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European Union Support to Agriculture Competitiveness and Rural Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina: EU4AGRI

Final Report

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List of Abbreviations

AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
BAM	Bosnian Convertible Mark
BIH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BD	Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CzDA	Czech Development Agency
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FARMA	Fostering Agricultural Markets Activity
FBIH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIP	Grant Investment Package
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFAD	United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RS	Republika Srpska
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SEE	Southeast Europe
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TA	Technical Assistance
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Action details

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Union Support to Agriculture Competitiveness and Rural Development in BIH (EU4AGRI) was designed as an integrated intervention, aiming to modernize the agri-food sector and foster rural economy in line with the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021). Initially planned as a four-year project (2020–2024), the Action was extended until June 30, 2025, with a total value of EUR 20,301,119.80. EUR 20 million was financed by the European Union (EU) and EUR 301,119.81 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in BIH and Czech Development Agency (CzDA). The EU4AGRI was jointly implemented by UNDP and CzDA.

This Final Report covers the overall implementation period for the EU4AGRI. The Executive Summary outlines key achievements, milestones, and challenges faced during the EU4AGRI implementation. It also reflects the Action's strategic contributions to strengthening the competitiveness, resilience, and sustainability of the agriculture and rural development sectors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly through the European Union accession process and its requirements. Building on evidence and results achieved, the Report highlights how EU4AGRI interventions supported structural improvements towards the EU accession, advanced green and digital practices, and fostered inclusive economic opportunities across rural communities.

The Action has brought meaningful improvements to the agriculture and rural development sector in BiH, supporting the country's EU approximation efforts and paving the way for future investments. Verified results show that it improved the quality of life in rural areas, particularly for vulnerable groups such as non-commercial farmers, women, and youth. Agri-food and rural tourism operators strengthened innovative approaches, competitiveness, and resilience, while institutional capacities, policies, and information systems were notably upgraded, laying a solid foundation for continued development. The Action also guided the shift toward more circular and environmentally responsible value chains. These achievements were enabled by innovative, participatory, and transparent practices. At the same time, external factors, such as limited political will, varying institutional absorption capacities, and insufficient long-term motivation, affected project dynamics and raised concerns about sustaining progress after the Action concludes.

The Action began implementation in March 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which, together with political instability, global economic shocks, and low beneficiary absorption capacity, made the early implementation challenging and caused delays in the implementation of Grant Investment Package measures. These challenges required multiple relaunches of public calls and led to the approval of a 12-month no-cost extension until 28 February 2025 (Addendum No. 1, signed on 29 January 2024). Subsequent changes to VAT exemption procedures introduced in April 2024 further affected implementation, resulting in an additional four-month no-cost extension until 30 June 2025 (Addendum No. 2, signed on 28 August 2025)[1]. Therefore, the EU4AGRI Project Team made early operational adjustments and changed the planned outreach approach to enable project beneficiaries immediate and impactful access to EU funding with launching of the first public call in May 2020, less than 2 months after the project commencement.

The EU4AGRI Action successfully achieved both its overall and specific objectives. The final project evaluation rated the Action's overall performance as high[2]. Its results are wide-ranging and primarily benefit the key target groups, agri-food and non-agri-food producers, as well as institutional partners, while also generating notable sector-wide impact. All targets set in the Logical Framework were met, alongside a number of unintended but positive outcomes. Overall, the Action contributed to the adoption of more efficient and sustainable practices, thereby adding long-term value to the agricultural sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[1] It should be noted that the Action submitted the request for a no-cost extension in a timely manner, following prior discussions with EUD representatives. However, due to major organizational changes and the transition to the new ITC system, EUD experienced delays in processing and signing Addendum II, resulting in the signature date occurring after the official closure date of EU4AGRI.

[2] Final Project Evaluation Report by independent evaluator

The key results achieved by the Action:

Result 1 – Higher level of production of safe and quality food based on introduced innovation practice while preserving the natural resources and the countryside are sustained

