in one area can have effects on other areas. LNOB not only entails reaching the poorest of the poor but requires combating discrimination and erasing inequalities—and their root causes—within and among IPA beneficiaries.<sup>26</sup> In order to operationalize the LNOB principle, based on the analysis and data, UN Women and UNDP have identified specific population groups that are most marginalized by structural inequalities and intersecting discrimination. These include women and girls belonging to ethnic minority groups, rural women, and women victims/survivors of gender-based violence. Special emphasis will be placed on reaching out to and engaging women belonging to these groups across all areas of work. In addition, efforts will be targeted at filling in the data gaps and generating evidence on the circumstances of these groups for effective policy making and development interventions.

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the UN understanding and utilization of HRBA, available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/human-rights-based-approach>.

<sup>26</sup> *Leaving No One Behind: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams* (Interim Draft), April 2019, Available at <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/leaving-no-one-behind-unsdg-operational-guide-un-country-teams-interim-draft>.

### **Sustainable capacity building**

The project component on women's economic empowerment has also taken into account the previous, current and planned interventions by other international partners in the area of gender equality, women's economic empowerment and leadership, Women in STEM, gender and green deal and gender responsive digitalization agenda.

The project will focus on gender equality assuring participatory, rights centred approach in its work with institutions, private sector, civil society and different parts of population, building co-operation between these stakeholders to create functional and sustainable synergies and broader ownership.

Capacity building of direct beneficiaries, institutions as well as those from the civil sector, will strive to ensure sustainability of the results achieved by the interventions. First, all the interventions are planned and will be implemented following precisely established needs of the concrete beneficiaries, based on, i.e., UNDP's and UN Women's past activities and project, extensive consultations with the beneficiaries and the partners in the project design phase and, importantly, needs assessments in the project as described in the sections of the activities. The project will, in general, promote strong ownership among the Beneficiaries, through proactive consultations and their engagement throughout the process - in the design as well as in the implementation and lessons learned phases. The project will apply various approaches and modalities for effective capacity development and learning, thereby ensuring that the direct beneficiaries will be able to sustain and apply expertise, systems, tools, and knowledge that will be generated and introduced to meet highest gender mainstreaming and women empowerment standards and practices.

### **Research, learning, and knowledge management**

UNDP and UN Women will tap on opportunities to assure cross-regional and global knowledge sharing when it comes to introduction of gender mainstreaming standards and application of Gender Equality Seal in private and public sector, sharing lessons learned among professionals from the same industries.

Among others, training and other forms of knowledge sharing will be developed with partnering institutions where possible. Depending on topics, knowledge transfer curricula and learning materials, and, where applicable, learning tools and platforms, will be purposefully developed for or left for use to the aforementioned partnering institutions and organizations. Mentoring schemes will be applied as per preference of partnering Regional Women in STEM Network to meet their specific needs. Due care will be taken that professionals selected to participate in training and other forms of knowledge sharing will be those that have a commitments and perspective of staying longer with the Regional Alliance, STEMInist and other women's networks and applying and disseminating the acquired knowledge further.

In the area of public awareness raising and promotion of fact-based, analyses and research driven dialogue, the project will focus on and empower specific target groups that have a potential to further expand and influence others: decision makers in public and private sectors, CSO, youth activists, etc. This is a mechanism to lay the ground for longer term impact on broader segments of societies, in particular offering young women change to grow into leaders.

UNDP and UN Women maintain regular communication and continuous coordination with all relevant partners and stakeholders throughout implementation of its regional activities assuring creation of opportunities for synergetic and amplified effects of complementarity in work.

## **Monitoring Evaluation and Learning**

Relevant stakeholders from the Western Balkan region – including public and private sector and civil society, have been consulted in the design of the project strategy and activities from the early start. Existing strategic frameworks and policy documents have also been a basis in the design.

Under the regional programme involving six economies, the UNDP management structure will be based in Montenegro, while utilizing local gender expertise from the remaining five economies. These experts contribute to ensuring effective partnership management, quality assurance, monitoring, and high effectiveness of the programme across. Their involvement facilitates collaboration among local stakeholders and promotes the sharing of best practices tailored to each context. Expert support encompasses a range of specialized services aimed at enhancing programme outcomes, particularly relevant for both outputs under outcome 1. This includes providing technical expertise in relevant fields such as STEM education and gender equality, as well as conducting training and capacity-building workshops for local teams. Additionally, experts assist in designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation frameworks, ensuring quality assurance through standardized protocols, and fostering strategic partnerships among stakeholders. They also contribute to strategic planning, policy advocacy, knowledge sharing, networking, and community engagement, which enhances programme sustainability. Furthermore, expert support aids in resource mobilization by identifying funding opportunities to secure additional resources, ultimately leading to a more robust and effective programme across all participating economies. Experts will provide tailored support to meet the specific needs of the outputs and will prepare reports based on management demand, but no less than annually, to ensure ongoing evaluation and adaptation of the programme's strategies and objectives. Any possible future revision of the project activities would be also based on consultations with the stakeholders and a full regard to the relevant national documents.

Specific needs assessments and scoping reviews at the early stages of the project and, periodically, during the implementation will serve, as also explained in the sections below, to update and add on the assessments and studies done before (through other UNDP and UN Women projects) or during the designing of this project, and to cover some specific angles not addressed by the previous assessments. Periodical or regular data collection and analyses will provide ground to evaluate the activities and approaches and calibrate and adjust them to emerging needs or changing circumstances. These may include, for example, data reflecting dynamic of regional stakeholders' co-operation, number of initiatives, new arising opportunities, etc. Data collection will be done by the project team in a structured regular process for indicators in the logical framework that is included in the Action.

