

# Final Evaluation Report

UNDA 11<sup>th</sup> tranche

Evidence-based environmental governance

UNECE Environment Division

Una Murray, PhD

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<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe</b>
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## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2. Description of the Project.....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Background .....	10
2.2 Project design and expected outcomes.....	12
2.3 Project strategies and key activities .....	13
2.4 Target countries and beneficiaries .....	14
2.5 Key stakeholders and partners .....	14
2.6 Resources.....	15
2.7 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) .....	16
2.8 Innovative elements.....	16
<b>3. Evaluation objectives, scope and questions.....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Purpose and objectives.....	17
3.2 Evaluation scope, criteria, and questions .....	17
<b>4. Methodology .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5. Findings .....</b>	<b>19</b>
5.1 Relevance .....	19
5.2 Coherence.....	26
5.3 Effectiveness .....	30
5.4 Efficiency .....	39
5.5 Sustainability .....	40
<b>6. Conclusions.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>7. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>8. Annexes.....</b>	<b>50</b>

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Una Murray, PhD, April 26 2022

## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

2030 Agenda	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EC	European Commission
EPR	Environmental Performance Reviews
EU	European Union
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RPTC	Regular programme technical cooperation project
SDGs	The Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Strategic environment assessment
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCT	United National Country Teams
UNDA	United Nations Development Account
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNFCCC COP	Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFCCC COP26	The 26 <sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in November 2022 in Glasgow
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

## Executive Summary

### Overview

The UNDA 11th tranche project “Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe” (2018-2021) aimed to strengthen national capacities of selected countries of South-East Europe for evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The countries who benefitted from the project are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia (and to a certain extent Republic of Moldova) during an implementation period spanning January 2018 to December 2021. The total project budget was \$470,000. Essentially, the context for this project is capacity building for environment alignment with the SDGs, in the context of implementing Environmental Performance Reviews (EPR) recommendations and EU integration.

EPRs are a peer review mechanism to assess progress a country has made in reconciling its environmental and economic targets and in meeting its international environmental commitments. The UNECE EPR Programme assists and supports member States in environmental management by undertaking EPRs. As this project was set up to build capacities and support countries in achieving their EPR recommendations, aligning them with the SDGs, the project facilitated the development of a national action plan or policy packages to implement the EPR recommendations related to SDGs. With two expected outcomes (i) enhanced national capacities to assess the most critical aspects and priority needs in their environmental governance and policies; and (ii) increased capacities to integrate evidence-based, coherent environmental policies into sector-specific and cross sectoral strategies, the project was directly designed for supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Countries were assisted to conduct a *Needs Assessment* through the provision of technical expertise with support from UNECE. Following this, a range of recommendations and policy packages which emanated from the *Needs Assessment* were discussed. Countries used their own institutional and political processes to make decisions on which recommendations were integrated into a national action plan or which policy package to move forward with. National workshops were planned to discuss the results of the EPR review and *Needs Assessment* and review the national action plan and policy packages. Many of these could not physically take place since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Planned project activities also included organising national validation workshops with inter-ministerial coordination groups and relevant stakeholders, to review the respective national action plans/policy packages and discuss their implementation, and subregional exchange events.

### Evaluation purpose, objectives, scope, users

The present evaluation took place between December 2021 and March 2022 to assess the extent to which the objectives of the UNDA project were reached. The primary user of the evaluation is UNECE with a view to helping it improve capacity building services provided to member States. The evaluation assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in supporting member States to strengthen their capacities in the area of sustainable environmental policies, in the context of the SDGs. The evaluation looked at the activities repurposed to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and assessed, to the extent possible, the UNECE’s COVID-19 early response through this project.

## Methodology

In line with the OECD/DAC criteria for evaluation, the evaluation followed the UNECE Evaluation Policy<sup>1</sup> and UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards for Evaluation. The methodology drew from a range of tools available for use in social science research including detailed key informant interviews (28), a short survey (5 country responses) and a review of a broad range of existing secondary data including project reports, EPRs, and EU documents on Accession. The evaluator met three interviewees at the UNFCCC COP26 when present for another project. Sub-questions were developed for each of the 18 key evaluation questions. All qualitative interview data was coded according to a pre-defined coding framework, generated through a deductive approach (based on the evaluation questions, issues that repeatedly emerged in interviews and key words in the project activities and results frameworks). Findings were triangulated across document review, interviews, and survey responses. In term of limitations, most interviews were done by electronic means, and some interviews took considerable time to set up.

## Findings

The design of the project was **relevant** to and consistent with UNECE global and regional priorities. UNECE helped member States advance their environmental governance, whether supporting them to define an environmental strategy; supporting clear directions and types of action (or a roadmap); support to improve the environmental legal framework; or strengthening environmental technical and administrative capacities. The evaluation found that the project responded to the needs of beneficiary countries to develop evidence-based policies, in the context of both aligning the EPR recommendations with the 2030 Agenda and EU integration. The policy packages were identified and developed in all beneficiary countries and cover a range of areas, such as in Albania on medical waste management, in Bosnia and Herzegovina on green economy, in Montenegro on air protection and climate change, in North Macedonia and in Serbia on air protection and waste management, and in the Republic of Moldova on environmental strategy and green economy. Some policy packages included responses to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This project strengthened the capacity of participating governments to implement UNECE legal instruments, norms and regulations in support of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Five countries of the UNDA project are very focused on EU integration whereby, as a candidate country, they must convince the EU that laws and administrative capacity are sufficient to execute EU environmental law. Apart from making progress towards the SDGs, the project helped countries reach EU Accession targets (European regulations, directives and standards). With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project had to be modified, including conducting additional studies to ascertain the impact of COVID-19 and possible recovery pathways. There were some efforts to target cross-border and subregional issues, involving policy makers from several countries participating in the project, but COVID-19 halted such efforts.

In terms of **coherence**, activities were planned with the participation of the immediate beneficiaries (national coordinators) who appreciated the approach used by UNECE. Due to COVID-19, it proved difficult to work with other sectoral ministries, although there are examples of inter-ministerial cooperation within the project. The project was not designed to reach civil society groups directly, but national workshops (organised via the ministries in charge of the environment) to be held were expected to share the process of EPR and SDG alignment. The relevance of the UNECE Aarhus Convention was mentioned by interviewees from civil society in relation to the need for more public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. Discussions did not seem to occur on the inclusion of vulnerable groups and how policies may affect them. Only one

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<sup>1</sup>ECE Evaluation Policy, adopted by ECE EXCOM in December 2021 is available here [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Item%2010\\_ECE\\_EX\\_2021\\_35\\_Rev1\\_Evaluation%20Policy\\_as%20adopted.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Item%2010_ECE_EX_2021_35_Rev1_Evaluation%20Policy_as%20adopted.pdf)

country, Serbia, was noted as having a strong focus on gender. Although many of the environmental regulations and policies that were developed or considered under this project are highly relevant to climate change and disaster risk reduction, this was not necessarily spelled out in project reports.

The extent to which the project collaborated with the UN system and other organisations on the ground was unclear due to COVID-19 restrictions. The project management maintains a spreadsheet with details of different related projects which allows for collaboration. No specific mention of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) was noted in interviews.

The project design was straightforward but may have benefitted from a more detailed *Theory of Change*, indicating how capacity building potentially encourages others to take action on environmental issues and not only strengthens the environmental governance systems but also aids service delivery, ultimately preparing the ministries to respond to and address any environment challenge.

In terms of **effectiveness**, although the project was slow to begin initially, all target countries endorsed priority national action plans or policy packages based on the EPRs. In addition, the project was able to assist the Republic of Moldova in reviewing the implementation of an existing environmental strategy and action plan and developing a new environmental strategy, as well as evaluating the implementation of a green economy programme and action plan and drafting of a new programme. Concrete outputs from the project are outlined in the Table 7 in Annex 8. Evidently, the COVID-19 pandemic affected project activities significantly. Non-essential travel due to COVID-19 hampered many activities, specifically workshops, but the project adjusted and funds were reallocated to support countries with additional policy packages that increase resilience and support a green economic recovery from COVID-19. Other challenges in implementing the project related to environmental governance issues; the complexity of SDG alignment; policy coherence issues; changes in personnel in administrations following elections; and financial and human resource/ institutional capacities.

Project funds were spent on concrete outputs. Many interviewees commented on how a relatively small project such as this one was extremely **efficient**. National coordinators interviewed were very pleased with UNECE's human resource support and organisation. The project allowed for flexibility, adaptability and followed developments in each country. Which specific recommendations to focus on (arising from the Needs Assessment) was driven by the national authorities, rather than UNECE staff deciding which environmental issues are priority. More attention on how to overcome governance and implementation challenges were noted as lacking. The exchange of experience within and between countries was planned but had to be modified in line with restrictions imposed due the COVID-19 pandemic. Encouragement for better linkages with civil society organizations was another gap noted.

The project incorporated national ownership through the validation of policy packages being led by appropriate national officials. Legislation and policy packages cannot be developed without national endorsement and the highest-level approval (the minister), which makes measures more **sustainable** (if subsequently implemented). The capacities and knowledge will be retained by those individuals who benefited from the project activities. The likelihood of activities to be scaled up or replicated depends upon national coordinators positions of power within their ministry (and politics) to work with other sectors, and whether they remain in their position. Sustainability relies on finances for the implementation of directives, which is insufficient in early 2022. Human and financial capacities are still a challenge. More encouragement for a focus on the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests in environmental issues and exercise their legal rights under legislation is required for sustained attention to environmental issues. Citizen level acceptance of new policy measures requires communication. COVID-19 restrictions did not facilitate

interaction with citizen groups within the country itself. Communications about new environmental legislation are important to ensure different levels are aware and expectation do not arise that cannot be met. All EPRs and Needs Assessments are now posted on UNECE's website allowing for transparency and accountability.

The objectives of the activities under this project are still valid. However, since February 2022, security has become the dominant theme in the region, with refugees and displaced persons arriving from Ukraine. A strong incentive is EU Accession which includes many measures on the environment, and will ensure impetus towards environmental policies in the South-East European countries, provided geo-politics still allow for EU Accession. An important lesson learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that activities must be flexible.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Having examined the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in supporting member States to strengthen their capacities in the area of sustainable environmental policies in the context of the SDGs, the evaluation concluded that this project is one step towards strengthening environment governance and the development of effective environmental policies. More initiatives are required as there are many environmental issues still to be addressed in the participating countries. The evaluation makes recommendations in eight areas, many of which relate to continuation of ongoing activities, subject to availability of funding.

- 1. Project design:** UNECE may consider developing a *Theory of Change* for projects in the future indicating how capacity building cascades change.
- 2. Regional information sharing:** Continue to put in place opportunities for regional information sharing, such as regional or national workshops, sharing practices on clean industry protocols or step by step approaches for environmental hazards and waste with opportunities for networking.
- 3. Climate change:** Consider how to mainstream climate change considerations into all projects that UNECE engages in, linking with UN country teams as appropriate.
- 4. Capacity building:** Continue to offer UNECE support in prioritizing recommendations arising from EPRs. Working with staff in ministries who understand the SDGs and have enthusiasm to move the agenda forward is recommended, as are training of trainer programmes, and un-packing aspects of governance that require support to narrow the focus of capacity building (e.g. developing accountability chains or how to encourage meaningful citizen participation or how to ensure higher level environmental issues prioritization). The UNECE Nexus Approach promotes an integrated way to accommodate competing environmental elements and should be shared more widely.
- 5. EU Accession focus:** Continue to align with the EU Green Agenda.
- 6. Politics and advocacy:** Civil society organisations (CSOs) should be considered a strong member of environment advocacy coalitions. The UNECE can encourage member States to consult with CSOs whilst also allowing them to implement their important watchdog role. UNECE country missions should ensure that they leave time to engage early with many stakeholders including CSOs and encourage national coordinators to ensure their voice is brought to the table.
- 7. Implementation of legislation:** Follow up on the implementation of policies and legislation approved to document which EPR recommendations are not yet being implemented and why not. Support for sourcing financial resources to pilot projects that improve the environment is always required as is funding to convene meetings that help build environmental advocacy coalitions.
- 8. Gender focus:** Draw lessons from the collaborative gender mainstreaming process that took place in Serbia. Continue capacity building on gender mainstreaming as it relates to environmental policy and local level implementation. A regional workshop to share experience may be useful.



## 1. Introduction

To support UNECE member States strengthen their capacities in the area of sustainable environmental policies [in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)], UNECE implemented the project *“Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe”* between January 1st, 2018, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. The project was implemented in five countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) with the later addition of the Republic of Moldova. primarily in collaboration with ministries of environment, with inputs from other ministries. This project was funded by the UN Development Account (UNDA) – a capacity development programme of the UN Secretariat<sup>2</sup> – through the 11<sup>th</sup> tranche of this fund. The project supports the expected UNECE accomplishment of subprogramme 1: ‘Environment’ – *Improved environmental performance review of interested countries*.

### ***Purpose of evaluation, timeframe***

The evaluation took place between December 2021 and March 2022. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which the objectives of the UNDA 11th tranche project *“Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe”* were achieved. The evaluation assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in supporting member States to strengthen their capacities in the area of sustainable environmental policies, in the context of the SDGs. The evaluation assessed progresses on human rights, gender equality results, disability inclusion, climate change and disaster risk reduction in the context of this engagement. The evaluation also examined how the UNECE repurposed the project activities to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and assessed, to the extent possible, COVID-19 early responses through this project.

The primary users of the evaluation are the UNECE themselves. The results of the evaluation should help to improve capacity building services provided to member States through regular technical cooperation as well as the development and implementation of similar future projects and activities by the Environment Division of UNECE.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: project website accessed on 24/11/21

## 2. Description of the Project

### 2.1 Background

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Essentially, the context for this project is capacity building for SDG alignment with environmental legislation, in the context of implementing Environmental Performance Reviews (EPR) recommendations and EU integration. These contexts are summarized below.

#### 2.1.1 SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

The [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) are a collection of 17 interlinked, globally-agreed goals established under the UN General Assembly to be achieved by the year 2030 (Agenda 2030). These are designed to be a *'blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all'*. A *global SDG indicator framework* was adopted by the General Assembly in July 2017.<sup>3</sup> To make progress towards 2030, a *robust review mechanism for SDG implementation* is required in each country, using indicators and statistical data to monitor progress, inform policy decision makers and ensure accountability of all stakeholders. Unfortunately, the lack of comprehensive and evidence-based policy and realistic plans of action prevents many countries from making progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

The UNECE facilitates greater economic integration and cooperation among its fifty-six member States (countries mainly in Europe and Central Asia), promoting sustainable development and economic prosperity using the following mechanisms:

- policy dialogue
- negotiation of international legal instruments
- development of regulations and norms
- regional implementation of outcomes of global UN Conferences and Summits
- exchange and application of relevant practices as well as economic and technical expertise
- technical cooperation for countries with economies in transition.

UNECE are playing their part in supporting countries make the SDGs a reality. There are many environmental dimensions of the SDGs,<sup>4</sup> which often fall within the realm of a country's environmental ministry. However, the cross-sectoral nature of the SDGs requires coherence in policy-making principles and objectives among several policy sectors in public administrations. To ensure co-produced policies, this requires an alignment of priorities and timeframes, with effective collaboration across ministry levels.

It is widely acknowledged that the 2030 Agenda requires more than the sum of national actions. The SDGs call for collective efforts at the regional level to tackle global and regional issues, and emphasize the sharing of experiences, challenges and good practices in improving environmental policies or developing legislation. The UNECE Environment Division supports countries to *improve environmental governance* by mobilizing consensus to formulate environmental policy, developing international environmental law and supporting international initiatives. The Division also helps member countries put these norms and rules into practice by organizing seminars, workshops and advisory missions and

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<sup>3</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([A/RES/71/313](#)).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. SDGs cover natural resource management, climate change, water-related issues, marine issues, biodiversity and ecosystems, circular economy, and environmentally-sound management of chemicals and waste.

by publishing guidance and compilations of good practice in numerous areas of pollution prevention and the sustainable management of natural resources.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.1.2 Economic Performance Review (EPR)

An *Economic Performance Review* (EPR) is a voluntary assessment of a country's progress in reconciling environmental and economic targets and in meeting international environmental commitments. An EPR programme helps individual member States (mainly countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia) assess progress in their development and implementation of environmental and green economy policies.

EPRs are a well-established flagship programme of the UNECE. In 2016, the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Batumi, Georgia addressed two themes: (i) "Greening the economy in the pan-European region" and (ii) "Improving air quality for a better environment and human health". The conference commended good cooperation between UNECE and the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) and invited them to support countries in their efforts to green their economies and achieve sustainable development. Following the conference, the EPR Programme was mandated to assist UNECE member States in supporting the achievement and monitoring of SDGs in the pan-European region.

### 2.1.3 EPRs and the 2030 Agenda

The First-cycle of EPRs began in the mid-1990s and established baseline conditions, policy commitments, institutional arrangements and capabilities. The Second-cycle EPRs, around the year 2000, assessed progress and encouraged accountability, implementation and financing for environmental measures. The Third-cycle EPRs, beginning in 2012, continued to include environmental governance and financing in a green economy context, countries' cooperation with the international community and environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors. The results of a survey with member States carried out in January-February 2020 is informing the fourth cycle of EPRs<sup>6</sup>.

Since 2017, the third-cycle EPRs contribute to the achievement and monitoring of relevant SDGs and provide recommendations to countries on SDG achievement. The Synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda "[The Road to Dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the Planet](#)" (2014) mentions the EPRs as an example of regional review mechanisms, whose experience is important for monitoring, evaluation and reporting on SDGs. EPRs prepared in 2017–2019 for six countries ([Albania](#), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Mongolia](#), [North Macedonia](#) and [Uzbekistan](#)) provide analyses of countries' performance in SDGs and include recommendations to achieve the Goals. Each EPR covered between 40 and 65 SDG targets. The selection of targets for a given EPR depends on the country, and the thematic focus of the report agreed with the country undertaking the EPR. The EPR process follows a series of organised and established steps with support from UNECE.<sup>7</sup> The UNECE has outlined how the UNECE EPRs can help to provide an analysis of countries' progress towards SDGs.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.1.4 EU integration and Western Balkans integration

The 2003 European Council summit in Thessaloniki set integration of the Western Balkans as a priority of EU expansion. The Copenhagen criteria are the rules that define whether a country is eligible to join

<sup>5</sup> <https://unece.org/environment-policy/about-environment-policy>

<sup>6</sup> Results of the survey on the possible options for the fourth cycle of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews. Information paper No. 9 27 August 2020 [https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/cep/CEP-26/EPR-4\\_SurveyResults\\_InfoPaperNo.9\\_e.pdf](https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/cep/CEP-26/EPR-4_SurveyResults_InfoPaperNo.9_e.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> EPRs generally follow these main steps: Preparation, Review Mission, Expert Review, Peer Review, Publication and Launch.

<sup>8</sup> [Integrating SDGs into Environmental Performance Reviews: Lessons Learned in Europe](#) by Iulia Trombitcaia

the EU.<sup>9</sup> Albania and the several successor states of the former Yugoslavia have all adopted EU integration as an aim of foreign policy. In fact, EU Accession negotiations are under way with Albania (since 2020), Montenegro (since 2012), North Macedonia (since 2020) and Serbia (since 2014). Serbia and Montenegro appear to be furthest along the Accession process. All prospective EU members must enact legislation to align their laws with European law (*acquis communautaire*). The *acquis* is divided into 35 separate chapters, each dealing with different policy areas. Once the European Council agrees to open negotiations, a screening process is initiated. The Commission and candidate country examine its laws as they align with those of the EU to determine differences.<sup>10</sup> The Council recommends opening negotiations on "chapters" of law, initiating constructive negotiation. A chapter is said to be closed when both sides have agreed it has been implemented sufficiently. The European Commission submits yearly reports to the European Council on progress of candidate countries toward European Union accession. Once the negotiations are complete, a Treaty of Accession is signed.