- Under this Result, the Action provided financial assistance to agri-food and rural tourism operators through 24 public calls launched in the period from May 2020 until December 2023. Of these, five were jointly published with EU4AGRI-Recovery (four) and EU4BusinessRecovery (one).
- As a result, a total of EUR 14.76 million in financial assistance from the EU was distributed across 211 projects. This support was further enhanced by EUR 8.26 million in co-financing from beneficiaries, bringing the total investment to EUR 23.02 million.
- In total, 2,083 stakeholders benefited from the assistance, including 2,041 agri-food operators, of which 1,626 were small farm holdings (individual farmers). In addition to agri-food operators the support was provided to 28 local governments, 6 science and research institutions/universities and 8 advisory service providers.
- 88 agri-food operators obtained certifications in food safety, quality control, or designation of origin, implemented through 17 projects.
- Through the support measure on preparation of project proposals and business plans for agri-food operators 108 individuals were trained in business planning and project proposal writing, following the EU methodology, to enhance their technical knowledge and skills for preparing high-quality business plans and applications when seeking access to EU funds. Additionally, 49 aspiring entrepreneurs, including 41 individual farmers and 8 local NGOs or small agri-food businesses, received technical assistance in transforming their business ideas into full business plans, focusing on the diversification of economic activities on farms and in rural areas. This support enabled them to access necessary funding and start their businesses.
- The implementation of the Action resulted in creation of 307 new jobs out of which 144 for women and 188 for youth.
- The supported agri-food operators reported 54% increase in their revenues as a result of the investments made through the Action.

Result 2 – Policy actions are implemented in EU aligned manner based on sector services and systems improved.

- Technical support, provided primarily to the institutional partners but also other stakeholders in the agri-food/rural sector to strengthen their capacities and address key requirements for EU accession, as identified in the EU Progress Report on BiH. Various intervention modalities included:
    - Developing strategies and policy documents
    - Learning by doing approach
    - Study trips, workshops and trainings
    - Numerous assessments including organizational capacity evaluation
    - Procurement of equipment
    - Digitalization of grants' management process

- Institutional capacities for coordinated policy delivery were significantly strengthened through a learning-by-doing approach, applied consistently during the design, evaluation, monitoring and publication of public calls throughout the Action's implementation. This method enhanced the skills and competencies of 45 representatives from eight institutional partners, particularly in designing support measures, selecting beneficiaries, and managing implementation processes effectively.
- The Grants' Management Software was fully developed, made operational, and utilized by several ministries, supporting more efficient and transparent grants' management processes.
- A comprehensive functional analysis of institutional roles, structures, and capacities, covering the entity ministries of agriculture and the Department of Agriculture in Brčko District, resulted in tailored technical assistance for each of them. This support led to enhanced operational effectiveness and established a solid foundation for continued institutional development.
- In parallel, the Action contributed to strengthened public advisory services, which together with support for non-state advisory services through GIP, contributed to wider availability and higher quality of services provided. Upgrading the agriculture information systems was supported, having in mind their importance for

evidence-based policy design, monitoring and evaluation. To that end, following outcomes have been successfully achieved:
    - Development of a Wine register based on best EU practices, managed by relevant entity ministries.
    - Creation of a decision support system for the sustainable management of pests and diseases, RIMpro.
    - Improvement of the weather prognosis in agriculture, thus enabling better, more efficient and sustainable production control (water usage, pest control, soil protection etc.). The weather stations installed earlier in the project have been integrated into one system. The data was integrated, set up, and optimized to provide the most accurate predictions for advisory services to farmers.
    - On-line platform for advisory work in Federation BiH and promotional WEB site were successfully launched and operational - https://savjetodavnafbih.ba/
- Finally, under Result 2 the Action offered support for policy and regulatory improvements in line with priorities for approximation with the Union acquis:
    - The Strategic Plan for Rural Development (SPRD) 2023-2027 – Framework Document
    - Law on the Organization of the Wine Market in BiH along with 11 accompanying rulebooks
    - The Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the FBiH 2021-2027
    - Mid-term Strategies for Agricultural Extension Service 2023 – 2030 for the FBiH and RS

Despite the positive impact of the project to the agri-food sector in BiH, it faced also numerous challenges that made the implementation of such structural and systemic intervention difficult. Key challenges are:

- Complex institutional framework and limited coordination among stakeholders, with insufficient political will and institutional capacity.
- Agricultural constraints, including fragmented land use, land-ownership issues, land degradation, small and inefficient farms, outdated technology, ageing producers, limited access to finance, and poor market access.
- Contradiction between the Action's goal of sector modernization and the job creation indicator, as automation improves efficiency but reduces workforce needs.
- Lack of harmonized legislation, particularly for construction permits and licenses, causing delays for beneficiaries and the Action within the GIP timeframe.
- Slow public procurement processes leading to delays.
- Time constraints, particularly affecting seasonal operations of agri-food and non-agri-food operators.
- Limited understanding of public call requirements among applicants and prior donation expectations, resulting in frustration, especially in early calls for primary agriculture and agritourism.
- Low reporting skills among beneficiaries, combined with reluctance to prepare required documentation, created a significant administrative workload for the Action team to manage.
- Change in VAT refunding modality during the last year of implementation — from UNDP's original process to retroactive VAT exemption requested by the Indirect Tax Authority — created challenges for both the Action and its beneficiaries.