The problem analysis, the intervention logic, and activities laid down in this document are informed by the findings, conclusions, needs assessments, so as institutional knowledge, experiences, best practices and lessons learned from these projects.

The project will also aim to achieve as much sustainability as possible in the private sector and in capacity building of Chambers of Commerce, specifically regarding piloting of UNDP flagship initiative GE Seal. Sustainability will be among key selection criteria for ideas in action and hackathons. By widening the scope of grassroots actors and supporting initiatives and actions in the field of STEM, the pool of women with strengthen capacities, including through training and mentoring will be assured with a view that this is also potential to further expand and influence others that can make specific impact in STEM fields.

## **Evaluation**

A final joint evaluation of the Programme will be jointly commissioned by UN Women and UNDP during the last year of implementation, in order to assess the programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, as well as the added value of a joint programming approach as a cooperation modality for sister United Nations entities. UN Women and UNDP foster highly participatory evaluation processes, and a threefold management structure will be established comprising a joint Evaluation Steering Committee (ESC), a joint Evaluation Management Group (EMG), and a joint Evaluation Reference Group (ERG).

The ESC will endorse the evaluation products. Once the evaluation process is completed, UN Women and UNDP Regional Directors will issue a joint evaluation Management Response (MR) to act upon the evaluation recommendations.

The joint EMG will be integrated by the UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialists and UNDP Data, M&E Analyst and will provide oversight and quality assurance to the evaluation process.

An ERG will also be conformed to foster a highly participatory approach and will be consulted throughout the evaluation process. The joint Evaluation Reference Group will include a valance representation of key external stakeholders involved in the implementation of the programme in the different IPA beneficiaries, including from civil society organizations, national and local governments and development partners.

Specific ToRs for the different bodies that integrate the evaluation management structure will be developed and endorsed by the implementing entities.

The Final Evaluation of the Programme will adhere to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation, UNEG Ethical Code of Conduct and UNEG guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation. The evaluation will have the following objectives:

- Assess the relevance and coherence of the Programme at the national and regional level, as well as its alignment with the needs of the intended beneficiaries and with international agreements and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Assess the organizational efficiency of the Programme in relation to delivering the desired results of the programme.
- Assess the effectiveness related to achievement of the programme results as identified in the programme document, as well as unintended outcomes and the added value of the joint programming approach and programming at regional level.
- Assess the sustainability of the programme's results.
- Analyse how the human rights-based approach and gender equality principles were integrated in the design and implementation of the programme.
- Identify and validate lessons learned, good practices, and innovations of efforts that support gender equality and human rights in this area of work; and
- Provide recommendations with respect to future work related to provision of holistic services including engaging women, men, boys, and girls in promoting respectful relationships and gender equality.

An evaluation dissemination strategy will be developed, and the results of the evaluation disseminated among key stakeholders of the programme and decision-makers to foster learning and accountability. Within six weeks up on approval of the final evaluation report UNDP and UN Women will endorse a joint evaluation Management Response to evaluation recommendations.

### **Provision of Technical Assistance**

The standing in-house gender expertise in the UNDP national and regional offices will be leveraged covers not only in engendering economic green agenda and boosting women's leadership in the region with specific attention to STEM fields, but UNDP will also assure cross-cutting knowledge sharing and synergies in areas relevant for the project, such as peace and stability, rule of law, climate change, youth development, and others. Whenever possible, and following its previous experiences and partnership models, UNDP will rely on internal expertise coupled with, when needed, targeted engagement of specific external partners, if available, that have been active in particular in the field of green deal and gender equality in Western Balkans.

### **Promotion of self (Western Balkans) leadership, partnership and collaboration**

To promote synergies and avoid duplication, this action will be implemented in close cooperation and coordination with the UN system, as well EU DG NEAR and with a number of relevant international and regional organizations such as EIGE and RCC with whom UNDP and UN Women have regular cooperation. As a mechanism for the co-ordination and co-operation, UNDP will set up governance and implementation

bodies comprised of key stakeholders from the institutions, private sector, women’s networks and local CSOs, and leading international partners active in same field. More details in Governance and Implementation arrangements.

The intervention as well as the concrete activities are to be need- and context- based and driven, fit for each participating economy and taking fully into account each of their institutional and legislative setting, various political and social context, as well as the needs already addressed by other international partners or UNDP’s previous interventions. Any future adaptations and revisions will be informed also by these elements. Therefore, activities would be implemented in or include a Beneficiary only if and to the extent the identified needs and other abovementioned elements would call for or justify such intervention.

Thus, the **theory of change** foreseen by the action is the following: **If** (1) capacity is built and new and existing networks are strengthened in the region, including the Gender Equality Leadership Academy, the Gender Equality Alliance in the Western Balkans and the digital chapter of the Women’s Entrepreneurship Expo; **if** (2) there is increased understanding of the main obstacles and challenges creating gender disparities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and ICT education and employment in the Western Balkans and increased opportunities for digital upskilling of women and girls, including those from marginalized groups; **if** (3) referral systems for survivors of technology-facilitated violence are strengthened in order to provide quality, coordinated offline and digital services; and **if** (4) there is increased awareness and ability of women and girls to recognize and report technology-facilitated violence **then** (5) women’s economic empowerment is increased (notably in managerial and leadership roles) and more women and girls enter the STEM, green and digital fields and (6) there is increased safety of women and girls and improved support for those who experience technology-facilitated violence; **thus** (7) women and girls participate in society, fully enjoying and exercising equal economic, labour, and social rights in a safe and secure environment.

