

# Mainstreaming equity considerations into environmental policymaking

The case of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Environmental  
Strategy and Action Plan

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## Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. GESEP mainstreaming approach in the project: aims, concepts and steps</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Key aims	5
2.2. Key concepts	5
2.3. Key steps	6
<b>3. Results of the project's GESEP mainstreaming efforts</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1. Integration of GESEP considerations into project activities and outputs	8
3.2. Fostering of diversity and inclusiveness in project team and activities	8
3.3. A socially redistributive BiH ESAP 2030+	9
3.4. Engagement and collaboration with institutions and organizations focusing on GESEP issues in BiH	9
3.5. Raising of project participants' awareness about GESEP issues in environmental policymaking	10
3.6. Additional impact: Incorporation of a GESEP lens in strategic development planning in Bosnia and Herzegovina	10
<b>4. Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1. Set GESEP-related ambitions for the project as a necessary first step	11
4.2. Allocate sufficient resources to meet GESEP mainstreaming goals	11
4.3. Improve access to (disaggregated) data and examples of best practices	11
4.4. Anticipate resistance to GESEP mainstreaming into environmental policy	12
4.5. Use project activities as a platform for marginalized groups to safely voice their concerns, needs and proposals	12
<b>References</b>	<b>13</b>

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## Key messages

This report describes the approach used to mainstream gender equality, social equity and poverty (GESEP) considerations into the project *Development of the Environmental Strategy and Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. It presents the project's GESEP mainstreaming goals, as well as the main steps used to do so. It then summarizes the project's GESEP-related results, and provides a series of key recommendations drawn from the project's experience. These include the need to set projects' GESEP-related ambitions as a first step in mainstreaming efforts; the importance of allocating sufficient resources to meet GESEP mainstreaming goals; and the need to anticipate resistance to GESEP mainstreaming into environmental policy. The report also highlights the need to improve access to disaggregated data and examples of best practices, as well as the need to use project activities as a platform for marginalized groups to safely voice their concerns, needs and proposals.

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## 1. Introduction

Gender inequality and social inequity are drivers of and outcomes of environmental change, as is poverty (SEI, 2019). At the same time, solutions to environmental change are not socially neutral and may affect certain groups disproportionately (Mackie & Haščić, 2018). There is thus a need to better integrate gender equality, social equity, and poverty (GESEP) analysis into environmental policymaking.

This report seeks to describe the approach used to mainstream GESEP into the project *Development of the Environmental Strategy and Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (hereafter "the project") and to share some lessons learned from it. The report aims to provide policymakers, international donors, project implementers and civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and elsewhere with a comprehensive understanding of the project's efforts to integrate GESEP into environmental policymaking. It outlines the project's strategies, challenges, and successes in mainstreaming GESEP, enabling these stakeholders to make informed decisions about funding and implementing similar projects in the future.

The project supported BiH with the preparation of its Environmental Strategy and Action Plan (BiH ESAP 2030+). As BiH obtained the EU candidate status in 2022, the strategy's adoption will help the country achieve a greater level of preparation in the accession negotiations' chapter on environment and climate change (European Commission, 2022). In the long term, the aim is for the BiH ESAP 2030+ to become a tool for reaching environmental sustainability and improving citizen health and well-being for current and future generations across the country.

The project took place between November 2019 and May 2023. The strategy development process was participatory (Stockholm Environment Institute, 2021), involving stakeholders from the public and private sectors as well as from civil society and academia, and covered seven thematic areas<sup>1</sup> (in accordance with the EU environmental *acquis*) across four jurisdictions<sup>2</sup>. The project was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in BiH.

Section 2 describes the overall GESEP mainstreaming approach we implemented in the project. Section 3 then describes the results of this approach, and Section 4 presents five key take-aways that can inform efforts to mainstream GESEP in other environmental policy development projects.

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<sup>1</sup> The thematic areas were: water; waste; biodiversity; air quality, climate change and energy; chemical safety and noise; sustainable resources management; and environmental management.