While the challenges affected the implementation, theEU4AGRI's adaptive, participatory, consultative, and collaborative approach ensured the timely engagement of all relevant stakeholders, thereby maximizing the impact of key decisions[3]. By applying inter- and intra-organisational methodologies, the Action successfully integrated lessons learned into existing strategies, systems, and processes, influencing not only organizational and institutional development but also contributing to broader sectoral advancement.

Today, sectoral needs are clearer than when the Action began in 2020, and lessons learned from 2020 - 2025 have been captured and transferred to institutional partners. Institutional capacities, legal frameworks, strategic mechanisms, and financial conditions are now significantly stronger than in 2020, better positioning the sector to address future challenges and sustain key EU4AGRI results. Ultimately, the durability of the Action's achievements will depend on the commitment and ownership of BiH institutions and their willingness to build on this foundation.

[3] Final Project Evaluation Report

CONTEXT OF THE ACTION

WIDER COUNTRY CONTEXT

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) is an upper middle-income country with 3.5 million population, which is gradually declining and aging. BIH has a high level of **human development**[4], but is still below the average for the Europe and Central Asia region. Inequality and poverty remain a concern, particularly in rural areas and among minorities[5].

The COVID-19[6] outbreak in Europe triggered an economic crisis in BIH as well, which was further amplified by the virus spread in the country and consequent government restrictions. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a marked drop in the economic activity. While between 2015-2019, a relatively favourable external environment helped to achieve average **economic growth** of 3.5%, economic output dropped by 3.2% in 2020. Per capita GDP stood at some 33% of the EU-27 average in 2020, only slightly higher than in previous years. Slower growth in the euro zone, the largest BiH export market, and regional trade disputes contributed to a fall in exports, as did a slump in industrial production, resulting in part from temporary output disruptions at large exporting firms. Delayed formation of the government along with the political instability additionally slowed down policy-making and impaired confidence in the economy. Economic activity was resilient in 2024 but weakened in early 2025. Real GDP growth decelerated from 4.1% in 2023 to 2.6% in 2024. This was largely driven by weaker exports, while import growth held up, reflecting stronger domestic demand. In the first half of 2025, output growth slowed down to about 1.7%, driven mainly by weakening domestic demand. The process of catching up with EU living standards has remained slow, with GDP per capita in purchasing power standards at 35% of the EU average in 2024, one percentage point (pp) lower than in 2023 and only 3 pps higher than in 2019. A weak export performance during the reporting period led to a marked deterioration of the current account deficit. Deficit increased from 2.2% of GDP in 2023 to 3.9% in 2024, mainly due to a reduction in goods exports (which fell by 1.5% of GDP) and an increase in imports (which rose by 0.9 % of GDP), leading to an increase in the goods trade deficit from 19.7% of GDP in 2023 to 21.3% in 2024. The weak export performance was broad-based, but in particular affected mineral products, base metals and footwear, while exports of military materials and transport vehicles performed significantly better.[7]

The overall **business environment** is weak[8], while BIH is also among the least competitive economies in the Southeast Europe (SEE)[9]. The economy is marked by high carbon and energy intensity, with energy sector, agriculture, industrial processes and waste being the largest sources of CO_2 emission. Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) saw an increase in 2019, but they remained low at 2.2% of GDP. FDIs declined in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however 2021 saw a positive increase of FDI by 22.1%. In period 2022 – 2024 this positive trend continued[10].

In 2020, the EU remained BiH's main trading partner, accounting for 65% of the country's total **trade** in goods, although with a 10.2% decrease due to the pandemic.[11] Consumer price **inflation** turned negative in 2020, due to low import prices and low domestic price pressures, however in line with global inflation trends, the inflation in 2021 has been registered towards nearly 2%, in 2022 nearly 14%, in 2023 nearly 6.1% and in 2024 2.2% respectively.[12] Furthermore, the increase in real purchasing power shows significantly bigger price pressure,

[4] Measuring average levels of income, health and education, the Human Development Index of BIH was at 0.804 in 2023, ranking it 74th among the countries with a high level of human development. Human Development Indices and Indicators, 2025 Statistical Update, UNDP.

