

STUDY REPORT

**Joint study on opportunities and
challenges for gender inclusive
environmental justice**

UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina and UNDP Kosovo

Study report

Joint study on opportunities and challenges for gender inclusive environmental justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo¹

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June 2024

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Acknowledgements:

We are grateful for all the support and feedback we have received in the preparation of this study. Thanks especially to (in alphabetical order): Aferdita Sylaj Shehu, Albulena Sadiku, Amina Omičević, Amela Šabić Ahmečković, Amra Smajnović, Andrea Bevanda Hrvo, Arben Nika, Arbëresha Loxha Stublla, Azra Berbić, Behare Bajraktari, Bojana Ilić, Branislava Crncević, Burim Ejupi, Dušan Radaković, Eglanitna Shala, Ehat Miftaraj, Emina Veljović, Emir Delić, Fatos Lajçi, Ferdane Asllani, Flutra Bektashi, Guxim Klinaku, , Helena Poučki, Igballe Rugova, Igda Lameš, Indira Kartallozi, Isak Skenderi, Janja Hodić, Jasmina Husanović, Jovana Radosavljević, Kemal Bajramović, Luljeta Koši, Lulzim Hoti, Maida Bilal, Majda Ibraković, Maksuma Topalović, Përparim Leka, Miodrag Marinković, Muhamed Lopo, Naida Katica, Naim Qelaj, Nera Monir Divan, Ozren Laganin, Petar Đorđević, Razija Mezić, Rinora Gojani, Sabina Jukan, Sabina Šahman Salihbegović, Sabina Topčić, Samir Lemeš, Sanela Popović, Sanja Čorović, Shpresa Loshaj, Snežana Jagodić, Sonja Kosanović, Stjepan Matić, Tijana Trbojević, Valmir Imsaili, Valon Raka, Violeta Vojin, and Zinaida Dimitrijević.

1 References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

This Study was prepared as part of “Leverage Data and Advanced Technology for Enhanced Crisis Risk Anticipation and Social Modelling in Bosnia and Herzegovina” and “Inter-community Dialogue in Kosovo” implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of donors, partners or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The UNDP Kosovo project support was made possible through generous contributions from Luxembourg, the Republic of Korea, Norway, and Sweden via [#UNDPFundingWindows](#).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms

Executive Summary

1 Introduction

1.1 Study scope and contents

2 Methodology

2.1 Research framework

2.2 Stakeholder interviews and validation workshops

2.3 Limitations

3 Bosnia and Herzegovina: State of women's engagement and gender considerations in environmental justice

3.1 Gender context

3.2 Distributive justice - Gender differentiated environmental impacts, concerns, and priorities

3.3 Representational justice - Women's representation and gender considerations in environmental governance

3.4 Procedural justice - Gender considerations in environmental procedural processes

4 Kosovo: State of women's engagement and gender considerations in environmental justice

4.1 Gender context

4.2 Distributive justice - Gender differentiated environmental impacts, concerns, and priorities

4.3 Representational justice - Women's representation and gender considerations in environmental governance

4.4 Procedural justice - Gender considerations in environmental procedural processes

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Recommendations

Annex 1: Existing environmental justice and gender justice frameworks reviewed

Annex 2: Information on stakeholder interviews and validation workshops

Participants in interviews and validation workshops

Questions for stakeholder interviews

References

Acronyms

ACDC	Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BiH ESAP 2030+	Environmental Strategy and Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina until 2030
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
CBD	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRSV	Conflict-related sexual violence
EIAs	Environmental Impact Assessments
EKW	EcoKosWomen
EU	European Union
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
GBV	Gender-based violence
GLPS	Group for Legal and Political Studies
IBCM	International Business College Mitrovica
KEPA	Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency
MESPI	Kosovo Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure
NAP BiH	Climate Change Adaptation and Low Emission Development Strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina
RS	Republika Srpska
SLAPPs	Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Executive Summary

Environmental justice cannot be achieved without the protection and fulfilment of human rights and gender justice. Addressing gender inequality is necessary as it impedes the central tenants of environmental justice, including fair allocation of environmental benefits and burdens (distributive justice); equal access to and influence in environmental governance (representational justice); and transparent, informed, and inclusive environmental decision-making processes (procedural justice). The impacts of environmental degradation are shaped by gender inequalities, with women facing disproportionate harm without equal access to resources to effectively cope (Boyer and Granat, 2021; Castañeda Carney et al., 2020; OHCHR, 2022; UN Women, 2022). While women are mobilizing and leading efforts to address environmental degradation, they are often left out of decision-making spaces to address environmental injustices and face barriers to accessing justice (Strumskyte et al., 2022; Tran and Hanaček, 2023; Xie, 2023).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo, environmental justice and the connections it has with gender equality and women's empowerment are emerging issues of interest among decision-makers, advocacy groups, and residents. In post-conflict societies like BiH and Kosovo, gender inclusive environmental justice contributes to the important peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts prioritized in the decades following violent conflict. Women leaders, civil society, and activists in BiH and Kosovo hold critical potential to drive gender inclusive environmental justice. However, structural barriers, inequalities, and capacity limitations must be understood and addressed to enable gender inclusive environmental justice and support the role of women in these areas.

Purpose

This study represents a first step in the critical examination of gender inclusive environmental justice by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices in BiH and Kosovo. UNDP BiH and UNDP Kosovo facilitated the development of this joint study to identify opportunities and challenges for gender inclusive environmental justice as a pathway to peace, building the knowledge base on these emerging topics and raising awareness of these critical issues.

This study utilized qualitative research approaches of literature review and in-depth stakeholder interviews to examine and analyze the following:

- ▶ *Differential Impacts of Environmental Degradation:* To examine how environmental degradation and pollution disproportionately affect women and men, especially those living in rural or less developed areas, and to explore the gender-based experiences, barriers, and opportunities in relation to environmental justice.
- ▶ *Policy and Institutional Frameworks:* To identify existing environmental policies, strategies, institutions, and processes that support women's engagement in environmental justice and to assess gaps in the legal and policy frameworks, as well as the conduct and practices in relation to gender and environmental justice.

- ▶ *Roles, Activism, and Participation:* To analyze the distinct roles and activism of women and men (in all their diversity) in environmental justice, identify barriers to their participation, and investigate whether women are at the forefront of environmental activism and advocacy, including successful case studies of women-led or women-centric initiatives.
- ▶ *Empowerment and Social Cohesion:* To explore the potential of women activists, women's rights movements, and decision-makers to engage in environmental justice as a common interest towards social cohesion, and to identify key intervention areas relevant to the socio-economic and peace-building benefits of empowering women in environmental justice for the broader community.
- ▶ *Contextual and Comparative Analysis:* To identify the commonalities between the contexts of BiH and Kosovo and explore knowledge-sharing opportunities to bridge the data gap in gender and environmental justice.
- ▶ *Actionable Recommendations:* To formulate actionable recommendations at policy and programmatic levels for addressing the gaps identified, focusing on enhancing gender equity in environmental justice, and ensuring that women's roles and contributions are effectively incorporated into existing infrastructures for peace.

Key findings

- ▶ *Assessments and data on gender and environment issues are insufficient or not available.* Available research and stakeholder views from both BiH and Kosovo show that women, particularly in rural areas, are more exposed and vulnerable to environmental harms and have less access to resources and services to cope with and adapt to harms. However, the full extent of gendered environmental impacts is not known due to a lack of formal assessments, data, research, and analyses in both BiH and Kosovo. This is a barrier to gender inclusive environmental justice. The distribution of environmental harms and burdens between women and men is not fully understood, meaning that environmental policies and investments are not informed and inclusive.
- ▶ *There is unequal representation in environmental decision-making spaces, and environmental laws and policies are gender neutral.* In both BiH and Kosovo, women are underrepresented in environmental decision-making spaces at all levels and fall below the legally mandated gender quotas. Additionally, most environmental laws and policies in both cases do not recognize the different environmental impacts, priorities, concerns, and knowledge of women and men in all their diversity. This is a barrier to gender inclusive environmental justice as programs, projects, and investments shaped by laws and policies are not fully considering the needs, priorities, and knowledge of all people.
- ▶ *Environmental and gender civil society and women activists are important leaders and actors in environmental justice, but they face barriers to engaging in environmental governance.* Despite their important roles, civil society organizations face funding challenges and limited meaningful interaction with public institutions that impede their influence in environmental governance. The significant role of women's activism in environmental action was especially highlighted in BiH, but these women also face gendered threats, social stigma, violence, emotional exhaustion, and lawsuits in response to

their advocacy. The barriers facing women in civil society and advocacy spaces is a representational injustice and a challenge to gender inclusive environmental justice.

- ▶ *Environmental civil society organizations and authorities institutions lack capacity on gender and environment linkages.* In both BiH and Kosovo interviews with civil society revealed that there is low capacity and knowledge base on gender and environment linkages in organizations. Limited capacity on gender is a representational injustice and barrier to environmental justice as the views, priorities, concerns, voices, and leadership of women from diverse communities may not be adequately recognized in civil society efforts.
- ▶ *Environmental procedural rights are not consistently or adequately enforced, and processes lack gender considerations.* A significant procedural injustice and barrier to environmental justice is that rights outlined in legal frameworks in both BiH and Kosovo are not enforced, including rights to information, public participation, and justice in environmental decisions. This has created distrust among communities and civil society in public and justice institutions to uphold and protect human and environmental rights. These processes often lack gender considerations, resulting in women's further marginalization and exclusion in environmental governance.
- ▶ *Environmental activism supports peacebuilding and unification.* Interviews in BiH and Kosovo reaffirmed the potential of environmental justice as a promising avenue for fostering unity and resilience in post-conflict societies. The recognition of the links between environmental protection and peacebuilding at the local level indicates a growing awareness of the broader benefits of environmental justice. Importantly, the role of women as activists, community leaders, and peacebuilders can be strengthened for more effective, inclusive, and sustainable environmental and transitional justice efforts.

Recommendations

Realizing the numerous and wide-spread benefits of gender inclusive environmental justice must include recognizing and repairing inequalities in the distribution of environmental harms and benefits, empowering women's voices and agency, strengthening gender-responsive environmental legal frameworks, and ensuring environmental procedural processes are accountable to women and men in communities (De Andrade Correa, 2022; Turquet et al., 2023).

Recommendations for addressing challenges and build on opportunities for gender inclusive environmental justice include the following actions, also inspired by UNDP's three-pronged approach to environmental justice (UNDP, 2022):

Establishing enabling legal frameworks

- ▶ *Conduct, fund, and support gender and environment analyses and data collection.* This includes working directly with the environmental and gender civil society organizations, building the capacity of statistical agencies and public institutions on gender and environment linkages, and ensuring gender and environment data and analyses are publicly available.

- ▶ *Harmonize international and local laws and commitments on gender equality, women's empowerment, and environmental justice. This includes increasing inter-institutional cooperation and capacities, engaging women and gender focused civil society groups, and raising awareness on rights and legal frameworks.*
- ▶ *Conduct a gender assessment of environmental legislation in Kosovo. This will help identify entry points for improving the legal framework and strengthening implementation. The process can be informed by a recent initiative by UNDP BiH to map gender in data and legislation on climate change, environment, and biodiversity (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022).*
- ▶ *Integrate gender differentiated threats, impacts, and concerns and protection of human rights in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). Gender mainstreaming needs to be strengthened in the guidance and requirements for EIAs in both BiH and Kosovo to ensure environmental decisions are guided by an informed and gender inclusive analysis.*

Strengthening people-centered and effective institutions

- ▶ *Build the capacity of environmental civil society on gender and environment issues, gender mainstreaming, and gender-responsive approaches. This includes dedicated training and workshops on gender-responsive approaches, establishing networks and working groups between gender and environmental civil society groups, and engaging civil society to lead capacity development and knowledge sharing.*
- ▶ *Develop financing initiatives that support women's leadership in environmental civil society. This requires shifting and enhancing access to funding sources by allocating a clear budget for civil society and establishing secure and long-term funding sources and commitments.*
- ▶ *Clearly outline donor funding requirements and guidelines to improve access for civil society organizations and shift funding strategies to directly empower and benefit civil society and grassroots organizations. Guidance should include a specific focus on improving funding access for women focused civil society, rural NGOs, and grassroots organizations that often face information and capacity barriers to donor funds.*
- ▶ *Improve coordination mechanisms between civil society and institutions for gender inclusive environmental justice. This can include coordination and knowledge sharing between rural and urban organizations, as well as collaboration between civil society and public institutions.*
- ▶ *Support women activists through targeted legal, services, resources, and financial means. This can include law reform on criminal defamation of environmental activists, particularly for gendered threats and violence against women activists, as well as advocating for more comprehensive accountability mechanisms and protections against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).*

Increasing access to justice and legal empowerment

- ▶ *Build the capacity of the judiciary system on environmental and gender laws. This can include incorporating gender and environment into education curriculum and legal training, developing training with judicial stakeholders on environmental laws, training paralegals and lawyers in rural areas on gender and environmental laws, and facilitating sessions on gender equality legislation with environmental legal professionals.*

- ▶ *Build the capacity of civil society, grassroots organizations, and activists to access information and justice for environmental matters. This can include establishing emergency legal funds for grassroots organizations and women activists, providing free legal aid on environmental matters, establishing clear and accessible communication and digital infrastructure for EIA processes and findings, and empowering civil society groups to serve as public consultation facilitations.*

1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1 Introduction

Environmental justice means that everyone – regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or income – has the right to the same environmental protections and benefits and meaningful involvement in the policies and actions that shape their communities. However, research from around the world shows that this is rarely the case, and the impacts of environmental degradation are shaped by and reinforce patterns of discrimination and inequalities, including those based on gender (Boyer and Granat, 2021; Castañeda Carney et al., 2020; OHCHR, 2022; UN Women, 2022). At the same time, women are mobilizing and leading efforts to address environmental degradation and inequality, but they are often left out of decision-making spaces and face barriers to equal services, resources, and rights (Strumskyte et al., 2022; Tran and Hanaček, 2023; Xie, 2023). Environmental justice cannot be achieved without the protection and fulfilment of human rights and gender justice, including through recognition and repair of inequalities, representation of women’s voices and agency, an enabling and gender-responsive legal environmental framework, and strengthened procedural and accountability processes for gender inclusive environmental justice (De Andrade Correa, 2022; Turquet et al., 2023).