### 2.1.5 Civil society interest in environmental issues

Environmental alignment was always not a political priority in Western Balkan countries. Apart from a lack of political will, there has often been a shortage of human resources in government to deliver in this area. In recent years, because of pressures from citizens and environmental NGOs, there is more awareness on the need for alignment with the Environmental Chapter of EU Accession. For example, air quality directives are an important focus for citizens in the countries of the project target group, with increased presence in the public domain – including through Digital Applications demonstrating air pollutants. Civil society protests regarding air pollution and plans for hydro plants in protected areas led to increased awareness of environmental protection issues amongst society at large and moved the issue up the political agenda. There has been a surge of NGOs who support civil society in the regions, such as [Riverwatch](#), [Euronature](#), and [The Nature Conservancy](#), with specific environmental NGOs in countries. For example, Serbia have civil society groups such as '[Young Researchers of Serbia](#)' or [Environmental Ambassadors for Sustainable Development](#).

## 2.2 Project design and expected outcomes

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### 2.2.1 Design of the UNDA project

The UNDA project was set up to build capacities and support countries in achieving their EPR recommendations and aligning them with the SDGs. The project aimed to assist countries in conducting a review and a needs assessment with regard to the implementation of the recommendations coming from their EPRs, and how to align them with relevant SDGs. Although most countries had already made progress on the integration of environmental issues in policies and legislations, they are weaker at translating the policies to the intermediary or secondary level. The need to integrate policy at the next level was noted in the project document. The project covered five countries, which were also selected countries based on their interest and the possible potential to apply a regional approach. Primary partners were ministries involved in environmental issues, as well as sectoral ministries responsible for agriculture, energy, industry, mining or transport, or the inspection authorities responsible for environmental enforcement. Interested stakeholders also included NGOs, the private sector and academia. The UNDA project intended to be implemented in cooperation with UNEP, UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Country Teams (UNCT). The project worked closely with the EPR Programme, which is led by the same UNECE project manager.

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<sup>9</sup> Institutions to preserve democratic governance and human rights, has a functioning market economy, and accepts the obligations and intent of the EU.

<sup>10</sup> The candidate country must convince the EU that its laws and administrative capacity are sufficient to execute European law.

Annex 1 contains the Project Results Framework.

### 2.2.2 UNDA project expected outcomes

The project “*Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe*” had two expected outcomes:

- i) Enhanced national capacities of participating countries to assess the most critical aspects and priority needs in their environmental governance and policies
- ii) Increased national capacities of participating countries to develop and integrate evidence-based, coherent environmental policies into sector-specific and cross sectoral strategies aimed at contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and relevant SDGs.

## 2.3 Project strategies and key activities

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### 2.3.1 Project strategy

The project document outlined how the project would enhance countries’ national capacities in assessing the most critical aspects and priority needs in their environmental governance and policies. Project activities were to increase national capacities to develop and integrate environmental policies into sector-specific strategies aimed at contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. It made sense to align the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with the EU accession process. The project built on the Third cycle EPRs conducted in the countries of South-Eastern Europe between 2014-2019. In particular, the project assisted countries in implementing EPR recommendations related to the SDGs. Specifically, the project assisted countries to conduct a review and a needs assessment of the implementation of the recommendations from their EPRs in line with relevant SDGs. The project facilitated the development of either a national action plan or sets of policy packages to implement their EPR recommendations related to SDGs. Attention was to be paid to vulnerable groups, as relevant to specific EPR recommendations.

### 2.3.1 Project activities

Activities included the following:

- A2.1 Develop national action plans/policy packages for implementing EPR recommendations in line with relevant SDGs in the five beneficiary countries in consultation with inter-ministerial coordination groups;
- A2.2 Organize five national validation workshops with inter-ministerial coordination groups and relevant stakeholders to review the respective national action plans/policy packages and discuss their implementation;
- A 2.3 Organize a subregional policy seminar to exchange experience on implementation of national action plans/policy packages;
- A 2.4 Organize a concluding subregional event to present an overview of the environmental challenges in the South-East Europe region, share good practices and discuss follow-up of the national action plans/policy packages.

Countries were supported to conduct a *Needs Assessment* through the provision of technical expertise via UNECE. Following this, a range of recommendations and policy packages were suggested in the Needs Assessment. National workshops were planned during the project timeframe to discuss the results of the EPR review and needs assessment, and to review the national action plan and policy packages. Countries used their own institutional and political processes to make decisions on which recommendations were to be integrated into a national action plan or which policy package to move forward with. National action plans were to allow countries to make focused efforts to address SDGs

covered by their EPRs. Policy packages were to enable the development of a strategic document, or a legislative act directed at implementing one of several EPR recommendations.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project had to be modified, including conducting additional studies to ascertain the impact of COVID-19 and possible recovery pathways. For instance, in Montenegro, public participation on environmental matters in times of COVID-19 was addressed. Additionally, planning for the subregional policy event (Activity 2.4) was no longer possible due to the pandemic.

## 2.4 Target countries and beneficiaries

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The target countries were Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Republic of Moldova was added later for activities, when COVID-19 facilitated some funds to be reallocated.

Citizens are ultimate beneficiaries when environmental legislation is implemented. In this project, however, the immediate beneficiaries were national coordinators in environment ministries and other ministry staff who were assisted in the short-term through the provision of analysis and alignment of environmental assessments, as well through overall efforts to improve their capacity in evidence-based environmental governance.

## 2.5 Key stakeholders and partners

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Four groups of stakeholders for capacity development were outlined in the project document (Figure 1 below).

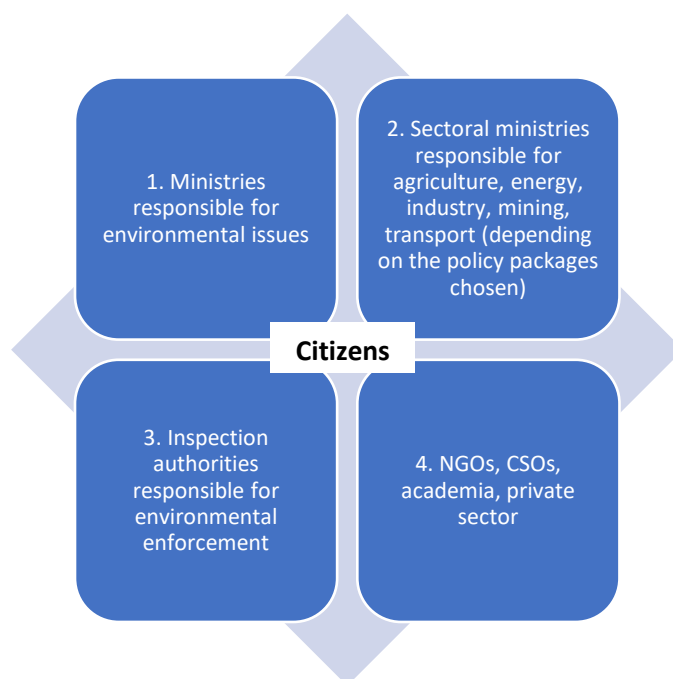


Figure 1: Stakeholders identified in project document

Key partners for this project were ministries responsible for environmental issues. The list of these key partners is outlined below by country.

- Albania : Ministry of Tourism and Environment
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Ministry of Spatial Planning, Civil Engineering and Ecology of Republika Srpska, and Sub-department of Spatial Planning, Urban Development and Environmental Protection of the Government of Brcko District
- North Macedonia: Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
- Montenegro: Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism
- Serbia: Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection

Sectoral ministries with responsibility for agriculture, energy, industry, mining, transport and other sectors were to be identified depending on the policy packages chosen, with inspection authorities and those responsible for environmental enforcement also expected to be involved via the ministries of environment. NGOs, CSOs, academia and the private sector were also expected to provide inputs in terms of environmental legislative requirements in particular sectors.

The initial UNDA project document expected UNEP, UNDP and the UNCTs in beneficiary countries to be co-operating entities within the UN Secretariat and system. EPRs are widely used by UNECE member states and broadly known amongst environment related stakeholders. When an EPR process is initiated (every 5 years), the whole UNCT is invited for a briefing and to the launch of the EPR report. Collaborative meetings are a standard procedure when UNECE travelled to countries prior to the pandemic. EPR reports are available on the UNECE website. A UNECE official outlined that UNCTs also use the recommendations stemming from the EPRs.

## 2.6 Resources

The total project budget was \$470,000, and it was managed by an Environmental Affairs Officer from the UNECE *Operational Activities and Review (OARS)* Section, funded from the UN regular budget resources.<sup>11</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on travel and workshops and on the overall delivery of the project. Major environment-related meetings were often postponed during this period. Therefore, some funds were reallocated, in agreement with the UNDA programme management, to other activities such as contracting consultants to conduct studies to develop policy packages that governments in recipient countries could adopt to increase population resilience, support a green economic recovery, reduce vulnerability to future pandemics and contribute to enhancing health and well-being. Table 1 below outlines revisions in budget allocations.

Table 1: COVID-19 Revisions in UNDA Budget

Object Class	Description	A. Budget/Allotment (as per project document) (USD)	B. Revisions to allotments(if any) (USD)	C. Total Expenditure (USD)
105	Consultants	152,000	320,997	472,997

<sup>11</sup> Mr. Antoine Nunes

115	Travel of staff	95,000	-88,000	7,000
120	Contractual services	24,000	-24,000	0
125	General operating expenses	34,000	-34,000	0
145	Workshops/Study tours (Grants and contributions)	165,000	-164,997	0
	Total	470,000	480,000	479,997

## 2.7 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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The project was designed around the SDG goals and targets. For the six EPR reviews undertaken, alignment to the SDGs were carefully made. The most common SDGs covered are: SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation); SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities); SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production); SDG 13 (climate action); and SDG 15 (life on land).<sup>12</sup>

As UNECE aligns its work with the SDGs, it is expected to contribute to the achievement of SDG 5 (gender) by mainstreaming gender equality in all activities. The UNECE's policy on *Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women* is expected to guide work to mainstream gender in substantive areas such as the environmental sector. Sex disaggregated data collection is expected for all activities to ensure awareness of the situation of women and men in different sectors. UNECE member States are expected to monitor progress towards international gender equality commitments.

## 2.8 Innovative elements

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The innovative approach applied in this project was the alignment of the SDGs with the prioritization of EPR environmental recommendations. In addition, the project allowed stakeholders to address two important commitments simultaneously, EU acquis and SDGs. The project used the SDGs as a frame whereby countries could assess their current distance from the ideal situation (2030 target), helping government officials plan a pathway towards the ideal, whilst also moving towards EU Accession.

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<sup>12</sup> In total, 85 targets have been addressed in one or more EPRs conducted so far, and 21 targets have been common to all six EPRs. *Financial and expert support to EPRs is provided by Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the EU. OECD, UNEP and WHO regularly participate on the international expert teams.*



### 3. Evaluation objectives, scope and questions

#### 3.1 Purpose and objectives

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The primary purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the objectives of the UNDA11th tranche project “*Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe*” were achieved. The evaluation assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in supporting member States to strengthen their capacities in the area of sustainable environmental policies, in the context of the SDGs. The evaluation attempted to assess progresses on human rights, gender equality results, disability inclusion, climate change and disaster risk reduction in the context of this engagement. The evaluation looked at the activities repurposed to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and assessed to the extent possible, the UNECE’s COVID-19 early response through this project. The evaluation results should facilitate a process of improving capacity building services provided to member States through regular technical cooperation as well as the development and implementation of similar future projects and activities by the Environment Division of UNECE.

#### 3.2 Evaluation scope, criteria, and questions

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The evaluation covered the full project implementation during the period of 1 January 2018-31 December 2021 in five countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) and Republic of Moldova. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation are available in Annex 1.

### 4. Methodology

The principles and approach adopted during the evaluation were in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) criteria for international development evaluation.<sup>13</sup> The evaluation also followed ECE Evaluation Policy<sup>14</sup>. The evaluation complied with the UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016) and followed ethical safeguards. Addressing all the questions in the ToR (Annex 1), the evaluation examined the evaluation criteria: relevance; coherence; effectiveness; efficiency and sustainability. Gender equality and non-discrimination were considered in evaluation questions as were questions on how the project addressed human rights impacts. The evaluator obtained information about the progress of UNDA/UNECE environmental governance project activities and examined the monitoring system in place, along with data and reports shared at the UNECE website.<sup>15</sup>

The methodology drew from a range of tools available for use in social research including key informant interviews, a short survey and a review of existing secondary data. An evaluation instrument was prepared to guide the evaluation and to document and analyse progress towards activities and

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

<sup>14</sup> ECE Evaluation Policy, adopted by ECE EXCOM in December 2021 is available here [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Item%2010\\_ECE\\_EX\\_2021\\_35\\_Rev1\\_Evaluation%20Policy\\_as%20adopted.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Item%2010_ECE_EX_2021_35_Rev1_Evaluation%20Policy_as%20adopted.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://unece.org/unda-project-evidence-based-environmental-governance-and-sustainable-environmental-policies-support>

project objectives. Sub-questions were developed for each of the 18 key evaluation questions outlining how answers would be triangulated across document review, interviews or survey responses. The evaluation methodology encompassed:

- A desk review of relevant project reports and materials (Annex 5). This included the project document, monitoring reports on project implementation, the EPRs, Needs Assessments, and documents provided by National Coordinators.
- Two annual progress reports were reviewed during this evaluation along with the monitoring spreadsheet from the UNECE Environmental Division, which outlined UNECE environment-related projects/activities in each country.
- A tailored on-line qualitative survey for UNECE national coordinators was sent to each country. Five out of six countries responded.
- Interviews with selected stakeholders via electronic means took place – 28 in total. Annex 4 contains the interviewee list. All national coordinators were invited for interview. Three individuals were met during COP26, as the evaluator was present for another project and took the opportunity to meet representatives from the relevant ministries in person.

The evaluator triangulated across data sources. Both primary and secondary sources of information were used. The EPRs and Need Assessment Reports were key secondary sources. For primary sources of information, interviews were undertaken utilising both opened-ended and semi-structured questions. Interviews were mainly with key informants. Subjective sampling of interviewees was based on discussions with the National Coordinator who provided a list of other contacts. Technical experts who worked on the Needs Assessment (mainly independent consultants) were interviewed for all countries. Deliberate attempts were made to reach NGOs operating in the six countries. Sampling criteria are based on interviewees' involvement in the project.

The methodological approach used mainly qualitative data analysis. Qualitative information was obtained through interviews with various stakeholders and qualitative questions in the evaluation survey. Interviews were content-analysed to determine patterns of responses and themes. Thematic and descriptive analysis was used to synthesize and analyse the data to understand the contexts in which the project evolved in each country. All qualitative interview data was coded according to a pre-defined coding framework, generated through a deductive approach. The coding framework was based on the evaluation questions, issues that have emerged interviews, EPR and project documents and the project activities and results.

#### *Limitations*

Travel was not possible due to COVID-19. In term of assessing the project, most interviews were done by electronic means, without meeting any UNECE staff face to face. Some interviews took considerable time to set up, with long delays between the invitation to be interviewed and the actual interview.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Relevance

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#### 5.1.1 Response to priorities and needs of beneficiary countries

The evaluation found that the UNDA/UNECE project (hereafter called the ‘project’) responded to the needs of beneficiary countries to develop evidence-based policies, in the context of both aligning the EPRs with the 2030 Agenda and EU integration. Each are described below.

**Relevance of EPR focus within the context of the 2030 Agenda:** The project was directly relevant to the SDGs, given that the Needs Assessment determined the gaps between current policies and the desired ones for alignment with SDGs targets. UNECE staff indicated that EPRs are widely used by member States. Any support for follow-up in terms of implementing the recommendations from the EPR is considered useful for member States. Member States representatives interviewed (called national coordinators in this report) reported that the technical cooperation provided via this project was demand driven, indicating that UNECE support responded to their needs. Some examples:

- The project *Needs Assessment* report helped **Bosnia and Herzegovina** have a clear picture of activities required in their environment ministry and helped them to define step by step activities.
- A government official from **Serbia** outlined how they request this type of technical assistance. All four policy package outputs developed via the project were highly relevant to them (air quality, the green economy, awareness on waste and climate change, and sanitation and women’s health) and to an SDG focus.
- Likewise, officials from **North Macedonia** underlined the relevance of the project themes of focus for them (transport, the economy) as being significant. The project was considered useful to ensure EPR recommendations are further incorporated into policy development.
- **Albania** interviewees emphasised how the third EPR was a very useful exercise to provide a roadmap of where to go. The EPR report coupled now with the *Need Assessment*, ensured their government have clear recommendations.
- For **Montenegro**, the focus on air quality was noted as very relevant, due to the history of industrial waste.

**Relevance for EU integration:** The main priority for countries covered by this project is EU integration.<sup>16</sup> All countries are at different stages in the process of harmonising, transposing and implementing environmental legislation aligned with EU Environmental Legislation (acquis)<sup>17</sup> Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Albania are official candidates, with accession negotiations and *Chapters* opened for these countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo are potential candidate countries.<sup>18</sup> Republic of Moldova also has an EU Accession Agreement. Most EU candidate countries are under pressure to move forward and faster with such alignment, and require strengthened administrative capacities, often requiring financial support. The EU is also concerned with delivering on the SDGs, which is essential for member States. The *Needs Assessment* process provided via the project was thus relevant to capacities for engaging with environmental legislation required for EU accession. According to EU officials interviewed, accession candidate countries require all the help they can get from different projects and different donors for their

<sup>16</sup> Croatia was the first of seven countries in the region to join.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Serbia and Montenegro have submitted their reports and will next negotiate transition periods to implement certain positions as most environmental changes still require financing. Candidate countries must achieve progress in aligning policies and legislations with the acquis, with significant implementation efforts and enforcement.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/the-western-balkans>

environment accession chapter. Alignment is not easy, and it is expensive particularly in the waste and water sectors which require capital infrastructure investment (in comparison to nature protection). Statements from officials interviewed underlined the relevance among the project and EU accession.

- **Serbia** noted that they had just opened *Chapter 27* with the EU when the project began and realised that awareness raising on waste management and climate change is extremely relevant. The project helped in finalising their negotiation positions. Online meetings helped their regional stakeholders harmonise local laws with the national strategy.
- An interviewee from **North Macedonia** noted how the project gave them an opportunity to align national policies with the EU Green Agenda, underlining the environmental and climate implications in key sectors such as transport and agriculture.

The EU programme *Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA)*, summarised in Annex 2, supports accession countries with their environmental strategies. One EU interviewee felt that the EPR as an exercise may not have changed its methodology for some years (perhaps not realising that SDG alignment is now included in the EPRs). However, EU Accession criteria in some sense is a moving target, with ambitious goals put forward under the EU Green Deal (Farm to Fork Strategy, single-use plastics directive, etc.). One EU interviewee felt SDGs are quite broad, whereas all EU Directives and Regulations align with UN Conventions.

#### **Box 1: Green Deal and Action Plan for the Green Agenda in the Western Balkans**

The European Commission (under the ‘Green Deal’) adopted a set of proposals to make the EU’s climate, energy, transport and taxation **policies fit for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 percent by 2030**, compared to 1990 level. The Green Deal aims to result in a resource-efficient and competitive economy, with no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050. Economic growth should be decoupled from resource use and there is an emphasis on no person and no place left behind. An [Action Plan on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans](#) was agreed in 2021. Western Balkan countries do not have the exact same objectives as EU Member Countries. Nevertheless, this Action Plan requires heavy investment to implement (with €9 billion in grants promised for the region). With many measures of change required (at least 58), countries in the region are struggling to incorporate the Green Agenda into their policy frameworks – a challenge for many EU member States.