[5] According to the latest available official data from 2015, the poverty is at 17% based on earnings below 60% of median national income. Household Budget Survey, 2015, BIH Agency of Statistics. The World Bank is predicting that the poverty in BIH is expected to rise from estimated 11.8% in 2019 to 12.9 to 14.6 % in 2020.

[6] COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the virus strain "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus" (SARS-CoV-2). In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic and a public health emergency of international concern. Governments in BIH also declared a state of emergency in March 2020. Imposed restrictions slowed the economy down, forcing many small and mid-size businesses and much of the hospitality, retail, and in-person service sector to close their business operations.

[7] The European Commission Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report

[8] The World Bank Doing Business Report for 2020 ranks BIH as 90th out of 190 countries globally.

[9] The Competitive Industrial Performance Index by the UN Industrial Development Organization ranks BIH 80th on the global scale of industrial competitiveness (latest available data for 2018), https://stat.unido.org/country/BIH.pdfhttps://stat.unido.org/country/BIH.pdf.

[10] Central Bank of BiH, https://cbbh.ba/press/ShowNews/1597?lang=en, https://www.cbbh.ba/Content/Archive/36

[11] COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT BiH 2021 Report.

[12] https://www.worlddata.info/europe/bosnia-and-herzegovina/inflation-rates.php

especially due to the severe increase in energy costs, thus spilling over the negative effects to other consumer goods as well.

The majority of companies in BiH (some 70%) have experienced a decline in operations and a decreased turnover, following COVID-19 related containment measures introduced since spring 2020. The services and tourism sectors felt the impact of the crisis significantly more than the rest of the economy. Furthermore, COVID-19 raised concerns on the resilience of the agri-food sector in a situation of supply chain disruptions, limitations on movement and trade restrictions. **SMEs** have experienced a more severe revenue decline compared to larger companies. In addition, SMEs are more prone to complete shutdowns, due to a smaller number of workers capable of ensuring the continuity of operations in health crisis. They are also more exposed to supply chain disruptions and reliance on specific industry segments. However, in 2021, most of the industry recovered, showing solid growth that was mostly fuelled by the global near-shoring trends (moving the production from Asia to Europe) and sharp increase in prices due to the disruption of global supply chains. Building on the post-pandemic rebound, recent assessments by the World Bank indicate that economic growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina has moderated in 2024–2025, reflecting weaker external demand, persistent structural constraints, and subdued investment dynamics. While overall economic activity has remained stable, growth has been increasingly driven by domestic consumption rather than productivity gains or export expansion[13]. At the same time, the European Commission's 2024 Bosnia and Herzegovina Report highlights that limited progress in structural reforms, particularly in the areas of governance, rule of law, and business environment, continues to constrain the country's long-term growth potential. As a result, the post-COVID recovery phase is gradually transitioning into a period of slower, more fragile growth, underscoring the need for targeted reforms and investment to sustain resilience, especially among SMEs and key productive sectors[14].

The pandemic also interrupted the ongoing **fiscal consolidation** that placed the public debt trajectory on a declining trend. Public debt declined from 42.4 percent of GDP in 2016 to 32.8 percent of GDP at the end of 2019, yet it increased to 37 percent of GDP at the end of 2020, of which roughly four-fifths represents external public debt.[15] From 2020 to 2023 the public debt declined reaching 25 percent of GDP in 2023 and 24% in end of third quarter of 2024[16].

Unemployment, already high, increased because of COVID-19. The unemployment rate fell from 18.4% in 2018 to 15.7% in 2019 and 15.9% in 2020, partly reflecting the country's aging and shrinking workforce. The positive trends in shrinking unemployment rate were reversed in 2021 (17,4%), mainly due to difficult business environment. In 2022 the unemployment rate was 15.4% and in 2023 fell to 13.2% and in 2024 fell to 12.6%[17]. The immediate effects of COVID-19 on the labour market have remained limited, due to limited governmental support measures. In the first half of 2021, the number of registered employed was some 0.8% lower than a year before, while the number of unemployed was 1.8% lower. This resulted in a further decline in the labour force by about 1.2%, or 14 000 persons.[18] The labour market continues to be characterized by low employment rates and high inactivity, particularly among women[19]. The country also has a relatively low level of wages as a reflection of its overall weak competitive position. The positive outcome might bring the newly adopted Law on minimal wages in FBIH, which increased the minimum wage to BAM 543.00 or almost 34% when compared to the old provisions. More recent labour market statistics from the Labour Force Survey conducted by the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BHAS) show that the unemployment rate continued to decline after 2023. In 2024, the unemployment rate stood at 12.6%, while the employment rate was 42.9%, indicating an overall improvement in