Importantly, gender inclusive environmental justice supports necessary conditions and enabling environments for pathways to peace and social cohesion by addressing root causes of environmental degradation, inequalities, and fragility and conflict (Ben-Shmuel and Halle, 2023; Boyer et al., 2020; Ensor, 2022; Ong, 2017; UN Women, 2020; Yoshida et al., 2020). For post-conflict societies that are struggling to reconcile and resolve social divisions, empowering women and supporting environmental justice in pursuit of transitional justice holds immense potential for sustainable and equitable growth (Ong, 2017). Environmental issues can provide a neutral ground for cooperation and dialogue among communities that might otherwise remain divided. Environmental initiatives can facilitate trust-building and reconciliation by focusing on shared interests and the collective well-being of the environment and fostering harmonious coexistence and mutual support among community members. Women’s voices and leadership are powerful in environmental and peacebuilding spaces and necessary component of a human-rights based approach for stronger and inclusive processes (Haffejee, 2021; UNDP and UN Women, 2022). Furthermore, engaging marginalized communities in environmental decision-making processes can empower them and provide a sense of ownership and agency, which is crucial for long-term peacebuilding.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo, environmental justice and the connections it has with gender equality and women’s empowerment are emerging issues of interest among decision-makers, advocacy groups, and residents. In both BiH and Kosovo, supporting gender inclusive environmental justice also supports the accession criteria for European Union (EU) membership, including human rights, rule of law, sustainable economic development, and effective institutions. Additionally, gender inclusive environmental justice contributes to the important peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts prioritized in the decades following violent conflict and social division. Women leaders, civil society, and activists in BiH and Kosovo hold critical potential to drive gender inclusive environmental justice. However, structural barriers, inequalities, and capacity limitations must be understood and addressed to enable gender inclusive environmental justice and support the role of women in these areas.

Under the projects titled “Leveraging Data and Advanced Technology for Enhanced Crisis Risk Anticipation and Social Modeling in Bosnia and Herzegovina” and “Intercommunity Dialogue in Kosovo”, funded by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the Governance, Peacebuilding, Crisis, and Resilience Funding Window, specifically the sub-window on Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace, UNDP BiH and UNDP Kosovo facilitated the development of this joint study to identify opportunities and challenges for gender inclusive environmental justice as a pathway to peace.

This study focuses on opportunities and challenges for gender inclusive environmental justice in communities in BiH and Kosovo, especially for women in rural or less developed areas. This study aims to examine and analyze the following:

- ▶ *Differential Impacts of Environmental Degradation:* To examine how environmental degradation and pollution disproportionately affect women and men, especially those living in rural or less developed areas, and to explore the gender-based experiences, barriers, and opportunities in relation to environmental justice.
- ▶ *Policy and Institutional Frameworks:* To identify existing environmental policies, strategies, institutions, and processes that support women’s engagement in environmental justice and to assess gaps in the legal and policy frameworks, as well as the conduct and practices in relation to gender and environmental justice.
- ▶ *Roles, Activism, and Participation:* To analyze the distinct roles and activism of women and men (in all their diversity) in environmental justice, identify barriers to their participation, and investigate whether women are at the forefront of environmental activism and advocacy, including successful case studies of women-led or women-centric initiatives.
- ▶ *Empowerment and Social Cohesion:* To explore the potential of women activists, women’s rights movements, and decision-makers to engage in environmental justice as a common interest towards social cohesion, and to identify key intervention areas relevant to the socio-economic and peace-building benefits of empowering women in environmental justice for the broader community.
- ▶ *Contextual and Comparative Analysis:* To identify the commonalities between the contexts of BiH and Kosovo and explore knowledge-sharing opportunities to bridge the data gap in gender and environmental justice.
- ▶ *Actionable Recommendations:* To formulate actionable recommendations at policy and programmatic levels for addressing the gaps identified, focusing on enhancing gender equity in environmental justice, and ensuring that women’s roles and contributions are effectively incorporated into existing infrastructures for peace.

This study represents a first step in the critical examination of gender inclusive environmental justice in BiH and Kosovo and focuses on gathering available information and building the knowledge base on these emerging topics. It will serve as a foundation for broader initiatives to raise public awareness of environmental issues and empower communities, particularly women, to advocate for environmental justice.

1.1 Study scope and contents

Research for this study focused on the state of women's engagement and gender considerations in environmental justice within the context of BiH and Kosovo. Section 2 provides an overview of the methodology used for the study, including a research framework for gender considerations in environmental justice. Sections 3 and 4 share the study findings for BiH and Kosovo, respectively, organizing the information into the following subsections to elaborate on key aspects of environmental justice and included boxes on cases from BiH and Kosovo where available:

- ▶ *Gender context:* Each section opens with a brief overview of key gender issues and context based on literature review findings. This helps inform how gender-based social, political, and economic injustices are intertwined with environmental injustice, including disproportionate environmental harms and benefits, underrepresentation in environmental governance, and inaccessible justice procedures.
- ▶ *Distributive justice - Gender differentiated environmental impacts, concerns, and priorities:* This sub-section outlines findings on how women and men are impacted by environmental harms and degradation, including from infrastructure development.
- ▶ *Representational justice - Women's representation and gender considerations in environmental governance:* This sub-section outlines findings on women's participation in environmental decision-making, gender considerations in environmental laws and policies, and women's engagement in environmental advocacy and activism.
- ▶ *Procedural justice - Gender considerations in environmental procedural processes:* This sub-section outlines available environmental procedural processes in the country/territory, particularly those informed by the Aarhus Convention (OSCE, 2012), and the extent to which these are enforced, as well as how gender considerations are reflected in these processes.

Section 5 provides conclusions on the study findings, including any similarities between the cases in BiH and Kosovo. It also provides policy and programming recommendations for UNDP to strengthen women's engagement in environmental justice in BiH and Kosovo based on the three-pronged approach to environmental justice defined by UNDP (2022):

1. Establishing legal frameworks at domestic and international levels, applying innovative and human rights-based approaches for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling environment rights.
2. Strengthening people-centered and effective institutions, especially those related to justice and human rights, to ensure they are accessible to all populations and are equipped to monitor, enforce, and implement environmental law and promote environmental rights.
3. Increasing access to justice and legal empowerment in environmental and climate change matters.

2

METHODOLOGY



2 Methodology

Qualitative research methods of literature review and stakeholder interviews were used to generate information on women's engagement and gender considerations in environmental justice issues and efforts in BiH and Kosovo. The literature review identified resources from institutions, academia and research institutions, domestic organizations, international organizations and donors, and other relevant institutions to inform the study findings, as well as identify the research framework. Local consultants coordinated with UNDP to identify stakeholders in BiH and Kosovo that are involved with environmental and gender justice issues and efforts and conducted in-depth interviews to inform the study. Additionally, a validation workshop was held in each country/territory with groups of relevant stakeholders to review the study findings and provide feedback and additional information for the study.

2.1 Research framework

Available literature on environmental justice tends to define it by three categories: distributional justice, procedural justice, and recognition justice (Blue et al., 2020; Ong, 2017; Schlosberg, 2003; Steger, 2007). However, research on intersectional environmental justice notes that this conceptual framing does not adequately analyze the complex ways that identity characteristics, such as poverty, race, ethnicity, gender, indigeneity, age, and disability, intersect to produce environmental injustices and affect environmental advocacy in specific contexts (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022; Atapattu et al., 2021; Bell, 2016; González-Hidalgo et al., 2022; Parsons et al., 2021).

Thus, the research framework for this study is based on numerous frameworks related to environmental justice, gender justice and analysis, and the intersections of these issues (see Annex 1 for frameworks reviewed and Table 1 for the research framework for this study). This helped to structure and guide research and define gendered aspects of environmental justice within this study to better understand the challenges and opportunities for strengthening women's engagement in environmental justice in BiH and Kosovo.

Table 1: Study research framework on women's engagement and gender considerations in environmental justice

Environmental justice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Distributive justice</i>: The fair allocation of environmental benefits and burdens, including those from economic activity. ▶ <i>Representational justice</i>: All people have access to and influence environmental governance at all levels and their diverse identities, experiences, and forms of knowledge are recognized. ▶ <i>Procedural justice</i>: Environmental decision-making processes are transparent, informed, and inclusive. Mechanisms are in place and enforced to support access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters. ▶ <i>Cross-cutting gender and social justice</i>: Environmental injustices are inextricably intertwined with social, economic, and political inequalities, including those based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, indigeneity, disability, and income, and cannot be separated from economic exploitation, marginalization of social groups, and gender subordination. 	
<i>Gendered aspect of environmental justice</i>	<i>Research questions</i>
<p><i>Distributive justice - Gender differentiated environmental impacts, concerns, and priorities</i></p> <p>Due to prevailing gender inequalities and discrimination based on sociocultural gender norms, roles, and beliefs, women bear disproportionate impacts from environmental degradation. Women tend to own less land and resources and have fewer economic opportunities than men, and women-headed households are more likely to be in polluted and environmentally degraded areas. These inequalities heighten women and girls' vulnerability and exposure to environmental harms and at the same time they have limited changes to benefit from environmental resources and development. Recognizing these gendered impacts and concerns is critical for addressing distributive injustices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What are the health, livelihood, and economic impacts of environmental degradation and pollution on women, men, youth, people living in poverty, and other socially marginalized groups? ▶ What are gender-based inequalities and discrimination that affect vulnerability to environmental degradation? ▶ What are different priorities, concerns, and barriers for people living in rural vs. urban areas?
<p><i>Representational justice - Women's representation in environmental governance</i></p> <p>This includes environmental decision-making, environmental laws and policies, and environmental civil society. Women's leadership and participation in environmental decision-making improves inclusive and effective policies and actions. However, women remain underrepresented at all levels of decision-making and gender is not adequately considered in environmental legal frameworks. Additionally, civil society groups and activists, including those focused on the environment and gender equality, face structural challenges engaging with environmental governance but play significant roles in education, advocacy, and holding actors accountable for environmental and human rights abuses. Strengthening women's engagement and voice in environmental decision-making, as well as recognition of gender and environmental linkages, is critical for addressing representational injustices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ How are women represented and engaged in environmental decision-making at all levels? ▶ How are gender specific vulnerabilities and opportunities for environmental sustainability included in environmental laws, policies, and commitments? ▶ How and in what ways do women engage in environmental organizations, grassroots advocacy, and activism? ▶ What are the barriers to women's engagement in environmental advocacy and activism? ▶ Are there gaps in the legal and policy frameworks related to gender and environmental justice?
<p><i>Procedural justice - Gender considerations in environmental procedural processes</i></p> <p>The three pillars of the Aarhus Convention that inform procedural rights on environmental justice are access to information, public participation, and access to justice (OSCE, 2012). Achieving these procedural rights necessitates the involvement of all stakeholders and accessible processes that promote inclusion and representation. However, inequalities and norms based on gender limit women's access to participatory processes, information, and justice when it comes to environmental issues. Their needs, priorities, and concerns related to environmental impacts are also not adequately considered in assessments that are a part of environmental procedural processes. These gender-based inequalities and gaps represent procedural injustices and a barrier to environmental justice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What procedural rights are in place to promote inclusive, transparent, and informed environmental decision-making? ▶ What are the challenges to effective implementation of processes and accountability to these processes? ▶ How do activists and civil society organizations engage with procedural processes? What are barriers to effective engagement? ▶ Are there gender-specific barriers to procedural processes? ▶ Do environmental impact assessments and studies address gender-specific vulnerabilities, priorities, and concerns?

2.2 Stakeholder interviews and validation workshops

In February and March 2024, the local consultants in BiH and Kosovo conducted interviews with stakeholders from public institutions, civil society, women activists, media, and other key actors involved in environmental and/or gender justice issues. Additionally, in May 2024, the initial study findings were presented at validation workshops in each country/territory with relevant stakeholders. Some of the stakeholders interviewed attended the validation workshops, based on availability, as well as additional stakeholders identified by the research team. In total, the study consulted with 65 of stakeholders (50 women, 15 men) across both countries/territories - 32 people (28 women, 4 men) in BiH and 33 of people (22 women, 11 men) in Kosovo. See Annex 2 for the interview questions and pictures from the workshops.

The findings from the stakeholder interviews and the feedback from the validation workshops are incorporated along with the literature review findings in Sections 3 and 4 and the recommendations in Section 5.

2.3 Limitations

Number of stakeholders consulted

It is important to recognize that the number of stakeholders consulted for this study is relatively low, which was a concern voiced in the validation workshop in BiH. The local consultants developed a stakeholder map of relevant actors in the environmental and/or gender justice spaces within BiH and Kosovo; however, the timeline of the study, resource capacity of consultants, resources from desk research, and responses from mapped stakeholders were limiting factors to the number of interviews conducted and participants in the workshops.

It is also critical to note that the subject of environmental justice and its connection with gender justice and women's empowerment are emerging areas in both countries/territories. While some stakeholders are more comfortable and confident speaking on these issues, the research team found that other stakeholders were interested in the topics but did not feel as though they were prepared to engage with these topics through the interviews or workshops. Yet, the conversations held as part of this study emphasize that these issues are relevant and critical, and many stakeholders expressed enthusiasm to continue this work. Building capacity and confidence on these issues will help bring more people together to act on environmental and gender justice.

To address this limitation, the research team aimed to involve a diverse group of stakeholders in both interviews and workshops and used the literature review findings to corroborate key points. The study identifies where information comes from to ensure transparency while protecting the identity of those

involved in the stakeholder consultation processes. The stakeholder mapping conducted by the consultants will aid and continue to be improved by UNDP in implementing the recommendations of this study. UNDP is also committed to continuing and building on the momentum of this study.

Quantitative data on gender and environmental issues

Reliable, high quality, and updated data on the gender and environment nexus is extremely limited or unavailable in a vast majority of countries/territories and contexts, including for BiH and Kosovo. Major environment-related monitoring frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Global Set of Climate Change Indicators, have significant gender gaps. Indicators often do not have a gender lens, and if the indicators do cover gender-environment concerns, gender data are almost completely unavailable (IUCN, 2023). A lack of investment in collecting and applying gender data is a significant barrier to effective policy making and implementation in environmental areas.

Limited data on these issues was brought up as a concern during workshops and interviews and is a commonly cited limitation from the literature review. It was beyond the scope of this study to support quantitative data collection on these topics in BiH and Kosovo, but the research team has emphasized the importance of closing this gap through continued actions in the recommendations.

Research language and translation

The stakeholder interviews and validation workshops were conducted in the official language in both countries/territories – Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian for BiH and Albanian and Serbian for Kosovo. A portion of the validation workshops were conducted in English by the international consultant, with translation provided for participants. The findings from these methods had to be translated to English for this study, which holds the potential for mistranslations and misunderstandings of the findings. The research team mitigated this risk by hiring local consultants fluent in the working languages of each country/territory and in English and allocating adequate time to translate the findings. Additionally, with consent from stakeholders, interviews were recorded, and the local consultants took detailed notes to ensure that they could be reviewed and aid translation.

3

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: STATE OF WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT AND GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



3 Bosnia and Herzegovina: State of women's engagement and gender considerations in environmental justice

Brief context and background: Bosnia and Herzegovina

The population of BiH is characterized by diverse ethnic and religious groups, with three major faiths – Islam, Orthodox Christianity, and Roman Catholicism – corresponding with three major ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, respectively (Malcom et al., 2024). During the dissolution of Yugoslavia, religious leaders aligned with ethnic nationalist movements, leading to ethnic and religious identities integrating with political party structures. Between 1992-1995, ethno-nationalist elites waged violent conflict and ethnic cleansing campaigns in an attempt to control territories (BTI, 2024a; Malcom et al., 2024). The 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace (The Dayton Peace Agreement) brought an end to the Bosnian War and established two entities responsible for many government functions within the state, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), with a Bosniak and Croat majority, and the Republika Srpska (RS), with a Serb majority, as well as the Brčko District, which is an autonomous administrative unit under BiH sovereignty. BiH's constitution (Annex IV of the Dayton Agreement) was intended to be a transitional arrangement and focused on bringing an end to the war and not a long-term framework for institutional functionality (BTI, 2024a). This has contributed to a highly decentralized state with administrative responsibilities fragmented across five levels of government (municipal, cantonal, entity, Brčko District, and central state levels) (BTI, 2024a; Malcom et al., 2024). In 2008, BiH and the European Commission and its Member States signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which set obligations for BiH to align existing and future legislation with the EU acquis and ensure its implementation. In 2016, BiH officially applied for EU membership, and it has been recognized by the EU as a candidate country for accession since 2022.