The methodology of the UN Women’s project’s work is greatly informed by the theoretical frameworks described in the Council of Europe 2014 report *Preventing Violence against Women: Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention – A collection of papers on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*. These theories underline that while rooted in gender inequality and unequal power relations, gender-based violence against women is the result of multiple risk factors and influences, rather than a single cause. Several models exist to show the interconnections between risk factors and influences and how they lead to perpetration. The “ecological model”, for example, organizes the risk factors by the different levels at which they occur (societal, institutional, community and individual). Hagemann-White (2010) has developed this into an interactive model based on a wide range of research into the different causal factors for the perpetration of abuse, in order to illustrate how the various risk factors intersect at the different levels to form different pathways that lead to gender-based violence against women. This interactive model provides a useful framework for developing strategies for the prevention of violence – defined as the disruption of the means, pathways and mechanisms of gender inequality – because it highlights those contexts that are conducive to perpetration and which therefore need to be disrupted to effectively prevent violence against women. The model locates factors that need to be disrupted on four levels – society, institutions, family/peers and individuals – depending on where the impact appears.<sup>27</sup>

At the **societal (macro) level**, preventive interventions are needed by the State to disrupt existing social structures. Changes in attitudes that contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based violence against women can and should be promoted, for example, by providing positive ideas of what constitutes “masculinity” and regulating the portrayal of violence and the sexualization of women in the media. Below this high-level intervention, measures are needed at the **institutional (meso) level** to change existing norms and values about the compliant behaviour of women. Policies need to address long-standing beliefs of men’s “entitlement” over women, “honour codes” that exist within some communities, gender-based discrimination within education and employment and the failure of agencies to implement sanctions for all types of gender-based violence against women, resulting in widespread impunity. At the next **(micro) level, that of family and/or peers**, factors leading to violence are placed within the context of the family or peer group structure, where general

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<sup>27</sup> Council of Europe, *Preventing Violence against Women: Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention*.

social norms are translated into expected or socially approved practices. This includes historical and cultural gender stereotypes that may exist either within families or, for example, in adolescent peer groups that support anti-social behaviour and/or physical and sexual aggression. Policy and practice that effectively engages men and boys – for example, through work with youth groups, through sport, or through other community-based measures – can work to change social norms by challenging existing gender-based stereotypes and by removing the “rewards” of or “opportunities” for, targeting potential or vulnerable victims. The **individual (ontogenetic) level** – or life history – refers to the characteristics of individuals that contribute to a disposition towards violence and suggests that influences such as poor parenting, early exposure to violence in the home, the existence of a hostile “masculine self-concept” or exposure to “stimulus abuse” (drugs, alcohol) contribute to violence against women. Preventing violence at this level should involve educational and therapeutic interventions for perpetrators, specialist work with abused children or children exposed to parental domestic violence, and preventive education programmes and interventions for parents to reduce harmful substance use. Targeted support to women experiencing GBV is also important at this level.<sup>28</sup>

Building on the above guidance and theoretical frameworks, the proposed action will contribute to the ending of violence against women and girls through awareness-raising, education, training and community intervention efforts.

**Campaigns and awareness-raising** – Public awareness-raising interventions are a central and long-established tool in the prevention of violence against women. They can be an effective measure for challenging stereotypes that perpetuate gender-based violence against women, and they can be targeted at different levels to interrupt the pathways to violence. At the societal level, awareness-raising campaigns can be an effective way to convey a strong message to society that any form of gender-based violence against women is a violation of human rights and should not be tolerated, including harmful practices that are often justified through concepts of culture, religion and “honour,” such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage. At the institutional level, campaigns will mobilize both the public and the private sector in prevention. At the community level, awareness-raising interventions will frame gender-based violence against women as a health and human rights issue and show the community the benefits of eliminating it. Such interventions should offer practical solutions about how members of society can work together to prevent violence against women, for example, by encouraging the community to prepare safer family environments for mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters. At the individual level, awareness-raising will be used to convey safety messages to women and inform victims about their rights, existing laws, and the services available for victims and/or perpetrators. Awareness-raising campaigns will also be targeted to challenge men’s views of acceptable violence, abuse and controlling behaviour in relationships.

**Addressing vulnerable groups**—Vulnerabilities create barriers to accessing and obtaining support, and it must be recognized that individuals may experience multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities that need to be considered. Addressing the needs of vulnerable persons entails both recognition and ensuring inclusion. Recognition requires measures to increase knowledge and understanding of how economic disempowerment and VAWG affect vulnerable groups, such as women from minority ethnic groups.

**Involving men and boys** – As many of the forms of violence against women covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention are perpetrated primarily by men, interventions to prevent gender-based violence against women must actively engage men, alongside women, as actors and agents for change. Working with men to address gender-based violence against women is important to change behaviour, to obtain men’s assistance in strengthening community institutions that can address GBV and to involve men in promoting women’s equality and leadership. Evidence suggests that gender-transformative programmes targeting men and boys are effective at preventing and tackling violence against women. Gender-transformative approaches challenge gender inequality by transforming harmful Gender Norms, Roles and Relations through programmes and strategies that foster progressive changes in power relationships between women and men.