[13] https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/cdefa361a845650bcadfc40c67e487a3-0080012025/original/WB28-FC-LOCAL-01-1-BIH.pdf?utm

[14] www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%20Report%202024.pdf?utm

[15] Madzarevic-Sujster,Sanja; Record,Richard James Lowden.
Greening the Recovery (English). Western Balkans Regular Economic Report,no. 20 Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.
http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/900381634670558017/Greening-the-Recovery

[16] Ministry of Finance and Treasury of BiH, Quarterly Overview of Public Debt of BiH, Third quarter of 2024,
https://mft.gov.ba/Content/OpenAttachment?id=0e096fe4-ce55-463b-9304-9515b893ccac&lang=en

[17] Agency for Statistics of BiH https://bhas.gov.ba/Calendar/Category?id=13&page=4&statGroup=13&tabId=0

[18] COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT BiH 2021 Report.

[19] http://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Bilteni/2019/LAB_00_2019_TB_0_BS.pdf.

labour market outcomes compared to the immediate post-pandemic period[20]. The 2025 quarterly data suggest that by the third quarter of 2025, unemployment had fallen further, reaching approximately 11.2%, the lowest level recorded in recent years, alongside continued increases in employment. These trends reflect a gradual strengthening of labour market dynamics, although overall participation and inactivity levels remain challenges for the Bosnian economy[21].

BIH is experiencing negative **migration trends**, where studies point to the fact that the emigration has reduced the country's population by around 400,000 persons (13%) since 2011. As emigration has been more prevalent among younger generations, this decrease has had more of an impact on the working-age population. Almost 60% of this emigration has involved medium level vocational education and training (VET) graduates, which is in line with their majority share of the domestic labour market. The second place belongs to the low-educated individuals, while the lowest percentage (5%) is among those with a higher education degree.[22] In addition, the country has been also struggling with increased numbers of migrants and asylum seekers since 2017. More recent data confirm that negative migration trends in Bosnia and Herzegovina have persisted beyond the period covered by the 2021 ETF study. Net migration figures for 2024 show a continued outward movement of people, with a net loss of approximately 4,497 persons, reflecting an increase in emigration relative to immigration compared with the previous year. This ongoing negative migration balance contributes to demographic decline and further impacts the size of the working-age population[23]. At the same time, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains part of major migration and transit routes in Europe, with substantial numbers of migrants and asylum seekers passing through or registering in the country. Reports from displacement tracking and mobility monitoring indicate that while arrivals have fluctuated, significant flows have continued into 2025, underscoring both the country's role as a transit point and the complexity of migration dynamics in the Western Balkans[24].

Natural and man-made hazards continue to represent a significant risk with over 20% of the country's territory prone to flooding. Land and ecosystems degradation typical for a transitioning country remain to threaten sustainability of the country's development efforts. High energy inefficiency contributes to high air pollution in some of the cities. Capacities to effectively address hazards and crisis need to be further strengthened, as confirmed by the unfolding COVID-19 crisis. On top of the two-year COVID-19 disruptions, the global uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine further precipitated the instability in terms of energy costs, disruption of global supply chains, and overall economic downturn.

The complexity of **governance structure**, insufficient efficiency of governments' institutions, complex coordination and political consensus undermine public policies and slow reforms in BIH. According to the Fragile States Index 2024, BIH features as "elevated warning", being ranked 77th among 179 countries[25]. Corruption continues to plague the country, while many challenges persist in relation to the rule of law and human rights. The process of reforming the public administration lacks the necessary political support to modernise administrations and provide better services to citizens and the private sector. The 2019-2022 Joint Socio-Economic Reforms have been adopted, while the governments collaborate to design the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Framework in BIH, which offers a unique opportunity for a common long-term sustainable development agenda.