3.1 Gender context

According to the Gender Equality Barometer of Bosnia and Herzegovina, most women and men in BiH believe that gender equality has improved, and that greater participation of women would lead to higher equality and fairer policies in society (Šiljak and Đipa, 2024). However, this declarative support for gender equality does not necessarily reflect and guarantee substantive equality. Discriminatory gender norms, traditions, and beliefs reinforce patriarchal structures in BiH and contribute to gender inequalities across many areas of life for women in BiH, including in political representation and decision-making, economic engagement, and social protections and healthcare (Šiljak and Đipa, 2024). These inequalities are reflected in the latest Global Gender Gap Report in 2023, where BiH ranks 86th out of 146 countries, falling 13 places since 2022 (WEF, 2023). Gender inequalities and gaps are compounded by intersecting discriminations for socially and politically marginalized groups, including Roma people and LGBTI people (European Commission, 2023a; Miftari et al., 2021; UNDP, 2018).

Legal and institutional framework

Over the last 20 years, BiH has taken strides to address and progress on gender equality in legal, strategic, and institutional frameworks, including in line with EU standards and agreements on fundamental rights (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022; Miftari et al., 2021; Šiljak and Đipa, 2024). At the international and regional level, BiH has ratified several key frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Council of Europe Convention (Istanbul Convention) on preventing and combating violence against women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 'Women, Peace and Security' (UNSCR 1325) (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022; Miftari et al., 2021). Furthermore, in signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2008, BiH has committed to aligning its legislation with EU *acquis*, including EU gender and anti-discrimination legislation, which is crucial for the country's accession to the EU (Kapić and Ramić, 2023).

The two main laws addressing gender equality in BiH are the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination and the Gender Equality Law. The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination aims to strengthen mechanisms to fight discrimination, including based on gender. The Gender Equality Law defines and prohibits gender-based discrimination and addresses gender equality in education, employment, labor, and access to resources and services. The law also stipulates that women should account for at least 40% of representation in public sector bodies. To support implementation of this law, the BiH Gender Action Plan was adopted and is updated periodically to monitor and coordinate activities. The BiH Agency for Gender Equality is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and coordinating with entity-level Gender Centres, which also coordinate specific sector strategies and develop local gender action plans (Karadinović, 2021). Both laws are partially aligned with EU gender directives (Kapić and Ramić, 2023). However, implementation is lacking and laws on non-discrimination are not sufficiently enforced or harmonized with the Gender Equality Law (CEDAW Committee, 2019; European Commission, 2023a; Karadinović, 2021). Harmonizing these laws with the Gender Equality Law is essential for effective oversight and implementation of international standards on gender equality, particularly in the EU integration process (Kapić and Ramić, 2023).

Political representation and decision-making

Women are underrepresented in decision-making at all levels due to socio-cultural expectations and stereotypes (European Commission, 2022; Kadribašić et al., 2020; Miftari, 2019; Šiljak and Đipa, 2024). Women hold only 16.67% of seats in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, 26.53% of seats in the Federation Parliament, 18% of all seats in the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska, and 11% of ministerial positions (Šiljak and Đipa, 2024; WEF, 2023). Women are also underrepresented in local assemblies and councils, and they are perceived as lacking political skills and being inactive once elected (Hogić, 2021; Kadribašić et al., 2020). Limited access to information, including on complex political and electoral systems, undermines women's participation and representation in BiH (HLPF, 2023). Women in political decision-making are subject to gender stereotypes and double standards, including facing criticism if they show dominant or entrepreneurial personality traits and public focus on their physical appearance and personal life rather than their actions (Šiljak and Đipa, 2024). Women in decision-making positions also face violence and discrimination that discourages their participation, undermines

their authority, and threatens their safety and wellbeing. A study on women in politics in BiH found that 60% of the 83 participants experienced some form of violence of the course of their engagement in politics, including verbal and emotional abuse in person and online (Miftari, 2019).

Economic engagement

About 40.5% of women participate in the labor force compared to 60% of men (Bosnia and Herzegovina Agency for Statistics, 2024). More than 60% of employed women work in the service sector, which is often characterized by precarious working conditions (Bosnia and Herzegovina Agency for Statistics, 2019). Men in rural communities are more than twice as likely to have a job compared to women in these communities (Karadinović, 2021), and women in rural areas are more vulnerable to poverty and have less access to and control over resources, including land, property, financial resources, education, and technologies (Miftari et al., 2021; UNDP, 2023).

Care work is seen as a gendered obligation, and women spend about 6-7 hours per day on unpaid tasks compared to about 4.5 hours spent by men, which limits their access to income generating opportunities (Šiljak and Đipa, 2024; UN Women, 2023). Women's career choices are often directly dependent on the quality of the care economy offered in society (Šiljak and Đipa, 2024; UNDP and SDC, 2021), and insufficient social services limit the career options available to women, as well as their agency in political and public life. Furthermore, gender-based discrimination in the workplace makes it difficult for women to obtain and stay in formal workplaces and they are more likely to work in the informal sector (UNDP, 2023). Single mothers and women who are primary earners in households are particularly vulnerable to these circumstances (HLPF, 2023). According to the Gender Equality Barometer of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a majority of women and men respondents agreed that smaller family businesses are more suitable for women, as these structures allow for more time for family care (Šiljak and Đipa, 2024). However, women entrepreneurs and business owners face challenges to financing and growing businesses. Women are much less likely to have a bank account at a formal financial institution than men (48% compared to 67%), and it is difficult for women to access loans due to low property ownership rates that can be used for collateral (74% of dwelling properties are owned only by men), which impedes women's entrepreneurship (Miftari et al., 2021; UNDP 2023).

Gender-based violence

Women's access to social protections and healthcare remains inadequate, particularly for women and girls with disabilities, women and girls living in rural areas, and women who are ethnic minorities, such as Roma women (Miftari et al., 2021). Gender-based violence (GBV) is of critical concern and impedes gender equality in BiH. A 2019 OSCE survey on violence against women found that 48% of women in BiH have experienced some form of abuse, including intimate partner violence, non-partner violence, stalking, and sexual harassment, since the age of 15 (OSCE, 2019a). However, this figure is likely a conservative estimate of actual violence experienced, as violence against women is under-reported due to fear of the perpetrator, long court proceedings, low penalties for perpetrators, distrust in institutions, and social stigma (HRW, 2020; Šiljak and Đipa, 2024). Services for victims of GBV and domestic violence are underfunded

and are often inaccessible to people needing services. About 42% of the women interviewed in the OSCE survey stated that they do not know what to do if they experience violence and 37% were not aware of any support organizations (OSCE, 2019a). In BiH, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), most of whom are women, have different legal protections and recognition under the law. However, some sources report that CRSV victims face challenges to adequate compensation and protections, and many are in difficult economic situations and live in rural areas without accessible health and psychological support (Amnesty International, 2023; Global Survivors Fund, 2022).

3.2 Distributive justice - Gender differentiated environmental impacts, concerns, and priorities

BiH faces several environmental challenges and drivers of degradation, including air pollution, limited water and waste management capacities, deforestation, and rapid infrastructure and construction development. BiH's economy and energy needs are highly dependent on fossil fuels. This drives water, soil, and air pollution to dangerous levels in BiH. As a result, BiH has one of the highest average mortality rates from air pollution in the world (UNDP, 2023; WHO, 2023). According to the Balkan Barometer, air pollution was listed as the greatest environmental concern for communities in BiH (Balkan Barometer, 2023). This reliance on fossil fuels underscores the need for a transition to cleaner energy sources to mitigate environmental degradation.

Women and men are affected differently by environmental degradation

Women, people living in poverty, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and other socially, economically, and politically marginalized groups of people in BiH are more likely to suffer from immediate and long-term impacts caused by environmental degradation and have limited resources to cope and recover (GEF and UNDP, 2020; Lehtmets, 2021; Strambo et al., 2021a; World Bank, 2021). This is in part due to gendered differences in time use, access, to financial assets and social resources, and limited influence in decision making spaces (Mujić et al., 2019; Strambo et al., 2021a), as well as gender blind or gender-neutral strategies and plans. For instance, major floods in 2014 had devastating impacts on women because rescue and protection plans were not gender-sensitive (Mujić et al., 2019).

An interviewee from an environmental NGO stated that women might be more vulnerable to health risks or displacement from mining operations due to the roles in caregiving and their socioeconomic status. Another interviewee emphasized that disparities in resource ownership and access, with most of the land held by men, underscore patriarchal norms that govern resource allocation and result in gender differentiated concerns and impacts from environmental degradation.

There are different environmental concerns between rural and urban areas

Rural communities living near coal-fired power plants suffer direct health and livelihood impacts from air pollution and wastewater from industries, many of whom are forced to leave if they are able or suffer in unhealthy conditions if they are not (UNEP, 2018). The use of firewood for heating is common in poor households and in rural areas in BiH, and since women take on primary responsibility for household tasks, they are more exposed to indoor air pollution from these sources (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022; Strambo et al., 2021b).

Hydropower is a more sustainable source of electricity compared to coal, but these plants are often planned or built in vulnerable communities, many in rural areas, and construction can have a significant impact on nature, resource access, and livelihoods (CfE, 2022; GEF and UNDP, 2020; UNEP, 2018). Residents and civil society groups are concerned about the environmental impacts of small hydropower plants, especially in water-dependent ecosystems, and disagree with prioritizing economic benefits over the natural resources and environmental health in communities, as well as diverting water access from the agricultural sector in these communities (CfE, 2022; GEF and UNDP, 2020; Sher et al., 2024). Rural communities, environmental groups, and activists have led opposition efforts to small hydropower plants all over BiH and achieved a significant milestone in 2022 when the FBiH lower house of parliament voted to change the Law on Electricity to ban the construction of any more small hydropower plants due to concerns (Kurtic, 2022). According to participants in the validation workshop, there is a moratorium on the construction of new small hydropower plants in both Entities.

Participants in the validation workshop emphasized that there should be more efforts to foster cooperation and information sharing between rural and urban communities to tackle common environmental challenges. However, weak and inadequate communication infrastructure in rural communities is a barrier to effective cooperation and is a challenge for women in rural communities to access essential information on environmental issues, resources, and support.

Research, data, assessments, and awareness of gender differentiated environmental impacts are limited

There was limited information available from the literature review on gender and environment linkages, concerns, and priorities in BiH. While these issues were discussed by stakeholders, the details are limited, and lack of data and analyses were cited as barriers. There is a need to fill the gap in formal assessments and ensure gender analyses on environmental issues are supported to better inform policies and activities.

3.3 Representational justice - Women's representation and gender considerations in environmental governance

3.3.1 Environmental decision-making

The complex decision-making structure in BiH is present in environmental decision-making and there are 14 different ministries for environmental protection with different, sometimes overlapping priorities and jurisdiction, as well as courts that provide independent oversight and rulings in environmental cases (see Table 2). This leads to challenges in coordination, decision-making, and policy implementation on environment and climate change in the country (Alibašić and Atkinson, 2023; Shabafrouz, 2024), which is further complicated by disagreements, corruption, and efforts to undermine state-level decisions (BTI, 2024a). As a candidate country to the EU, BiH must harmonize environmental protection regulations with those of the EU, but the fragmented administrative structure challenges harmonization efforts (Alibašić and Atkinson, 2023; Shabafrouz, 2024).

Table 2: Main institutions involved in environmental decision-making in BiH

State level

- ▶ The Constitution assigns primary jurisdiction of environmental issues to FBiH and RS, but the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations is authorized to oversee environmental problems and issues and is responsible for defining general principles and coordinating activities and harmonizing plans of Entity level authorities and institutions at the international level.
- ▶ The Agency for Statistics of BiH and the Ministry of Communications and Transport of BiH support environmental mandates and decision-making.
- ▶ The Inter-Entity Environmental Steering Committee was established in 1998 by FBiH and RS to improve common strategies and policies in environmental management. There is also an Inter-Entity Water Management Corporation Advisory Commission.
- ▶ The BiH Agency for Gender Equality contributes to environmental and gender justice through gender equality policies and cross-sectoral collaboration, including through its leadership role in the Feminist Coalition for Climate Justice in BiH.

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)

- ▶ The Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism is responsible for strategies and policies for environmental protection and monitoring the equality of air, water, land, and soil.
- ▶ Ministries of Water, Agriculture, and Forestry; Health, Energy, Mining, and Industry; Transport and Communications; and Urban Planning also support environmental decision-making in the entity.
- ▶ The FBiH Environmental Protection Fund is involved financing the preparation, development, and implementation of environmental programs and projects and supports the Ministry in preparing strategies and action plans.
- ▶ Cantonal level environmental ministries in FBiH play an intermediate role through the development and implementation of adaptation activities, integration of mitigation objectives in development plans, and energy efficiency.
- ▶ Municipalities in FBiH play a local role through establishment and implementation of environmental protection policies, management of natural resources of local self-governing units, and management and financing of operations, facilities, and parks.

Republika Srpska (RS)

- ▶ The Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction, and Ecology is responsible for strategies on and implementation of environmental protection, development and implementation of environmental projects, and cooperation with international and domestic environmental institutions.
- ▶ Ministries of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management; Health and Social Welfare; Energy and Mining; Transport and Communications; and Trade and Tourism also support entity-level environmental decision-making.
- ▶ The Fund for Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency of RS is involved in fundraising and the financing of preparation, development, and implementation of environmental programs and projects.
- ▶ Local administrative units in municipalities play a local role by ensuring the preservation of natural resources, monitoring of air quality, managing water resources, and implementing environmental protection activities.

Brčko District

- ▶ The Department for Physical Planning and Property Affairs of the Government of the Brčko District is responsible for performing professional and administrative tasks that apply to environmental protection and eco-permits.

Sources: Interviews with stakeholders in BiH; Dietachmair et al. (2024); European Committee of the Regions (n.d.); European Environment Agency (2021); Pilipović (2021)

Women are underrepresented in environmental decision-making at all levels

A recent report indicates that, in 2022, only 2 out of the 13 ministries responsible for the environment, energy, and agriculture sectors were led by women, and of the 29 department managers within these ministries, only 4 were women (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022). At the local level, stakeholders highlighted that women are underrepresented in watershed management agencies and forest management administration. When interviewed, the Agency for Gender Equality recognized challenges to ensuring compliance with gender equality legislation, which sets quotas for women's representation, in environmental governance.