#### **5.1.2 Consistency with UNECE [global and regional priorities](#)**

The project was relevant to the activities vis-à-vis the programme of work and mandate of the UNECE. The project was in line with UNECE’s *Technical Cooperation Strategy* which expects projects to take into consideration the 2030 Agenda, SDGs and the UN Development System reform. In line with the requirement made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to mainstream SDGs in activities,<sup>19</sup> the project demonstrated the practical details of engaging in such efforts. Although focused on environmental governance, project activities reflected the interlinked nature of 2030 Agenda and SDGs, in that the environmental policy packages moved beyond ministries of environment. However, facilitating inter-ministerial coordination proved difficult with COVID-19.

Helping countries align national environmental policies with international and regional commitments contributes to EU integration, which strengthens economic relations of the West Balkan countries with countries of the EU (and with other countries of the world). UNECE technical experts working on the *Needs Assessment* for the countries took into account international legally binding instruments

<sup>19</sup> OIOS audit of management of trust funds at UNECE September 2018

(for example the five conventions and 11 protocols<sup>20</sup>) developed within UNECE (e.g. on air pollution, environmental impact assessment, industrial accidents, transboundary waters, water and health, and public participation). In essence, the project initiated and participated in measures for facilitating environmental action in line with economic development and integration of Europe.

As indicated by some national coordinators, the UNECE provides a valuable political platform for countries to come together to discuss common environmental challenges. In theory, the regional dimension was important, as it provided a platform for learning across South-eastern Europe.<sup>21</sup> The regional value of the project was mentioned by UNECE staff as significant, given that UNECE does not have country presence. The organization of subregional events were designed to facilitate peer learning, discuss good practices on addressing shared environmental challenges in the South-East Europe region and discuss alignment with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>22</sup> However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, these failed to take place.

### 5.1.3 Value added by UNECE efforts

Annex 2 contains details on what five out of six national coordinators stated about the value that this UNECE project brought to environmental governance in their country. In summary, all national coordinators noted the support in environmental governance through the project, whether helping to define an environmental strategy; supporting clear directions and types of action (or roadmap) to be taken for the environment; support to improve the legal framework for environmental governance; or strengthening technical and administrative capacities in environmental governance. Only one country (Serbia) mentioned climate change and the same country highlighted the incorporation of gender issues. One country (North Macedonia) highlighted the support for the 2030 Agenda implementation, and another country (Montenegro) noted the improvement in the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and tools for environmental assessment.<sup>23</sup>

### 5.1.4 Relevance to target groups needs

The project followed UNECE's technical cooperation guiding principle in that activities were demand driven, or planned with the participation of the immediate beneficiaries (consultation, information sharing, and participation in planning meetings and prioritising the policy packages suggested). National coordinators appreciated the approach adopted by UNECE for this UNDA project. For example, the national coordinator from Albania noted that it was based on their needs, in lieu of a project being thrust on them just because there was funding available.

Many interviewees noted that given the structure of their ministry that is responsible for environmental issues, it was essential to work with other sectoral ministries, such as water, tourism, and ministries of foreign affairs. Although challenging with COVID-19 restrictions, some examples were found. In Albania, the ministry of tourism was involved. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry of the Republika Srpska engaged and developed guidelines for the establishment of sustainable agriculture. Evidence from a municipal level project in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Naum) demonstrated that they were aware of the project. In Montenegro,

<sup>20</sup> <https://unece.org/environment-policy/conventions-and-protocols>

<sup>21</sup> which allows for a balance between regional experiences whilst also bringing UNECE expertise to the national or sub-national level.

<sup>22</sup> These subregional events were expected to assist in strengthening transboundary environmental issues.

<sup>23</sup> This Convention establishes a number of rights of the public with regard to the environment, and expects public authorities (at national, regional or local level) to make the necessary provision so such rights become effective. For example, public participation in environmental decision-making; and the right to review procedures to challenge public decisions that have been made without respecting access to information, participation in decision making or without consideration of environmental law in general (access to justice). For the OECE, economic and environmental activities fall under security and democratization.

the UNECE technical expert stated that different stakeholders across a range of sectoral ministries, including energy, were met whilst on mission to the country. The 2019 conference that focused on transport and environment proved useful for sharing information in Montenegro. The national coordinators reached out to obtain technical inputs from academia and research institutes in their country for inputs and evidence on environmental changes. For example, professors from the university of Banja Luka were consulted in the Republika Srpska on climate change and environmental issues and were requested to obtain the latest evidence via their climate models for Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>24</sup>

#### 5.1.5 Civil society focus (who may represent rights based, or inclusive approaches)

A key evaluation question was whether the project had a focus on the most vulnerable and was rights-based. This question is addressed by examining the civil society focus who may represent rights based, or inclusive approaches. The project was not designed to reach civil society groups directly, but national workshops were expected to share the process of EPR and SDG alignment (organised via the ministries of environment). The relevance of the UNECE Aarhus Convention was mentioned by interviewees from civil society in relation to access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. Whether or not environmental laws respect vulnerable groups depends on the country and also on civil society organisations who check compliance of new legislation. For example, in Republic of Moldova, an NGO indicated that their legal staff check new laws that are shared for public consultation. Some environmental NGOs referring to the Aarhus Convention, stated that decision making processes in the field of environmental protection and climate change are still not sufficiently transparent. For example, there is confusion amongst civil society actors regarding Best Available Techniques (BAT) in accordance with the *Industrial Emissions Directive*. Civil society interviewees advocate that citizens should have access to more timely information on the status of the environment and opportunities to participate in policy-making processes.

Some National Coordinators (e.g. North Macedonia) mentioned that civil society were consulted at the appropriate times in the country, including in youth consultations. Many actors and contributions arose from the aforementioned 2019 conference in Montenegro, which included academia, NGOs and local authorities. The government in Montenegro produced some guidance on how to deal with complaints and objections from the public with regard to environmental instruments. Some environmental civil society organisations were not happy with the consultation process or time period available to comment on the Action Plan. More generally, in Serbia it was noted that consultation processes are at the end of policy development, with little space for intervention. In North Macedonia, national NGOs were reported to be involved in country discussions, but the extent to which their agendas were heard is unknown. The national coordinator mentioned public hearings on new laws, where all sectors including civil society, the private sector and academia are invited and can discuss and comment on proposed changes.<sup>25</sup> Likewise in Republic of Moldova, an NGO interviewed highlighted how they are invited to participate in governmental working groups on the environment. Officials from Serbia indicated that they conducted public consultations and examined NGO perspectives. Although NGOs may have a different position, the ministry representatives said their ministry try to include their perspectives. In December 2020, a Public Debate was held on the draft for

<sup>24</sup> For example papers from Trbic et al. (2021) on the impacts of climate scenarios RCP8.5 and possible impacts on fruit production including important exports for the region (grapevines) or the influence of climate change on river discharges in certain watersheds.

<sup>25</sup> The process of conducting an EPR requires that the expert team include meetings with NGOs representatives and the private sector. When the EPR is complete, the results are also directed to a wider audience (general public, NGOs, industry, government at different levels) who are included in the launch.

the 5-year Air Quality Plan of the City of Kraljevo. Remarks, proposals and suggestions were discussed. At the time of interview, the draft plan was still awaiting approval.

It is important that environmental lobby groups are aware of the administrative and resources constraints experienced by government officials. Some officials see themselves as technically trained in specific environmental areas with considerable expertise (thus not requiring further inputs). Some officials stated that it is policy makers who are leading on the environment agenda (as opposed to civil society), using a scientific basis, and good analytical work. One interviewee saw civil society mainly as partners for implementation, acting as a catalyst for implementation. Interviewees noted that many countries have environmental officials who are enthusiastic, energetic and who encourage younger colleagues to focus on environmental issues (Serbia), but the challenge is inadequate resources. In a number of countries, civil society groups have come together under a *Coalition 27* platform with the aim of monitoring and contributing to the process of harmonization and implementation of the policies and regulations. An example of work in Serbia is included in the Box below.

#### **Box 2: Coalition 27 in Serbia**

*Coalition 27* in Serbia produced their seventh Shadow Report on Chapter 27 in early 2020 – *Walking in the Mist*<sup>26</sup>, which advocates for decision making processes in the field of environment and climate change to have more transparency with the public, as there are few opportunities for the public to participate. The subsequent eighth Shadow Report covers the progress of Serbia in EU integrations in the areas of Chapter 27, Environment and Climate Change progress,<sup>27</sup> and highlights that information is not shared with citizens in a timely way. Three interviewees mentioned these reports.

#### 5.1.6 Gender and disability inclusion

UNECE emphasises a *Leave no one behind* dimension in all project documents for technical cooperation, mentioning gender and disability. The project document stated that the selection of stakeholders for participation would need to be tailored to ensure that vulnerable groups affected by policies discussed are involved and no one is left behind. There was no indication that the UNECE Gender Action Plan<sup>28</sup> guided this UNDA Project. However, it may well be that the importance of taking gender perspectives into account was highlighted in discussions regarding the development of environmental policies, even if no evidence was found. Only one country, Serbia, was noted as having a strong focus on gender, as was mentioned by coordinators in Serbia and also by UNECE staff (Box 3 below). This focus linked to some funds from UNECE's Regular Programme on Technical Cooperation (RPTC) on SDG 5 and work with UN Women/UNDP. At the request from the Ministry of Environmental Protection in Serbia, UNECE provided support in strengthening the capacity of the Ministry's staff in gender mainstreaming and developing a package of relevant gender mainstreaming tools for environmental policies.

The evaluation concluded that discussions did not occur on the inclusion of vulnerable groups and how policies may affect them, which was likely due to COVID-19 restrictions hindering gatherings and workshops. The project did not appear to specifically apply a disability inclusion approach throughout. One UNECE staff interviewed reported that it is not always possible to delve deep into gender mainstreaming and/or disability inclusion but they attempt to do so.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.koalicija27.org/en/shadow-reports/> covering the period March 2019 to February 2020

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.koalicija27.org/en/shadow-reports/> Covers the period between March 2020 and December 2020.

<sup>28</sup> [UNECE Gender Action Plan](#)

### Box 3: Gender and synergies with other environmental activities in Serbia

The National Assembly adopted the new Law on Gender Equality in 2021 with two articles on gender and the environment. Serbia adopted a gender mainstreaming approach horizontally across all policy areas, while recognizing the importance of including special measures in ensuring de facto equality between women and men. Serbia's law calls upon all authorities to take gender equality into consideration and requires gender mainstreaming into their plans, projects and policies (including environmental protection), which according to one interviewee has a long way to go.

The Government wished to raise awareness amongst local authorities on the integration of gender aspects into environmental policies and activities. Thus, UNECE in collaboration with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, UNDP and UN Women in Serbia organized a training session in September 2021. The training addressed local authorities and regional agencies in Serbia and attempted to support them in integrating a gender perspective into environmental policies and measures. Participants at the training learned about commitments from the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities and Regional Development Agencies towards gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, they learned about gender aspects in sectors relevant for environmental policies at local levels, namely climate change, transport, energy efficiency, waste management and disaster risk reduction, partly based on new findings specific for Serbia and reference to available international findings.

According to an interviewee from Serbia, a recent gender and transport case study was presented at a side event for European transport meeting (with good collaboration between the ministry of health transport, environment and health). The ministry created a toolkit for gender mainstreaming into environmental policies. A UNECE official was invited to an interactive gender workshop with local level government officials, as the Ministry was attempting to put in place a pilot project related to gender and the environment at the local level. Participants have been introduced into several approaches to help design, implement and develop further gender-responsive environmental policies, such as programme screening, gender impact assessment, gender responsive budgeting, and gender monitoring presented by UNECE, UNDP and UN Women. A short and useful [guidance document](#) was developed on mainstreaming gender into environmental policy. Discussions demonstrated that it is difficult to go beyond issues of gender balance and locate adequate responses to the substance of environmental policies and their impacts on gender equality. One of the main challenges is a lack of local gender-disaggregated data.

A further regional on-line workshop took place in February 2022, also inviting other Balkans projects. The interest in gender spurred from the focus on the green economy and the waste, climate change and women's sanitation focus of the project under evaluation.

#### 5.1.7 Relevance to Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

Although the environmental regulations and policies that were developed or considered under this project are highly relevant to climate change and disaster risk reduction, this was not necessarily spelled out in project reports. During the *Needs Assessment*, links were made to many relevant SDGs that focus on climate change or disaster risk reduction.<sup>29</sup> For example, the *Needs Assessments* and the EPRs themselves mention SDG 13.1 (*resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards*) and

<sup>29</sup> For example, Goal 11 make cities and human settlements sustainable; Goal 12, sustainable consumption, and production patterns; Goals 13, urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Goal 15 protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.



SDG 11 (*making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*) including SDG target 11.b *strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* (e.g. Serbia). EPR recommendations mention the need for the development of a national disaster risk reduction strategy (e.g. Albania, North Macedonia or Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the need for a strategy to adapt to climate change (North Macedonia and Serbia). Specific policy packages that were prioritized under this UNDA project and that directly addressed climate change included:

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** A Low Emission Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, and an Environmental Strategy and Action Plan that facilitates updating reports on climate change.
- **Montenegro:** A package of secondary legislation that follows the law on the protection from negative climate change effects, including mitigation monitoring (greenhouse gas emissions), and guidance on climate and energy.
- **Montenegro and Serbia:** Guidance to strengthen environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures by integrating climate change concerns in the procedures.
- **North Macedonia:** The development of a long-term strategy on climate action and a draft law, administrative set up of the National Council on Climate Change, roadmap to develop a National Adaptation Plan and disaster risk reduction with climate change in a common reporting platform. Linkages were made to an SDG-funded project that focused on air quality, GHG emissions and the energy sector, devising targets for GHGs reductions in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)
- **Serbia:** A climate change awareness programme as an output from the project.

Interviews with National Coordinators revealed that countries were keen to develop more policy packages, many of which relate to climate adaptation and mitigation specifically (SDG 13). For example, Bosnia and Herzegovina obtained climate modelling evidence from national experts for climate adaptation plans; and information about pollution, leading towards policy packages on green cities. North Montenegro wished to improve environmental compliance and enforcement mechanisms. North Macedonia hoped to have enhanced climate change action towards more ambitious national commitment, as well as monitoring air quality.

Some countries in the region have enhanced their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as required under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Many actions in the NDCs were noted to be ambitious for a climate transition, and some are conditional on funding. Funding for climate change and environmental projects is an issue. Linkages to the *Readiness Programme* of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) was recognised as important by North Macedonia, along with the need for a long-term strategy on climate action. Albania mentioned the national energy and climate plan, and the need for funding for the NDCs. With a GCF project just started, Albania is also currently working on a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and will revise their National Climate Strategy soon.

Many government staff engaged in the UNECE project at the national level were linked to climate change related activities. Some national coordinators interviewed emphasised a need for more focus on climate change to support them implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Clarity on the balance countries should place on mitigation or adaptation would be useful. Three interviewees for this evaluation were undertaken at COP26 (the evaluator attended for another project), demonstrated the linkages between the project coordinator activities and climate change policy. Energy was the most frequent climate change related issue mentioned. Apart from awareness amongst environmental NGOs, in some countries, citizens are only beginning to see connections between environmental changes and climate change (e.g., Republic of Moldova). Floods in 2014 catalysed citizen understanding of how climate related events are now affecting them. However, awareness at

the national level must also reach the provincial and municipal level – this is just beginning to occur.<sup>30</sup> Because many climate issues cross borders, North Macedonia highlighted environmental and climate priorities must be addressed at the regional level, specifically with regional plans on climate adaptation or energy.

## 5.2 Coherence

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### 5.2.1 Collaboration with other UN entities

Coordination with the UN system and other organizations was hampered by COVID-19. Although the project expected to collaborate with UNEP, UNDP and the UNCTs in beneficiary countries, the extent to which the project actually collaborates with the UN system and other organisations on the ground is unclear due to COVID-19 restrictions. The UNECE Environmental Division maintains an Excel worksheet which monitors and reports on all activities for each country, including whether the activity is under UNDA funding, extra budgetary or a regular programme technical cooperation project (RPTC). Such monitoring allows for cross collaboration and cross sectoral knowledge on other technical cooperation that is taking place.<sup>31</sup> Interviewees revealed that their work was planned and implemented in close collaboration with the UNCT system in the country. When UNECE experts were on mission for the *Needs Assessment* activity, they linked with other agencies, noting that collaboration can be difficult if there is no associated shared funding. A [webpage](#) for this project was created to share reports and other information. To a certain extent, coordination and coherence depended on national project coordinators. Some country coordinators (e.g. in North Macedonia) emphasised linkages with UNDP, UNIDO, UNICEF and UNEP. Some examples are outlined below.

- Activities in **Serbia** stand out as an example of collaboration between this project and UNEP, UN Women and the ministry of environment, with joint work on gender and the green economy. These entities are now preparing a proposal for a 2-3 year project to continue collaboration.
- A national coordinator from **Bosnia and Herzegovina** reported in an interview that they are in daily communications with representatives of other UN organisations (FAO, UNEP) and the World Bank and GEF, with UNDP coordinating country activities. They reported good coherence with other entities in the UN system and other international organisations.
- In **Montenegro**, the UNDP plays a leading role for UN agencies and the UNECE project relied on UNDP for initial set up activities.
- An interviewee from **Albania** noted that there was good collaboration with other countries on training for the implementation of the EPR recommendations, but collaboration with other agencies did not necessarily take place through this project.

No specific mention of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) was noted in interviews, although specific questions were not asked about linkages to the UNSDCF. No mention was made of issue-based coalition (IBCs) in countries. An EU Official noted that the environmental area is getting a bit crowded, and many agencies are trying to get funding from the EU.<sup>32</sup> The UNECE

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<sup>30</sup> For example: An interviewee from Bosnia and Herzegovina noted how for a different project, they have just completed a climate change and coastal management adaptation paper. An interviewee from civil society in Montenegro highlighted that climate change is not pointed out as a large problem yet. Another country (Serbia) noted the need for less piecemeal municipal level approaches (such as planting trees or cleaning streets) to climate change.

<sup>31</sup> For example, extrabudgetary funded project examined environmental governance and health related matters, with a focus on public participation on decision making in environmental and health (in Montenegro, North Macedonia).

<sup>32</sup> UNEP is considered quite active in the region in particularly as Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians) which was signed by the seven Parties including Serbia. The Convention is a multi-level governance mechanism covering the whole of the Carpathian area in terms of the protection and sustainable development of a mountain region.

UNDA project manager emphasised clarity with regard to not overstepping or reproducing other UN agencies mandate or focus on specific SDGs.

### 5.2.2 Coherence of the project design and its implementation

The project design was straightforward, although the project document did not contain a lot of detail. The overall goal was supporting governments to prioritise and align environmental recommendations from the EPR with SDGs in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Three results were expected from the project – change was expected to happen because of capacity building for ministry of environmental staff and new environmental related legislation. The underlying assumption is that strengthened capacities would lead to better environmental governance. However, this assumption is not automatic and relies on many other factors including careful follow up and much more training on and understanding of environmental governance issues, as well as staff remaining in their current positions. Considering the key focus of the project, it could not focus on root causes of environmental challenges, but helped bring to the fore discussions on what is needed to be done (and funded). Many interviewees reiterated political, financial and other challenges before SDG targets are reached. A *Theory of Change* could help define assumptions about how change will happen in a country. Table 2 below outlines how the Evaluator perceives the *Theory of Change* for this project, which also contains activities that may not have been present in this project (due to a lack of funds). The Outputs and Outcome are the same as in the UNDA project document. Some inputs that may also be required (or took place) are added (in red/bold), and likely impacts are also added (in red/bold).