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with BiH's institutional set up, the BiH ESAP 2030+ includes components at country level, at the entity level (i.e., the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS)), and at district level, i.e., Brčko District (BD).

## 2. GESEP mainstreaming approach in the project: aims, concepts and steps

### 2.1. Key aims

The project's GESEP mainstreaming approach sought to achieve three objectives:

- Ensure that the process is respectful and inclusive and provides equal access to employment and participation opportunities to all project team members and stakeholders.
- Deliver outputs that help further mainstream GESEP in environmental policymaking and implementation, as this can pave the way to a more equal access and distribution of resources in BiH.
- Contribute to SEI's goal of embedding GESEP into its research, policy engagement and portfolio of tools, and comply with Sida's goals regarding addressing GESEP issues within its funded portfolio.

The project's mainstreaming approach consisted of three interconnected levels of involvement:

- Within the project team: ensuring inclusive working dynamics, equal access to project-related opportunities, and building capacities on GESEP issues.
- Within project activities: ensuring inclusive working dynamics, equal access to project-related opportunities, a diverse set of participants, and the involvement of institutions and organizations working on GESEP issues in BiH.
- Within the project outputs: achieving at least a socially aware, or even better, a redistributive BiH ESAP 2030+<sup>3</sup>, ensuring inclusive and diverse representation in communication activities and outputs, and raising awareness of project participants and the general public about the relevance of GESEP considerations in environmental policymaking.

### 2.2. Key concepts

The project used the concept of multidimensional poverty. To capture this holistic concept of poverty, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has developed a framework for multidimensional poverty analysis which includes four dimensions: resources, opportunities and choice, power and voice, and human security (Sida, 2017). In this model, poverty "not only means lack of material resources but also lack of power and voice and respect for human rights, lack of opportunities and choice" (Sida 2017, p. 5).

The project's approach also accounted for intersectionality, a focus on how combined aspects of one's social and political identities (e.g., sex, age, sexuality, and dis/ability) can create unique modes of discrimination (United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 2022). By looking at the combination of several social variables, an intersectional perspective moves beyond, for example, understanding men and women as binary and homogenous groups, instead introducing many kinds of intersecting differences. In this way, it acknowledges different spheres of influence, perceptions and actions across environmental, social and economic dimensions. This deepens the understanding of how different social groups are affected by environmental change, and adopting an intersectional GESEP approach could allow for a more nuanced understanding of the interactions between the environment and gender equality, social equity and poverty in BiH.

<sup>3</sup> Here we build on the concepts of gender awareness and gender redistributive policies (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023), but broadened to incorporate multidimensional poverty and social equity more explicitly. Socially aware refers to developing a strategy and action plan that recognizes differences in needs and contributions from different groups in society and the structures behind these differences, while redistributive refers to a strategy and action plan that seeks to restructure the current allocation of resources and responsibilities in order to create more equal relationships between groups in society.

Following Sweden's Gender Equality Policy (Government of Sweden, 2019) and Sida's Gender Toolbox (Sida, 2015) and Poverty Toolbox (Sida, 2019), the project aimed for achieving at least a socially aware environmental strategy, or if possible, even a socially redistributive one, acknowledging that a) all people are development actors, but that, given various kinds of social relations, their involvement and needs are different; b) men and women are not binary or homogenous groups; and c) environmental trends combine with structural factors in driving poverty or creating opportunities to move out of it (Segnestam, 2018). It also aimed to enable the incorporation of measures that seek to transform the status quo between different (intersectional) groups and enable more gender equality and social equity in BiH.