Findings from the validation workshop reveal that there is a high level of political involvement in the appointment of managerial positions, which often results in gender equality being neglected in the selection of leadership positions. Participants emphasized that increasing the number of women in decision-making roles does not necessarily result in more gender inclusive and equal policies, and the focus should be ensuring that the interests of women and marginalized groups are included and an aim on social justice rather than solely numerical quotas.

Interviews with environmental civil society and women activists reveal that local decision-making processes related to environmental issues lack transparency and are not inclusive, which limits women's influence in decision-making. Enhancing community engagement and public participation is essential for promoting women's engagement in environmental decision-making. The workshop noted that attacks on divergent opinions and critiques of institutional policies can stifle constructive debate and innovation, particularly affecting women and civil society activists. Addressing these barriers requires creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and decision-making that consider the perspectives of women.

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“Women in our society still don't have a decisive role. Women in positions of power are often an extension of patriarchy. But the opportunity for them to have a say is significant because it's not often the case.”

- Interview with a woman activist from an urban area

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3.3.2 Environmental laws and policies

Environmental issues are under the jurisdiction of the two entities, FBiH and RS, which is further distributed to the level of municipalities for RS and cantons and municipalities for FBiH. This means that there are different entity level laws and policies on environmental concerns and issues (see Table 3). According to stakeholders, this can lead to fragmented and inconsistent management practices. For instance, there is not a Law on Forests in the FBiH, and each canton has its own forest law. At the state level, there are environmental strategic documents that guide environmental policies, including strategies, action plans, and reports prepared in accordance with BiH's commitment to several international and regional frameworks related to the environment (see Table 3). Implementation of environmental laws and policies are lacking, including due to the fragmented policy landscape, limited institutional capacity and resources, lack of clear targets and monitoring mechanisms, and lack of commitment to and prioritization of environmental issues.

Table 3: Environmental laws, policies, strategies, and commitments

State level

- Environmental Strategy and Action Plan for BiH until 2030 (BiH ESAP 2030+)²
- Climate Change Adaptation and Low Emission Development Strategy for BiH (NAP BiH)
- Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BiH (2018-2021)
- Framework Energy Strategy for BiH until 2035
- Committed to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and ratified the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.
- Committed to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
- Supports the Sofia Declaration on Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.
- Signatory to the Aarhus Convention.
- The Gender Action Plan for BiH 2023-2027 includes a priority area on environmental protection and climate action.

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)

- Law on Environmental Protection (“Official Gazette FBiH”, No. 33/03)
- Law on Concessions (“Official Gazette FBiH”, No.40/02, 61/06)
- Law on Waters (“Official Gazette FBiH”, No.70/06)
- Law on Waste Management (“Official Gazette FBiH”, No. 33/03)
- Law on Electricity (“Official Gazette FBiH”, No.66/13, 94/15 and 54/19)
- Law on Air Protection (“Official Gazette FBiH”, No. 33/03)
- Law on Nature Protection (“Official Gazette FBiH”, No. 33/03)

Republika Srpska (RS)

- Law on Amendments to the Law on Environmental Protection ("Official Gazette RS", No. 71/2012, 79/2015, 70/20)
- Law on Concessions ("Official Gazette RS", No.59/13, 16/18 and 70/20)
- Law on Waters ("Official Gazette RS" No.50/06, 92/09, 121/12)
- Electricity Law ("Official Gazette RS", No.8/2008 - revised and reduced text, 34/2009, 92/2009 and 1/2011)
- Law on Spatial Planning and Construction ("Official Gazette RS", No.40/2013, 2/2015 – decision of the Constitutional Court, 106/2015 and 3/2016 – corrigendum, 104/2018 –decision of the Constitutional Court and 84 / 2019)
- Law on Amendments to the Law on Waste Management ("Official Gazette RS", No. 63/21)
- Law on Amendments to the Law on Air Protection ("Official Gazette RS", No. 46/17)

Brčko District

- Law on Amendments to the Law on Environmental Protection ("Official Gazette of Brčko District", No. 01-02-32/09)
- Law on Concessions of Brcko District ("Official Gazette of Brčko District", No.41/06, 19/07.02/08)
- Law on Water Protection ("Official Gazette of Brčko District", No.25/04, 1/05 and 19/07)
- Electricity Law ("Official Gazette of Brčko District", No.36/04, 28/07, 61/10 and 4/13)
- Law on Spatial Planning and Construction ("Official Gazette of Brčko District", No.29/08, 18/17, 48/18, 10/20, 29/20, 40/20)

Sources: Interviews with stakeholders in BiH; Dietachmair et al. (2024); Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević (2022); Pilipović (2021)

Gender is not embedded into environmental protection laws and strategies

Environmental protection in BiH is regulated by entity laws. However, the gender component is not directly embedded in existing legislation (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022). At the state level, gender is integrated in some strategies but to varied degrees. For instance, the NAP includes a section on gender equality for implementing the strategy, emphasizing that a gender mainstreaming approach will help identify vulnerabilities and capacities for adapting to and mitigating climate change. However, gender is not specifically included in the planned outputs and measures for delivering the strategy (UNDP and GEF, 2020).

Interviews with public institution representatives in RS and FBiH found that environmental ministries acknowledge the significance of gender equality but there was not information available on specific objectives, priorities, and actions related to gender equality from the ministries. A report from the Audit Office of the institution in the FBiH noted the absence of gender mainstreaming in strategies and action plans in the FBiH, indicating that gender equality assessments are inadequate and that all institutions must respond appropriately to improve this area. Government bodies at the state and entity levels, cantonal authorities, and local self-government units, as well as legal entities with public authorizations and those majority-owned by the state, are obliged to take all appropriate and necessary measures to implement the provisions prescribed by the Law on Gender Equality in BiH and the Gender Action Plan of BiH (Audit Office of the Institutions in the FBiH, 2023).

Interviewees and available literature cite several factors that limit gender mainstreaming in environmental legal frameworks and effective implementation of environmental policies: (1) lack of data on gender and environmental issues; (2) low awareness on the importance of gender-sensitive environmental policies; (3) inadequate inclusion and consultation with vulnerable groups in policy development; and (4) lack of formal assessments on the impact of gender on the environment (Alibašić and Atkinson, 2023; European Commission, 2023a). Participants in the validation workshop emphasized that the patriarchal context in BiH

influences how environmental issues are perceived and addressed, which affects both women and men. Effective policies should recognize and address these gender differences to ensure that environmental management strategies are equitable and socially just.

The ESAP 2030+ represents an improvement in mainstreaming gender into environmental protection strategies

The ESAP 2030+ initiative developed a comprehensive state-level document comprising an environmental strategy and action plan for the entire country, covering all administrative levels in BiH, and it represents a significant step in incorporating gender into environmental protection (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022; Karađinović, 2021). Gender and social equality considerations are integrated throughout the strategy and in action plans for state and entity levels and the Brčko District. The ESAP 2030+ addresses aspects of gendered vulnerability to environmental harms, gendered aspects of poverty reduction, and inclusion of women in decision-making, which helps elevate gender considerations from solely including women as vulnerable parties to enhancing livelihood outcomes and empowering women as agents of change (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022; Strambo and Solujić, 2023).

Importantly, priority 7.4 under the strategy to improve the environment and management commits to a high level of public awareness about environmental protection and involvement in decision-making processes, particularly focusing on women, young people, and socially vulnerable groups. This extends to the inclusion of civil society groups in drafting strategic and legal documents, including environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and issuance of environmental permits. Under priority 7.6, there is mention of using tools, such as gender analysis, gender impact assessment, gender-responsive budgeting, and gender audits, in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of environmental policies, programs, and projects to ensure standards and principles of gender equality are integrated into environmental policies, strategies, and programs.

The ESAP 2030+ is also important for encouraging cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination, as the BiH Agency for Gender Equality has a role in owning and implementing the ESAP 2030+. This commitment and role of the Agency is incorporated into the newly developed Gender Action Plan for BiH 2023-2027, which includes a specific priority area related to gender equality within the context of environmental protection and climate change.

The strategy entails that before its adoption at the state level, environmental protection strategies must be adopted for the entities and the Brčko District. The entity strategies and the strategy of the Brčko District have already been adopted. However, as of writing, the state-level document has yet to be adopted.

3.3.3 Environmental organizations, grassroots advocacy, and activism

Environmental civil society groups are actively involved in environmental governance in BiH and have made important contributions to environmental justice through education and awareness raising campaigns and oversight of environmental commitments and impacts made by public and private institutions.

Environmental civil society face challenges to engaging in environmental governance and gender equality

Stakeholders noted that civil society organizations in general face financial sustainability challenges in BiH and are heavily reliant on support from foreign funding (BTI, 2024a; Veljović, 2019). One study found that environmental NGOs in BiH receive training and capacity building from international donors, but these donors may not support foundations for increasing organizations' roles and influence in environmental governance. The study stated that many environmental organizations "play[ed] an ephemeral role in EIAs and rarely engage[d] the state at a higher level or with any regularity" (Fagan and Sircar, 2010, p. 18).

Participants in the validation workshop noted that a rise of patriarchal values in Europe have implications on environmental policies and gender equality in BiH and have affected donor politics, which is likely to endanger the operation of environmental and gender focused organizations through decreased funding for local actions. They emphasized that there needs to be a clear elaboration of donor policies and funding strategies to ensure the effective allocation of resources, and these policies must be adapted to focus on a bottom-up approach through the support of local communities.

One issue discussed in the validation workshop and in the literature is that environmental protection is not promoted or prioritized in political agendas and environmental civil society organizations have limited engagement with decision makers (Veljović, 2019). Environmental civil society interviewed for this study report facing bureaucratic delays, lack of governmental support, and intimidation tactics employed by vested interests, including Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) targeting both men and women activists. Furthermore, the roles of NGOs and government structures in environmental management are not clear and widely understood, which affects effective coordination between entities.

Many of the civil society actors interviewed for this study focused on environmental issues and actions, with limited consideration of gender. Environmental organizations in the validation workshop stated that the environmental civil society lacks sufficient knowledge on gender equality. Only one interviewee, the feminist initiative EkoFem, is explicitly focused on challenges faced by women in environmental activism, particularly regarding trust-building and infrastructural hurdles.

Recently in BiH, there have been efforts to bridge the gap between environmental actors at all levels and encourage collaboration, including toward gender-just climate action (see Box 1). This can help to build cross-sectoral capacity and networks for more effective and inclusive sustainable development and environmental action.

Box 1: Feminist Coalition for Climate Justice in BiH

In 2022, the Feminist Coalition for Climate Justice in BiH was launched to accelerate progress on gender-just climate action. The Coalition was established as part of the global “Generation Equality” initiative by UN Women in cooperation with UNDP in BiH. It brings together representatives from governments, civil society, youth organizations, international organizations, and the private sector to address critical gender-climate issues and empower women in climate change action. A key priority of the Coalition is to support a transition to an inclusive and regenerative green economy by promoting women's access to finance for climate solutions, strengthening women's participation in environmental governance and green economies, building community-based cooperative models, and strengthening collection and availability of gender and environment data.

Women engage in environmental civil society but tend to be underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles

In terms of women's engagement in environmental civil society, some interviewees suggested that women are more engaged in environmental activism than men, particularly elderly and retired women because they have more free time and fewer household responsibilities compared to their younger counterparts. However, leadership roles in environmental organizations tend to be dominated by men; according to one group, this is due to women's time constraints related to daily responsibilities and social barriers to these positions. EkoFem also noted that there is a tendency for women to withdraw from activism when men take over leadership roles, highlighting gender dynamics within movements. Some of the environmental civil society noted efforts to improve women's participation. For instance, Eko BiH implements membership fee waivers for certain groups to encourage diversity in membership and leadership positions, and CZZS facilitates meetings with eco-feminists to engage them in environmental protection efforts.

Women significantly contribute to environmental activism and advocacy

Interviews with public institutions, environmental civil society, and women activists championed women's activism in environmental protection, emphasizing on their significant contributions, leadership, and resilience despite facing intimidation, legal threats, and societal stigmas (see Box 2). Women are depicted as catalysts for community mobilization and agents of change in advocating for environmental justice. In an interview with a representative from the FBiH Ministry of Environment and Tourism, it was noted that women are prominently represented in media regarding environmental activism and that many environmental protection initiatives originate from women activists.

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“We women step up, setting a good example for other women, especially when you're from a small community like them, having had the same experiences, and understanding.”

- Interview with woman activist from an urban area

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Box 2: The Brave Women of Kruščica

In 2017, local women spent more than 500 days in improvised accommodations to prevent the construction of a small hydropower plan on the Kruščica River (Kurtic, 2022). Local communities said they were not consulted about the planned hydropower plant and responded by blockading a bridge used to access sites. Women involved in the protest were met with violent opposition from riot police and faced insults with sexual connotations, injuries, and arrests, but they returned and kept protesting on the bridge, which was renamed by locals to the “Bridge of Brave Women of Kruščica” (Arnika, 2019). A court order cancelled permits for the hydropower projects, but the protestors continue to face legal battles over concessions for the projects (Murphy, 2020). Some women involved ran for and were elected to local council, with some sources reporting this as the first time women had won Bosniak local council seats (NDI, 2023a).

Women activists highlighted various motivations for their involvement in environmental justice efforts, including concern for the health of their children and their community, the sense of solidarity and community support in activism, protection of natural resources and the local environment, and preservation of heritage and traditions associated with nature and natural resources. They also are committed to fighting against injustice and political corruption that contribute to environmental issues. These motives are often linked to individual experiences, a sense of responsibility towards future generations, and a desire to preserve the natural environment for future generations.

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“Regarding my motivation, it’s about the health of us and our children, preserving our heritage. There’s a river that runs in front of my house. My parents are buried there. That’s my motivation. I am emotionally attached to my homeland.”

- Interview with woman activist from a rural area

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Women in environmental activism face gendered barriers and risks

Interviewees shared that women in environmental activism face specific barriers and risks based on their gender, including violence, verbal attacks, threats, and emotional exhaustion. Both women and men in activism positions are often met with lawsuits, particularly SLAPPs that are used by powerful investors to silence dissenting voices, but women activists may have fewer financial and legal resources to fight lawsuits. One interviewee noted that women may face heightened risks of lawsuits compared to men and reflected on a lawsuit against Hajrija Čobo, a woman environmental rights defender, wondering if the lawsuit would have even happened if Čobo was a man. One interviewee explained that powerful actors will use resources to gain favor with communities while intimidating activists.

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“Activists are definitely being intimidated. I had a similar experience with online comments. Corporations have well-developed mechanisms to intimidate activists while, on the other hand, they donate TVs to schools, pave streets, and so on.”

- Interview with woman activist from an urban area

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Interviews did reveal there are factors that can limit women's engagement in environmental justice initiatives and activism spaces. For instance, societal norms and expectations especially affect women in rural areas from engaging in grassroots initiatives and activism due to competing daily responsibilities and limited financial resources. In rural areas, women also have less access to information, environmental groups, and resources that can help support their activism. Many women activists said that their communities often do support their activism, but there are instances where residents can be aggressive and accuse them of opposing development. EkoFem and women activists also emphasized the importance of psychological and mental health support for women in activism to address the immense emotional toll of environmental activism and the gendered backlash these women face.