In order to mitigate the negative effects of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, the authorities supported the health sector, enterprises and households, by financing medical equipment, providing loan guarantees and co-financing social security contributions and wages. Furthermore, the country's two banking agencies have adopted and extended loan repayment moratoria for restructuring credit arrangements for individuals and legal entities that were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, allocated funds (about 2.5% of GDP for financial assistance and another 0.5% of GDP for loan guarantees) and the efficiency of spending have been relatively low. Coordination of the authorities as well as consultations with the social partners in the context of COVID-19 were limited.

20 LAB_00_2024_Y1_1_BS.pdf
21 LAB_00_2025_Q3_1_BS.pdf
22 https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-06/migration_bosnia_and_herzegovina.pdf
23 https://statbase.org/data/bih-net-migration/?utm
24 https://www.collectiveaidngo.org/blog/2025/2/21/bosnia-and-herzegovina-saw-10000-fewer-people-on-the-move-in-2024-what-changed?utm
25 https://countryeconomy.com/government/fragile-states-index/bosnia-herzegovina?utm

Furthermore, the implementation of adopted measures has been inadequate, in particular in view of protecting the most vulnerable parts of the population.

EU accession remains an overarching priority for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country has been a potential EU candidate since 2003, signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2008 (in force since 2015), and submitted its formal EU membership application in 2016. Key milestones include the European Commission's Opinion on BiH's application in 2019 and the adoption of the coordination system for European integration.

Following limited progress on reforms, BiH was granted EU candidate status in December 2022. In March 2024, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations, marking a significant step forward in the EU integration process.

SECTOR-SPECIFIC CONTEXT

Having in mind its contribution to gross value added, employment and overall socio-economic development, **agriculture** is one of the most important economic sectors in the country. The agriculture's share of gross value added was at 5.9% in 2020[26] (compared to 1.1% in EU-28[27]) and decreased in next two years reaching 4.4% in 2023. Employment in the sector was at 18% of total employment in 2019, decreasing to 12% in 2020 and increasing during next two years up to 14% in 2021 and 17% in 2022. However, it slightly increased in 2023 to 18%[28]. Out of some 185,000 people employed in agriculture and processing in 2024, over 60% are men[29].

BIH has some 2.2 million hectares of agricultural land of which 1.6 million hectares are **arable**. There are over 125,000 registered farms in the country, with the average farm size of approximately 2.6 hectares[30]. In addition to the fragmentation-of-land-use pattern, topographic characteristics, land-ownership challenges and the quality of soil limit agricultural production. Domestically, the sectors with the best available and productive natural resources are fruits and vegetables, livestock, and poultry. The largest crop is corn, followed by wheat and barley. The agricultural sector's share of GDP is approximately 6 percent, while it accounts for approximately 9,4 percent of total employment[31]. The majority of farms are small and inefficient, and the country remains a net food importer.[32]

While the **climate** in BIH is generally adequate, increased climate variabilities have negative impact on agricultural production, especially fruits and vegetables but also on livestock. Climate change is expected to raise temperatures, reduce rainfall, and cause more frequent droughts, floods and heat waves, requiring a stronger focus on climate-smart agriculture practices and climate change adaptation approaches and measures.

BIH remains a **net food importer**. In 2020, agri-food imports totalled EUR 1.6 billion, while exports were valued at EUR 460 million. Agricultural products only represent approximately 8 percent of exports, but account for 18 percent of total imports. The trade deficit in agricultural products and foodstuffs is still very high (some EUR 800 million); while these products only represent 9% of exports, they account for 17% of total imports. Roughly 35% of BIH agricultural exports go to the EU, whilst the EU accounts for 52% of BIH agricultural imports[33]. In 2020, almost EUR 830 million of agri-food goods were imported from the EU into the country, while exports of agri-food products amount to EUR 171 million.[34] Agri-food exports are dominated by primary or largely unprocessed produce with