Table 2: Possible Theory of Change for UNECE environment governance project

	Inputs	Outputs	Outcome	Impacts
Evidence-based based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the SDGs	Providing evidence through legislative desk review  Enhancing capacities to review EPR implementation  Building ownership on EPR  Undertaking a Needs Assessment  Identifying policy gaps  <b>Supporting other national entities to influence key policy processes</b>  <b>Sharing institutional positioning with civil society</b>  <b>Building and consolidating partnerships</b>  <b>Producing communications tools</b>  <b>Supporting countries to expand donor base to implement environmental activities</b>	<b>Output 1:</b> Five target countries identified policy gaps between current conditions and desired achievement of relevant SDGs  <b>Output 2:</b> Five target countries developed and endorsed priority national action plans/policy packaged based on EPRs	5 target countries presented reports on the implementation of SDG-related recommendations resulting from the EPRs	<b>Enhancing policy makers capacities.</b> <b>Aarhus Convention provisions provision in place so rights become effective (public participation in environmental decision-making; and the right to review procedures to challenge public decisions that have been made)</b>  <b>SDG environmental responses in locations with environmental issues</b>  <b>Information, (green) services and activities emerging at municipal level (with associated budgets)</b>

### 5.2.3 COVID-19 adjustments made and whether they responded to new priorities of Member states

The project was up and running for at least a year and a half prior to COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic reached the target countries from February 2020. Governments responded in different ways. Generally, businesses, venues and amenities shut, government employees began to work from home and large gatherings were cancelled. Non-essential travel was not allowed and contact with others was limited. UNECE quickly produced guidelines for responding to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic in the UNECE region, building on three pillars: i) facilitate connectivity; ii) address trans boundary and other risk and iii) support a green and resilient recovery.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> UNECE's Action Framework for a coherent response (link?)

The adjustment to the project occurred fast at the onset of the pandemic, although an Albanian interviewee noted that apart from on-line meetings, COVID-19 repercussions resulted in a gap of nearly one year in the project. Overall, COVID-19 impacted planned workshops (in particular sharing regional experiences) and travel including UNECE staff travel. Some project workshops had already taken place, such as a workshop in Montenegro in June 2019 to validate the results of the reviews and needs assessment, but others were cancelled or moved online.

Planning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was made early during the pandemic. Two budget revisions took place in 2020, one in May and the second one in November. The final subregional policy seminar for the five countries and the concluding subregional event were merged and planned as one event depending on travel guidance at the end of 2021 (Activities under 2.3. and 2.4). Depending on whether there were restrictions about workshops and people coming together, the five national workshops originally planned were changed to virtual meeting formats (where gatherings were not allowed). Funds that related to physical meetings or workshops were reallocated to Activity 2.1 (develop national action plans/policy packages for implementing recommendations coming from EPRs in line with relevant SDGs in the five beneficiary countries in consultation with inter-ministerial coordination groups). The five targeted countries were keen to develop more policy packages and had identified areas to focus on, many of which related to the pandemic itself. Some funds were reallocated to support countries with policy packages that increase resilience and support a green economic recovery to COVID. For example, Albania wished to assess waste disposal, landfills and incinerators, and wanted an action plan in relation to COVID-19. Additional policy packages for Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia were approved (\$60,000), and two evaluations of environmental strategies undertaken in an additional country, Republic of Moldova (\$17,000 approximately).

With the advent of COVID-19, the focus on some environmental priorities were reduced in member States, although others, such as medical waste and air quality, became higher priorities. UNECE were flexible, adjusting based on government demand for online events, online training and further policy packages. Funds were redeployed to support the preparation of additional strategic and policy documents, all of which focused on strengthening environmental governance. The 2020 monitoring report outlines how three countries (Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) were able to develop further policy packages, which addressed climate change mitigation and adaptation and focused on improving air quality. Interviews also provided more detail:

- **Montenegro** officials explained how COVID-19 restrictions gave their country an opportunity to spend project funds on more concrete outputs. Local consultants were contracted to develop an extended range of policy packages using the funds originally intended for travel and workshops. The focus of these policy packages was on increasing resilience in response to the pandemic in the participating countries (e.g., in air quality and waste management).
- National coordinators in **North Macedonia** outlined how they had to adapt the policy documents to include attention to COVID-19, particularly for the local government level as the economy was reacting to the pandemic. They noted that they were only able to focus on the short-term effects on the environment, because it was unknown how long the pandemic would last.
- **Serbia** noted that all four projects were adjusted to COVID-19. Two out of four projects were developed while COVID restrictions were in place. An interviewee from Serbia said that addressing medical waste was a key issue. Pilot activities were run in 5-6 municipalities, focusing on medical waste from patients' homes, medical facilities, public health institutions. In this case, the Ministry of Environmental Protection worked closely with the Ministry of Health and a network of Public Health Institutions, presenting at a range of workshops to reach many stakeholders. Specific messages for the awareness raising campaign on medical waste were developed.

- Although not originally included in planned activities, due to the availability of travel funds that could not be spent, two concrete pieces of work were completed in the **Republic of Moldova**. A *Need Assessment* was not completed, but discussions with the national focal point on the green economy and climate change took place, and funding for two specific proposals were agreed upon (an evaluation of the implementation of the existing environmental strategy; and an evaluation of the green economy action plan). The timeframe for the work in Republic of Moldova was short – May 2021 to October 2021.

## 5.3 Effectiveness

### 5.3.1 Reaching the results expected

An analysis of reports and interviews revealed that project activities were slow to begin in 2018. This may have been linked to the heavy workload of the EPR Programme. In 2019 activities were ramped up, with four reviews assessing how recommendations coming from drafts of EPRs vis-à-vis SDGs were implemented.<sup>34</sup> According to the 2020 Progress Report, by the end of 2019, four out of five target countries identified policy gaps between the current conditions and the desired achievement of relevant SDGs. The fifth country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, required four national focal points to agree on logistics and activities because of the decentralised nature of the country (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska and Brčko District condominium). Eventually, an agreement was reached with the Assistant Minister at the State level to start activities in spring 2020. By the end of 2020, five out of five target countries had endorsed priority national action plans or policy packages based on the EPRs. Apart from the five country policy package outputs, the UNDA project was able to assist the Republic of Moldova in developing a draft environmental strategy and evaluating a green economy action plan to draft a new programme.<sup>35</sup>

The following tables outline the achievement of the indicators in the logical framework against interview results and activities listed on the project website.<sup>36</sup> Table 7 in Annex 8 outlines the specific policy packages produced through the project.

Table 3: Overview of EPR, Need Assessments and Actions undertaken

Country	3 <sup>rd</sup> EPR	Needs Assessment	Outcomes (national action plan or policy packages)
Albania	2017	√ in 2019	√
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2017	√ in 2020	√
Montenegro	2014	√ in 2019	√
North Macedonia	2019	√ in 2019	√
Serbia	2014	√ in 2019	√
Republic of Moldova	Planning EPR	Not in project plan	2 evaluation reports

<sup>34</sup> Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia were the first three reviews prepared on the implementation of the recommendations coming from the EPRs vis-a-vis the SGS targets. Serbia followed soon after.

<sup>35</sup> [Evaluation of the implementation of the Environmental Strategy for the period 2014-2023 and development of a draft environmental strategy](#)

[Evaluation of the Programme on the green economy and its Action Plan and drafting of a new Programme](#)

<sup>36</sup> <https://unece.org/1819ae-evidence-based-environmental-governance-and-sustainable-environmental-policies-support-2030>

Table 4: Indicators achieved in UNDA/UNECE environmental governance project

Outputs and activities	Result		Result
<b>EA 1: Enhanced national capacities of the selected countries of South-East Europe to <u>assess</u> the most critical aspects and priority needs in their environmental governance and policies.</b>		<b>Indicator:</b> Five target countries identified policy gaps between current conditions and desired achievement of relevant SDGs	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Activity 1.1 Develop five (one per target country) reviews of the implementation of the recommendations coming from EPRs vis-à-vis SDGs and targets</b></li> </ul>	Completed		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Activity 1.2 Undertake need assessments (one per target country) to determine and address gaps identified in the reviews between current conditions and desired achievements of relevant SDGs</b></li> </ul>	Completed		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Activity 1.3 Organise five (one per target country) workshops to present and validate the results of the reviews and needs assessments</b></li> </ul>	Completed, but affected by COVID-19 hence, some virtual workshops		
<b>EA 2: Enhanced national capacities of the selected countries of South-East Europe to <u>develop and integrate</u> evidence-based coherent environmental policies into sector-specific and cross-sectoral strategies aimed at contributing to the achievement of relevant SDGs the most critical aspects and priority needs in their environmental governance and policies.</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Activity 2.1 Develop national action plans/policy packages for implementing recommendations coming from EPRs in line with relevant SDGs in the five beneficiary countries in consultation with inter-ministerial coordination groups</b></li> </ul>	Unknown if all were completed in consultation with inter-ministerial coordination groups. However, policy packages could not be accepted without at least one ministerial endorsement.	<b>Indicator 2.1</b> Five target countries developed and endorsed priority national action plans/policy packages based on the EPRs.	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Activity 2.2 Organize five national validation workshops to review the respective national action plans/policy packages with inter-ministerial coordination groups and relevant stakeholders and discuss their implementation</b></li> </ul>	Physical workshops took place in some countries (Montenegro) but not all.	<b>Indicator 2.2</b> Five target countries presented reports on the implementation of SDG-related recommendations resulting from the EPRs.	Completed and presented on ECE Committee website. Reflected in ECE Committee on Environments reports
		<b>Indicator 2.3</b> 80 percent of recommendations from EPRs either implemented or incorporated into national action plans/policy packages based on the national priority needs	Albania  Bosnia and Herzegovina: Out of 14 recommendations, 79% on going and 21 % not implemented.  Montenegro: Out of 9 recommendations, 77% are implemented or ongoing and 23% are not implemented.

Outputs and activities	Result		Result
			<p>North Macedonia: Out of 18 recommendations, 33% are not implemented and 66% are ongoing.</p> <p>Serbia: Out of 13 recommendations, 11 % are not implemented and 89% are either implemented, partly implemented or ongoing.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Activity 2.3 Organise subregional policy seminar to exchange experience on implementation of national action plans/policy packages</b></li> </ul>	No. Affected by COVID-19		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Activity 2.4 Organise concluding subregional event to present an overview of the environmental challenges in the South-East Europe region, share best practices and discuss follow-up of the national action plans/policy packages aligned with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels.</b></li> </ul>	No. Affected by COVID-19		



### 5.3.2 Achievements of the project

The *Needs Assessments* provided a clear picture of environmental issues in different sub-sectors, which helped ministerial staff plan subsequent steps (noted in a few interviews with national coordinators). The importance of having policy papers produced under the approved project was highlighted. Following the *Needs Assessment*, national coordinators appreciated having choices and the ability to utilise their judgement based on the work undertaken by UNECE – specifically in choosing whether to follow a roadmap in implementing the EPR recommendations, or to focus on specific policy packages. In terms of **EA1** enhanced national capacities, national coordinators reported the following:

- **North Macedonia** stated that the main outcome of the project is that policy packages emanating from the EPR in line with the SDGs are developed using a participatory process. It was also stated that North Macedonia achieved the project objectives and outputs – demonstrated by four projects that incorporate policy recommendations (stemming from the EPR) in the area of the green economy. All policy packages provide the ministry with information on the current situation and where they should go in the next five year period.
- **Albania** emphasized how the UNDA project helped their Directorate draft policy papers. Another policy paper highlighted by Albania representatives as particularly useful, is the *Regulatory Impact Assessment*, which is being used to train staff on how such assessments link with social, environment and financial issues prior to the adoption of a legal instrument.
- Interviewees from **Bosnia and Herzegovina** reported how satisfied they were with the results achieved and how useful the project was for them. They completed four policy documents (greening the economy, coastal management, guidelines for sustainable development in agriculture and COVID-19 impacts in the public sector).

A few national coordinators (Montenegro, Albania) noted how they appreciated that the project was flexible, so the country itself was able to determine their national priorities. However, it was noted by one coordinator that the project could have been more focused, because of the pressure experienced by those with responsibility for environmental legislation and Chapter 27 for EU Accession. In terms of developing and integrating (**EA2**) evidence-based coherent environmental policies into sector strategies linked to the SDGs in environmental governance and policies, the following was highlighted in interviews.

- In **Serbia**, the proposed policy packages (Green Economy Program, Air Quality Plan) are expected to be used as a road map for policy implementation and serve as a basis for the development of a National Action Plan or other policy documents. The statistical office is monitoring progress on SDG targets. An official noted that each document produced under the UNECE project produced a strategy or guidance that will now require further direction for implementing green economy initiatives and the air quality action plan.
- In **Albania**, it was noted that thanks to the UNDA project they now have an inter-ministerial committee on chemical safety and an advisory body for the country is in place.
- In **North Macedonia**, policy packages are to be implemented at local level. Prior to the project analyses had been undertaken on municipality implementation. Through the project new information was produced to direct local municipality implementation. Combining both was reported as very useful for the central government.
- With regard to the *Low Emission Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina*, it was reported that it compiled and consolidated recent information and is ready for use for all stakeholders. Apparently, it was the first such document prepared in Bosnia and Herzegovina, so the information is very important for strategy development and other action plans and documents, as well as for the preparation of various projects.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, people from the agricultural sector reported they appreciated the opportunity to analyze the situation and contribute the guidelines in agriculture as well as in other areas.

- Interviewees from government in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** reported that the best results were achieved in line with other policy instruments they are hoping to reach. Their next step is to get stakeholder ratification for the policy packages. An interviewee from another project in Bosnia and Herzegovina noted how the documents from the project provide great detail and an interesting overview of environmental issues, and they will use it again for project funding applications and background details.
- The EPR recommendations are largely implemented in **Montenegro**. Some systemic proposals which are beyond the competence of the Ministry of Environment (e.g. utility fees, organization of municipal communal services) are still pending since the transition of public utility companies is slow and social policy still prevents an increase in utility fees. A technical expert who worked in Montenegro stressed how one policy packages was designed to achieve three SDG goals. She also mentioned that the project facilitated dialogues across ministries to implement the policy packages. This expert stated that what the ministries are striving to do in terms of a holistic cross sectoral approach should be praised (e.g. ministry of environment and tourism meeting with the transport section and talking about air quality). This is despite budget constraints. The project was able to use good technical translation on EU best available techniques and technical guides in Montenegro. However, CSO interviewees highlighted how there are few local actions. The decentralised implementation of environmental laws is challenging. A general problem is transcending laws from national to local level. Hence, empowerment and capacity building work is required at municipality levels.

**Exchanging information at the subregional level:** Activities 2.3 and 2.4 did not take place.<sup>37</sup> Although some countries are very keen on (sub)regional approaches, there were few opportunities for regional exchange travel to visit colleagues. Regional exchange of experiences is appreciated by officials in ministries of environment to discuss how to overcome obstacles, purchase equipment, or locate experts. Whilst it was noted that countries in the region have similar legal frameworks and similar shaped administrations, interviews raised the following issues in terms of sharing experience and regional collaboration.

- For **North Macedonia** the exchange of knowledge and good practice at the national and regional level was also mentioned as an important output. An official from North Macedonia mentioned that through the UNECE and this project they are in communication with Albania, Montenegro and Serbian colleagues. For example, they are collaborating or working together on a regional approach to a policy document on climate change underlining common challenges to climate change and waste management - regional approaches are very relevant for such issues.
- Regional meetings are considered by **Bosnia and Herzegovina** as an excellent way to transfer knowledge, and share experiences and findings where applicable. It was noted that regional knowledge sharing should move beyond theoretical and aspirational discussions and move towards implementation details. In general, there are limitations to reading in background document detail, and many would prefer to discuss implementation issues and how to overcome implementation challenges.
- **Montenegro** noted that the project found it difficult to maintain a regional dimension due to the pandemic. However, Montenegro cooperated with Serbia on a climate change in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures guidance document. Such collaboration was appreciated, with regional papers on specific topics mentioned.

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<sup>37</sup> Subregional policy seminar and subregional event to present an overview of the environmental challenges in the South-East Europe region, share good practices and discuss follow-up of the national action plans/policy packages aligned with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

On the other hand, an Albanian interviewee noted that they do not necessarily require a regional focused project, but would appreciate another national project, based on their current situation and EU Accession requirements. The Moldovan national coordinator also felt that a country focused project, rather than a common project across 4-6 countries would be better to consider national policy requirements. They also felt that timing is important, as policy development is slow (a policy document can take up to one year to be developed).

### 5.3.3 Challenges/obstacles to achieving activities, objectives and expected accomplishments

Evidently, the COVID-19 pandemic affected project activities significantly. This is explored under the coherence and sustainability sections. Broad challenges and obstacles discussed with interviewees can be categorised into:

1. Environmental challenges faced in respective countries
2. Internal governance/legislative and implementation challenges related to project activities

For 1 above, interviewees noted many specific environmental challenges in their country (air quality, waste, industrial waste, climate change etc.).<sup>38</sup> Aspiration towards and adherence to EU environmental guidelines is particularly challenging, for example in reduction of single-use plastics.<sup>39</sup> These specific environmental challenges are beyond the remit of this evaluation. The second set of challenges (internal governance/ legislative and implementation challenges)<sup>40</sup> as they relate to national capacities towards environmental governance and policies are discussed in more detail in this section. Specifically, the evaluation notes data gaps; the complexity of SDG alignment; policy coherence issues; political change challenges; implementation issues, including resources (financial and human) and institutional capacities.

**Data for targets and indicators:** With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, the EPRs underwent a significant change to integrate the SDGs into the methodology and content of the reviews. This is a complex task, and one which UNECE tackled very well (by all accounts) through this UNDA project. There are 17 SDGs, 169 Targets with 247 indicators and 231 unique indicators listed in the global indicator framework.<sup>41</sup> Although certainly not unique to South-East Europe, as indicated by an Environmental Affairs Officer at UNECE<sup>42</sup>, a key constraint to integrate SDGs into EPRs is limited data and information. National data collection capacities and ability to measure progress varied. For some countries (Montenegro), it is still challenging (due to a lack of systematic database collection and limited resources); for others (Serbia), monitoring on SDGs is set up to be undertaken via the government statistics unit. Likewise, in Republic of Moldova the Statistic Unit in Government reports on the SDGs.<sup>43</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the non-existence of an environmental protection agency was mentioned as challenging as it could provide data on SDGs. Voluntary reporting on the SDGs is also a challenge as countries tend to look for data on goal achievements one by one and it is difficult to report on their cross-sectoral nature.

<sup>38</sup> For example, it was noted in the short survey that environmental challenges in North Macedonia include the need for ecosystem-related infrastructure improvements, communication challenges, resilience to climate change, and international considerations. Many challenges related to the implementation of a new developments at international and regional level in terms of decarbonisation (implementation of a Glasgow Climate Pact, Sofia declaration on Western Balkans etc.)

<sup>39</sup> The EU aims to reduce the volume of specific plastic products on the environment through Directive (EU) 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, commonly referred to as the Single Use Plastics Directive.

<sup>40</sup> in terms of integrating evidenced-based coherent environmental policies into sector strategies linked to the SDGs in environmental governance and policies

<sup>41</sup> Twelve indicators repeat under two or three different targets.