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“At the local level, it's extremely exhausting to lead the fight. The women of Kruščica, even today, are very emotional when they recall their experiences. People were divided among themselves about this. Families were almost split between those for and against. The betrayals were deep. Psychological support came up naturally as a topic.”

- Interview with woman activist

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Environmental activism supports peacebuilding and unification

All people interviewed for this study stated that environmental protection and activism unify people around a common goal regardless of ethnic, religious, or other differences. The interviewee from the FBiH environmental ministry acknowledged that environmentalism transcends local and other boundaries and suggested that more effort should be made to unite diverse communities in BiH in environmentalism to foster inclusive collaboration and solidarity. This was reflected in interviews with civil society and activists, who mentioned successful initiatives challenging environmental threats have been led by women and involve collaboration across ethnic lines, and that the connections between environmental protection and peacebuilding are recognized at the local level. One woman activist in the multi-ethnic Kakanj area said that the fight against small hydroelectric power plants and nature preservation is a shared goal that united people from different ethnic groups in environmental protection. Additionally, the municipality of Jezero was highlighted for women activism despite facing challenges in a politically charged and ethnically diverse environment.

“It is a beautiful thing; people are uniting regardless of everything. We have women leaders and men who support each other... We don't allow people to divide. The Lopare community is quite nationalistic, but our colleague went to record statements from people there who spoke against divisions. The stance is to protect natural resources, environment, which should be supported regardless of everything. That is above all.”

- Interview with environmental NGO

3.4 Procedural justice - Gender considerations in environmental procedural processes

BiH is a signatory to the Aarhus Convention and its implementation is overseen by the Department of Environmental Protection of the BiH Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations. In 2013 a network of four Aarhus Centres was established by OSCE to facilitate resident access to information, support involvement in environmental decision-making, and provide support to legal protection of human rights in the environment (OSCE, n.d.).

Laws in both FBiH and RS broadly adhere to the provisions of the Aarhus Convention and support procedural rights in environmental decision-making and recent amendments have strengthened compliance with the convention. For the three procedural rights under the convention, the following processes are in place (Pilipović, 2021):

- Access to environmental information is supported through Laws on Freedom of Access to Information and Laws on Environmental Protection in both entities and the Brčko District. When a request for information is submitted, an administrative procedure is initiated to provide information according to deadlines depending on specific provisions. The deadlines allow the requester to access their right to justice if the request is denied or the response is unsatisfactory. The procedures for administrative disputes are covered in Administrative Dispute Laws for both entities and the Brčko District.
- Public participation in environmental decision-making is implemented by authorities according to the Laws on Environmental Protection in the entities and District, and public participation is envisaged in the initial stages of EIAs and in the process of approving Assessments.
- Access to justice in environmental matters there are several regulations that allow for disputes to be initiated in requests for information, approval of environmental impact studies, or issuance of environmental permits. Access to justice can be initiated through administrative disputes or against the decisions of the courts deciding on an administrative dispute.
- EIAs and environmental permitting are regulated through the Laws on Environmental Protection in both entities and the Brčko District. The rules for EIAs as outlined in the European Union EIA Directive are transposed and processes for EIAs established in both entities and the Brčko District (Havránková, 2016).

Representatives from the RS Ministry for Spatial Planning, Construction, and Ecology interpret environmental justice through these procedural processes, emphasizing equality in the application of regulations and access to justice. Representatives from the FBiH Ministry of Environment and Tourism likewise emphasized the importance of procedural processes in environmental justice and stated that there are opportunities for feedback on initiatives from civil society and public consultations and educational programs to ensure equal participation of women and vulnerable groups in decision-making processes.

Implementation and enforcement of procedural rights is lacking

However, findings from interviews and reports show that the presence of amendments and laws on environmental justice processes are not necessarily indicators of implementation in practice. Despite legal obligations, EIAs are not consistently prepared, and planning continues to be conducted without stakeholder consultation, leading to protests and challenges in court (European Commission, 2023a). A shadow implementation report to the Aarhus Convention submitted by Arnika, the Center for Environment, and the association Resource Aarhus Center in 2021 outlines challenges to implementation, including lack of capacity of state entities in information sharing procedures, inadequate advertisement of public auditing processes, and protracted judicial and administrative proceedings, as well as lack of coordination between different authority levels (Pilipović, 2021).

Stakeholders noted that there is an insufficient number of environmental lawyers, which exacerbates challenges to address environmental issues in courts. Furthermore, there is low interest among lawyers to represent environmental cases in rural communities due to low profit potential and prolonged processing times. This is a significant barrier to environmental justice.

Interviews with stakeholders also shared current concerns around proposed amendments to the Law on Geological Research in RS, which would remove provisions requiring environmental impact studies and approval from residents for companies to conduct geological research in certain locations. These amendments would impede procedural processes in line with the Aarhus Convention and limit the ability of residents and civil society to raise concerns and seek justice for environmental and human rights harms.

There is a high level of distrust in public entities to uphold environmental and human rights

Interviews with civil society and activists reveal a common theme of distrust in public entities, including the courts, police, and other government institutions, to uphold justice procedures and address environmental and human rights concerns effectively. There is concern that public and private sector activities may not be adequately held accountable for environmental protection and community welfare. Interviewees stated that without trust in these entities, achieving procedural justice is challenging and communities may hesitate to engage with legal mechanisms to address grievances. Furthermore, lack of trust and accountability leads to environmental injustices, where marginalized communities withstand the worst of environmental harm without recourse to legal remedies or meaningful redress.

Environmental procedural processes are not inclusive and lack gender considerations

A report on public participation in BiH environmental decision-making cites examples where there are clear gaps public participation, including use permit processes that are not open for public participation and urban and construction permitting processes where the public can only participate as an intervener after proving that they have a direct legal interest (Havránková, 2016). Rural communities in particular face barriers to accessing environmental information and participating in public processes, as infrastructure is weaker or inadequate compared to urban areas.

The workshop noted that legal and advocacy challenges hinder the enforcement of procedural rights, and women may face additional barriers due to gender discrimination in accessing legal representation and advocating for their environmental rights. Enhancing legal frameworks and capacity building for environmental justice are crucial to overcoming these challenges. Gender considerations are missing from reports and discussions on environmental justice procedural processes in BiH. There needs to be further assessment into the challenges and barriers facing women from accessing and benefitting from these processes. This will ensure that efforts to address the shortcomings of procedural processes for environmental justice are gender-responsive and do not unintentionally contribute to and reinforce women's marginalization in information access, public participation, and access to justice.

4

KOSOVO: STATE OF WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT AND GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



4 Kosovo: State of women's engagement and gender considerations in environmental justice

Brief context and background: Kosovo

Following World War II, with the new Constitution of 1974, Kosovo became an Autonomous Province within Yugoslavia and was recognized as a constitutive element of the federation, guaranteeing its cultural and administrative autonomy. Tensions between Kosovo's Albanian and Serb communities simmered throughout the 20th century, culminating in the armed conflict of 1998–1999. After international mediation failed, NATO launched a military operation in March 1999, forcing Belgrade to withdraw its forces. UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) placed Kosovo under the temporary administration of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). In 2008, the Kosovo Assembly unilaterally declared independence, establishing an executive branch at the central level and municipalities as the basic units of local governance. Kosovo's commitment to the global 2030 Agenda for sustainable development was demonstrated by the Kosovo Assembly's unanimous endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2018. The EU-Kosovo Stabilization and Association Agreement has been in effect since April 2016. Additionally, Kosovo adopted a revised 2023-2027 program for EU integration. The EU-facilitated Dialogue on the normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade is ongoing.

4.1 Gender context

Women face barriers to equal opportunities in economic, social, and political participation in Kosovo. These inequalities are largely due to predominant patriarchal gender patterns in all areas of life, including in decision-making spaces, employment and income, and health and safety (Gueye, 2021; Kosovo Women's Network, 2021), as well as gaps in resource access – women only own 4.9% of land and 12% of residential property (PEFA, 2022). Social attitudes and beliefs reflect widely held patriarchal ideals. As a 2018 survey found that 70% of male respondents felt that the husband should have final say on decisions within his home (OSCE, 2018). A 2019 survey found that 57% of female respondents think that a good wife should obey her husband even if she has a different opinion (OSCE, 2019b).

Legal and institutional framework

Kosovo has a solid legal framework and gender machinery to promote gender equality. Although not a signatory to international agreements on human rights, the Constitution defines international human rights conventions, such as CEDAW and UN Resolution 1325, as being directly applicable to domestic legislation and is considered to prevail over acts and laws issued by public institutions. The Constitution considers equal opportunities and equal participation of men and women as fundamental democratic values, and in 2020, the Constitution was also amended to include the Istanbul Convention to address violence against women and girls.

The Law on Gender Equality promotes equality and gender representation in legislative, executive and judiciary bodies, and other public institutions, setting a quota for women to represent 50% of members. The law also mandates inclusion of gender-responsive budgeting in all areas to guarantee gender equality is respected in collecting, distributing, and allocating resources (GAP Institute, 2023). The aspiration and practice of gender-responsive budgeting to address socioeconomic, political, and cultural gender inequalities has been achieved in large part due to the actions of civil society organizations with support from international organizations. The Kosovo Programme on Gender Equality (2020-2024) sets the general framework for integrating gender equality and gender-responsive budgeting into all phases of the central and local fiscal management systems. Since 2018, gender impact assessments are mandatory when adopting a new law or policy under the Better Regulation Strategy of Kosovo 2.0 (PEFA, 2022). However, enforcement of sanctions is insufficient, and the Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality lacks adequate power and resources to support its work (GAP Institute, 2023; Kosovo Women's Network, 2021).

Political representation and decision-making

There has been progress and significant milestones for women in Kosovo decision-making spaces over the last several years. The current president, Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu, was the first female speaker of the Parliament in 2020, and in the most recent election when she won the presidency, she received the highest number of votes for any candidate in the history of Kosovo. The most recent election also saw a record number of 43 women in the 120 seat Assembly, representing 35.8% of members. Reports on women's engagement in decision-making indicate that at least 30% of members of local assemblies are women, but that women remain under-represented in decision-making positions in the administration and independent agencies, falling below mandates for equal representation (PEFA, 2022). A study from 2017 states that central and local institutions in Kosovo do not enforce the Law on Gender Equality and leadership positions and influence tend to be male dominated (Zymberi and Zogiani, 2017). Women's underrepresentation and limited influence are due to several factors, including discriminatory social norms and education and literacy gaps; however, even women with advanced degrees have trouble accessing decision-making roles (Zymberi and Zogiani, 2017). Women in decision-making positions tend to face challenges and barriers that undermine their authority, including scrutiny from peers, harassment, threats, and in some cases violence (Zymberi and Zogiani, 2017). A public opinion poll by NDI found that 46% of residents in strongly agree/ agree that violence against women in politics is widespread in Kosovo (NDI, 2023b).

Economic engagement

Estimates for labor force participation in 2022 show that about 49% of men over the age of 15 are active in the labor market compared to 19.4% of women (World Bank, n.d.b). For 40% of women, the main reason they are not active in the labor market is due to care and family responsibilities, compared to 3.8% of men who are inactive in the labor market (Stanko, 2021). A study by Kosovo Women's Network found that women spend up to 300% more time on unpaid care and household activities compared to men (Kosovo Women's Network, 2021). Patriarchal beliefs reinforce gendered division of labor and women's responsibility over household tasks. According to a survey by OSCE (2018b), about 73% of women state that their most vital role is to care for her home and family and 72% of men believe that women should care for children.

Women face discriminatory hiring practices and various forms of discrimination in the workplace, including sexual abuse and harassment that goes unreported due to fear of dismissal or retribution (US Department of State, 2023). Single mothers, women with disabilities, women from minority ethnic communities, and

women living in rural areas face additional challenges and barriers due to limited access to property and unequal access to public services (European Commission, 2023b; US Department of State, 2023). Workshop participants noted that women face high barriers to ownership of businesses and land, which affects their ability to benefit and be included in different types of projects. For example, they may not be awarded with resources if businesses are not under their name. Additionally, in some cases grants or subsidies intended for women are ultimately controlled by the husband or other family members due to discriminatory cultural and social norms.

Gender-based violence

Domestic violence and GBV remains widespread in Kosovo, and 54% of women say they have experienced psychological, physical, or sexual violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15 (OSCE, 2018b). Institutional response and prosecution remain weak, and reports describe police response as inadequate (BTI, 2024b; Gueye, 2021), leading many women who experience intimate partner violence to not contact services for support or report violence to police (OSCE, 2018b). Despite legislation to address domestic violence and GBV, including the Strategy on Protection Against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women, implementing legislation is challenging in Kosovo. According to the Kosovo Women's Network, issues include authorities discounting evidence, limited imprisonment of perpetrators, delayed protection orders, inadequate follow-up to protection orders, and weak accountability in cases when protection orders are violated (Farnsworth et al., 2015). There is also limited capacity and knowledge in procedural institutions to responsibly manage domestic violence cases and a shortage of financial resources to support shelters and services (Gueye, 2021). Human rights groups who advocate for survivors also face death threats and harassment in response to their work (BTI, 2024b).

4.2 Distributive justice - Gender differentiated environmental impacts, concerns, and priorities

Key environmental issues and concerns in Kosovo include waste management, industrial and air pollution, deforestation, and water contamination. These issues have immense impacts on human and environmental health, wellbeing, and biodiversity, but environmental and climate issues have long been neglected in Kosovo (GIZ, 2023; Madhi and Trupia, 2022; Ong, 2017). There are several reasons for this neglect, including heavy reliance on coal, limited funding, competing priorities, and lack of implementation of environmental policies (European Commission, 2023b; Ong, 2017). One of the challenges Kosovo faces in addressing these environmental concerns stems from its status as a non-member of the United Nations, which limits access to funds. One interviewee noted that there persists a mentality of exploitation, with construction occurring in protected areas without accountability for environmental damage.

Lack of awareness on and prioritization of environmental issues and legacy of industrial activities contributes to environmental degradation

A strong theme in both the literature and from interviews was the lack of awareness on and prioritization of environmental issues, with a minority of Kosovo residents considering environmental pollution to be the most pressing problem in Kosovo while a significant percentage considers their local environment to be very polluted (BTI, 2024b). Economic growth and infrastructure development are also often prioritized over the health of people and the environment, and one representative noted a case of the Obiliq/Obilic municipality, which was financially supported to mitigate pollution but directed funds to road construction rather than needed healthcare investments, highlighting a misallocation of resources.

Findings from the literature and interviews emphasize the legacy of industrial activities that have contaminated areas around Kosovo. Industrial waste, including from former mine sites, factories, and construction activities, can be dispersed into the air during windy conditions and washed into rivers and soil during rainfall, leading to widespread consequences. In some cases, waste materials are removed during privatization processes, but the disposal and storage of waste remains unclear representing another significant hazard. In general, rehabilitation efforts to address these concerns are lacking.