### 2.3. Key steps

The mainstreaming of GESEP started at the beginning of the project, with the setting up of a GESEP team within the project team and the elaboration of a stakeholder map identifying public and international institutions, as well as civil society organizations (CSOs), working on GESEP issues in BiH. The project's GESEP team mapped the relevant policy and legal framework and then carried out a series of informal individual consultations with institutions and organizations identified through stakeholder mapping. These consultations helped to adjust the project's GESEP-related ambitions and priorities by allowing for a better understanding of GESEP challenges and how they relate to the environment in BiH, and by providing the project team with a picture of the current landscape of activities bringing together environmental and GESEP issues in the country.

On this basis, the GESEP team elaborated a GESEP mainstreaming plan for the project that included goals, concepts, methods, and monitoring indicators. To develop this plan, the team relied on guidelines and best practices from organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2016a), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2017), Sida (Sida, 2020a), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, 2021), and the Stockholm Environment Institute (Galaitis et al., 2017; Segnestam, 2018). Stakeholders working with GESEP issues, such as institutional gender equality mechanisms, the Ombudsman and relevant CSOs, were invited to participate in the project. The GESEP team then organized a webinar to present the overall approach, as well as its main concepts and methods, to the broader project team, including the BiH thematic experts in charge of leading the development of the strategy's contents.

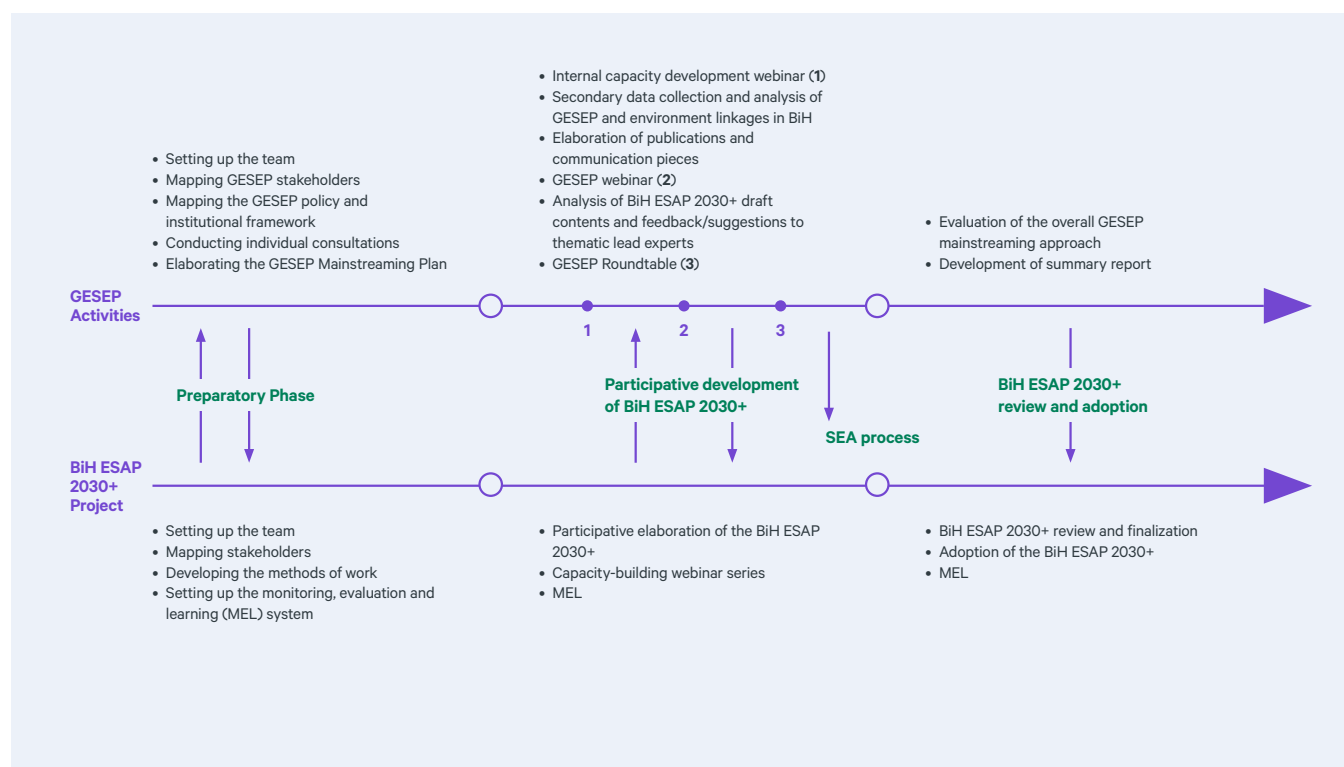
The next step was to develop background information and suggestions on how to integrate GESEP considerations into each of the strategy's thematic areas, based on a review of academic and grey literature on GESEP and environmental issues in BiH and the Western Balkans (WB) and the European Union (EU) more broadly. On this basis, the project developed a series of publications that summarized the main findings and recommendations, including a general report (Strambo, Jahovic, et al., 2021) and four specific thematic briefs (Strambo, Segnestam, et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). The project made all publications available on the project's website in English and BiH's three official languages and prepared a series of shorter communication pieces to accompany their publication.