Because of the immense influence that men have on one another, prevention programmes are effective when men assume responsibility for men’s violence against women and when they are approached as part of the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

solution rather than part of the problem. Teaching men to intervene in other men's behaviour can produce positive anti-violence values. Prevention measures that engage men and boys need to overcome potential resistance to be effective. Experience suggests that while there is no single most effective entry point for engaging men as partners, several factors maximize the effectiveness of interventions. To overcome the barrier of resistance from men – often based on fear, negative cultural attitudes, and norms or beliefs that violence against women is a women's issue – measures that target the way that men think and behave need to make the prevention of gender-based violence against women matter to men. This can be done by strategically opening training and education sessions, piquing the interest of men and approaching the topic of GBV at the end, once they have gained trust and opened communication with the trainers, and by encouraging men to take action against violence against women by making it as easy as possible. It can also be accomplished by creating peer environments, especially among young men, in which they feel safe to open up and find positive ways of asserting their masculinity.

**Programme partners** will be public government institutions such as line ministries and gender equality mechanisms within the participating IPA beneficiaries, as well as private sector representatives, networks and companies, regional EU and cross-governmental bodies, regional civil society networks, women's business associations, trade unions, entrepreneurs, chambers of commerce, representatives of STEM industries, the private sector, and academia.

In the component of EVAW, the Action will also sub-contract women-led and women's rights CSOs in its awareness-raising and advocacy interventions through open call for proposals (following UN Women and UNDP corporate rules and procedures for the selection of responsible parties / implementing partners).Eeva

The details about foreseen partnerships are spelled out under each activity.

UN Women will publish the awarded procurement and grant contracts on the following web pages:

- Procurement contracts: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/procurement>; and
- Grants: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/programmeme-implementation>.

UNDP will publish on Procurement contracts [Procurement Notices](#) and NGO Grants on specific project page: <https://www.undp.org/montenegro/projects/eu-4-gender-equality>.

**Target groups** of the intervention are women and girls in the Western Balkans. More specifically, the programme targets women entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs, leaders from private and public sectors, Women in STEM, survivors of technology-facilitated violence against women, women active in the labour market, and women seeking education or employment in STEM. Other target groups include government representatives responsible for promoting women's economic empowerment and preventing VAWG, as well as regional and local government actors involved in referral mechanisms for VAWG. The Action will also target private sector companies and networks. The final beneficiaries of the project are women and girls, mainly living in rural areas, ethnic and religious minorities and victims/survivors of violence or those at high risk of violence, as well as men and boys.

## 4. Implementation and management arrangements

### 4.1. Governance arrangements

#### 1. The Joint Project (JP) Steering Committee that is the main decision-making body of the Action

accountable for the overall results and provides strategic oversight and guidance for the JP team from launch to closure. This includes adjustments to JP results and strategy, progress reports and learning, and evaluation. It will also:

- Review and endorse the JP work plans and budgets and fund transfers.
- Review, as needed, JP resource mobilization needs and recommend and support opportunities to address funding gaps.

- Review and endorse the annual results-based report to identify achievements, constraints and opportunities, and to recommend measures to adapt and strengthen JP strategy and results for greater relevance and effectiveness.
- During the annual progress review<sup>29</sup>: (1) Review progress information, lessons and good practices, including any adjustments made by JP team, (2) Compare actual progress against expected JP results, (3) Consider the contribution of JP results to CF outcome(s), country priorities, and related SDG targets; and (4) Review the sustainability plan and exit strategy and make adjustments (as needed).
- Review and approve any substantive changes that affect expected JP results and the theory of change, involve a no-cost extension, or exceed 25 percent of the annual budget.
- Review and endorse the rolling JP workplan and budget for the next year.
- Share updates and reports with relevant stakeholders.
- Scan the programme environment for changes and monitor assumptions and risks.
- Facilitate the resolution of any external challenges that the JP team may face during the JP cycle
- Assume the role of, or appoint an Evaluation Steering Group to:
  - » Approve the Terms of Reference for the joint evaluation;
  - » Commission and receive the inception, progress and final reports;
  - » Develop and adopt a dispute resolution mechanism for the evaluation process and
  - » Review and endorse the proposed management response to the findings and recommendations from the joint evaluation.

**JP Steering Committee is Co-chaired by:**

- UNDP representative in the region (RR in Montenegro, as delegated by UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and/or Deputy Director of the RBEC)
- UN Women (Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia and/or Deputy Regional Director)
- Members of the JP Steering Committee will include:
  - o A designated representative of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (Western Balkans Regional Programmes, Economic Investment Plan Unit)
  - o A representative from the EU DG NEAR Head of Sector Western Balkans Regional Programmes, Economic Investment Plan Unit

During project implementation, the Steering Committee will invite representatives from UN Women and UNDP in the programme participating IPA beneficiaries and the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office as observers. It may also seek to engage relevant stakeholders and may invite external experts, as observers, for example, other UN agencies, donors, or NGOs/ associations active in the field.

The PSC will provide high-level strategic guidance for implementing the Action and its strategic objectives, results, and associated activities to improve the Action's efficiency, effectiveness, and coherence and help achieve its overall impact. UNDP and UN Women will co-chair SC meetings with EC on a rotational basis.

Secretariat functions are provided by the convening participating UN organisation (i.e. PUNO) for this JP.

JP Steering Committee provides strategic oversight and guidance for the JP team from launch to closure, including adjustments to JP results and strategy, progress reports and learning, and evaluation (as required).

Steering Committee meets at least once annually.

**The Joint Programme Technical Coordination** supports crucial function within the regional programme, a collaborative initiative of UNDP and UN Women. Its primary focus is on joint drafting of inputs for decisions of the Steering Committee (SC) with aim to emphasize the achievement of common strategic results by

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<sup>29</sup> This may be timed to coincide with CF annual review.

capitalizing on the comparative advantages of each participating entity. Pointing up maximum synergy, coherence, and effectiveness, the Technical Coordination Group also plays a key role in identifying lessons learned and advancing mutual coordination. The JP Technical Coordination will bring together designated Senior experts and programme managers from both PUNOs.