Women and men face different impacts from environmental degradation but assessments and research on these differences are limited

Available literature and stakeholder discussions indicate that the impact and benefits from environmental degradation and development vary by gender, with women and marginalized groups in Kosovo particularly vulnerable to negative impacts from environmental degradation (Civil Rights Defenders, 2023). Access and benefits are divided due to unequal access to information, infrastructure, and services, which is reflected in areas such as flood response, environmental protection, health, property rights, access to finance, and climate change. One interviewee noted that women farmers in rural areas do not have adequate knowledge on biodiversity and climate change impacts, which affects their ability to contribute to conservation and adapt to and mitigate climate change.

Discussions from the validation workshop highlighted unequal distribution of information and resources, including financial support, to women and men as a factor driving women's vulnerability to environmental degradation. For instance, subsidies from the Ministry of Agriculture may be allocated to both women and men, but the support offered to men tends to be larger. This allows them more resources to develop adaptive capacity and safeguard against environmental shocks compared to women. Additionally, stakeholders noted that assessments on damages from environmental impacts overlook impacts on informal economies, which significantly involve women, and only consider the owners of households and businesses, which are predominately men.

Negative environmental consequences tend to affect women more severely than men due to cultural norms and traditions that limit women's access to social and economic resources and heighten their exposure to environmental harms and degradation. Cultural norms, traditions, and inadequate legal infrastructure often favor men in accessing and controlling natural resources. As a result, women face greater challenges in securing their rights to natural resources and suffer disproportionately from the environmental impacts.

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“Despite the principle of equality, the distribution of natural resources is not equitable between men and women. Consequently, when environmental issues arise, women bear a disproportionate burden of the impact because they typically bear the responsibility for managing household affairs and caring for their families. For instance, during floods, women are particularly vulnerable as they are often at the forefront of household management and caregiving. Failure to adequately address environmental issues exacerbates this vulnerability, resulting in greater harm to women.”

- Interview with woman in academia

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Gender differentiated impacts from environmental degradation and climate change were mentioned by several interviewees, but there is a notable lack of data and analyses on the gendered impacts of environmental degradation and climate change in Kosovo (Rashiti et al., 2024).

4.3 Representational justice - Women's representation and gender considerations in environmental governance

4.3.1 Environmental decision-making

The main institution responsible for environmental and climate change decision-making is the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure (MESPI) (Dietachmair et al., 2024). The Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency (KEPA) is under the MESPI and is responsible for professional, supportive, scientific, and research tasks, including environmental monitoring, and issues opinions on EIAs and construction permits (World Bank, 2013). At the local level, each municipality has an environmental unit and is responsible for fully applying principles of environmental protection under the law and cooperating with MESPI to prepare environmental protection and sustainable development plans. Municipalities also take on responsibility for monitoring, issuing construction permits, ensuring compliance and proper land use, and protecting natural resources within municipal boundaries (World Bank, 2013).

Women are underrepresented in environmental decision-making spaces at all levels

Traditional gender roles and norms influence occupational segregation, contributing to women's underrepresentation in several departments. Women's work and care roles at home combined with a lack of flexible working hours may make it difficult for women to take more time-consuming positions, such as

in leadership. Political affiliation also affects women and men's access to promotion and participation in decision making. Many women, albeit not all, feel excluded from decision-making processes because they are women. Furthermore, interviewees state that resources are not distributed equally among women and men, and women have less access to training, networking and exchange opportunities.

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“In rural areas, women and men are both affected by environmental degradation, but women are not involved in decision-making processes.”

- From discussions in the validation workshop

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According to interviewees, women are underrepresented at MESPI, particularly in decision-making positions. Women's representation in central and local level environmental decision-making bodies is also low. MESPI noted that in the process of drafting and discussing the legal infrastructure, men lead public consultations, with minimal or no female representation. This gender disparity is evident in urban areas and even more pronounced in rural settings, where male dominance in gatherings is prevalent (see Box 4).

Box 4: EcoKosWomen (EKW) study on women's participation in environmental decision-making

EKW conducted a study on women's participation and involvement in environmental decision-making in protected areas. The study found multiple gaps that limit women's participation in these areas. The study focused on the Peja/Peć region and found that many women residing in protected areas have elementary education levels and lack information regarding participation in decision-making processes. EKW has also observed that in many instances, while women's names may appear formally, the decision-making power often lies with the man standing behind her. In the community, women play a significant informal role, particularly in promoting environmental justice

4.3.2 Environmental laws and policies

Kosovo has signed the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, but given its international status, Kosovo is not a party to any of the UN environmental conventions and cannot fully engage in multilateral fora. Despite this, Kosovo has made dedicated efforts to align policies and practices with global sustainability strategies, including the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Commitment to the environment is reflected in the constitution, legal framework, and sectoral policies (see Table 4), which support efforts to align with EU legislation to support Kosovo's EU membership application. However, implementing and enforcing environmental legislation in Kosovo remains a challenge due to limited funding, lack of administrative capacity, and heavy reliance on international donors, and adoption of environmental strategies are delayed, including the Strategy for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development 2022-2030 (European Commission, 2023b). An interviewee from Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) notes that administrative control over environmental decisions in Kosovo is lacking, both at the primary and secondary levels, with ministries or independent bodies failing to provide satisfactory control

and adequately address environmental considerations. Furthermore, environmental protection ranks low in terms of general priorities for the population compared to employment, economic, development, and corruption (World Bank, 2013).

Table 4: Environmental laws, policies, strategies, and commitments in Kosovo

Constitution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Article 7 establishes protection of the environment as a principle of constitutional order. ➤ Article 52 recognizes responsibility for the environment as a fundamental human right, which includes the opportunity to be heard by public institutions, consideration of public on issues that affect their environment, and public institutions' consideration of environmental impact in their decision making.
Laws
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Law on Environmental Protection ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 03/L-025) ➤ Law on environmental impact assessment ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 08/L-181) ➤ Law on strategic environmental assessment ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 03/L-015) ➤ Kosovo Water Law ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 2004/24) ➤ Law on air protection ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 2004/30) ➤ Law on waste management ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 02/L-30) ➤ Law on integrated prevention pollution control ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 03/L-043) ➤ Law on nature conservation ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 02/L-18) ➤ Law on agricultural land ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 02/L-26) ➤ Law on climate change ("Official Gazette of Kosovo", no. 08/L-250)
Policies and strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Climate Change Strategy 2019-2028 and Action Plan 2021-2023 ➤ Energy Strategy for 2022-2031 ➤ Water Strategy Document 2017-2036 ➤ Draft Energy and Climate Plan (2025-2030)

Sources: Interviews with stakeholders in Kosovo; Dietachmair et al. (2024); World Bank (2013)

Environmental laws and policies tend to overlook or omit gender considerations

Gender considerations and linkages to environmental protection, environmental degradation, and climate change are missing from Kosovo's environmental laws, policies, and strategies. When gender considerations are included, the mentions tend to be limited and not supported by concrete strategies. For instance, the recent Law on Climate Change does commit to implementing awareness campaigns on the role and involvement of women in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts and developing guidelines for integration of gender issues in the climate change program. However, there is no information on how these commitments will be met. The Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan briefly mentions that the strategy will aim to improve adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities, including women, but there are no associated activities included in the action plan. According to the MESPI, most strategies developed by the ministry and that relate to its work are gender blind and do not reference gender equality legislation.

A notable exception is the Energy Strategy of Kosovo 2022-2031, which was found to be gender-responsive according to an analysis conducted by the Kosovo Women's Network (Rashiti et al., 2024). The strategy aims to reduce gender inequalities and includes a specific objective for women's participation with equal opportunities in energy education and training programs, as well as sets targets for women's employment in the energy sector.

In an interview with MESPI, it was noted that prior to 2017 gender considerations were absent from many policies and laws, including on the environment. The representative emphasizes that there has been a significant shift, and all current and future documents are now being crafted with a focus on gender equality. However, a significant obstacle is the lack of gender-disaggregated data to inform effective policy development and implementation. Additionally, gender-responsive budgeting will need to be effectively implemented in development of policies, programs, and projects in line with commitments to ensure that gender is effectively addressed in environmental efforts (see Box 5).

Box 5: Gender-responsive budgeting guidance by the Kosovo Women's Network

The Kosovo Women's Network has implemented several efforts to improve gender-responsive budgeting in Kosovo in compliance with I law. In 2016, the Network conducted a gender analysis of the budget and financing for MESPI and set out several recommendations to align the ministry's efforts with the Law on Gender Equality (Farnsworth et al., 2016). In 2017, the Network revised two practical guidance documents to support gender-responsive budgeting at the central and local levels in Kosovo (Farnsworth et al., 2017a; Farnsworth et al., 2017b). These guidance documents and insights from the gender analysis for MESPI can help improve efforts on gender-responsive budgeting and support implementation of gender considerations in environmental actions in Kosovo.

4.3.3 Environmental organizations, grassroots advocacy, and activism

Civil society groups in Kosovo, including those focused on environmental issues and human rights, play a key role in holding authorities accountable to laws and raising awareness and providing support to the public (Alidemaj and Haxhiu, 2021). Interviews with civil society highlighted many of these efforts (see Box 6).

Box 6: Involvement of environmental civil society in collaboration, prosecutorial actions, and education

Many civil society organizations emphasized the importance of collaboration with municipal authorities to promote environmental and gender issues and support implementation. EKW maintains important partnerships with gender officials within municipal frameworks, recognizing them as integral and permanent mechanisms for advancing gender equality initiatives. NGO Gjethi has collaborated closely with the municipality of Kaçanik/Kaçanik on joint projects, including the development of the Local Environmental Plan.

Interviews with BIRN, NGO Gjethi, and Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS) noted instances of lawsuits brought against MESPI. BIRN filed and won a lawsuit against MESPI regarding the construction of a thermal power plant by Contour Global due to legal violations during the public consultations processes. NGO Gjethi and GLPS brought a lawsuit against MESPI regarding the Lepenci 3 hydro powerplant, alleging that the ministry granted permits without adequately considering the environmental impact or ensuring sufficient public participation, thus violating concession agreements. Despite victories in the basic, appellate, and supreme courts, the case progressed to the Constitutional Court, which ruled in favor of the hydropower company that allowed operations to continue until a final decision was reached.

The Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC) collaborated with BIRN to facilitate discussions on the misuse of forests, including illegal tree cutting, and has initiated legal action based on public information gathered from seven municipalities in the Mitrovica region spanning from 2020-2023.

BIRN has taken an active role in training and research efforts for the environment. BIRN has provided training to numerous activists and media professionals to effectively report on environmental issues and empower them as environmental activists. Additionally, BIRN has conducted diverse initiatives to raise community awareness about the repercussions of environmental degradation in various regions, including local parks.

EKW implemented a series of training courses covering topics such as climate change, energy-saving practices in households, and efficient use of equipment. The training also focused on utilizing renewable energy sources to promote sustainability. Beneficiaries of these trainings were women farmers from Prishtinë/Priština, Obiliq/Obilić, and Podujevë/Podujevo.

Environmental and gender civil society groups face challenges to engaging in environmental governance

Despite their important roles in education, awareness raising, and procedural processes, civil society organizations face significant challenges (Alidemaj and Haxhiu, 2021; UN Habitat, 2022). A report on a local climate action forum showed that lack of funds for environmental issues prevents the sustained work of civil society. Limited funding sources means these groups are competing for a small pool of funds and cannot retain permanent staff to ensure long-term human capacity. Furthermore, the report stated that civil society groups faced problems creating networks with public institutions, business sector, academia, and industries (UN Habitat, 2022). Interviewees stated that these challenges particularly affect women-focused civil society groups. The representative from EKW noted that since 2019, financial support for civil society groups from the MESPI has ceased, with no calls for support since then. This has affected EKW's work and exacerbated challenges for funding, as studies show that women's rights organizations face challenges accessing sustained funding with 86% of organizations lacking resources (Kosovo Women's Network, 2021).

Environmental civil society have limited capacity on gender considerations

Information on women's involvement in environmental activism and advocacy organizations was limited in the literature review, and interviewees had different views on this aspect of environmental justice. Some interviewees indicated challenges to equal participation of women and men. NGO Gjethi shared that they face challenges gathering data and ensuring inclusive participation of women and girls, particularly in districts like Ferizaj/Urosevac, Kaçanik/ Kačanik, and surrounding villages. Among the civil society representatives interviewed, many recognized the importance of gender and women in environmental advocacy, but that gender aspects were not a focus. For instance, Let's Do It Peja does include gender-disaggregated data in its reports but does not focus on environmental impacts to different social groups, preferring to address impacts to society as a whole.

Lack of data on gender and environmental issues was noted as a significant and critical limiting factor to effective design and implementation of gender-responsive policies and capacity among civil society and decision makers on gender and environment linkages. Civil society actors in interviews and the validation workshop emphasized the importance of this data to guide inclusive policy development and implementation.

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“A major challenge is the lack of access to information and data in real time and in proper time. Numbers talk and it is important to have more data and information on these issues.”

- From discussions in validation workshop

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Women are underrepresented in environmental advocacy spaces

Interviewees shared some examples of women playing critical roles in environmental activism (see Box 7). However, it was agreed that women are underrepresented and marginalized in advocacy spaces. According to an interviewee from academia, women are actively involved and make contributions at the grassroots level, but they are underrepresented in decision-making positions in formal institutions and environmental advocacy initiatives tend to be spearheaded by men. This does not indicate that women are less interested or invested in environmental issues, as the interviewee also notes that:

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“Young girls are actively engaged in environmental initiatives, comprising 70% of female students in the second semester at the college. Education, especially in environmental and technological fields, holds immense significance for these girls.”

- Interview with International Business College Mitrovica (IBCM)

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Box 7: SLAPP against woman environmental activist

In June 2020, Shpresa Loshaj, the founder of the Pishtaret NGO, had a defamation lawsuit brought against her by the Austrian hydropower company Kelkos Energy for speaking out against the company's operations, particularly its management of four hydropower plants in Kosovo's protected Deçan/Dečan region. Alongside sixty other NGOs, Pishtaret penned an open letter to the Austrian Embassy in June, alleging Kelkos Energy's involvement in illegal practices, including operating without proper permits and contributing to environmental degradation. Amnesty International determined these represented SLAPPs, as public institutions in Kosovo made similar claims but did not receive defamation lawsuits (Amnesty International, 2021). In October 2021, the company decided to withdraw the lawsuit (Marí, 2021).

Environmental advocacy can contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion

Many interviewees saw environmental justice and advocacy initiatives as an entry point to support collective action and overcome social tensions. Civil society representatives shared that environmental issues can function as an important catalyst to unite communities, particularly when they face shared challenges and are advocating for common causes. Interviews with civil society highlighted some cases where these issues have united communities (see Box 8).

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“Women from different ethnic backgrounds often come together and collaborate on initiatives when they share common interests.”