[26] Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS?locations=BA
[27] Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Performance_of_the_agricultural_sector, accessed on 6.7.2020.
[28] Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=BA
[29] Source: https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopstenja/2025/LAB_02_2025_02_1_BS.pdf
[30] Data by the competent entity ministries and BD Department.
[31] In 2020, there was a brake in LFS data series due to change in sample size and frequency of the survey. Prior to 2020, the LFS was conducted only once a year, while now it is conducted constantly (published quarterly) on a much bigger sample. This was the main cause to a sharp drop in agriculture share in total employment from 18% in 2019 to 12% in 2020, and 7.4% in 2021.
Sources: LAB_00_2019_TB_0_BS.pdf (bhas.gov.ba); LAB_15_2020.xls (live.com); LAB_15.xls (live.com)
[32] https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/bosnia-and-herzegovina-agriculture
[33] Analytical Report accompanying the Commission's Opinion on BIH's application for membership of the EU, Commission Staff Working Document, 2019.
[34] https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/agrifood-bosnia-herzegovina_en.pdf

lower unit values. These factors indicate that BIH has scope to increase competitiveness on local markets to substitute import and on EU agri-food markets, both in general and relative to other non-agricultural goods and services[35]. Recent trade data show that BiH continues to be a net agri-food importer. In 2024, the value of EU agri-food exports to BiH reached approximately EUR 1.36 billion, while EU agri-food imports from BiH were about EUR 259 million, indicating a persistent trade deficit and a substantial reliance on European markets for food supplies. According to World Bank data, food exports accounted for just over 7 % of total merchandise exports in 2024, underscoring the limited share of agricultural products in the country's overall export structure[36].

Agricultural productivity, value added, and competitiveness generally remain low. **Constraints on growth** include a high share of small and inefficient farms, inadequate or outdated technology and skills, the unfavourable age structure of producers, limited access to finance and integration into European value chains, and poor market access. Sectoral performance is also undermined by the lack of downstream trade and market infrastructure, as well as weak structural linkages and poor integration of value chains: producers, processors, and trade.

Despite rural outmigration, BIH remains one of the most rural countries in Europe (per OECD categorization), with around 60% of its population living in **rural areas** (defined as villages and scarcely populated municipalities)[37]. BIH rural areas are generally characterized by fewer job opportunities, weak physical infrastructure and public services, as well as limited access to markets, business development and financial services and other social services. Unemployment rates in rural areas are considerable and can be 40% higher than in the main urban centres. Wages are also 25% lower, while the estimated GDP per capita is less than half the level reported in urban environments. 19% or the rural population lives in poverty (compared to poverty rates of 9% in urban areas)[38]. Diversification of economic activities in rural areas in BIH could contribute to further job creation outside of the agriculture and provide for income generation from multiple sources. Considering the rich natural, cultural and historical heritage in BIH, the diversity of gastronomic offering as well as distinct biodiversity, rural tourism is one of the activities through which this potential could be better exploited. While the tourism sector in BIH is experiencing tremendous negative impact of COVID-19 (more than 80% in lost revenues is reported across the sector), the rural tourism in certain areas (e.g. Trebinje, Jajce, Una river valley) has experienced positive impulse, mostly thanks to the domestic demand.

As indicated in the Analytical Report accompanying the Commission's Opinion on BIH's application for membership of the EU, the country's **agricultural policy** is based on the 2008 state-level Law on agriculture, food and rural development, entity and Brčko District (BD) laws in this area, as well as strategic documents at different levels of government. While the implementation of the overall state law on agriculture still needs to be ensured, the country needs to adopt other state laws (e.g. on wine and on organic production), as well as to ensure that its legislation is harmonised across the country and aligned with the EU *acquis*. The alignment of BIH's food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary regulations with the Union acquis remains highly relevant to ensure the country's progress and enable agri-food businesses to fully benefit from the access to the EU market.

To guide the sector development BIH has in place the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018–2021) – Framework Document, which is based on the entity strategic frameworks[39]. However, more efforts are necessary to strengthen **institutional and administrative capacities**, as well as to coordinate and harmonize policies and implementation across the governments agencies that are responsible for policy delivery (entities, cantons and

[35] COMEXT, Agricultural trade data following FAO definition (including Chapter 3, fishery products). Over the past five years, BIH's agricultural trade deficit with the EU-28 has increased, while the BIH's total trade deficit with the EU declined.
[36] https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/agrifood-bosnia-herzegovina_en.pdf?utm
[37] Rural Development in BIH: Myth and Reality, National Human Development Report, UNDP, 2013.
[38] Ibid.
[39] There are Mid-term Agricultural Sector Development Strategy of FBIH (2015-2019), Rural Development Programme of FBIH (2018-2021) – not yet enforced and Strategic Plan for Rural Development and Agriculture of RS (2016-2020), based on which the Strategic Plan is designed "through a *middle-up*, entity-led approach that seeks to fully respect entity, BD and state competencies, whilst promoting practical solutions that will ensure that real and measurable progress can be made in the interests of all main agriculture and rural stakeholders in the sector …"(Strategic Plan, page 3).