In addition, the project organized a webinar on GESEP and the environment with guest speakers to raise awareness about the relevance of GESEP issues in environmental policymaking among stakeholders participating in the elaboration of the BiH ESAP 2030+ and the broader public (BiH ESAP 2030+, 2021a). The project's GESEP team also regularly communicated with and provided feedback and suggestions to the BiH thematic experts leading the development of the of the strategy's contents.

Once the draft strategy was finalized, the GESEP team also organized a roundtable with GESEP stakeholders to present and discuss how GESEP had been incorporated so far. At that point in the project, the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) process<sup>4</sup> initiated. Here, the GESEP team provided feedback on how to incorporate GESEP considerations into the preparation of the SEA reports. Finally, as the project got closer to its end, the project team made an evaluation of the GESEP mainstreaming efforts based on the initial plan's indicators to identify lessons from the process and learn for improving GESEP mainstreaming in future projects. Figure 1 below shows the main GESEP activities and how they interacted with other project activities.

In parallel to project activities, the GESEP team also participated in other events in BiH to raise awareness about the need for and value of mainstreaming GESEP into environmental policymaking. For example, the team presented in an event organized by the BiH Gender Equality Agency at the BiH Parliamentary Assembly on gender equality and the environment on 8 March 2022, and in an event on gender and air pollution organized by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency in Sarajevo on 29 March 2022.

Figure 1: Summary of GESEP activities' interactions with the overall project's development



<sup>4</sup> SEA is "a systematic process for evaluating the environmental implications of a proposed policy, plan or programme", which also "provides means for looking at cumulative effects and appropriately address them at the earliest stage of decision making alongside economic and social considerations" (Rodríguez Fortun 2021).

### 3. Results of the project's GESEP mainstreaming efforts

This section summarizes the main results of GESEP mainstreaming in the project. The results are presented in accordance with the main indicators of success that were defined in the project's GESEP Mainstreaming Plan (see Table 1).

Table 1. GESEP indicators.

Outcome	Outcome Indicator
Integration of GESEP considerations into project activities and outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GESEP situation analysis is carried out</li> <li>• Working groups incorporate GESEP issues in their discussions</li> <li>• Communication outputs emphasize GESEP dimensions</li> </ul>
Diversity and inclusiveness among project staff at different position levels, and in project activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Composition of the project management team and working groups is diverse</li> <li>• Participants in working groups feel free to express themselves and feel heard and listened to</li> </ul>
Socially redistributive BiH ESAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BiH ESAP includes measures that seek to transform the status quo between different (intersectional) groups and enable more gender equality and social equity in BiH</li> </ul>
Involvement of institutions and organizations focusing on GESEP issues in BiH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number and diversity of GESEP-related organizations involved in project activities</li> </ul>
Increased awareness among participants in working groups and members of the PMT about GESEP in relation to environmental policy making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working groups incorporate GESEP issues in their discussions</li> </ul>