- Interview with woman from civil society

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Box 8: Environmental advocacy and peacebuilding

EKW has undertaken the project “Empowering Farmers of Lipjan/Lipljan,” which aims to empower women from the Serbian minority community in Lipjan/Lipljan. As part of this project, joint groups consisting of both Kosovo-Albanian and Kosovo-Serbian women have received training in green agriculture, smart agriculture, and green agroforestry techniques. This initiative promotes collaboration and inclusivity among women farmers from different ethnic backgrounds, fostering sustainable agricultural practices and empowering women in the farming sector.

Let's Do It Peja is currently in the process of establishing twenty water councils. While these councils are informal, they play a crucial role in addressing water-related issues in Kosovo. The councils are established by addressing twenty specific issues, two of which involve representatives from the Serbian community (Graçanicë/ Gračanica and Mitrovica North). Other councils also encompass the presence of diverse ethnic communities such as K-Ashkali, K-Egyptian, K-Bosniak, K-Gorani, and K-Roma. These communities of different ethnicities collaborate to identify and address shared challenges, exemplified by the joint efforts of Serbian and Albanian communities in Shtërpçë/ Štrpce and Hani I Elezit/Elez Han. These councils cover four water basins and are composed of community members from specific regions. As part of their mandate, they are currently conducting legal analyses of water-related cases to determine appropriate actions and the relevant authorities to be engaged

4.4 Procedural justice - Gender considerations in environmental procedural processes

Kosovo has not signed or ratified the Aarhus Convention, but as it is a vital component of the Environment for Europe Initiative, the Aarhus Convention is implemented in Kosovo through the Law on Environmental Protection. This law includes the following principles under Article 6 that inform environmental procedural processes:

- ▶ Principle of precaution and prevention: To the extent reasonable, practicable, and in light of the relative cost and expected environmental benefits, an activity shall be planned and implemented in such a way as to prevent or limit adverse effects on the Environment and the potential risks to human health.
- ▶ Principle of Protection of the Right on Court: Any physical and legal entity as well as the public, if they are suffering material damage or are under a serious threat of suffering material damage attributable to a particular activity or source of pollutions that is in violation of the present law or a subsidiary normative act issued pursuant to the present law, shall have the right to file a claim or request the competent court or public authority requiring the appropriate enforcement of the present law or such subsidiary normative act.

- Principle of Public Access to Information: All natural and legal persons have rights to be informed on environmental state and participation in decision making process.

This is supported by procedures to issue environmental permits and conduct EIAs, including through the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment adopted in 2022. The law ensures that projects that have significant environmental impact will only be granted building permits after assessment has been conducted and suitable mitigation measures put in place.

Implementation and enforcement of environmental procedural processes is lacking, and processes are not inclusive of women

However, many interviewees state that implementation of legislation on EIAs is weak due to lack of enforcement capacity and limited political will, and available literature also cite challenges related to staff and resource shortages (Ong, 2017; World Bank, 2013). Furthermore, EIAs that are conducted are often gender-blind and the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment is gender negative, with language that reinforces gender norms and stereotypes and no provision to ensure gender analyses are included in EIAs (Rashiti et al., 2024). MESPI confirmed this gap in EIAs, noting that conducted by the Ministry they have not considered the differentiated impacts of environmental degradation on women and men.

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“Non-compliance [to conduct EIAs] is evident, and there is a critical concern regarding the limited involvement of women and girls in the planning, implementation, and development processes of programs and projects.”

- Interview with man from a policy NGO

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For persons from communities, and in particular women living in northern Kosovo, there is less access the courts in general (Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 2020). Representatives from several civil society groups shared that there is a scarcity of professionals within the justice system who possess comprehensive knowledge of current regulations and understand the ramifications of environmental crimes, and that judges lack expertise regarding environmental matters and environmental justice. Consequently, decisions tend to prioritize electricity generation without consideration for environmental concerns.

Participants in the validation workshop emphasized that economic and industrial development do not address the immediate and long-term impact they have on human health and EIAs must include assessment that emphasize the important connections with health. Additionally, validation workshop participants note that residents do not have access to information from EIAs, which limits their ability to be involved in and informed about decisions through development processes.

There is a high level of distrust in judicial institutions to uphold environmental and human rights

Access to justice in cases of environmental harm and mismanagement is a challenge in Kosovo, and according to several civil society groups, confidence and trust in the justice system and judicial institutions has eroded. The role of the judiciary in environmental management remains weak due to a backlog of court cases and low efficiency, which affects the ability of the judiciary to enforce environmental legislation and residents' ability to seek justice (World Bank, 2013).

There is limited awareness among residents of their rights in procedural processes

A significant challenge to effective implementation and compliance with procedural processes lies in how much awareness residents have regarding their rights under legislation, and whether they possess the necessary information to effectively exercise these rights. There is a pressing need to enhance capacity-building efforts and disseminate information about rights within the legal environment and infrastructure, elucidating how these rights can be utilized. Importantly, validation workshop participants note that women often receive information second hand from men who directly receive information. This means that there is room for information to be misinterpreted or incomplete by the time women receive it. It is critical to identify different pathways for communication preferred and used by women and men when disseminating environmental information.

However, there are different views and opinions on who is responsible for raising awareness and ensuring enforcement of laws, with some interviewees emphasizing the need for civil society to take primary responsibility. Yet, the European Commission report from 2023 states that Kosovo needs to meaningfully consult with civil society, build institutional capacity, and assume responsibility over environmental awareness raising from the international community and civil society organizations (European Commission, 2023b).

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“While legislation offers numerous opportunities and mechanisms, proper information dissemination is crucial. Ultimately, it falls upon civil society and the community to determine how effectively the legislature is utilized.”

- Interview with environmental agency

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5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



5 Conclusions and recommendations

This study represents an important and initial effort to elaborate on the emerging priority area of gender inclusive environmental justice in both BiH and Kosovo. What this study finds is that there is significant interest and passion among stakeholders on issues of gender inequality and environmental injustice, as well as how addressing these issues can support social cohesion and sustainable, inclusive development. There are also opportunities to build on enabling factors and ongoing efforts in BiH and Kosovo to support these priorities. However, there are also critical gaps in capacity, resources, and knowledge that must be addressed to fully realize gender inclusive environmental justice. The main findings and similarities between BiH and Kosovo include the following.

Assessments and data on gender and environmental issues are insufficient or not available.

In both BiH and Kosovo, distributive injustices of environmental harm and benefits impede gender inclusive environmental justice and women's empowerment. Available research and insights from stakeholders in BiH and Kosovo reveal that women, particularly in rural areas, are more exposed and vulnerable to environmental harms and have less access to resources and services to cope with and adapt to harms. However, the full extent of gendered environmental impacts is not known due to a lack of formal assessments, data, research, and analyses in both BiH and Kosovo. Neither BiH or Kosovo systematically monitors the impact of environmental degradation on women and men, including on their health, income, livelihoods, and wellbeing, or the impact of natural disasters on women and men, including damage to property and economic livelihoods, injuries, missing persons, or deaths. Addressing distributive injustices through informed policy development and inclusive decision-making requires investment in formal gender and environment assessments and data collection.

In Kosovo, gender impact assessments are mandated by law in developing new policies and laws, and gender-responsive budgeting is a legal obligation for all institutions. While implementation of these mandates is currently lacking, efforts to improve compliance on conducting gender impact assessments, including around environment and climate change, and ensuring institutions are utilizing and reporting on gender-responsive budgeting can help to close the critical information gap on gender and environment in Kosovo.

In BiH, the ESAP 2030+ emphasizes the use of gender analysis, gender assessments, gender-responsive budgeting, and gender audits to support gender integration in environmental policies, programs, and projects. As of writing, the ESAP 2030+ has not been formally adopted, meaning the implementation of strategies cannot be assessed. When adopted, leveraging the inclusion of these tools in implementation will be critical to close the information gap on gender and environment in BiH.

There is unequal representation in environmental decision-making spaces, and environmental laws and policies are gender neutral.

In both BiH and Kosovo, women are underrepresented in environmental decision-making spaces. This representational injustice is a barrier to gender inclusive environmental justice. Both BiH and Kosovo have gender quotas in place for women's representation in public institutions, 40% in BiH and 50% in Kosovo. However, both BiH and Kosovo are falling short of the set quotas and enforcement of legislation is weak. Increasing the number of women in environmental decision-making spaces is not a singular solution, but there is evidence to support that equal representation of women and men in decision-making spaces results in more inclusive, representative, and sustainable outcomes and more ambitious environmental legislation (Strumskyte et al., 2022).

Another representational injustice in both BiH and Kosovo is the lack of gender considerations in environmental laws and policies. Environmental laws and policies in both cases do not recognize the different environmental impacts, priorities, concerns, and knowledge of women and men in all their diversity, except for the ESAP 2030+ in BiH and the Energy Strategy in Kosovo. This means that programs, projects, and investments shaped by laws and policies are not fully considering and protecting the roles, rights, knowledge, labor, safety and health, and wellbeing of all people. When laws and policies do include mentions of gender, it tends to be cursory and not supported through specific objectives, actions, strategies, indicators, and investments.

Environmental and gender civil society and women activists are important leaders and actors but face barriers to environmental governance.

Environmental and gender civil society in BiH and Kosovo provide invaluable services and resources for communities, help advance rights, and aid in holding actors accountable for human rights and environmental abuses. However, funding was cited as a major challenge for the sustained work of civil society organizations, particularly those focused on women's rights. Funding from public institutions fluctuates based on political priorities, where environmental issues are ranked low, and with the rise of patriarchal norms and structures in political spaces, funding for civil society work is threatened. Additionally, civil society organizations have limited meaningful interaction with public institutions and are not consistently engaged in environmental decision-making. In BiH and Kosovo there were different views on the roles of civil society and authorities in environmental management, which affects effective coordination between entities.

In BiH, and to a lesser extent in Kosovo, the role of women activists was highlighted in environmental justice efforts. However, civil society organizations and activists in both countries/territories noted that women do tend to be underrepresented in decision-making spaces in advocacy groups and their involvement can be restricted due to social norms and roles that affect women's time and access to spaces. These barriers affect women in rural areas, as they tend to have less access to financial resources, information, and environmental groups compared to women living in urban areas. In BiH, there was significant emphasis placed on the gendered threats and barriers women activists face in environmental advocacy, including social stigma, threats, violence, emotional exhaustion, and lawsuits.

Environmental civil society organizations and institutions lack capacity on gender and environment linkages.

In both BiH and Kosovo interviews with civil society revealed that there is low capacity and knowledge base on gender and environment linkages in organizations. Limited capacity on gender is a representational injustice and barrier to environmental justice as the views, priorities, concerns, voices, and leadership of women from diverse communities may not be adequately recognized in civil society efforts. The challenges facing environmental civil society to better incorporate gender considerations in their work and strengthen women's participation within organizational structures include lack of data and analyses and limited human, technical, and financial capacity. Organizations with specific capacity, including EkoFem in BiH and EKW and Kosovo Women's Network in Kosovo, can help to raise awareness and capacity on gender and environment linkages. Additionally, efforts in BiH through the Feminist Coalition for Climate Justice can help to bridge the gap in capacity and encourage collaboration across institutions and sectors.

Gender capacity limitations among public institutions was not addressed to the same extent as it was for civil society, but there are clear gaps in capacity among environmental institutions that must also be addressed to improve gender inclusive environmental justice.

Environmental procedural rights are not consistently or adequately enforced, and processes lack gender considerations.

A significant procedural injustice and barrier to environmental justice is that procedural rights outlined in legal frameworks in both BiH and Kosovo are not enforced. This has created distrust among communities and civil society in public and justice institutions to uphold and protect human and environmental rights. Challenges include a lack of awareness on environmental rights and procedural processes, particularly for rural communities, and limited capacity among justice structures on environmental and gender issues. In Kosovo, findings indicate that EIAs do not include gendered impacts and concerns, and public participation processes are not inclusive of both women and men. However, gender considerations are missing from discussions and literature on procedural rights.

Environmental activism supports peacebuilding and unification.

Interviews in BiH and Kosovo reaffirmed the potential of environmental justice as a promising avenue for fostering unity and resilience in post-conflict societies. Examples from interviewees indicate that social cohesion was not an initial or intentional objective of environmental projects and advocacy efforts but emerged organically as environmental issues and concerns transcended social differences. The recognition of the links between environmental protection and peacebuilding at the local level indicates a growing awareness of the broader benefits of environmental justice. By continuing to support and expand such initiatives, it is possible to build more resilient and harmonious communities. Policymakers, civil society, and international organizations should invest in environmental programs that emphasize collaboration, inclusivity, and sustainability to harness the full potential of environmental justice as a catalyst for peace. Importantly, the role of women as activists, community leaders, and peacebuilders can be strengthened for more effective, inclusive, and sustainable environmental and transitional justice efforts.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following are policy and programmatic recommendations for addressing gaps and building on opportunities for leveraging socioeconomic, equality, and peacebuilding benefits from empowering women in gender-inclusive environmental justice. The recommendations strengthen gender considerations and gender-responsiveness, and are inspired by UNDP's three-pronged approach to environmental justice (UNDP, 2022):

1. Establishing enabling legal frameworks at local and international level, applying innovative and human rights-based approaches for respecting, protecting and fulfilling environmental rights.
2. Strengthening people-centered and effective institutions, ensuring they are accessible to all populations and equipped to monitor, enforce, and implement environmental laws and promote environmental rights.
3. Increasing access to justice and legal empowerment in environmental and climate change matters.

5.1.1. Establishing enabling legal frameworks

Conduct, fund, and support gender and environment analyses and data collection

Effective legal frameworks must be based on dependable, inclusive, and relevant analyses and data. Conducting a gender analysis should be a part of drafting public policies. This should include consultations and coordination with environmental and gender civil society organizations, drawing on their expertise and their influence and connections in communities. Stakeholders emphasized that gender and environment research should be supported at the local level and be women directed. Baseline information and analyses are critical to support gender-responsive environmental justice and shape more effective and inclusive investments and policies.

The lack of gender and environment data was a central barrier to gender inclusive environmental justice in both BiH and Kosovo. Gendered data gaps in environmental sectors are an issue around the world, and resources must be dedicated to close this critical gap. This can include:

- Working directly with environment and gender focused civil society to conduct analyses. For instance, the Kosovo Women's Network has conducted analyses on environmental issues and has an extensive network of civil society organizations across Kosovo to support data collection.
- Building capacity of statistical agencies to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data, including data that supports international commitments.

- ▶ Building capacity of public institutions on gender and environment linkages and gender-responsive approaches for research, data collection, policy development, and analysis.
- ▶ Ensuring analyses and data are available to civil society and public institutions.

Harmonize international and local laws and commitments on gender equality, women's empowerment, and environmental justice and strengthen implementation

While there are legal frameworks in place to promote gender equality and non-discrimination in both BiH and Kosovo, these laws and commitments must be harmonized across the environmental legal framework. For instance, the Law on Gender Equality in Kosovo must be reflected in environmental laws and strategies, including mandates on gender impact assessments and gender-responsive budgeting. Additionally, previous or ongoing processes to develop new or revised laws and policies must identify and adhere to gender mandates to incorporate gender considerations fully and from the beginning of the process. This can be supported through:

- ▶ Increasing inter-institutional cooperation as well as capacities to conduct gender mainstreaming in environmental policies.
- ▶ Ensuring women and gender focused civil society groups are included in working groups and supported as partners in research and design of environmental policies and strategies.
- ▶ Raise awareness on rights and legal frameworks among different stakeholders and disseminate knowledge on different environmental laws, functions, and benefits to the public.
- ▶ Build a foundation of collaboration between civil society and administration structures to ensure continued and consistent consultation between these important actors.