<sup>42</sup> <https://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/integrating-sdgs-into-environmental-performance-reviews-lessons-learned-in-europe/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?!=en&id=6306&idc=605>

**Complexity of governance for SDG alignment:** SDG implementation require a paradigm shift in siloed sectoral thinking, which seems plausible in theory, but very difficult in practice due to the structure of government institutions. A lack of dialogue and cooperation between and across sectoral ministries is always a challenge and this issue arises in many countries, including countries in this project. Because of ministerial divisions on policy matters, there can be confusion over who is responsible for which SDGs that cut across ministries. For example, energy cuts across all other sectors, and must be dealt with beyond the ministry that deals with energy alone. The SDGs are interlinked; the achievement of one goal (energy reduction via hydro interventions, linked to target 7.3) can contradict another SDG (if the hydro power station is planned in a national park affecting biodiversity, linked to target 15.6). The UNECE project did facilitate or at least start multi-ministerial dialogues to implement the SDG related policy packages (for example in Montenegro or in Albania). However, what an inter-ministerial approach can look like in practice must be understood more, and how collaboration works without funding for a specific initiative is a major problem. According to one technical expert interviewed, the *EU's Strategic Environmental Assessment* gives a good notion of how to integrate different environmental elements, and how they are in competition against each other. The *NEXUS* approach outlined by UNECE is also considered very useful as it promotes an integrated approach.<sup>44</sup>

**Policy coherence:** Only SDG 17 emphasises policy coherence and partnerships (for sustainable development), including support for capacity building (target 17.9), yet all SDGs require elements of governance and policy coherence.<sup>45</sup> State organisations are complex, and different authorities share responsibility for different environmental issues (water quality, sea, energy). For example, when countries do not have locations for industrial hazardous waste, recycling plants, or systems to separate waste, directives on waste and water must be made across ministries –this can be particularly challenging. A recent Bosnia and Herzegovina report on coordination mechanisms for integrated coastal zone management highlighted: “*Weakness is also the cooperation between the various institutions involved in governance*” (January 2022 pg. 7). Other countries also raised this issue (e.g., Republic of Moldova), particularly when new members focused on how single issues join environmental working groups, without having knowledge of broader environmental governance issues. Interviewees noted the importance of clearly understanding of how administrative systems work, who has power, who decides, and who is responsible for creating common guidelines for a country. A flow diagram from a Bosnia and Herzegovina coastal project (CAMP) on how decisions are made provided a good example of such understanding.<sup>46</sup>

In North Macedonia, it was noted in the survey for this evaluation that time to develop broad coordination across different institutions and stakeholders at different levels is challenging. It was noted that projects such as this UNECE project provide an excellent opportunity to bring ministries together. However, these working groups tend to dissipate after the project unless another project begins, and sometimes this results in new nominations – hence a lack of effectiveness and coherence.

The relatively weak position of ministries responsible for environmental issues within the national government system was noted (e.g., Montenegro). Prioritization of where funding goes is a challenge in some countries, whereby funds go to security or custom zones rather than for improving environmental issues. Governance and politics affect the interlinkages of whether attention is paid to multi-dimensional aspects, for example in water management (such as riverbeds management planning as well as ground water management). Another governance issue is that countries may not monitor their whole territory but focus only on certain areas. A challenge reported by many is the

<sup>44</sup> <https://unece.org/general-introduction>

<sup>45</sup> Target 17.15 requires respect for each country's policy space and leaderships to establish and implement policies, and Target 17.7 requires countries to promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships.

<sup>46</sup> See Page 11 flowchart in the report *Coordination mechanism for ICZM in Bosnia and Herzegovina* UNEP/MAP PAP/RAC January 2022

lack of political understanding at the most senior level in ministries of environment and beyond on the amount of work required for environment legislation alignment, reporting and monitoring (Conventions).<sup>47</sup> The same is also true at different levels of government - environmental challenges are not high on the agenda in many political parties in office in the region. Some government officials perceive environmental policies as obstacles for overall economic growth strategies.

**Political change challenges:** Broader political changes are also a recurring challenge in the region, and what gets prioritised depends on elections and who is in power. Many countries (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina) have complex political and institutional set-ups. Several levels of political structuring make legal and policy changes and measures difficult across the country.<sup>48</sup> Other countries (Republic of Moldova) have few government staff working on environmental governance issues and find it hard to attract people to work in this area due to salary limitations. A lack of political support for the implementation of environmental activities was noted in some countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina for example). Some countries (Albania North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia) changed governments during the project, sometimes leading to different prioritisation of environmental issues. Civil society organisations (Montenegro) noted that ministries often switch responsibilities after elections. Delays to adaptation of the documents are caused by changes in administrative set-up. There can be a reshuffling of staff in environmental ministries following elections (Serbia).

Elections and political contexts delayed activities in some countries, e.g., Albania's election in 2019 meant the ministry had to wait until any new structures were in place. In Serbia, a change of government at the end of 2020, enabled additional policy documents to be developed, since the priorities of the government changed (however, April 2022 elections may change priorities). A change of government in Montenegro at the end of 2020 was significant, and it is hoped that there will be more efficient administrative procedures and the harmonization of priority actions in some sectors. Recent political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the tripartite state including structural and constitutional issues will also affect scaling up institutionalisation and replication. Republic of Moldova noted governmental changes following elections, and the creation of a new Ministry of Environment during the project implementation period.

**Implementation challenges:** A key challenge is the implementation of environmental policies at the national and municipality level. Local government have many priorities, including dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, as noted by North Macedonia, most of the responsibility lies at local level, with local government capacity identified as a weakness along with the lack of financial resources to implement at each of 18 municipalities. Bosnia and Herzegovina is highly decentralised. Environmental competences related to international environmental agreements are not necessarily strong in the decentralised entities. A lack of cooperation between the state and local authorities is certainly challenging, such as getting local government to sponsor activities. In many countries, personal contacts are required to ensure cooperation between national and local government. Yet implementation and decentralised systems still require standards that apply to all. For example, waste management requires a centralised monitoring system, an accredited lab, and a common chemical analysis methodology to be able to compare data from all parts of the country. Thus, as noted by an interviewee from Montenegro, both vertical and horizontal governance are issues. More dialogue between the levels is required. Civil society representatives in some countries noted that although environmental policy is being developed, the government as a whole is not making progress towards SDGs.

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<sup>47</sup> For example, in Montenegro, a lack of capacities blocks the implementation and reporting on SDGs (e.g. only one person in the Ministry is in charge of Agenda 2030). Recently, a small office is opened within the Cabinet of the Prime Minister to support sustainable development.

<sup>48</sup> The country is divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska. The Brčko District functions under a decentralized system of local government.

**Funding challenges:** Countries are facing a lack of funds, lack of staff (particularly at the municipality level) and a lack of capacity. Direct finance is required at lower levels for implementation when regions cannot raise their own funds. Many coordinators mentioned the need for funds to ensure roadmaps for implementation. For instance, infrastructure for the waste and water sectors is particularly expensive, more so than the nature sector. An interviewee from Serbia also noted that funds collected through taxes are not systematically earmarked for environmental protection. Funding for EU law requires a huge investment for infrastructure, for example, a water equipment plant may require 5 billion euros in investment. A challenge for countries is to estimate costs and identify sources of funding for compliance measures from loans, or the Green Climate Fund (GCF). In some countries (North Macedonia), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a catalyst for action on the environment and is seen as important for implementation. Most countries have started their GCF readiness fund, although the new rules regarding blending GCF facility with loans and grants is proving difficult. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is quite active in the region, and the European Investing Bank provides the majority of funding under The Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) – a regional blending facility supporting EU enlargement and socio-economic development in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. One other challenge related to funding is that money for infrastructure may be available from other sources who do not follow rules regarding environmental impact assessments.<sup>49</sup>

**Staff and institutional capacity:** It was noted in interviews that a capacity gap for some national partners was not the technical aspects of packages, but how to make the technical proposals happen. An issue highlighted was the need for further resources to build other capacities in institutions to ensure effective implementation and enforcement measures envisaged in strategic environmental documents. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are only seven persons working on environmental governance in the ministry. This is extremely challenging given the range of legislation to be covered (including for EU integration). The ministry is reporting on and servicing up to 70 Convention protocols or international agreements, which takes considerable time to implement and follow. One staff member has to report on many conventions and are overburdened with their ongoing tasks. An interviewee from Serbia mentioned that when Chapter 27 was opened, it was estimated that five times more staff were required to fill positions, but hiring new staff was not possible. With staff change following elections, it takes time for the new staff to become acquainted with environmental governance issues. Most countries do not have systematic and regular training for new employees. Similarly, Montenegro noted that there is only one person dealing with Agenda 2030 in the ministry of environment.

The local government sector is also understaffed and finds it difficult to retain staff due to the lower relative salaries. Migration is an issue in many South-East Europe countries, including for those with expertise in environmental issues in some countries (North Macedonia). UNECE is supporting some countries (Republic of Moldova) develop environmental focused university courses. Including important environmental issues in curricula should result in a new cadre of citizens being able to tackle environmental issues. Whether graduates gravitate to public service is not guaranteed, however.

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<sup>49</sup> The example was given with regard to parklands and nature areas in one country - EU law does not allow hydro parks to be built in national park area, but funds were available from elsewhere for such infrastructure.

## 5.4 Efficiency

### 5.4.1 The achievement of project objectives within budget and allocation of resources.

The United Nations Development Account (UNDA) from the UN Regular Budget, provided funding for the project. The project followed UNECE's technical cooperation guiding principles in that the project was anchored in UNECE normative work; and the project mainly used UNECE's in-house expertise ensuring the optimal use of limited resources. It was noted in interviews that national coordinators used the small amount of funding available thought this project was efficient and did a good job. With small sums, countries were able to undertake several seemingly minor policy and alignment activities yet complete them efficiently. Project funds were spent efficiently on concrete outputs, and large expensive studies were not undertaken (large studies, according to some interviewees are not used as by the time they are completed the issue may have changed). Many commented on how a relatively small project such as this one was extremely efficient. For example:

- An **Albanian** interviewee noted that although the project did not have a large budget, they managed to get maximum benefit with what was available. The three policy documents in place are very important to their ministry.<sup>50</sup>
- Interviewees from **Montenegro** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina** stated that sometimes modest projects have better impacts, given the financial investment.

It was also noted that the project allowed for flexibility, adaptability and followed what has happening in a country. Two examples illustrate this point:

- When the roadmap was developed, it was evident in **Montenegro** that needs had changed, as a new law on industrial emissions was in place and the project was flexible.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, because of the political make-up, four national focal points were nominated for the country, which required more logistics in terms of initiating the project.

### 5.4.2 Alternatives suggested for use of resources

Four alternatives to achieve the same results were noted in interviews. One suggestion was to focus more on how to overcome governance and implementation challenges. Countries may have environmental legislation on paper, but in practice it is not being implemented. Relatedly, a second suggestion was to demonstrate and share more the effects of the implementation of environmental legislation, clearly indicating differences before and after improvement. It was thought that detailed instructions and guidelines for administrations and enterprises could be shared from other jurisdictions demonstrating how environmental legislation was actually implemented, and who was involved (including administration and entrepreneurs). In line with this suggestion was the recommendation to use more examples from nearby countries, with the focus on the effects of laws regulating environmental procedures. For example, once a law concerning better waste management has been approved, and control permits for waste management issued, a country should share the specific guidance developed regarding the location and operation of waste disposal sites, waste landfills, waste management and recycling obligations. A final alternative to the use of resources that arose was the need for project resources to be used to more strongly encourage governments to consult with civil society organizations working on environmental issues. The key point here is that given low capacities in government, environmental NGOs can help fill various gaps. A related suggestion was to consider using funds (post-COVID) in a way that encourages better linkages to civil society organizations or to develop campaigns that create new social behaviours.

### 5.4.3 Efficiency of human and financial resources

An important part of the overall support provided through this project to the selected countries was the form and nature of the technical expertise provided via the UNECE. National coordinators

<sup>50</sup> two policy documents completed and one nearly completed at time of interview in November 2021.

interviewed were very pleased with UNECE's human resource support. Montenegro interviewees noted that UNECE have a long-term experience in technical cooperation with respect to environmental governance, which is proven to be tailor-made and host-country driven for good results. Other national coordinators also praised the UNECE staff (North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Moldova). Many national coordinators noted that from the UNECE side, the project was well organised from all aspects (with good cooperation, coordination, communication and so on). The project manager appeared to work with those in member state ministries who have a strong interest in or ability to influence the project. The participatory manner in which the project manager consulted with national coordinators was highlighted. Serbia official noted the work of the gender consultant as being very useful.

Technical experts with knowledge of the region, with specialisation in environmental policy, law, or health issues, were contracted by the UNECE to conduct the needs assessment and workshops. Although UNECE located the five international experts who conducted the *Needs Assessments*, the national coordinators for this project were involved in reviewing who was chosen and developing the terms of reference for experts' work. The process of drafting the *Needs Assessments* were reported as being very efficient, with good collaboration between UNECE, the experts and the national coordinators. Experts who are knowledgeable about the national situation are necessary for this type of work, as ministry staff do not have to spend time sourcing data for experts or explaining the national system to them. One national coordinator from Montenegro was involved in conducting a *Needs Assessment* of another country (Albania). This allowed one country to share EU negotiation experiences with the second country, who are a few steps back in the EU Accession process.

## 5.5 Sustainability

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The project incorporated sustainability into its activities by ensuring national ownership, whilst validation of policy packages was led by appropriate national officials. The skills, capacities and knowledge will be retained by those individuals who benefited from the project activities. All research and analysis were checked and approved by government staff before being sent to UNECE. Following the policy options provided via the *Needs Assessment*, policy packages or guidance documents were designed and developed in collaboration with ministry of environment staff. Because the choice of which recommendations to focus on was driven by the national authorities, the approach is based on national priorities, rather than UNECE staff deciding which environmental issues should be invested in. Legislation and policy packages cannot be developed without national endorsement and the highest-level approval, by the minister, was sought.

### 5.5.1 Partners ownership of the project outcomes

The project was systematically aligned with national priorities in all countries, however the extent to which sectoral ministries with responsibility for specific policy packages areas of focus (transport, energy, industry) own the outcomes of work is unknown. The likelihood of activities to be scaled up or replicated depends upon national coordinators positions of power within the ministry (and politics) to work with other sectors, and whether they remain in their position. Countries themselves have identified ways to sustain and develop outputs further. North Macedonia officials said that further linkages can be made towards the implementation of some of the policies and actions set by the decarbonisation documents at national and regional level. For example, the development of a National Plan on the *Green Agenda* following the implementation of an Action Plan for implementation of the Sofia Declaration on Western Balkan and other decarbonisation documents at national level.

### 5.5.2 Financial required for scale up and replication



Sustainability relies on finances for the implementation of directives. Many countries noted that the policy packages are not sustainable in terms of implementation, due to a lack of funds. For example, in Serbia considerable funding is required for infrastructure projects, such as waste management. Some countries noted how they are drafting proposals for the Global Environment Fund (GEF) or the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and how the information and data in the UNECE documents (Needs Assessment) significantly helped them improve their environmental strategy. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, using their environmental strategic plan (which has over 1,800 measures to be implemented with financial estimations outlined), may support their efforts in getting GEF funding. As already mentioned, a sustainability challenge is capacity in ministries. In many countries, human and financial capacities are limited; when staff retire, they may not be replaced; there is a lack of long term training courses on environmental sustainability matters. In one country, only three employees are working on climate change. In others, ministry staff are overwhelmed by environmental projects.

### 5.5.3 Lessons learned on need for advocacy coalition focus

Sustainability of the policy packages requires paying attention to the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests in environmental issues and exercise their legal rights under new legislation. Sustainability requires citizen level acceptance of the new policy measures, and inclusion of non-state actors' perspectives to inform discussion. In theory, there was to be opportunities and entry points for non-state actors' voice through national policy package prioritization and validation workshops. Whether priorities were decided by government authorities without consultation with citizens depended on the country and the COVID-19 situation. COVID-19 restrictions did not facilitate interaction with citizen groups within the country itself. Because not all of the five national workshops to present and validate the results of the reviews and policy packages took place, NGOs, the private sector and academia may not have been aware of the activities and processes, and may not be fully on board to support the measures to be implemented. Some countries have more concrete mechanisms to ensure the voice of non-state actors than others. Some look to Montenegro's methods of engagement for Chapter 27, with NGO representatives facilitated to directly engage in negotiations and working groups related for different environmental *Chapters*.<sup>51</sup> In Serbia, CSOs and Coalition 27 groups are extremely important for ensuring sustainability in an environmental focus.<sup>52</sup> However, although NGOs may be heard in Montenegro or Serbia, they do not feel their voice is included in political level make final decisions.

Communications about new environmental legislation is important to ensure different levels are aware and unmet expectation will not be put in place (i.e. government meet their obligations and mediate differences with stakeholder groups). All EPRs and *Needs Assessments* are now posted on UNECE's website allowing for transparency and accountability (if civil society and others track the implementation of the policy packages).

### 5.5.4 Validity of objectives and likelihood of replication in other regions

The objectives of the activities under this project are still valid, although since February 2022, security is now the dominant theme in the region, with refugees and displaced persons arriving from Ukraine. A strong incentive is EU Accession including Chapter 27 on the environment, which will ensure continuance of sustainable environmental policies in the South-East European countries, provided geo-politics still allow for EU Accession.

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<sup>51</sup> They meet periodically and answer public calls from the ministry or the EU integration office and appoint representatives for these negotiation. At least 15 environmental organisations are engaged, and they form coalitions and are in constant communications with state institutions.

<sup>52</sup> In Serbia for example at least eight different organisations who form Coalition 27 monitors, provides recommendations to the government in a shadow report, which is also shared widely and with the EU.

UNECE have already had discussions about how the activities from this project can be replicated in the region. For example, partnering with UNDP or other agencies on the ground is important to continue with implementation. UNECE is also considering how to examine systems for tracking recommendations from the EPR, linking to capacity building via technical cooperation. UNECE are receptive to funding for further technical cooperation packages for EPR recommendation implementation. According to the Project Coordinator, although the Balkan countries reacted positively to this UNDA environmental policy project, and adapted quickly, there may be some difficulty in replicating the project as it is planned in other UNECE member States in Central Asia. However, the design and way the project was implemented in terms of the SDG focus may suit some countries in Eastern Europe and in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova).

For national coordinators, EPR recommendation with regard to SDG alignment are still extremely useful in terms of undertaking priority environmental activities. Countries are still working to harmonise all their legislation with the EU, which remains a priority, and they will presumably continue. Within countries, technical cooperation to better track SDG indicator progress is still needed. A forum for support and exchange of experiences with all responsible persons who work with the SDG indicators would be helpful according to the evaluation survey response in North Macedonia. In their survey response, Montenegro recommended a stronger focus on SDGs and even more activities in that context, beyond EPRs.

National coordinators in their survey responses made recommendations related to exchanging experiences, continuing with similar work, and expanding capacity building work. Some countries noted how they learn from regional information sharing, although two interviewees (Albania and Macedonia) highlighted that future technical cooperation could focus on the concrete national requirements of policy documents in a country (rather than a common project for 4-6 countries). On the other hand, Serbia coordinator noted that the importance of funds for organizing international events for sharing experiences and good practices among countries of the region. An interviewee from Republic of Moldova said after the next ministerial conference in Cyprus, they will develop a new EPR. They would be interested in UNECE supporting them prioritise the recommendations from their next EPR. Bosnia and Herzegovina are also moving ahead with preparations for the fourth EPR and would appreciate continued support for similar activities (workshops, trainings, and round tables on the specific environmental subjects).

#### 5.5.5 Lessons learned from COVID

An important lesson learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that activities must be flexible, and not concentrate so much on physical meetings. Developing specific on-line tools that were interesting for webinars and training was important. There was a lot to learn about on-line interactions that were set up in lieu of planned project activities. UNECE staff tried to ensure dynamics and energy were kept up with on-line events. Other lessons included the importance of hybrid meetings, with some on-line and some participating. One national coordinator noted the difficulty in organising activities across ministries online. Timing for such events is important. Another interviewee reported that initially, people listened very carefully to web-based seminars, as they were not able to go to the office and were able to pay more attention. In Bosnia and Herzegovina for example, it was felt by one interviewee that on-line presentations at meetings encouraged ministerial staff to use more information from statistics offices, resulting in a better use of evidence.

#### 5.5.6 Laws, regulations, policies developed through the project

The concrete outputs from the project are outlined in the Table 7 in Annex 8, which contains information from the progress reports, the UNECE website, and what was listed by survey respondents in the survey completed for this evaluation.

## 6. Conclusions

This evaluation assessed the extent to which the objectives of the UNDA 11th tranche project “*Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe*” were achieved. Having examined the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in supporting member States to strengthen their capacities in the area of sustainable environmental policies, in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), conclusions are made below. Recommendations with regard to improving capacity building services for member States are made in Section 7.