#### 3.1. Integration of GESEP considerations into project activities and outputs

The project generated specific GESEP-related outputs, such as publications (Strambo, Jahovic, et al., 2021; Strambo, Segnestam, et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021d, 2021c), an op-ed (Strambo & Husika, 2021), webinars (BiH ESAP 2030+, 2021b, 2021c), and blog posts (Strambo et al. 2022; see also [esap.ba/category/news](http://esap.ba/category/news)). These describe the interlinkages between environmental and GESEP issues and make suggestions on how to incorporate GESEP issues into environmental policy in BiH. Participant feedback pointed out that GESEP-related analysis conducted and published by the project represents a valuable source of information for interested stakeholders.

The project also sought to highlight GESEP considerations in other activities, especially in thematic working group sessions where the contents of the strategy were initially developed. As a result, the strategy includes GESEP considerations in its background sections as well as in its priorities, measures and targets. However, as thematic working group meetings were moved online and shortened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the space for discussing GESEP was more limited than projected. In addition, GESEP was also incorporated into the SEA methodology.

#### 3.2. Fostering of diversity and inclusiveness in project team and activities

In order to foster an inclusive participation process, the GESEP team held several trainings for the project implementation team<sup>5</sup> about inclusive facilitation and conflict management at the beginning of the project. They also put in place various channels for stakeholders to provide

<sup>5</sup> The implementation team included SEI project staff, as well as staff from the project local partner, Consortium Enova d.o.o. Sarajevo & Center for Energy, Environment and Resources – CENER 21, and the thematic lead experts responsible for developing the thematic contents of the BiH ESAP 2030+ in accordance with the participatory methodology.



inputs in the BiH ESAP 2030+ development, both oral and written, both during and after thematic working group sessions.

The GESEP team also sought to promote diverse voices from BiH society in communication activities. For example, media campaigns included profiles from people belonging to historically marginalized groups. Nevertheless, conducting the majority of activities online due to the pandemic limited the space available for discussing GESEP aspects of environmental policy and stakeholders' level of engagement activity, due among others, to technological limitations and online engagement fatigue.

In the project participant survey conducted between July and September 2021 with 131 participants, 79% answered they felt free to express themselves during project activities and felt heard and listened to. Among the project implementation team, 24 out of 26 survey respondents considered the project was conducted in an inclusive way.

### **3.3. A socially redistributive BiH ESAP 2030+**

One of the project's GESEP mainstreaming goal was to include a few priorities or measures within the BiH ESAP 2030+ that would be socially redistributive and transform the status quo between different groups to help improve further gender equality and social equity in BiH.

The BiH ESAP 2030+ includes GESEP considerations at the level of priorities, measures, and indicators. At the level of priorities, all jurisdictions in BiH identified gender mainstreaming of policies in nature resources protection (sustainable forest management) and environmental management thematic areas. All thematic areas except for water management include GESEP-relevant measures. Some examples of relevant measures include the development of just transition plans for coal regions, the inclusion of informal waste collectors in waste management, various campaigning and awareness-raising activities on the importance of GESEP in biodiversity conservation and in chemicals management, as well as including a GESEP lens in sustainable mining activities. Environmental management – the cross-cutting thematic area – has the most measures related to GESEP, including fostering and strengthening the participation of gender equality institutions and CSOs in environmental policymaking and the further mainstreaming of GESEP into environmental policymaking.

These priorities and measures are more gender responsive than redistributive, meaning that they consider the needs of different groups (Sida, 2020b) and make the strategy socially aware but do not per se tackle the root causes of discrimination and inequality. Some GESEP measures, such as just transition plans and environmental awareness campaigns, do hold some redistributive potential, provided they are implemented in ways that challenge and tackle the cultural norms, power structures and roots of discrimination during the implementation phase.