#### **4.2. Management arrangements**

**JP Implementation Teams of both PUNOs** responsible for implementation and management of respective joint programme components as per following:

UN Women Implementation Team responsible for the VAWG component and relevant activities under women's economic empowerment component as per Programme document; and

UNDP Implementation Team responsible for the relevant activities under WEE component.

Each JP Implementation Teams of both PUNOs is:

- accountable for effective and efficient implementation of their respective components and activities, according to its programming policies and procedures and financial regulations and rules.
- comprises of responsible programme staff for respective JP component, as per results framework, work plan and budget and monitor and discuss the coordination, sequencing, and implementation of planned development activities by PUNO.
- reports to their respective PUNOs to technically compile narrative and financial report to be presented to AA, JP SC and donor. Reports need to be cleared by the Steering Committee and the clear deadlines for reporting followed.
- maintains its own channels of communication with DG NEAR and EU Delegations on policy and programmatic issues. If communication is related to submission of the reports, then, it goes through the Steering Committee and then MPTF.
- gathers key national and regional stakeholders in for respective components to discuss important aspects of its JP component.
- assures smooth communication with other PUNOs and implementation of endorsed JP coordination, monitoring, communication and reporting methodology, with due diligence.
- each entity programme management team will meet regularly to discuss progress, address emerging issues and coordinate workplans.
- practices a set of teamwork skills: participation, effective listening, collaboration, flexibility and the ability to revise and refine.

**Convening PUNO** in this JP is assigned to UN Women (in line with MPTF pass through management modality), where convening role refers only for the administrative tasks as per following: (1) Organizes and supports meetings of the JP SC; (2) Supports meetings of the JP Technical Coordination meeting, (3) Collects inputs for MPTF AA including conveying fund transfer requests and preparing consolidated narrative reports and, (4) Facilitates audit and evaluation (as may be required), (5) Continuously assures visibility of both PUNO as per Visibility and Communication Plan and guiding principles.

**UN Women Implementation Team** responsible for the VAWG component and relevant activities under women's economic empowerment component as per Programme document comprise of following:

**Regional Project Manager**, possesses specialized knowledge and expertise on advancing gender equality and empowering women, along with advanced familiarity with the region and work experience across all WB6 IPA beneficiaries. (S)he will be leading strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation of the UN Women programme component throughout the region. This involves ensuring alignment with organizational goals, sustainable development objectives, and strategic EU gender targets. (S)he will provide valuable input and policy advice, contributing to the development of effective strategies and initiatives. The Manager will advocate for sustainable development practices, communicate project successes and challenges to diverse audiences, and guide and motivate a diverse team. (S)he will promote teamwork and collaboration, along with innovation to attain project objectives, all the while maintaining effective communication and efficient resource utilization.

Additionally, (s)he will coordinate with other UN agencies, international partners, and non-governmental organizations to optimize resources, share best practices, and prevent duplication of efforts within the region.

**Programme Analysts (2 positions)**, 1) provide substantive programmatic and technical support to the implementation of the programme; provides technical assistance and capacity development to project/programme partners; provides technical inputs to the monitoring and reporting of the programme/project; and 2) provides financial and operational support to the implementation of the programme covering logistics and project financial management.

**Communications, Advocacy and Visibility Expert (50%)**, playing a crucial role in programme development and implementation, by contributing on strategic communication, i.e. crafting and executing a communication strategy aligned with programme goals, ensuring consistent messaging across various channels, and engaging stakeholders effectively through targeted communication. CAV expert will also work on elevating the programme's profile through visibility campaigns, showcasing success stories, milestones, and achievements, leveraging media, events, and digital platforms for broader reach. (S)he will be responsible for facilitating dialogue with beneficiaries, donors, and partners, ensuring transparency and accountability, while at the same time assessing the effectiveness of communication efforts, gathering feedback and adjusting strategies as needed, and demonstrating the programme's value to stakeholders.

**European Commission (EC) Projects – Finance Specialist (HQ)**, responsible for the oversight, support, and timely and effective control of UN Women's and overall JP financial reporting obligations to the European Commission (EC).

The programme will have five (5) **Monitoring Officers** in total, one in each IPA beneficiary i.e. Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia. Monitoring Officers are estimated to dedicate approx. 12.5% of their work time under each of 4 outputs, mainly for partnership engagement and building at IPA beneficiary level. In total for overall programme, Monitoring Officers will be engaged at 50% in 5 IPA beneficiaries. Monitoring Officers' efforts are tied to specific outputs, allowing for more precise tracking of their performance and accountability. The UN result-based approach depicts the humanitarian resources under the respective outputs as delivering on them. This alignment makes it easier to monitor progress, measure success, and adjust as needed to ensure that each output is effectively supported and achieved. Moreover, this targeted approach helps in optimizing the use of their skills and knowledge, leading to an overall more effective and efficient programme implementation.

**UNDP Implementation Team** responsible for the relevant activities under Women's Economic Empowerment component as per Programme document comprise of following:

**Regional Programme Manager**, brings specialized knowledge and expertise in the field of gender equality, holding advanced knowledge on the region with work experience with all WB6 IPA beneficiaries. Manager will be leading the strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation of UNDP programme component across the region ensuring alignment with organizational goals, sustainable development objectives as well as strategic EU gender goals. Manger will provide valuable input and advice on policy matters related to their expertise, contributing to the development of effective strategies and initiatives. Advocating for sustainable development practices and communicating project successes and challenges to a diverse audience and guides and motivates a diverse team, fostering collaboration and innovation to achieve project goals, while ensuring effective communication and optimal use of resources. Manager will also coordinate with other UN agencies, international partners, and non-governmental organizations to leverage resources, share best practices, and avoid duplication of efforts in the region.