Conduct a gender assessment of environmental legislation

Stakeholders in Kosovo indicated the need for a gender assessment on environmental legislation to ensure alignment and compliance with strategies and commitments on sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda. This process could be informed by the recent initiative and report from UNDP BiH, Report on Mapping the Gender Component in Data and Legislation in the area of Climate Change, Environment and Biodiversity (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022).

Integrate gender differentiated threats, impacts, and concerns and protection of human rights in EIAs

Guidance and mandates for private sector and public institutions on conducting EIAs should be elaborated to include gender impact assessments as part of the process. One avenue to support this effort could be through the development of a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (OHCHR, 2016).

5.1.2 Strengthening people-centered and effective institutions

Build capacity of environmental civil society on gender and environment issues, gender mainstreaming, and gender-responsive approaches

There should be dedicated support for environmental civil society to build gender capacity through:

- ▶ Dedicated training and workshops on gender-responsive approaches, as well as information on gender mandates for major environmental donors.
- ▶ Networks and working groups between gender and environmental civil society to enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- ▶ Involve civil society and leverage their influence to lead capacity development on implementation of European and global environmental and gender standards.

These efforts should leverage the existing strengths in both BiH and Kosovo. For example, in BiH, Aarhus Centres can function as conveners to organize training and awareness raising activities on gender and environment for environmental decision makers, NGOs, professionals, grassroots organizations, and other stakeholders. Additionally, EkoFem in BiH and EKW and the Kosovo Women's Network in Kosovo can help to close knowledge gap on gender and environment issues.

Develop financing initiatives that support women's leadership in environmental civil society

Supporting women and gender focused civil society requires shifting and enhancing access to funding sources (Women Deliver, 2019). This can include allocating clear budget for civil society to strengthen their work related to the environment and gender, including capacity building and development of policies and action plans to improve women's engagement in organizations.

To address finance challenges faced by environmental and gender focused civil society, there should be secured funding sources and commitments that remain in place for a longer period (e.g., 10-year commitment) and across institutions and international donors' efforts. This will provide longer-term stability for civil society to address issues that require long-term and sustained commitment, including gender equality, environmental sustainability, and peacebuilding.

Clearly outline donor funding requirements and guidelines to improve access for civil society organizations and shift funding strategies to directly empower and benefit civil society and grassroots organizations

Stakeholders in BiH indicated that donor policies should be clearly outlined and adopt a more bottom-up approach to funding. There should be clear guidance developed on funding from major donors that also include information on gender requirements and mandates, as well as sources for support to meet those mandates (such as grants, women's networks, etc.). Guidance on donor policies should include specific focus on improving access to finance for women focused civil society, rural NGOs, and grassroots organizations that may face information and capacity barriers to donor funds.

Improve coordination mechanisms between civil society and institutions for gender inclusive environmental justice

Establishing connections between environmental, gender, human rights, and justice institutions with environmental and gender ministries will be critical to drive progress on gender inclusive environmental justice. This can include coordination and knowledge sharing between rural and urban civil society, as well as collaboration between civil society and ministries. For example, in Kosovo, EKW collaborates with local and central level gender mechanisms as these existing mechanisms are integral for advancing gender equality initiatives.

Support women activists through targeted legal, services, resources, and financial means

Increased effort must be made to identify the support needed for women activists in environmental justice. This can include law reform on criminal defamation on environmental activists, particularly for gendered threats and violence against women activists, as well as advocating for more comprehensive accountability mechanisms and protections against SLAPPs.

5.1.3 Increasing access to justice and legal empowerment

Build capacity of judiciary system on environmental and gender laws

Judiciary structures need specific support to improve capacity on environment and gender issues, particularly in rural areas. This could include:

- ▶ Incorporating gender and environment into education curriculum and legal training.

- Developing specific training with institutions, responsible agencies, lawyers, judges, police, and communities to implement environmental laws.
- Training paralegals and lawyers in rural areas on gender and environment laws and best practices.
- Facilitating sessions on gender equality legislation, conventions, and good legal practice with environmental legal professionals.

Build capacity of civil society, grassroots organizations, and activists to access information and justice for environmental matters

Improving access to information and justice must include capacity on navigating legal systems and resources and services to support civil society, grassroots organizations, and women activists to safely access justice. This could include:

- Establishing emergency legal funds for grassroots organizations and women activists
- Workshops on legal framework and navigating justice system
- Vetted list of services and resources for legal matters – including lawyers familiar and committed to women's rights
- Database on court decisions on environmental issues to easily identify cases and decisions with gender aspects.
- Free legal aid relevant to environmental matters, particularly for grassroots organizations and activists.
- Establish clear and accessible communication and digital infrastructure for EIA processes and findings.
- Empower civil society organizations to serve as public consultation facilitators and their role in building community capacity on public participation techniques and procedures.
- Apply additional measures to ensure quality public consultations with gender representation to avoid manipulation of these processes.

Additionally, efforts are needed to build the knowledge and skills of women in rural communities who face greater challenges in accessing information and justice resources.

Annex 1: Existing environmental justice and gender justice frameworks reviewed

Framework	Description
<p>Environmental justice conceptual frameworks</p> <p>Blue et al., 2020; Steger, 2007</p>	<p>Environmental justice conceptual frameworks tend to define it within the following three categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Distributional justice</i> refers to the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits in society among different social groups. ▶ <i>Procedural justice</i> (sometimes referred to as representation) refers to who is involved and has influence in terms of environmental decision-making. ▶ <i>Recognition justice</i> is about whose interests, values, and views are recognized and considered
<p>UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)</p> <p>UNECE, 1998</p>	<p>Leading international agreement on environmental democracy that guarantees three procedural rights on environmental issues: (1) access to environmental information, (2) public participation in environmental decision-making, and (3) access to justice in environmental matters.</p>
<p>Environmental justice: Securing our right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment</p> <p>UNDP, 2022</p>	<p>UNDP understands the connection between environmental crisis and challenges to human rights and rule of law, and how these elements should be key components to address the crisis through promotion of environmental justice. UNDP concepts and approaches to environmental justice are explained as three pronged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establishing enabling legal frameworks ▶ Strengthening people-centered and effective institutions ▶ Increasing access to justice and legal empowerment in environmental climate change matters.
<p>Harvard Analytical Framework, Moser Conceptual Framework for gender analysis and planning, and Levy conceptual framework</p> <p>Summarized together by EIGE, 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Harvard Analytical Framework</i>: Used to identify and understand differences between men and women in their participation in the economy. The framework describes who does what activity, who has access to and control of resources, and the influences of gender roles. ▶ <i>Moser Conceptual Framework</i>: Based on the concepts of gender roles and needs in productive, reproductive, and community spheres. ▶ <i>Levy Conceptual Framework</i>: Addresses gender mainstreaming in institutions for development planning.
<p>Legal frameworks for civic space</p> <p>UNDP, 2021</p>	<p>Provides an overview of human rights standards applicable to civic space. The framework focuses on freedoms of expression, assembly, and association based on international human rights standards, and includes guidance on legislation to align with these standards. It also outlines main laws and regulations that affect civil society in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CSO life cycle ▶ CSO fiscal regulation ▶ State-society relations ▶ Public participation

<p>Social Relations Approach framework for gender analysis</p> <p>ITC-ILO, n.d; Equilo, n.d.</p>	<p>Method for analyzing existing gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities, and power and designing policies and programs that enable women to be agents of their own development. Underpinned by power relations and how gender and social inequality is reproduced through a range of institutions – including the state, market, community, and family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Rules - how things get done ▶ Activities - what is done ▶ Resources - what is used and produced ▶ People - who is in, who is out, who does what ▶ Power – who decides and whose interests are served ▶ Gender policies – classified into gender blind, neutral, -sensitive, or -positive
<p>Feminist climate justice: A framework for action</p> <p>UN Women (Turquet et al., 2023)</p>	<p>Provides conceptual clarity on the barriers to feminist climate justice and how public action can drive progress at all levels and across sectors. The four dimensions of the framework are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Recognition</i> and respect of diverse identities, experiences, and knowledge ▶ <i>Redistribution</i> of resources ▶ <i>Representation</i> and meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups in climate decision-making ▶ <i>Reparations</i> for past and future harm <p>The framework also includes two cross-cutting principles: <i>Interdependence</i> recognizes the impact of relationships with one another, with nature, and with global mechanisms on climate justice. <i>Intersectionality</i> recognizes that social inequalities and power dynamics are complex and multifaceted and shape experiences of penalties and privilege.</p>
<p>Mapping gender component in data and legislation in the area of climate change, environment, and biodiversity</p> <p>UNDP (Eskić-Pihljak and Knežević, 2022)</p>	<p>Provides overview and information on gender inclusion in statistical data and legal documents related to climate change, environmental issues, and biodiversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The mapping framework is based on the vision and global goals of the Gender and Climate Coalition and includes information on land tenure; access to food, energy, and water and sanitation; climate change and health; energy consumption; environmental decision making; labor markets; education; and legal acts in the country.</p>

Annex 2: Information on stakeholder interviews and validation workshops

Participants in interviews and validation workshops

Bosnia and Herzegovina	
Interviews	Validation workshop
Conducted in February and March 2024 11 interviews with 14 people (12 women, 2 men) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 3 interviews with public institutions ▶ 4 interviews with civil society and grassroots organizations ▶ 3 interviews with women activists ▶ 1 interview with a feminist initiative 	17 May 2024 in Zenica at Eko Forum Zenica NGO 18 people (16 women, 2 men) – hybrid event with participants joining online and in-person <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ # from civil society ▶ # activists ▶ # media ▶ 1 from public institutions ▶ 1 from private sector
Kosovo	
Interviews	Validation workshop
Conducted in February and March 2024 9 interviews with 14 people (7 women, 7 men) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 2 interviews with public institutions ▶ 3 interviews with civil society ▶ 2 interviews with activists and advocacy organizations ▶ 1 interview with academia ▶ 1 interview with media 	21 May 2024 in Prishtina at the Hotel Sirius 19 people (15 women, 4 men) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 13 from civil society (from 10 groups) ▶ 2 activists ▶ 2 institutions ▶ 1 from academia ▶ 1 from international organization

Questions for stakeholder interviews

Interviewers identified several of the questions from the following table, including more specific questions for stakeholder groups, based on the interviewee. These questions were used as guides for the in-depth interviews.

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ In what ways does your organization engage in advocacy efforts to promote environmental justice/gender equality, social inclusion, and women's empowerment? What are the main issues and priorities for achieving these goals? ▶ Can you share any successes or challenges your organization has faced in influencing environmental justice/gender and social inclusion at different decision-making levels?
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Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What does the term environmental justice mean to you? ➤ What do you feel are the most pressing issues regarding the position of women and girls in your communities? ➤ What do you feel are the most pressing issues facing vulnerable groups in your community (e.g., ethnic and religious communities, youths, IDPs, etc.)?
Distributional justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How do women and men in your community use and prioritize natural resources? Have you observed any changes to resource access in recent years? ➤ What barriers or challenges do women and men face in accessing environmental resources? ➤ In what ways have environmental concerns impacted women and men differently in your community, especially in relation to livelihoods, health, and well-being?
Procedural justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Can you describe the roles that women and men play in environmental decision-making at the community, advocacy, or institutional levels? ➤ Are there existing conflicts or competitions over natural resources in your community, and who is involved in mitigating these conflicts? ➤ How would you assess the public trust and confidence in legal entities, such as police, courts, and authorities, to address environmental and human rights concerns? ➤ Do you feel that there are sufficient public mechanisms to raise environmental/human rights concerns and claim rights to public authorities? ➤ Do you feel as though public and private sector activities are held accountable to the protection of the environment and the rights and needs of the communities?
Recognition justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How is the participation of women in decision-making and advocacy regarded in your society? ➤ Are there specific concerns or challenges related to security and safety in participating in environmental discussions and activism? Have these concerns affected how women engage in these spaces? ➤ What is the level of public awareness regarding environmental matters, rights, and environmental justice movements in your community? ➤ Do you feel as though legal frameworks, institutions, and organizations reflect the rights, needs, and priorities of women and other marginalized groups?
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What funds, resources, or services are available to marginalized groups for promoting their advocacy and protecting their rights and safety? ➤ What is needed to support women's participation and leadership in environmental justice advocacy? ➤ How can authorities, private sector, and external organizations, including NGOs, better align their efforts with the needs and aspirations of your community?
Environmental civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are there specific policies, strategies, capacity, resources, etc. in the organization that promote women's empowerment in environmental advocacy work? ➤ Are there challenges to integrating gender and social considerations in the organization's work? ➤ Are there impacts or connections that you have observed between environmental advocacy work and peace outcomes? ➤ Do you feel like environmental NGOs are effectively engaged in activities? Do legal mechanisms support your involvement?

Women or gender focused civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Does your organization work on issues related to women's engagement in environmental justice and activism? ➤ What support or challenges do women encounter when actively participating in environmental protection initiatives, and how can these obstacles be addressed to further enhance women's contributions to peace efforts? ➤ How can authorities and environmental protection NGOs better involve and support women in decision-making processes related to environmental policies and conservation programs? ➤ Are there specific regions or projects where you've observed a positive impact on peaceful coexistence through community-led conservation efforts? ➤ Do you feel that current legal frameworks effectively protect the rights of women and advocacy efforts?
Grassroots organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What challenges does your grassroots organization face in implementing environmental justice projects at the community level, and how do you overcome these challenges? ➤ Does your organization work on gender issues within environmental concerns? ➤ In what ways does your organization ensure inclusivity and diversity in its membership and leadership? ➤ Is women's involvement important for grassroots organizing and environmental activism? ➤ Have you observed connections between environmental advocacy and issues with peacebuilding in local communities? ➤ Do you feel as though grassroots organizations are supported and effectively engaged in environmental activities and decision-making?
Women activists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What values and principles guide your activism or advocacy efforts, particularly concerning gender, social justice, and environmental sustainability? ➤ What challenges have you faced as an environmental activist or advocate, and how do you navigate and overcome these challenges? ➤ How do you see the connection between your environmental advocacy work and gender equality or women's empowerment efforts? ➤ Do you think that environmental justice efforts can be a pathway for peacebuilding in communities? In what ways?
Public institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are there specific strategies or policies that guide your work on environmental justice? ➤ Are there strategies and policies that guide your work on gender and social inclusion aspects? ➤ How does your institution ensure accountability in addressing environmental harm and human rights abuses? ➤ In what ways does the authority support or collaborate with environmental protection NGOs? ➤ How does your institution engage with women and men in local communities in decision-making process related to environmental issues? ➤ From your perspective, how does the involvement of women and men in local communities in conservation align with broader peacebuilding goals?

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