**Relevance:** The project did respond to the priorities and needs of ministries of environment regarding the 2030 Agenda and to a certain extent supported some processes related to EU Accession, a key goal for target countries in the region. Given that the *Needs Assessments* conducted with UNECE support determined gaps between current conditions and desired ones for alignment with SDG targets, the project was extremely relevant to the 2030 Agenda. The project was reported by all governmental official interviewees to be important for EU negotiations and helped plan further actions, to respond to the environmental acquis for EU Accession. Interviewees noted the UNECE supported environmental governance through the project, whether this was through the process of gathering information in the *Needs Assessment* and subsequent discussions, which eventually provided support towards directions on the types of action that should be taken (to improve the legal framework for environmental governance), or support in deciding whether to define an environmental strategy. Activities were relevant towards building technical and administrative capacities in environmental governance for a small number of strategic people in ministries of environment. The project was relevant to the mandate and the work programme of the UNECE itself in line with principles in the UNECE’s Technical Cooperation Strategy and requirements to mainstream SDGs in all UNECE activities.

The project outcomes are relevant to environmental NGOs and civil society organisations who are advocating for environmental laws in line with government commitments and human rights of those affected by environmental damage. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, when conducting country missions, there was a little evidence of UNECE technical experts meeting with both governmental and nongovernmental groups during the *Needs Assessment*. In many countries, public officials may try to consult with civil society and academia through a project, but lack capacity to systematically do so, unless their laws require public hearings.

Only Serbia had a strong focus on gender, which linked to another UNECE project on SDG 5. UNECE has been supporting Serbia to advance gender mainstreaming by organizing a series of training workshops. Lessons can be learned from the gender focus in Serbia and shared with other countries. Disability inclusion was not noted throughout this evaluation. Climate change and disaster risk reduction were evident in some environmental legislation. National coordinators are often involved in adaptation strategies in the countries. It was noted that climate change issues are coming more to the fore, as the public are now slowly beginning to connect climate change with extended drought periods. Policy packages that related to sustainably managing forests, or making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable are relevant for anticipating future disaster risk reduction and improving resilience but may be of high priority as they were not spelled out in this project as a disaster risk reduction priority.

**Coherence:** To the extent possible, and given COVID-19 restrictions, collaboration via information sharing at country level took place with the UNCT. It can be concluded that attempts were made to engage other entities in the UN system. The UN system are aware of the EPRs process, particularly when the UNECE team of experts are on mission to the country and are reviewing the situation.

Resident Coordinators and UNCTs were informed about planned activities to identify synergies. The project documents for this UNDA initiatives did not contain a lot of detail, with a basic results framework prepared. This evaluation considered a more detailed Theory of Change for the project may be helpful to describe in detail assumptions around how change comes about.

With the advent of COVID-19, the focus on some environmental priorities were reduced in member States, although others (such as medical waste and air quality) became higher priority. Under COVID-19 restrictions, UNECE project adjustments were generally quick and efficient. Additional policy packages were developed with the reallocated funds, and the Republic of Moldova (not originally included) benefitted from two pieces of work, evaluating important aspects of their evaluation context. Some activities under the project were cancelled, but the project achieved most of the expected results, apart from sub-regional policy seminars to exchange experience on implementation and a concluding subregional event to present the challenges and share good practices. Cross ministerial collaboration also suffered from a lack of ability to physically meet.

**Effectiveness:** Having a legal policy framework behind environmental issues is of utmost importance and appreciated by many interviewed. The focus on a national action plan or policy packages (no matter how few) to implement the EPR recommendations related to SDGs was effective, worthwhile and high value for money, given the small amount of funding spent allocated to the project. The project achieved most of the expected results during the timeframe, even with a range of challenges and obstacles. Officials interviewed fully understand environmental challenges and the need for environmental regulations in key areas such as waste, water or energy – although without a baseline, it is hard to assess the effectiveness of the capacity building focus.

Challenges raised by evaluation interviewees included environmental specific challenges and internal governance/ legislative and implementation challenges. Thematic analysis of interviews revealed the following obstacles: SDG data gaps; the complexity of SDG alignment; policy coherence issues; political change challenges; implementation issues, including resources (financial and human) and weak institutional capacities. Some challenges are political in nature, other technical (data and data collection, financial and human resources).

Multi-sectoral work is extremely challenging in practice. The SDG targets are generally easy to understand, and can be aspired to, but how to coordinate and partner with other national entities across SDGs is not so clear. Those at the top level in a ministry must lead on governance aspects but this governance aspect is often ignored, particularly when there is an assumption that environmental governance is purely technical. Apart from the difficulty of creating dialogue across national institutions, it is not always evident how to integrate governance aspects for each specific SDG. One ministry may be made responsible for all SDGs that relate to environmental policies, but these should be shared as they have to also be implemented in other ministries. It was noted in interviews that what is missing in the SDGs is a system by which entities responsible for the particular SDG (given that the SDGs are divisible) are directed and coordinated. Governance of the SDGs requires a structure and process for decision making on how to prioritise and implement the SDGs across sectors, with accountability aspects incorporated. Limited financial resources allocated to the ministry or environmental protection agency who deals with sustainable development, remains a matter of serious concern.

A major challenge experienced by countries in the region is the implementation of environmental policies. Administrative capacity still requires strengthening, including capacity for inspection, supervision and local administration. Sometimes, the national government leaves municipalities to their own devices with regard to implementation and may not provide funding for practical implementation. A lack of political will at the municipality level was highlighted by interviewees. Weak

capacities is well acknowledged, including and especially at the local administration level. Low salaries in ministries do not make environmental positions in government attractive. Having available and sufficient expertise for the integration of environmental issues in times of limited resources is an overarching challenge. In conclusions, although the green economy and sustainable development are gaining recognition in the targeted countries, there is less knowledge and capacity to enable practical implementation. Further capacity building is required.

**Efficiency:** Despite the pandemic, this type of policy focused project was very efficient in producing solid policy outputs and can be considered excellent value for money. In general, the project proved to be effective in locating technical experts and building partnerships with national coordinators in recipient countries. The technical expertise provided to ministries of environment staff was of great value for member country policy prioritisation and environmental norm setting. The project had a substantive focus on environmental norms and standards where UNECE has in-house expertise, which ensured the optimal use of limited resources. The human and financial resources allocated to the project were used efficiently. Many interviewees mentioned the solid ability of UNECE staff and consultants to carry out normative and analytical functions linking intergovernmental norms and assisting member States in their transposition into legislation. The UNECE was able to use their technical experts and networks of consultants effectively in their support to the recipient countries. This, combined with in-house technical expertise, allowed the UNECE to ensure optimal use of the resources allocated for this project. Many countries noted the good relationship they have with UNECE and UNECE staff - the UNECE team was noted as being very responsive to requests for inputs, communicated effectively and on a timely basis.

Possible alternatives to achieve the same results included focusing on building capacities to overcome governance and implementation challenges and demonstrating more examples of environmental legislation implementation using examples from nearby countries. More emphasis on engaging with and involving civil society organisations following the provisions in the Aarhus Convention would also be useful for building an advocacy coalition towards environmental governance compliance.

**Sustainability:** The UNECE promoted national ownership throughout project implementation. Because the project tailored activities to specific national realities and anchored the project interventions in national development planning process, the extent to which coordinators from ministries responsible for environmental issues own the outcomes of the work would appear to be high, provided they remain working on these issues. The extent to which inspection authorities responsible for environmental enforcement will ensure enforcement of the new policy packages depends on political priorities and will, local governance, politics, institutional capacities, culture and funding issues. The implementation of policy packages is worrying given regional security priorities, which may affect the continuation of some activities. Diffusion of legislation to district levels is not guaranteed, without municipal level consultations, public management and funding for delivery and citizen watchdogs' systems in place. To ensure the government commits to implementation, it is important to expand capacity-building activities (workshops, seminars, study tours and training) and field projects to CSOs and environmental NGOs as there can be few opportunities to exchange information between government and civil society. More efforts are required to ensure provisions are in place so that public authorities provide access to environmental information earlier so CSO can participate in environmental decision-making – commenting on and also challenging public decisions.

In conclusion, a specific number (Table 7, Annex 8) of laws, regulations, strategies and guidance notes are now available in the participating countries, which should be one step towards strengthening environment governance and the development of sustainable environmental policies. Nonetheless, more initiatives are required as there are many environmental issues still to be addressed.

## 7. Recommendations

Eight sets of recommendations are outlined below under the headings: project design; regional information sharing; climate change; capacity building; aligning with EU Accession; political dimensions; implementation aspects; and gender focus. Some of these recommendations may already be ongoing in the Environment Division of the UNECE, and some may not be possible due to resource constraints. Nonetheless, the recommendations are outlined for consideration as themes linked to an evaluation finding. Some recommendations relate to designing a similar project, others are for consideration when designing activities to support environmental governance in line with SDGs in the future.

Table 5: Recommendations

Theme/Topic	Findings	Evaluation recommendations	Responsibility
<b>1. Project design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project document did not contain a lot of information on how capacity building supposedly leads to change. An inherent underlying assumption was that strengthened capacities would lead to better environmental governance, which tends to ignore other factors (political, financial, institutional issues and national priorities).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommendation 1: Project design</b>            UNECE may consider developing a <i>Theory of Change</i> for projects in the future to describe the processes through which change comes about for individuals, stakeholder groups, ministries, industry or communities. The <i>Theory of Change</i> should provide an assumption (or series of assumptions) about how change will happen in a country, regardless of what a donor or project does or does not do.</p>	Guidance from UNECE PMU
<b>2. Regional information sharing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This project provided a small cog in environment legislation adjustment in the countries of focus. A lot remains to be done.</li> <li>Many environmental challenges can be tackled locally, but are global in terms of systems (e.g., energy, forestry regulations, agriculture regulations). Regional information sharing was found to be important in terms of sharing lessons on greening of industry. Many countries appreciate regional projects and require increased regional awareness raising of environmental challenges detailing actions and legislation that was put in place.</li> <li>Although the project adjusted quickly and efficiently in relation to COVID-19, some important activities could not be implemented (regional workshops for information sharing) that were noted to be particularly important.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommendation(s) 2: Regional information sharing</b>            2.1: Acknowledging that sharing information is already ongoing, continued sharing clean industry practices or step by step approaches for overcoming negative consequences of environmental hazards and waste across countries in the region.             2.2: Depending on funding available, organise a workshop for all project countries inviting representatives of governments, CSOs/ UN system and EU active in those countries, to share experiences, network, and develop partnerships for future needs. Alternatively organise workshops at national level.</p>	UNECE Environmental Division
<b>3. Climate change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate change and disaster risk reduction did not emerge strongly in interviews or survey responses. Citizens in the Balkans region require more awareness on how climate change affects their lives. EPRs and strategic environment assessment (SEA) are</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommendation 3: Climate change</b>            Consider how to best mainstream climate change considerations into all projects, linking with the UNECE Climate Task Force/</p>	PMU to integrate climate into all project document templates, with

Theme/Topic	Findings	Evaluation recommendations	Responsibility
	<p>effective tools for countries in planning their climate change adaptation and mitigation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNECE has a lot to offer in terms of environmental governance challenges and alignment with SDGs in the region. UNDP is setting up a working group on climate change in some countries (Serbia), which includes all institutions (energy, mining, agriculture, water).</li> </ul>	Regional Advisors, whilst also ensuring linkages to relevant results groups of UN Country Teams.	advice from UNECE Climate Task Force/Regional Advisors for substantive matters. UNECE Environment Division to integrate climate into all work.
<b>4. Capacity building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some ministries with responsibility for environmental concerns have staff that are technically apt and have a vision for sustainable development in their country, though such staff are few. The UNECE tended to prioritize governmental counterparts (i.e. staff who can catalyze actions or be role models), yet many government staff still require capacity building. Staff in ministries are constantly changing due to political parties' priorities also changing.</li> <li>• More technical assistance is required to enhance capacities, with experts exchanging views, and supporting ministries of environment.</li> <li>• Further capacity is required on how to operationalise transparent decision making, clear and operational accountability mechanisms, outlining what participatory approaches mean in practice, how to integrate strategy work, and how to garner institutional attention.</li> <li>• Enabling frameworks for streamlining environmental policies into sector specific strategies are still required.</li> <li>• Some officials require more systematic approaches so that what they propose can be approved at a higher level and therefore prioritized for implementation with an accompanying budget.</li> <li>• The UNECE nexus and SEAs approaches are considered very useful as they both promote an integrated approach, provide a notion of how to integrate different environmental elements, and how they compete against each other.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommendation(s) 4: Capacity building</b></p> <p>4.1 Continue to develop projects where UNECE provides support in prioritizing recommendations arising from EPRs. Continue to work with staff in ministries who understand the SDGs and have energy and enthusiasm to move the agenda forward.</p> <p>4.2: Encourage countries to develop their own environmental training programmes including systems where training of trainer capacity building becomes systematic and reaches inspection authorities responsible for environmental enforcement.</p> <p>4.3 Apart from technical environmental issues, UNECE should also unpack related aspects of governance where member States require support— e.g. transparency, accountability aspects; how to develop an accountability chain; or how to be inclusive and unlock citizens participation.</p> <p>4.4 The UNECE nexus approach must continue to be shared with member states. During UNECE missions hold workshops on the nexus approach in a concrete way. Continue to encourage ministries to engage on the SDGs across sector silos, using projects such as these as a means.</p>	UNECE Environmental Division
<b>5. EU Accession focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many countries in the region are prioritising the political process of EU Accession. Countries continue to require substantial help to implement the European Chapter 27 Directives (environment).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommendation 5: EU Accession focus</b></p> <p>Any new projects that support Western Balkans countries to implement the SDGs should also try to align (somewhat) with the</p>	UNECE Environmental Division.

Theme/Topic	Findings	Evaluation recommendations	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The EU Green Agenda (for the Balkan countries) does help some countries push ahead with environmental legislation and governance issues.</li> </ul>	EU Green Agenda. Highlight how the EPR methodology also facilitates EU law and how EU law is built on and references major UNECE Conventions.	
<b>6. Politics and advocacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addressing environmental issues in some countries faces competition from many other priorities and is not always to the fore in terms of political support, even with environmental protection agencies attempting to push environmental priorities further.</li> <li>Civil society organisations tend to highlight rights-based environmental issues, which are important in terms of the UN human rights mandate. Member States need to be continuously reminded of such commitments.</li> <li>Member States also require knowledge on circular economy concepts emphasising co-benefits linking consumption patterns and the need for a transfer to renewables.</li> <li>Consulting with civil society organisations by national coordinators was variable. There was little time when UNECE missions took place for meetings with civil society organisations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommendation(s) 6: Politics and advocacy</b></p> <p>6.1: At policy level, UNECE must continue to work with high level representatives from member State ministries of environment to convey messages of commitments made to SDGs, climate change agreements and human rights.</p> <p>6.2: Linking to UN information campaigns (twitter cards or other social media methods) may be useful to push the 2030 Agenda and environmental governance issues.</p> <p>6.3: CSOs should be considered a stronger part of the environment advocacy coalitions. More encouragement could be placed on member States to consult and work closely with CSOs in projects that deal with environmental governance. This means government provides adequate time for others to comment and agree action plans and roadmaps. Preparations for UNECE country missions should ensure that they leave time to engage early with many stakeholders including CSOs and encourage national coordinators to ensure their voice to be brought to the table.</p>	UNECE Environmental Division
<b>7. Implementing legislation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of environmental policy was noted as challenging during the evaluation. Gradual change is often best at the implementation level, with step-by-step approaches.</li> <li>Building personal relationships at different levels (with municipal authorities, academic and research experts) are still considered important in some countries, as enforcement is not yet in place.</li> <li>Many countries' governments are relying on civil society partnership for their support in the implementation of sustainable environmental policies.</li> <li>A lack of funding for environment legislative implementation was noted in all countries.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommendation(s) 7: Implementing legislation</b></p> <p>7.1: Follow up on what was approved and how it was implemented in a year or so. Find out which EPR recommendations are not yet being implemented and encourage civil society organisations to continue to play a 'watchdog' role.</p> <p>7.2: Continue efforts to locate sources of finance to demonstrate and pilot what can be achieved to improve the environment. Funding for conveying meetings that help build environmental advocacy coalitions is also suggested, so results/innovations are shared more widely. Consider whether resources can be obtained from the Western Balkans Investment Framework</p>	UNECE Environmental Division
<b>8. Gender focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A strong gender focus was not found except in Serbia. The response to, and the interactions during, the Serbian workshop showed that a gender focus provides a good opportunity for</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommendation 8</b></p> <p>Learn and draw lessons from the collaborative gender mainstreaming process that took place in Serbia. The need to</p>	UNECE Environment Division in collaboration with



Theme/Topic	Findings	Evaluation recommendations	Responsibility
	intensified multi-level collaboration of UN agencies, national and local governments.	continue capacity building on gender mainstreaming as it relates to environmental policy and at local level implementation is important. A regional workshop to share experience may be useful.	the UNECE Gender Focal Point.

## 8. Annexes

### Annex 1: Evaluation TORs

#### 1819AE: Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe

##### I. Purpose

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which the objectives of the UNDA 11th tranche project “Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe” were achieved. The evaluation will assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in supporting member States to strengthen their capacities in the area of sustainable environmental policies, in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The evaluation will also assess progresses on human rights, gender equality results, disability inclusion, climate change and disaster risk reduction in the context of this engagement. The evaluation will finally look at the activities repurposed to address the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, and assess, to the extent possible, the ECE’s COVID-19 early response through this project.

The results of the evaluation will allow improving capacity building services provided to member States through regular technical cooperation as well as the development and implementation of similar future projects and activities by the Environment Division (ED) of UNECE.

##### II. Scope

The evaluation will include the full project implementation during the period of 1 January 2018-31 December 2021 in five countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) and Republic of Moldova.

##### III. Background

The project supports the expected accomplishment (d) of the subprogramme 1 “Environment” “Improved environmental performance review of interested countries”. The main goal of the project is to strengthen environmental governance and development of sustainable environmental policies. The lack of comprehensive and evidence-based policy and of concrete and realistic plans of actions prevent countries from progressing towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda. An EPR is an assessment of the progress a country has made in reconciling its environmental and economic targets and in meeting its international environmental commitments. The EPR Programme has been mandated to assist the UNECE member States in supporting the achievement and monitoring of SDGs in the pan-European region by the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, 2016).

The project builds on the EPRs of the targeted countries. These countries have recently been reviewed by the EPR Programme. Moreover, the stretched national resources in the five countries are currently strongly focused on EU integration. Additional efforts are therefore needed to emphasize and prioritize the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including by aligning it, as much as possible, with the EU accession process. Another selection criterion has been the opportunity to strengthen the impact at the country level by applying the regional approach. As the five countries have similar conditions and priorities, they often face similar challenges in improving their environmental policies and legislation. For these reasons, they can benefit from peer learning, identification of common issues and solutions, and exchange of best practices, offered through the proposed project. All targeted countries have achieved some progress with the integration of environmental issues in existing sector-specific policies and legislation. However, such integration exists at the level of policy documents and laws and is weaker at the level of secondary legislation. Mechanisms to integrate them are often absent.

The project assisted countries to conduct a review and a needs assessment of the implementation of the recommendations coming from their EPRs in line with relevant SDGs. Further, it facilitated the development of a national action plan or policy packages to implement the EPR recommendations related to SDGs. Specific attention was paid to vulnerable groups, as relevant to specific EPR recommendations. In March 2020, the project was modified to involve additional studies to ascertain the impact of the COVID 19 and possible recovery pathways. For example, in Montenegro, the public participation on environmental matters in times of COVID-19 was addressed. The primary partners of the project were the ministries involved in environmental issues, together with sectoral ministries responsible for agriculture, energy, industry, mining or transport, the inspection authorities responsible for environmental enforcement, NGOs, the private sector and academia.

The project was implemented in cooperation with UNEP, UNDP and the United Nations Country Teams in beneficiary countries. The budget of the project was \$470,000 funded from the 11th tranche of the Development Account. The project was managed by the Environmental Affairs Officer from the Environment Division, funded from the UN regular budget (Sect.20) resources.