**Regional Programme Coordinator (Analyst)**, responsible for coordinating diverse project activities, the role involves liaising with stakeholders, managing resources, and ensuring adherence to project timelines. The Project Coordinator will facilitate effective communication among team members, government officials, and partner organizations, contributing to the achievement of goals set. With a focus on problem-solving and strategic planning, the coordinator ensures that projects are executed efficiently, addressing challenges as they arise. Additionally, the Project Coordinator may be involved in monitoring and evaluating project outcomes, maintaining documentation, and promoting collaboration for impactful and sustainable development initiatives.

**Regional Programme Assistant (Analyst)**, responsible for administrative and logistical tasks, the Programme Assistant ensures the smooth functioning of day-to-day operations. This includes organizing meetings, maintaining project documentation, and supporting communication among team members and stakeholders. The role involves assisting in the preparation of project reports, monitoring progress against established timelines, and contributing to the coordination of project activities.

The programme will have five (5) **Monitoring and Evaluations officers** (50% contribution) in following IPA beneficiary: in Albania, BIH, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia will facilitate effective cooperation and communication with government officials, and partner organizations, contributing to the progress against established milestones. While holding gender expertise, officers will ensure that activities are on track in the WB economies by liaising with stakeholders and ensuring adherence to project goals and timelines set. Monitoring and evaluating of activities impact in the day-to-day context, addressing challenges as they arise, maintaining relevant data collection, documenting and encouraging collaboration for more efficient and effective work will be key in maximizing programme impact.

### **Joint Programme Structure / Project Office Costs**

Under the JP, there are several categories of the project office costs that are envisaged for the functioning of the JP, including costs of the AA and PUNOs staff and personnel along with other costs necessary for the implementation of the JP such as travel and subsistence costs for staff and other persons directly assigned to the operations of the project office; office rent costs, depreciation costs, rental costs or lease of equipment and assets composing the project office; costs of maintenance and repair contracts specifically awarded for the operations of the project office; costs of consumables and supplies specifically purchased for the operations of the project office; costs of IT and telecommunication services specifically purchased for the operations of the project office; costs of energy and water specifically supplied for the operations of the project office; costs of facility management contracts including security fees and insurance costs specifically awarded for the operations of the project office.

A final **external evaluation** of the action will take place during the last year of Programme implementation. It is envisaged (unless otherwise agreed). A joined evaluation management structure will be constituted, and the final evaluation of the Programme will be commissioned by the UN Women ECARO and UNDP ECA Regional Office and closely supported by the UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist for the ECA region and the UNDP RBM and QA Specialist. The evaluation will be designed as a summative project evaluation to support the UNDP and UN Women's regional and country Offices' and regional national stakeholders' strategic learning and decision-making with a focus on the assessment of outcome-level results and capturing key lessons learned from the implementation of the programme. The evaluation will aim to enhance accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The evaluation will adhere to the United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards for Evaluations and Ethical Code of Conduct. In addition, the evaluation shall take into account and should also refer to the guiding documents for evaluation at UN Women and UNDP, including the Evaluation Policies of both entities, UN Women's GERAAS evaluation report quality checklist, the United Nations System-wide Action Plan Evaluation Performance Indicator (UN-SWAP EPI) and the UN Women Evaluation Handbook the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines, UNEG Norms and Stand for Evaluations, and the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. These documents will serve as the reference framework for the Evaluation Manager and the evaluation consultant(s) for ensuring compliance with the various requirements and assuring the quality of the evaluation report.

### **Fund management**

The programme will be using a pass-through fund management modality where UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office will act as the Administrative Agent (AA) under which the funds will be channelled for the programme through the AA. Each participating UN organization receiving funds through the pass-through would have to sign a standardized Memorandum of Understanding with the AA.

The Administrative Agent will:

- Establish a separate ledger account under its financial regulations and rules for the receipt and administration of the funds received from the donor(s) pursuant to the Administrative Arrangement. This Joint Programme Account will be administered by the Administrative Agent in accordance with the regulations, rules, directives and procedures applicable to it, including those relating to interest;
- Make disbursements to Participating UN Organizations from the Joint Programme Account based on instructions from the Steering Committee, in line with the budget set forth in the Joint Programme Document.

The Participating UN Organizations will:

- Assume full programmatic and financial responsibility and accountability for the funds disbursed by the AA.
- Establish a separate ledger account for the receipt and administration of the funds disbursed to it by the Administrative Agent.

Each UN organization is entitled to deduct their indirect costs on contributions received according to their own regulation and rules, taking into account the size and complexity of the programme. Each UN organization will deduct 7% as overhead costs of the total allocation received for the agency.

The MPTF Office will charge administrative agent fee of one per cent (1%) of the total contributions made to the Joint Programme.

The Convening Agency will consolidate narrative reports provided by the Participating United Nations Organizations.

As per the MoU:

- Annual narrative progress report and the final narrative report, to be provided no later than three months (31 March) after the end of the calendar year.