### **3.4. Engagement and collaboration with institutions and organizations focusing on GESEP issues in BiH**

The project engaged and collaborated with a variety of institutions and organizations working with GESEP issues in BiH and elsewhere through initial consultations, events and working group meetings. These institutions included the BiH Gender Equality Agency, the FBiH Gender Equality Centre, the RS Gender Equality Centre, as well as the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH. The team consulted six civil society organizations that work on GESEP issues in BiH, and two of them were then further involved as working group members. Six institutions and civil society organizations working on GESEP also participated in the GESEP Roundtable to discuss the contents of the draft BiH ESAP. The team also collaborated with ALHem, a Serbian NGO working with chemical safety, and the Focus Association for Sustainable Development, a Slovenian NGO that works with air quality and energy poverty, to contribute to the first GESEP webinar on "how can a social equity

lens improve environmental policy?”. While a conscious effort was made to consult with, as well as enable and encourage the participation of, institutions and organizations working with GESEP concerns in the process, more could have been done to provide dedicated space for representatives of marginalized groups to share their views, concerns, and policy proposals.

The inclusion of gender equality mechanisms into the development of the project was highlighted as a good example of participation in the *BiH Gender Country Profile 2021*, which emphasizes the need for more attention to gender equality and involvement by gender equality institutions in environmental policymaking.

### **3.5. Raising of project participants’ awareness about GESEP issues in environmental policymaking**

The project resulted in increased awareness about GESEP issues for both participating stakeholders and experts involved in the project implementation. In the project participant survey, 28% of respondents answered they think the project has increased their knowledge of the interlinkages between GESEP and environmental issues.

The project also increased the awareness of the project implementation team. A survey conducted in December 2022 indicated that of 26 respondents, only two respondents (8%) answered they disagree with the explicit consideration of GESEP issues in environmental policymaking, and only one that they were undecided. Twenty respondents (76%) indicated they have gained a better understanding of the links between GESEP and the environment, and of how to incorporate GESEP considerations into developing environmental policy. And twenty-one respondents (80%) indicated they think they will use what they have learned in this project regarding GESEP and the environment in their future work.

### **3.6. Additional impact: Incorporation of a GESEP lens in strategic development planning in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The project has contributed to develop new norms about GESEP lens integration in the environment and development policy fields. For example, the legal framework for development planning in BiH has recently incorporated gender equality as one of its core principles across BiH (*Law on Development Planning and Management in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022; Law on Strategic Planning, 2022; Rules about the methodology for content creation, system monitoring and supervision of strategic implementation, 2022*). Bylaws also now include the participation of vulnerable groups and the evaluation of proposed strategic development plans’ impacts on men, women and vulnerable groups as requirements into the rules for development planning. This is an important milestone in policymaking that directly mandates GESEP lens in all development interventions. How these rules are implemented in practice will however determine to what extent this framework enables more inclusive strategic development planning.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

GESEP issues are intertwined with environmental challenges should be integrated into environmental policymaking. The project described in this report implemented a comprehensive GESEP mainstreaming approach, involving the project team, project activities, and project results. The project successfully integrated GESEP considerations into various project activities and outputs, including thematic group meetings, publications, webinars, and blog posts. It also fostered diversity and inclusiveness within the project team and activities. However, various factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, limited the participation of disadvantaged groups. And while the BiH ESAP 2030+ includes GESEP considerations in its priorities, measures, and targets, few measures have redistributive potential. This section provides five recommendations based on this experience.

### 4.1. Set GESEP-related ambitions for the project as a necessary first step

Knowledge of and experience working with GESEP-related issues within the environmental field vary from context to context. It is thus key to adjust the project's GESEP mainstreaming ambitions, priorities, strategies, and activities to its context. Reviewing recent and current projects in the same field and conducting interviews with key actors in the environmental and GESEP-related policy fields can help with understanding such contexts better and adjust a project GESEP-mainstreaming approach accordingly.