##### IV. Issues

The evaluation will answer the following issues: Relevance; Coherence; Effectiveness; Efficiency and Sustainability.

**Relevance:**

1. To what extent did the Project respond to the priorities and needs of the beneficiary countries to develop evidence-based policies, in the context of the 2030 Agenda and EU integration?
2. To what extent were the activities consistent with global and regional priorities? How relevant were the activities vis-à-vis the programme of work of the UNECE? What value has UNECE's efforts added in this area?
3. How relevant was the project to the target groups' needs and priorities? Was there a focus on the most vulnerable ones?
4. Did the project apply gender, rights-based and disability inclusion approaches in the design, implementation, and results of the activities?
5. How relevant was the project with regards to climate change and disaster risk reduction?

**Coherence:**

6. How coherent was the collaboration with other entities in the UN system and other international organizations?
7. How coherent was the project design? Were the activities implemented in the required sequence needed to ensure the greatest impact of the project? To what extent are the outputs consistent with and relevant to the overall objective and expected accomplishments?
8. What adjustments, if any, were made to the project as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, and to what extent did the adjustments allow the project to effectively respond to the new priorities of Member States that emerged in relation to COVID-19?
9. How did the adjustments, if any, affect the achievement of the project's expected results as stated in its original results framework?

**Effectiveness:**

10. Did the project achieve the results expected during the project design in terms of the planned activities, outcome, and impact?
11. What were the challenges/ obstacles to achieving the activities, objective and expected accomplishments?

**Efficiency:**

12. Did the project achieve its objectives within the anticipated budget and allocation of resources?
13. How could the use of resources be improved? Would you propose any alternatives to achieve the same results? If yes, which ones?
14. Were the human and financial resources allocated to the project used efficiently and commensurate the project results?

**Sustainability:**

15. How is the stakeholders' engagement likely to continue, be scaled up, replicated or institutionalized? To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the work?
16. To what extent are the objectives of the activity still valid? How can the activity be replicated in the UNECE region or in other regions?
17. What are the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 related activities? Could they be replicated?
18. What are the laws, regulations, policies or projects that have been developed so far based on the strengthening of environmental governance and development of sustainable environmental policies?

**V. Methodology**

**a) The evaluation will be conducted based on the following mixed methods to triangulate information:**

- A desk review of all relevant documents, as the primary source of information. The desk review will include *inter alia*: the project document and information on project activities (monitoring data); studies and reports (EPRs reports, EPR-related CEP reports); and the EPR-related decisions from the CEP annual sessions. These documents will be provided by the EPR unit. The consultant will also research projects in the same area conducted by other UN agencies.
- Interviews (in person and/or by telephone/video) to be conducted with (i) national coordinators who acted as UNECE counterparts throughout the national assessments and follow up activities; (ii) representatives of

government agencies responsible for the areas addressed in the studies; (iii) representatives of enterprise support institutions ; and, (iv) partners involved in the project, UNECE responsible staff from the Market Access Section and UNCTAD. As deemed necessary, focus group discussions via online platforms can also be organized.

- Online survey of the key stakeholders and beneficiaries. The survey will be developed by the consultant on his preferred platform.
- Remote observation of virtual workshops and meetings

**b) Norms and standards**

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the [ECE Evaluation Policy](#) and the Administrative instruction guiding Evaluation in the UN Secretariat ([ST/AI/2021/3](#)).

Gender equality and human rights considerations are integrated at all stages of the evaluation: (i) in the evaluation scope of analysis, evaluation criteria and questions design; (ii) in the methods, tools, and data analysis techniques; (iii) in the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the final report.

**c) Outline of the final report**

The evaluation report will strive not to exceed 30 pages and follow the mandatory outline for UNDA report to be shared by the Programme Management Unit. An Executive summary (max. 2 pages) will summarize the methodology of the evaluation, key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

**VI. Evaluation schedule**

A. Preliminary research: by 1 November 2021;

B. Data collection: by 15 December 2021;

C. Data analysis: by 15 January 2021;

D. Draft report: 20 February 2022;

E. Final draft report: 1 March 2022;

F. Final report: 15 March 2022

*Final timetable to be agreed following engagement of the evaluator. The timing above is indicative.*

**VII. Resources and Management of the evaluation**

An independent consultant will be engaged for a period of 40 days to conduct the evaluation, within a budget of \$18,800, inclusive of all costs.

To enhance the relevance, quality and credibility of the evaluation process, an Internal Evaluation Committee will support the evaluation process. The Committee will be comprised of two members:

- Project Manager, OARS
- Programme Officer in charge of evaluations, Programme Management Unit (PMU)

The Internal Evaluation Committee will be involved in the following steps:

- Development of the Terms of Reference
- Review of the proposed evaluator profiles
- Reception and review of the draft evaluation report

The Project Manager, Mr. Antoine Nunes, in consultation with Mr. Nicholas Bonvoisin, OARS Chief of Section will be involved in the following steps:

- Provide all documentation needed for desk review, contact details, support and guidance to the evaluation consultant as needed throughout the timeline of the evaluation.
- Advise the evaluator on the recipients for the questionnaire and for follow-up interviews.
- Process and manage the consultancy contract of the evaluator, along the key milestones agreed with PMU.

The Programme Management Unit will be involved in the following steps:

- Selection of the evaluator
- Clearance of the Terms of Reference
- Provide guidance to the Project Manager and evaluator as needed on the evaluation design and methodology
- Clearance of the final report after quality assurance of the draft report

**VIII. Intended Use/Next Steps**

Findings of this evaluation will be used when possible to:

- improve direct project's follow up actions, implementation of products by project beneficiaries and dissemination

- of the knowledge created through the project;
- learn lessons from early response to the impact of COVID-19, to develop further related projects
- assess the gaps and further needs of countries in the area of this project;
- formulate a tailored capacity building projects for the development of evidence-based policies for environment;
- induce new project ideas, improving the planning and design of future capacity-building activities and projects on evidence-based regulatory and environmental policies in the UNECE region;

The results of the evaluation will be reported to the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP).

Following the issuance of the final report, the Project Manager will develop a Management Response and action plan for addressing the recommendations made by the evaluator. The final evaluation report, the management response and the progress on implementation of recommendations will be available on the UNECE website.

#### **IX. Criteria for evaluators**

Evaluators should have:

- An advanced university degree or equivalent background in relevant disciplines
- Specialized training in areas such as evaluation, project management, advanced statistical research and analysis.
- Demonstrated relevant professional experience in design, management and conduct of evaluation processes with the UN Secretariat, with multiple stakeholders, survey design and implementation, and project planning, monitoring and management, gender analysis and human rights due diligence
- Demonstrated methodological knowledge of evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for end-of-cycle project evaluations.
- Fluent in written and spoken English.

Evaluators should declare any conflict of interest to UNECE before embarking on an evaluation project, and at any point where such conflict occurs.

## Annex 2: Project results framework

Table 6: Logical Framework for UNDA/UNECE Environmental Governance Project

Intervention logic	Indicators	Means of verification
<b>Objective</b> To strengthen national capacities of selected countries of South-East Europe for evidence- based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda		
<b>EA1</b>  Enhanced national capacities of the selected countries of South- East Europe to assess the most critical aspects and priority needs in their environmental governance and policies.	<b>IA 1.1</b> Five target countries identified policy gaps between current conditions and desired achievement of relevant SDGs	Sources of information to inform the indicator will be the needs assessments presented and discussed at the national workshops.
<b>Main activity A1.1 Develop five (one per target country) reviews of the implementation of the recommendations coming from EPRs vis-à-vis SDGs and targets;</b>  The reviews of the implementation of the recommendations coming from EPRs vis-à-vis SDGs and targets will allow identifying the current state of affairs with the implementation of EPR recommendations and positioning these efforts vis-à-vis SDGs and their targets.  Activity A1.1 will be undertaken in full scale for Montenegro and Serbia where Third EPRs were produced in 2014. Lighter versions will be prepared for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina since their Third EPRs are being prepared in 2017 and therefore most likely only very few EPR recommendations, if any, will be implemented by the start of the project in 2018. In addition, the Third EPRs of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina will include the links between EPR recommendations and SDGs. As for the EPR of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the review will be included as part of the EPR (will be implemented in 2018-2019).		
<b>Main activity A1.2 Undertake need assessments (one per target country) to determine and address gaps identified in the reviews between current conditions and desired achievements of relevant SDGs;</b>  Activity A1.2 will be implemented in conjunction with (in parallel with or immediately after) Activity A1.1, so that to ensure that the needs assessment builds on and logically follows from the review of implementation. The methodology for the needs assessment will include a desk study, complemented by interviews with national stakeholders and soliciting comments to the draft document.  The substantive analyses of the needs assessment will conclude with the proposals for the development of a national action plan and ideas for potential policy packages to be developed later in the project.		
<b>Main activity A1.3 Organise five (one per target country) workshops to present and validate the results of the reviews and needs assessments;</b>  The one-day workshops will bring together the national stakeholders to comment upon and validate the results of the reviews and needs assessments. The workshops will conclude with a selection of national action plan/policy packages to be further worked on. The workshops will be used to develop country-specific project work plans with country-specific activities and outcomes. The selection of stakeholders to participate in the workshop will depend on the content of country's EPR and issues raised therein. Every effort will be made to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are engaged and that no one is left behind.  The workshops may be held as two-day events if needed. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, two one-day workshops may be organized (one in each entity).		
<b>EA2</b>  Increased national capacities of the selected countries of South- East Europe to develop and integrate evidence-based coherent environmental policies into sector-specific and cross- sectoral strategies aimed at contributing to the achievement of relevant SDGs and 2030 Agenda.	<b>IA 2.1</b> Five target countries developed and endorsed priority national action plans/policy packages based on the EPRs.	Sources of information to inform the indicator will be the drafts of national action plans/policy packages.
	<b>IA 2.2</b> Five target countries presented reports on the implementation of SDG-related recommendations resulting from the EPRs.	Sources of information to inform the indicator will be the reports presented by five countries at the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy in 2020-2021, with presentations posted on the Committee's website and reflected in the Committee's report(s).
	<b>IA 2.3</b> 80 per cent of recommendations from EPRs either implemented or incorporated into national action plans/policy packages based on the national priority needs	Information will be gathered through interviews conducted in the countries by consultants and staff. It will be verified by national stakeholders during the validation workshops. Drafts of national action

		<p>plans/policy packages will include references to EPR recommendations.</p> <p>For Montenegro and Serbia, this indicator can be calculated after completion of A1.1 and A1.2 and recalculated after completion of A2.2 and A2.3</p> <p>For Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia this indicator can be calculated after completion of A2.2 and A2.3.</p>
<p><b>Main activity A 2.1 Develop national action plans/policy packages for implementing recommendations coming from EPRs in line with relevant SDGs in the five beneficiary countries in consultation with inter-ministerial coordination groups;</b></p> <p>Activity A2.1 results in producing the most tangible outcomes – the national action plan or 1-3 policy packages (concrete legal/policy documents) for implementing recommendations coming from EPRs in line with relevant SDGs.</p> <p>This activity requires significant involvement of national stakeholders. It is also key for national ownership of the project and for sustainability of its results.</p> <p>Where available, existing inter-ministerial coordination groups (e.g. inter-ministerial group on waste or a national water council) will be used to provide guidance on the national action plan/policy packages. If not available, coordination groups may be established for the purposes of the project.</p>		
<p><b>Main activity A 2.2 Organize five national validation workshops to review the respective national action plans/policy packages with inter-ministerial coordination groups and relevant stakeholders and discuss their implementation;</b></p> <p>The two-day workshops will bring together the national stakeholders to comment upon the national action plan/policy packages. If a country will be working on several policy packages with different topics, one-day workshops will be organized per policy package.</p> <p>The selection of stakeholders to participate in the workshop will depend on the content of national action plan/policy packages. Every effort will be made to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are engaged and that no one is left behind. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, two workshops may be organized (one in each entity).</p>		
<p><b>Main activity A 2.3 Organise subregional policy seminar to exchange experience on implementation of national action plans/policy packages;</b></p> <p>The subregional policy seminar (2-3 days) will allow countries to benefit from each other by exchanging experience, knowledge and best practice on the content and implementation of the national action plans/policy packages and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.</p> <p>This activity will contribute to finalization of the national action plans/policy packages. It will also be used to promote the project results throughout the region.</p>		
<p><b>A 2.4 Organise concluding subregional event to present an overview of the environmental challenges in the South-East Europe region, share best practices and discuss follow-up of the national action plans/policy packages aligned with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels.</b></p> <p>The concluding subregional event (1-2 days) will allow countries to discuss follow-up of the national action plans/policy packages aligned with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the context of environmental challenges in the South-East Europe region. This activity may be organized back-to-back with a larger international event, e.g. the RFSD, or the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy, or the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.</p>		

### Annex 3: Data collection instrument

The following was the qualitative survey developed for the evaluation and sent to National Coordinators in each country.

Evaluation questions for the UNECE project that aimed *to strengthen national capacities for evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda*. We would be most grateful if you could respond to the following 6 questions with as much detail as you like. *Please return to Dr. Una Murray (Evaluator) by email: [unamurray@gmail.com](mailto:unamurray@gmail.com) by January 17<sup>th</sup> 2022*

Question	Response
1. Can you list the laws, regulations, policies or projects that have been developed following the Needs Assessment of the EPR	
2. What value do you think this UNECE project brought to environmental governance in your country?	
3. What worked particularly well in terms of how UNECE organised and implemented this project?	
4. Apart from COVID-19, what challenges have you identified in terms of EPR recommendations and SDG implementation?	
5. Can you indicate any organisations or individuals from your country whom I should talk to briefly who may provide a perspective on environmental governance in your country (e.g. from civil society or from another ministry)?	
6. Can you indicate any recommendations you have for UNECE in terms of technical cooperation with respect to Environmental Governance and SDG implementation	



## Annex 4: List of individuals interviewed

	Country/ organisation	Name	Position	Notes on dates
1.	<b>Serbia</b>	Biljana Filipovic	Coordination and planning of international multilateral cooperation programs Department for Multilateral Cooperation Sector for strategic planning, projects, international cooperation	16/12/21 (SS 10/1/22
		Radica Vuckovic (no response)	<a href="mailto:Radica.Vuckovic@ekologija.gov.rs">Radica.Vuckovic@ekologija.gov.rs</a>	10/1/22 SS 10/1/22
2.		Snezana Paunovic	UNDP Serbia Collaborated on Gender Mainstreaming Project	4/2/22
3.		Tanja Petrovic	Young Researchers Serbia	
4.	<b>North Macedonia</b>	Kaja Sukova	State Secretary Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning Presveta bogorodica 3, 1000 Skopje	16/12/21 SS 10/1/22
5.		Teodora Obradovic Grncarovska	State Counsellor at Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning	CoP SS 10/1/22
		Recorded video interview from 2019 with Ana Petrovska	State Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Physical discussing the 3rd EPR	2019 Video
6.	<b>Montenegro</b>	Olivera Kujundzic	Senior Advisor, Ministry for Sustainable Development and Tourism	13/12/21 SS 10/1/22
7.		Miodrag Karadzic	Association of Young Ecologist, Nikšić Executive director Montenegro	4/2/22
8.		Dusan Babic	Association of Young Ecologist, Nikšić, Project coordinator Montenegro	4/2/22
9.	<b>Albania</b>	Rrezart Fshazi	Director Policies and Strategies for Dev of Environment, General Directorate of Policies and Development of Environment	COP SS 10/1/22
10.		Eneida Rabdishta En	Climate Specialists at Ministry of Tourism and Environment	
11.	<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	Senad Oprašić, PhD	Head of Environmental Protection Department, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Street: Dubravačka 6, 71000 Sarajevo. (t: 00387 33 95 35 36)	15/12/21 SS 10/1/22

12		Nada Mlinar	Expert adviser, Environmental Protection Department, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Street: Dubravačka 6, 71000 Sarajevo (t: 00387 33 25 58 78)	15/12/21 SS 10/1/22
13		Josip Njavro	Neum Coastal Area Management Project CAMP Coordinator, Sustainable development of the Adriatic Sea and Coastal Zone Management of Bosnia and Herzegovina <a href="mailto:jnjavro@gmail.com">jnjavro@gmail.com</a>	8/2/22
14		Prof. Goran Trbić,	Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics University of Banja Luka Republika Srpska, BiH	16/2/22
15		Prof. Milica Balaban,	Head of the Chemistry Department Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics University of Banja Luka Republika Srpska, BiH	16/2/22
16		Jadranka Bojic	Consultant, adviser to Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Water Management, Republika Srpska. <a href="mailto:Jadrankab75@gmail.com">Jadrankab75@gmail.com</a>	9/2/22 Email with information
17	<b>Republic of Moldova</b>	Maria Nagornii	Direcție politici de prevenire a poluării, Ministerul Mediului. Ministry of Environment <a href="mailto:maria.nagornii@mediu.gov.md">maria.nagornii@mediu.gov.md</a>	28/2/22
18		Natalia Guranda	EcoContact Oficiul Nostru str. Vlaicu Pîrcălab 27/1, mun. Chișinău. <a href="mailto:natalia.guranda@ecocontact.md">natalia.guranda@ecocontact.md</a>	28/2/22
19	<b>Technical Experts</b>	Dafina Dalbokova	<a href="mailto:dafina.dalbokova@gmail.com">dafina.dalbokova@gmail.com</a> Needs Assessment and EPR for North Macedonia	17/1/22
20		Zbigniew Sobociński	<a href="mailto:zbyszek@epoczta.pl">zbyszek@epoczta.pl</a> Needs Assessment and EPR for Bosnia and Herzegovina	21/1/22
21		Irina Davis	Montenegro Need Assessment	26/1/22
22		Karin Fueri	Needs Assessment Serbia	4/2/22
23	<b>UNECE</b>	Antoine Nunes	UNECE UNDA Project Manager Environmental Division, UNECE	
24		Polina Tarhis	Programme Management Officer Programme Management Unit (PMU) Programme Management & Support Services Division (PMSSD) Office of the Executive Secretary Email: <a href="mailto:polina.tarhis@un.org">polina.tarhis@un.org</a>	17/12/21

25	<b>EC</b>	Mihail Dimovski,	Mr. Mihail Dimovski, Team Leader, EU Environment Partnership Programme for EU Accession (EPPA)	21/12/21
26		Madalina ivanica	Coordinator Enlargement Sector Coordinator for UK, EEA/EFTA and Micro States European Commission Unit F.2 – Bilateral, regional and international relations DG Environment Tel.: 0032.229.67147 Address: Avenue de Beaulieu 9, Office BU-9, 03/163 1160, Brussels Website: <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/environment">http://ec.europa.eu/environment</a>	12/1/22
27		Andrzej Januszewski	European Commission. DG Environment Bilateral & Regional Environmental Cooperation (Unit F2)	written
28	<b>OSCE</b>	Olivera Zurovac-Kuzman	Democratic Governance Section   National Environmental Affairs Officer. Democratization Department   <a href="http://osce.org">osce.org</a> Office: +381 11 3606 168   Mob: +381 63 221 375 e-mail: <a href="mailto:olivera.zurovac-kuzman@osce.org">olivera.zurovac-kuzman@osce.org</a>	2/2/22

## Annex 5: List of documents reviewed

### Albania

- Albania's needs assessment report

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Bosnia and Herzegovina needs assessment report
- Bosnia and Herzegovina Highlights
- Bosnia and Herzegovina and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025 (signed May 21, 2021)
- CAMP project: Coordination mechanism for ICZM Bosnia and Herzegovina. UNEP/MAP PAP/RAC. January 2022
- Presentation CAMP project. Monitoring marine and coastal environment Monitoring Common Indicator 16 Jerko Leventić, dipl. ing. geod. Tomislav Leventić, mag. ing. geod. et geoinf.