The MPTF Office will:

- Prepare consolidated narrative and financial progress reports, based on the narrative consolidated report prepared by the Convening Agency and the financial statements/ reports submitted by each of the Participating UN Organizations in accordance with the timetable established in the MoU;
- Provide those consolidated reports to each donor that has contributed to the Joint Programme Account, as well as the Steering Committee, in accordance with the timetable established in the Administrative Arrangement.
- Provide the donors, Steering Committee and Participating Organizations with: Certified annual financial statement (“Source and Use of Funds” as defined by UNDG guidelines) to be provided no later than five months (31 May) after the end of the calendar year; and, certified final financial statement (“Source and Use of Funds”) to be provided no later than seven months (31 July) of the year following the financial closing of the Joint Programme.

**Budget Preparation** - The Convening Agency will prepare an aggregated/consolidated budget, showing the budget components of each participating UN organization.

**Accounting** - Each UN organization will account for the income received to fund its programme components in accordance with its financial regulations and rules.

**Interest on funds** - Interest will be administered in accordance with the financial regulations and rules of each UN organization.

## 5. Communications and visibility

Regarding communications and visibility, the Action will ensure strategic and effective internal and external communications in relation to disseminating knowledge and supporting policy advocacy. A Joint Communication and Visibility Strategy, aligned with participating institutions' and development partners' branding policies, will outline the guiding rules and key actions for implementing communications within the Action. It aims to guide the effective implementation of the programme's communications, expand partnerships among various stakeholders in the region, and disseminate information on programme results.

The Communications and Visibility Strategy will be regularly updated and presented to the JP Steering Committee.

Specifically, UN Women and UNDP will ensure that all communication and visibility interventions are implemented in accordance with the Joint Communication and Visibility Strategy, EU-UN Visibility Action Plan, and Joint Visibility Guidelines for EC-UN Actions in the Field. The Strategy will adhere to joint EU-UN guidelines (2022 EC visibility guidelines) on communication and visibility in compliance with the multi-partner contribution agreement, including its general conditions (Annex II). The EU logos will be used throughout the project materials and publications to acknowledge the EU's support.

The programme will provide active inputs into the visibility for specific events and campaigns. UN Women and UNDP will communicate programme goals, objectives, outputs and results to the relevant partners and stakeholders to facilitate the project implementation, encourage synergies, raise awareness about the Action's benefits, and promote the EU and UN values, including but not limited to human rights, gender equality, women's empowerment and anti-discrimination. The visibility and communication activities will ensure acknowledgement of the European Union's prominent role in promoting gender equality in the region and communicate successful cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans.

The overall purpose of visibility within the context of this JP is to enhance awareness and understanding of the programme's activities, achievements, and impact. By ensuring visibility, the programme will also aim to promote accountability, attract support, and inspire further action. When implementing communication and visibility activities, UN Women and UNDP will adhere to the principles of consistency, inclusivity, accuracy, and timeliness. Agreement on communication and visibility tools will be reached through a consultative process, including EC and implementing partners through collaborative decision-making. The responsibility for visibility lies with implementing partners.

## 6. Indicative action plan for implementing the action<sup>30</sup>

	Year 1 <sup>31</sup>		Year 2		Year 3	
	Half-year 1	Half-year 2	Half-year 1	Half-year 2	Half-year 1	Half-year 2
<b>Activity</b>						
1.1.1 To set up regional Leadership Academy (UNDP)						
1.1.2 Establish an overarching Regional Alliance of existing regional networks and activists to facilitate dialogue and debate on women’s economic empowerment. (UNDP)						
1.1.3 Carry out a review of the entrepreneurship ecosystem (support for women in next gen jobs (UNDP)						
1.1.4 High level strategic dialogue platforms in WB6 with international, regional and national stakeholders to assure commitment to women economic empowerment (UNDP)						
1.1.5 Prepare Action Plan to advance women in leadership roles in economic and social sectors (UNDP)						
1.1.6 Support key stakeholders in endorsing gender mainstreaming standards into organizational systems, culture and processes. (UNDP)						
1.1.7. To conduct a comprehensive gender analysis of women entrepreneurs’ ecosystem in IPA beneficiaries using Women’s Entrepreneurship Development (WED) Assessment Framework. (UN Women)						
1.1.8 To hold two virtual regional Women's Entrepreneurship EXPO #ConnectToCreate events to provide women, including those from marginalized groups, with mentoring and networking opportunities and connect them with national, multi-national, and global companies and business investors for pitching their goods and services and competing for capital investment. (UN Women)						
1.2.1 To establish mentorship schemes for women in STEM (UNDP)						
1.2.2 To assess public perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes on gender mainstreaming in STEM (UNDP)						
1.2.3 To develop awareness raising activities showcasing women’s potential in the region (UNDP)						
1.2.4 To conduct research on gender responsiveness of existing policies and practices impacting economic development and green agenda (UNDP)						

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed indicative action plan for Year 1, please see Appendix A to this Annex I.

<sup>31</sup> For further details on Year 1, please see Appendix A

1.2.5 To Organise and design Thematic Training Programmes on Gender Mainstreaming in STEM focusing on green economy						
1.2.6 To support regional “best idea in action” to mainstream gender into the STEM (UNDP)						
1.2.7 Organise regional hackathons within an existing structure like an incubator/accelerator or public university aiming to create tools and digital solutions to empower women (UNDP)						
1.2.8 To deliver a mentorship programme to 800 women in the region leveraging UN Women’s partnership with Women in Tech. (UN Women)						
2.1.1. To establish and operate a community of practice on the development, improvement, and management of referral pathways in the region that encompass multi-stakeholder articulated and coordinated dialogue informed by best practices. (UN Women)						
2.1.2 To undertake policy advocacy and provide technical assistance for the introduction and implementation of specific gender-sensitive normative frameworks and services across the region. (UN Women)						
2.1.3. To undertake capacity building for women’s civil society organizations about VAWG including TF violence against women definitions, current state, normative frameworks and key stakeholders. (UN Women)						
2.1.4 To organize two regional forums on EVAW in the region to convene local, national and regional stakeholders to accelerate the GE agenda and EVAW commitments informed by national and subregional and global frameworks and to contribute to intergovernmental processes with a focus on the latest developments on violence and gender-based discrimination in digital contexts. (UN Women)						
2.2.1 To foster collaboration between the women’s entrepreneurship ecosystem, tech companies and VAW service providers to develop innovative tools to prevent and respond to violence with a focus on TF VAW (UN Women)						
2.2.2 To undertake regional communications and behavioural change initiatives among targeted populations to raise awareness, nudge behavioural change and provide information on rights and available services. (UN Women)						