### 4.2. Allocate sufficient resources to meet GESEP mainstreaming goals

Mainstreaming a GESEP lens in environmental policy development projects requires the allocation of considerable financial resources, as well as the involvement of subject matter experts. It is important to match the project's GESEP mainstreaming ambition and scope to appropriate resources.

For example, the implementation of GESEP-related activities in the project was led by a team of four people, three experts based in SEI HQ and one external expert based in BiH. It also involved the participation of the rest of the project team to organize events, coordinate with stakeholders, communicate and publicize key GESEP messages and outputs, and monitor impact. In particular, the BiH thematic experts played an important role in incorporating GESEP considerations into the draft BiH ESAP 2030+. Overall, the project invested approximately SEK 2.3 million (approximately USD 220 000) in implementing the GESEP approach, or about 5.5% of the overall project budget. The funder's interest and support for mainstreaming GESEP was essential for the project to develop and implement a comprehensive approach. Indeed, as illustrated by the increasing attention to gender-responsive budgeting (EIGE, 2023; UN Women, n.d.), assigning specific resources to GESEP mainstreaming is a key signal of commitment towards improving gender equality and social equity in policies or projects.

### 4.3. Improve access to (disaggregated) data and examples of best practices

Finding relevant and recent disaggregated data (FAO & UN Women, 2021; ILOSTAT (database), 2020; Kadribašić et al., 2020; Nikoloski & Marnie, 2018; OECD Development Centre, 2019; UN Women, 2021; UNDP, 2016b) as well as examples of how GESEP approaches are being incorporated in environmental strategic documents in the EU and around the world was a real challenge in the project. There were very few examples of specific measures aiming at integrating

GESEP issues into environmental strategic documents. For instance, the EU 7th Environment Action Programme only included references to the vulnerability of particular groups to pollutants and the need for more knowledge on this matter, without including measures targeted to these groups (European Parliament and Council, 2013). Some examples of specific measures were found in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (Clabots & Gilligan, 2017), as well as in Climate Change Gender Action Plans, Stockholm Convention National Implementation Plans, the EU Gender Action Plan (European Commission, 2016), as well as reports of other environmental and social projects in the region (EBRD, 2011; GIZ, 2018; OSCE, 2014).

The limitations encountered with regards to finding disaggregated data and examples of GESEP mainstreaming in environmental policy documents highlights the need for conducting reviews and summaries on the ways GESEP and environmental issues interact in projects' context and for making it available to stakeholders, including in the country's language(s). Projects should also consider incorporating some degree of disaggregated data collection into project activities, if time and financial resources allow for it. Building a more robust empirical base is essential for a more nuanced analysis of differentiated environmental vulnerabilities, needs and possible responses across society.

#### **4.4. Anticipate resistance to GESEP mainstreaming into environmental policy**

When planning GESEP-related activities in an environmental policy project, it is important to anticipate some level of disengagement or even push back, with stakeholders failing (or refusing) to see the relevance and importance of mainstreaming GESEP into environmental policymaking. This may be due to individual ideological positions, but also to limited capacities to engage or to the lack of institutional frameworks enabling stakeholder engagement on issues that often remain perceived as outside the realm of environmental policy. Ways to address this challenge include awareness-raising activities in early stages of the project to highlight the benefits of GESEP mainstreaming, capacity-building activities, as well as tying the GESEP mainstreaming approach to relevant international and national institutional frameworks and regulations.

#### **4.5. Use project activities as a platform for marginalized groups to safely voice their concerns, needs and proposals**

While the BiH ESAP project involved organizations working with marginalized groups and used media campaigns to amplify some of their insights, there was limited space for members of disadvantaged groups to share their concerns and proposals with the broader group of project stakeholders, especially in activities that were not catered to GESEP issues. It is important to make use of project opportunities to give a platform to such groups and to amplify their voices and messages. This will likely require specific support mechanisms, such as dedicated funding for their involvement or diverse forms of engagement to facilitate their safe and free participation.

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