### Montenegro

- Montenegro (2019) Needs Assessment for Evidence-Based Environmental Governance and Sustainable Environmental Policies in Support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe 2018-2021 Environmental Division Geneva 2019 *NO ORG on DOC UNECE?*
- Montenegro (2019) Needs Assessment Report
- Montenegro Workshop on validation for the UNDA Project "Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe" (Montenegro) Workshop 17 June 2021
- Agenda for June 17
- Presentation by Olivera Kujundzic
- Slides from Nebojša Jablan Programme of measures for reduction of air pollution in Montenegro UNDA: Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe Budva 17/06/2019. Nebojša Jablan
- Presentation of Environmental Performance Review results by Irina Davis, UNECE consultant

### Serbia

- EPR third Review Highlights UNECE
- [Walking in the Mist](#): Shadow Report on Chapter 27 Environment and Climate Change March 2019 – February 2020 Publisher: Young Researchers of Serbia Editor: Milena Antić Authors: Belgrade Open School, Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia, Climate Action Network Europe (CAN Europe), Environment Engineering Group, Environment Improvement Centre, One Degree Serbia, Safer Chemicals Alternative, Young Researchers of Serbia and the World Wide Fund for Nature Adria – Serbia (WWF Adria – Serbia)
- Chapter 27 in Serbia: Progress in lockdown. March 2020 – December 2020. Shadow report that follows the progress of Serbia in EU integrations in the areas of Chapter 27, Environment and Climate Change. Available [here](#)
- Opinion on the draft Law on Gender Equality of Serbia. On the basis of comments by Claire Guiraud and Susana Pavlou. Strasbourg, May 202. Council of Europe, Directorate General for Democracy, Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality>

- Serbia (2021) Guidance: Gender Mainstreaming in Environmental Policy Training on the Integration of Gender Aspects into Environmental Policies of Local Governments

#### North Macedonia

- Needs assessment report prepared by Dafina Dalbokova, UNECE Consultant, 2019


#### UNECE

- Annual Progress Reports for 11<sup>th</sup> Tranche Development Account Projects January 2019. Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe.
- Annual Progress Reports for 11<sup>th</sup> Tranche Development Account Projects January 2020. Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe.
- [Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference Batumi](#), Georgia 8–10 June 2016 Report of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference Addendum Declaration: “Greener, cleaner, smarter!” by Ministers of the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
- 2020 UNECE Spreadsheet with national reporting
- 2021 UNECE spreadsheet with national plans
- UNECE annual reports on technical cooperation <https://unece.org/reporting-technical-cooperation-activities>
- UNECE technical cooperation strategy [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Item%207\\_ECE\\_EX\\_2021\\_11%20TC%20Strategy.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Item%207_ECE_EX_2021_11%20TC%20Strategy.pdf)
- UNECE resource mobilization strategy – [https://unece.org/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/Remote\\_informal\\_mtg\\_20\\_05\\_2020/Item\\_9\\_ECE\\_EX\\_2020\\_27\\_Rev.1\\_Resource\\_mobilization\\_as\\_adopted.pdf](https://unece.org/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/Remote_informal_mtg_20_05_2020/Item_9_ECE_EX_2020_27_Rev.1_Resource_mobilization_as_adopted.pdf)
- UNECE technical cooperation page - <https://unece.org/technical-cooperation-15>
- Project management guide <https://unece.org/technical-cooperation/publications/guide-project-managers>
- TC success stories - <https://unece.org/technical-cooperation/publications/success-stories-technical-cooperation-towards-2030-agenda>
- UNECE contributes to good practices on SSC publications – can be found here <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/library/publications/>
- UNECE Covid response brochure - attached
- Success Stories in Technical Cooperation Success Stories in Technical Cooperation [Towards the 2030 Agenda](#)
- [UNECE 2010 Guide for Project Management](#)
- *UNECE Responding to the socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the ENECE region. UNECE Information Service. No Date*

#### Other

- UN (2009) Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Europe Fifth revised edition. E/ECE/778/Rev.5.
- OECD, (2021) Implementing the OECD Recommendations on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development-Guidance Note. COM/DCD/DAC/GOV/PGC(2021)1

## EU

- Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Environmental Policy Twentieth-sixth session Geneva, 9–11 November 2020 Item 6 of the provisional agenda Environmental performance reviews Information paper No. 9 27 August 2020 Results of the survey on the possible options for the fourth cycle of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews.
- EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession. Annex 1: List of the environmental acquis for Progress Monitoring Report 2021
- “Monitoring transposition and Implementation of the EU Environmental acquis” MANUAL 2021  
 This Project is funded by the European Union The project implemented by the Consortium of NIRAS (lead) and Umweltbundesamt GmbH
- Letter from EUROPEAN COMMISSION DIRECTORATE-GENERAL ENVIRONMENT The Director-General to Launch of Progress Monitoring as a new activity under the EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA)
- EU Implementation Questionnaires for Air, Chemicals, IPC, Nature, Noise, Waste, Water, Horizontal (other directives around liability, laws, plans and programmes for the environment).
- ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 117th meeting Geneva, 8 July 2021 Item 6 UNECE Technical Cooperation Activities 2020 Annual Report Informal Document No. 2021/17
- ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 116th meeting Geneva, 17 May 2021 Item 7 UNECE Technical Cooperation Strategy (for approval) Informal Document 2021/11
- ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 117th meeting Geneva, 8 July 2021 Item 6 UNECE Technical Cooperation Activities 2020 Annual Report Informal Document No. 2021/17
- Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships. Fourth session Geneva, 1-2 December 2020 Item 4 of the provisional agenda Review of the work since the third session of the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships on 3-4 December 2019 Guidelines on Promoting People-first Public-Private Partnerships Waste-to-Energy Projects for the Circular Economy

## Annex 6: The EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA)

The EPPA is regional multi country programme EU project, with a focus on regional accession for environment and climate. The EPPA categorises environment Directives and Regulations into themes related to: Air Quality; Waste Management; Water Quality; Nature Protection; Industrial Pollution Control; Chemicals; Noise, CITES (endangered plants and animals) regulations and horizontal Directives/Regulations such as public access to environmental information, public participation in plans relating to the environment, and minimum criteria for environmental inspections. The EPPA works not only with the ministries of environment, but also with those with responsibility for energy. There is a separate DG Climate programme.

*Annual Progress Monitoring Reports* are an important output in EU cooperation programmes for enlargement countries, where countries assess their own compliance checking with EU directives. These reports were due in February 2022, after the UNECE project closed. Tables of concordance are prepared by candidate environment ministry staff, with responses to implementation questionnaires for all pieces of environmental legislation expected. The EU subsequently prepares an assessment of progress, to be reviewed by the accession country environmental ministry and the EC. The European Commission has put a lot of emphasis on these *Reports* as a source of information on the level of transposition and implementation of the environment acquis in accession countries.

Linkages with EU Member States using support from EU public administrators under the *Technical Assistance and Information Exchange* (TAIEX) instrument of the EC is recommended by the EPPA programme. TAIEX supports public administrations with regard to the approximation and enforcement of EU legislation, sharing EU good practices. The TAIEX mandate covers North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similar to the UNECE environment approach expertise is provided via:

- **workshops, where a** EU Member State experts present specific areas of EU legislation to a large number of beneficiary officials;
- **expert missions, where an** EU Member States experts are sent to the beneficiary administration to provide in-depth advice on the transposition, implementation or enforcement of a specific part of EU legislation
- **study visits** to an EU Member State's administration.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> In terms of bringing in the experiences from EU public institutions, more than 1000 public officials have been trained. More than 400 experts from public administrations in EU countries from 39 EU agencies are involved in establishing cooperation between EU Public institutions and enlarged countries.

## Annex 7: Survey results on value of project

The short survey for the evaluation which was completed by the national coordinators indicated the following:

### North Macedonia

- North Macedonia government staff said that the project linked environmental and climate governance with other sectorial policies and overall sustainable development in their country. The Needs Assessment report provided a definition of a clear framework for the implementation of measures aimed at overcoming identified weaknesses. EPR recommendations are integrated in the environmental governance in North Macedonia and serve as a roadmap in integrating the environmental policies in all relevant sectors. The implementation of the EPR recommendations are transferred in different environmental policies, programmes and strategies on national and local level.
- Officials underlined the value of UNECE's support for 2030 Agenda implementation in its country as well as in the region, with UNECE playing a key platform for cooperation to advance progress and ensure SDGs are incorporated in national documents.

### Montenegro

- The National Coordinator reported that the project brought the great value to Montenegrin administration in pandemic times. The Project facilitated improving the legal framework for air protection, industrial emissions and accidents, and climate change. The project also provided many guidance documents (15) on different topics, helping capacity building in the public administration in times when workshops and trainings traditionally provided by this kind of projects were not possible. The project supported important initiative on greening the public administration and commercial sector in Montenegro and fostered regional cooperation in many sectors. Implementation of Aarhus Convention and EIA/SEA instruments of environmental governance has improved also.

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

- The coordinators from Bosnia and Herzegovina indicated that UNECE is one of the first organizations to support the country in directing environmental protection activities. In addition to organizing many workshops, training seminars, collecting, arranging, and delivering important and useful environmental information, UNECE helped Bosnia and Herzegovina determine environmental policy and governance and define priority areas for action. Other value added according to the coordinators was providing space to define environmental sub-sectors that require urgent response, and define priority activities in environmental areas where action is needed. The project helped outline clear direction and types of actions to be taken as well as defining stakeholders to take certain environmental actions.

### Serbia

- The Serbian national coordinators reported that the project brought an added value in strengthening the administrative and technical capacities and in improving environmental governance by raising public awareness and participation of all relevant stakeholders in green economy concepts, waste management, climate change and gender issues. The project served as a basis for further raising awareness campaigns that need to continue, particularly for Serbia's EU integration and the Chapter 27 (where waste and climate issues are priorities). Capacity-building and advisory services contributed to the development of practical guides/policy documents that supported gender mainstreaming into environmental policies and the implementation of the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health. Linked was the policy brief: gender mainstreaming in women's access to sanitation in Serbia. Overall the project aligned Agenda 2030, the SDGs and



the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, supporting environmental governance on all levels. Good practices, policies and platforms from these projects, brought an added value for negotiation and decision making in environmental cooperation and governance.

**Republic of Moldova**

- UNECE experts through the project brought support for the implementation of commitments under Governmental Action Plan and Ministerial Action Plan. The results/recommendations of the assessment reports on the implementation of the Environmental Strategy and the Programme for the Green Economy will be applied in the development of future policy documents.

## Annex 8: Laws, regulations, policies developed through the project

Table 7: Concrete policy package outputs

Country Review of the implementation of the recommendations coming from the EPR vis-à-vis SDGs	National Workshop to validate the review and needs assessment	Policy packages notes (from progress reports) 2020	Policy packages from UNECE website	Policy packages mentioned as key in Survey to coordinators
Albania	2019	2020 Albania decided to concentrate its efforts on medical waste management (2020) to protect public health and the environment. Requirements for the management of hospital waste management were developed.	<a href="#">Medical waste management</a> <a href="#">Waste management</a> <a href="#">Chemical safety</a> <a href="#">Regulatory impact assessment</a> <a href="#">Strategic environmental assessment</a>	
Bosnia and Herzegovina		2020 A review of the situation with respect to the green economy was put forward, focusing on opportunities for the green economy. Linkages with the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy BIG-E held in Georgia in 2016 (committed to harmonise processes with the requirements of the green economy).	<a href="#">Overall picture of the status of green economy</a> <a href="#">Guidelines on sustainable agriculture</a> <a href="#">Coastal management - Adriatic Sea Bosnia and Herzegovina part</a> <a href="#">Overview of COVID-19 pandemic Impact on the Economy and Environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy for harmonization of regulations with the acquis Communautaire in the field of environmental protection of Bosnia and Herzegovina-EAS-BiH,</li> <li>• Low Emission Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina</li> <li>• ESAP BiH/Environmental Strategy and Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina starting 2022 for 10 years 2030+ - this is a policy document that establishes the environmental policy goals and key activities up to 2032. Aimed to strengthen the environmental frameworks within BiH and an important step for alignment with EU laws and procedures, for joining as well as for future National communication for climate change from (1 to 4); Biannual updated reports for Climate changes (1-3); Biodiversity strategy document; Land Degradation strategy and other strategic documents.</li> <li>• International convention and agreements ratified, and implemented in BiH in accordance with recommendations from EPR (1-3)</li> </ul>
Montenegro	17 June 2019	Three rule books and one guide developed. Policy packages focused on health, air quality and energy.	<a href="#">Improving air quality</a> <a href="#">Addressing climate change and promoting sustainable mobility</a> <a href="#">Enabling safer industry</a> <a href="#">Managing industrial waste</a>	Assistance for the development of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National Strategy on Air Quality Management;</li> <li>- Air Pollution Control Plan in accordance with EU Directive on national emission ceilings (2016/2284/EU)</li> </ul>

Country Review of the implementation of the recommendations coming from the EPR vis-à-vis SDGs	National Workshop to validate the review and needs assessment	Policy packages notes (from progress reports) 2020	Policy packages from UNECE website	Policy packages mentioned as key in Survey to coordinators
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Rulebook on contents of GHG monitoring plans for stationary plants was adopted (092/20 od 09.09.2020).</li> <li>2. Rulebook on contents of GHG monitoring plans for aircraft activities (102/20 od 16.10.2020).</li> <li>3. Rulebook transposing Directive 1999/94/EC relating to the availability of consumer information on fuel economy and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in respect of the marketing of new passenger cars (br. 113/20 od 25.11.2020).</li> </ol> <p>Focus on mitigating climate change, air pollution, monitoring and reporting on greenhouse gas, emissions for stationary plans, consumer information on fuel economy and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for marketing new cars. There was a focus on and rule books for COVID.</p>	<a href="#">Financing environmental protection</a> <a href="#">Ensuring public participation on environmental matters in times of COVID-19</a> <a href="#">Scoring global goals for sustainability</a> <a href="#">Enabling conditions for country assistance and increasing resilience to pandemics</a> <a href="#">Greening of the commercial sector</a> <a href="#">Guidance for greening the public administration</a> <a href="#">EIA and SEA</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A package of secondary legislation following the Law on protection from negative effects of climate change (e.g. rulebooks on monitoring GHG gasses from stationary installations and aviation activities as well as fuel economy guide for purchase of new passenger vehicles)</li> <li>- A package of secondary legislation related to the Law on industrial emissions – decrees on air emissions from large and medium combustion plants, joint inspection control and analysis of legislation related to major industrial accidents</li> <li>- The package of technical translation and adaptation of the Conclusions on Best Available Techniques (BATs) for industries relevant for Montenegro (production of iron and still, production of aluminum, large combustion plants, landfills, production of food, production of cement and limestone, pigs and chicken farms, monitoring of industrial emissions)</li> <li>- Study on turning of historical industrial waste (red mud) into resource</li> <li>- An analysis of environmental taxes and provision of recommendations to the newly established eco-fund</li> <li>- Handbook on handling environmental complaints and public participation, especially in the times of COVID-19</li> <li>- Guidance for greening the public administration and the commercial sector, cost-benefit analysis of greening the public administration</li> <li>- Guidance to strengthen EIA and SEA procedures in Serbia and Montenegro by integrating climate change concerns in these procedures – the activity was implemented jointly with Serbia</li> </ul> <p>Regional analysis of potentials for transition into green economy</p>
North Macedonia	2019	Programme of measures for improving environment inspection developed.	<a href="#">Air quality management</a> <a href="#">Institutional air quality</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Waters prepared.</li> </ul>

Country Review of the implementation of the recommendations coming from the EPR vis-à-vis SDGs	National Workshop to validate the review and needs assessment	Policy packages notes (from progress reports) 2020	Policy packages from UNECE website	Policy packages mentioned as key in Survey to coordinators
		<p>New law on environmental inspection.</p> <p>Efforts were concentrated on air quality management and waste management. A waste management strategy developed.</p> <p>A monitoring framework for air quality management was deemed important. For waste management, efforts were focused on achieving EU standards linked to SDGs, fulfilling the obligations of the <i>Stabilization and Association Agreement</i>.</p>	<p><a href="#">Enhanced climate change action towards more ambitious national commitment</a></p> <p><a href="#">Local governments and their role in implementation of EPR recommendations</a></p> <p><a href="#">Waste management</a></p> <p><a href="#">Regional organisation of waste management</a></p> <p><a href="#">Programme of measures for environmental inspections</a></p> <p><a href="#">Harmonization of RBMPs</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of draft rulebooks for monitoring and calculation of the unit of harmfulness, in accordance with the requirements of the law on water.</li> <li>• National Waste Management Plan 2021-2031 (NWMP) and National Waste Prevention Plan (2022-2028) prepared and to be adopted in 2022</li> <li>• New Law on waste management adopted in 2021</li> <li>• New draft Law on Nature prepared in 2021, to be adopted in 2022</li> <li>• Law on air quality amendments adopted in 2021</li> <li>• Amendments of Law on Environment developed in 2021</li> <li>• Law on Industrial Emission prepared in 2021, to be adopted in 2022</li> </ul> <p><b>Climate outputs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Long term strategy on Climate Action, the draft Law on Climate Action, addressing recommendations by the 3<sup>rd</sup> EPR e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>legal setting and composition of the National Council on Climate Change, roadmap for institutional strengthening,</li> <li>preparation of proposal to develop a National Adaptation Plan</li> <li>linking DRR with Climate Change in a common reporting platform</li> <li>integration of energy and climate issues in a national integrated Energy and Climate Plan</li> <li>inclusion of a circular economy concept</li> <li>GHG emissions from several waste streams into the National Determined Contribution</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Serbia	2019	<p>A policy package on circular and green economy developed.</p> <p>Air quality plan in Grada Kraljeva an administrative centre of the Raška District in central Serbia was also a focus, with an action quality plan</p>	<p><a href="#">Air Quality Plan for the city of Kraljevo</a></p> <p><a href="#">Green economy</a></p> <p><a href="#">Waste management</a></p> <p><a href="#">Impact of access to sanitation on women's health</a></p>	<p>UNDA Projects developed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Green Economy program</a> for Serbia, serving as the Road Map for the circular economy, with guidelines for transition.</li> </ul>

<b>Country</b> Review of the implementation of the recommendations coming from the EPR vis-à-vis SDGs	<b>National Workshop to validate the review and needs assessment</b>	<b>Policy packages notes (from progress reports) 2020</b>	<b>Policy packages from UNECE website</b>	<b>Policy packages mentioned as key in Survey to coordinators</b>
		<p>that can be duplicated in other towns.</p> <p>Guidelines for the management of infectious medical waste through hazardous waste collection, waste separation and collection and recycling of municipal waste was a focus. How to create local registers of pollution sources also developed.</p>	<p><a href="#">Raising awareness on waste management and climate change EIA and SEA</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air Quality Plan for the City of Kraljevo awaiting approval (following a public debate)</li> <li>• Waste management public awareness program,</li> <li>• Climate Change Awareness Programme,</li> <li>• Impact of access to sanitation on women's health</li> <li>• Integration of gender aspects into environmental policies. A background note for a pilot project for the Fruska Gora National Park has been developed. This will demonstrate in practice how gender considerations can be taken into account at the local level.</li> <li>• A policy brief for decision makers, about the impact of sanitation on women's health, is being used as an instrument in further raising awareness activities related to the Protocol on Water and Health.</li> </ul>
Republic of Moldova			<p><a href="#">Evaluation of the implementation of the Environmental Strategy for the period 2014-2023 and development of a draft environmental strategy</a></p> <p><a href="#">Evaluation of the Programme on the green economy and its Action Plan and drafting of a new Programme</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress and evaluation report of the state of implementation of the Environmental Strategy of the Republic of Moldova 2014-2023 and its Action Plan</li> <li>• Recommendations for the priority areas for the Environmental Strategy 2030, with priorities based on Moldova 2030</li> <li>• Progress and evaluation assessment report of the state of implementation of the Programme on the promotion of green economy in the Republic of Moldova and its Action Plan for 2018-2020</li> </ul>