2.2.3. To train media outlets and monitor media reporting, publish investigative articles and develop broadcasting standards on reporting TF VAW (UN Women)						
2.2.4. To partner with technology companies to regulate and monitor TF EVAW (UN Women)						
2.2.5. To conduct research on women’s participation in the digital economy, digital gender divide and violence against women (UN Women)						
2.2.6. To pilot and evaluate prevention and response interventions to tackle TF VAW to generate knowledge on what works (UN Women)						

Indicative Activity Plan Year 1 EU4 Gender Equality – Women’s Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women (Regional, and Western Balkans) Contract Ref No. IPA III/2024/459-852													
Indicative Activity Plan for Year I													
Outcome / Specific Objective 1: Women’s economic empowerment is increased (notably in managerial and leadership roles) and more women and girls enter the STEM, green and digital fields													
Outputs	Activities	Indicative schedule for Year 1 (by month)											
		Half Year 1						Half Year 2					
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Output 1.1: Capacity built and new and existing networks strengthened in the region, including the Gender Equality Leadership Academy, the Gender Equality Alliance in the Western Balkans and the digital chapter of the Women’s Entrepreneurship Expo</b>	1.1.1 To set up regional Leadership Academy (UNDP)				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	1.1.2 Establish an overarching Regional Alliance of existing regional networks and activists to facilitate dialogue and debate on women’s economic empowerment. (UNDP)				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	1.1.3 Carry out a review of the entrepreneurship ecosystem (support for women in next gen jobs (UNDP)			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	1.1.4 High level strategic dialogue platforms in WB6 with international, regional and national stakeholders to assure commitment to women economic empowerment (UNDP)							X	X	X	X	X	X
	1.1.5 Prepare Action Plan to advance women in leadership roles in economic and social sectors (UNDP)								X	X	X	X	X
	1.1.6 Support key stakeholders in endorsing gender mainstreaming standards into organizational systems, culture and processes. (UNDP)								X	X	X	X	X
	1.1.7. To conduct a comprehensive gender analysis of women entrepreneurs’ ecosystem in IPA beneficiaries using Women’s Entrepreneurship Development (WED) Assessment Framework. (UN Women)							X	X	X	X	X	X
	1.1.8 To hold two virtual regional Women’s Entrepreneurship EXPO #ConnectToCreate events to provide women, including those from marginalized groups, with mentoring and networking opportunities and connect them with national, multi-national, and global companies and business investors for pitching their goods and services and competing for capital investment. (UN Women)							X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Output 1.2: Increased understanding of the</b>	1.2.1 To establish mentorship schemes for women in STEM (UNDP)				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

<b>main obstacles and challenges creating gender disparities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and ICT education and employment in the Western Balkans and increased opportunities for digital upskilling of women and girls, including those from marginalised groups</b>	1.2.2 To assess public perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes on gender mainstreaming in STEM (UNDP)			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
	1.2.3 To develop awareness raising activities showcasing women’s potential in the region (UNDP)									X	X	X	X
	1.2.4 To conduct research on gender responsiveness of existing policies and practices impacting economic development and green agenda (UNDP)						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	1.2.5 To Organise and design Thematic Training Programs on Gender Mainstreaming in STEM focusing on green economy (UNDP)						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	1.2.6 To support regional “best idea in action” to mainstream gender into the STEM (UNDP)												
	1.2.7 Organise regional hackathons within an existing structure like an incubator/accelerator or public university aiming to create tools and digital solutions to empower women (UNDP)												
	1.2.8 To deliver a mentorship programme to 800 women in the region leveraging UN Women’s partnership with Women in Tech. (UN Women)							X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Outcome / Specific Objective 2: Women and girls who have experienced violence including online and technology-facilitated violence and gender-based discrimination have access to and use multi-sectoral, inclusive and survivor-centred offline and digital services.</b>													
<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Indicative schedule for Year 1 (by month)</b>											
		<b>Half Year 1</b>						<b>Half Year 2</b>					
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Output 2.1: Capacity of key stakeholders in the referral system, including government, policymakers, law enforcement officials, the judiciary, the health sector, and civil society organizations, to provide quality, coordinated offline and digital services for survivors of violence including online and technology-facilitated violence is strengthened.</b>	2.1.1. To establish and operate a community of practice on the development, improvement, and management of referral pathways in the region that encompass multi-stakeholder articulated and coordinated dialogue informed by best practices. (UN Women)							X	X	X	X	X	X
	2.1.2 To undertake policy advocacy and provide technical assistance for the introduction and implementation of specific gender-sensitive normative frameworks and services across the region. (UN Women)							X	X	X	X	X	X

	2.1.3. To undertake capacity building for women's civil society organizations about VAWG including TF violence against women definitions, current state, normative frameworks and key stakeholders. (UN Women)						X	X	X	X	X	X
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Logical framework. Please see Appendix B to this Annex I.