BD). In 2021, total government support for agriculture and rural development in BIH was approximately EUR 88.5 million[40]. Out of this, ca 88% was realised through direct production support measures.

As mentioned in the Analytical Report accompanying the Commission's Opinion on BIH's application for membership of the EU, these support measures are not harmonized across the country, while their effectiveness and compliance with the Union acquis is insufficient to increase the sector productivity and competitiveness. The country has made no progress in establishing the institutional structures necessary to benefit from the indirect management of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD).

The Country Report 2023[41] for BiH specifies that the country is at an early stage of preparation in the area of agriculture and rural development. There was limited progress in implementing previous recommendations, with the adoption of a state-level Law on the wine market, drafted through the support of EU4AGRI Project, and for which the related by-laws now need to be adopted. The Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018–2021) is implemented at an uneven pace across the country, and the country is yet to adopt the state-level law on organic production and to update the legislation on quality policy, in line with the EU acquis. In the coming year, the overall recommendations are to 1) complete the implementation of the 2018-2021 strategic plan for rural development, in particular by harmonizing across the country and aligning with the EU acquis and adopt a country-wide strategy for agriculture and rural development for 2022-2027; 2) adopt a state-level law on organic production and all the required by-laws for the implementation of the Law on the organization of the wine market, in line with the EU acquis; 3) update and adopt a state-level law on quality policy, in line with the EU acquis. The new Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2023–2027) – Framework Document, has been developed by MoFTER through the support of EU4AGRI Project and adopted by House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH on 10 October 2024.

The **agricultural statistics and the information system** are not sufficiently developed to support evidence-based policy making. The lack of a recent agricultural census is a major limitation in this context. A limited number of statistical indicators are produced for agriculture. A harmonised approach to the exchange of sectoral data across governments and their country-wide consolidation, while ensuring traceability and verifiability of such data in the system, is not in place. Therefore, as also indicated in the Analytical report accompanying the Commission's Opinion on BIH's application for membership of the EU, agricultural information systems must be set up in line with the EU framework[42].

Agricultural advisory systems in BiH are weak, unevenly developed, and constrained by non-harmonised regulations. Public services face financial, managerial, and technical challenges, with too few qualified advisors to meet farmers' needs. Private advisory services exist but remain limited. Service quality standards are lacking, and advisory approaches are outdated, with a farmer–advisor ratio of about 900:1 compared to 50–90:1 in the EU. Strengthening public systems and engaging private providers is essential to expand access and improve the quality of support.

RELEVANCE OF THE ACTION

The Action was fully aligned with the **Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021) – Framework Document**, designed to guide the development of BIH agriculture and rural development sector. The Strategic Plan is focused on enhancing policy coordination and management in the sector, improving the regulation of food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary matters, as well as on harmonisation of legislation towards its alignment with the EU and international standards. The Action directly contributed to its Strategic Goal 2 on strengthening

[40] Source: Office for Harmonization and Coordination of Payment Systems in Agriculture, Food and Rural Development of BIH (government support distribution: ca 51% for the FBIH, 41% for the RS, and 8% for BD).
[41] https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2023_en?prefLang=hr
[42] As indicated in the Analytical report accompanying the Commission's Opinion on BIH's application for membership of the EU, in the wine sector, for instance, BIH does not have a register of grape and wine producers or vineyard cadastre nor is there official data or available statistics on the number and size of households and farms producing.

competitiveness of agriculture, forestry and rural areas through increasing the level of investments and improving the transfer of knowledge and promotion of innovation; Strategic Goal 3 on improving marketability of agri-food products by increasing value-added activities, improving quality and safety standards and strengthening linkages within the value chains; and Strategic Goal 5 addressing the quality of life in rural areas.

The Action was also in line with the **BIH Economic Reform Programme (2019-2021)**, which defines a comprehensive set of structural reforms aimed at boosting the country's growth and competitiveness. Key constraints to agricultural development identified by the Economic Reform Programme include low level of investment, fragmentation of arable land, a high share of small farms, low productivity and outdated production and processing capacities, as well as the lack of agricultural information system and agricultural census. The Programme puts an emphasis on enabling the use of EU financial assistance to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of agri-food operators, enhance the institutional systems and capacities, as well as harmonise the legal framework in the field of agriculture and rural development.

In addition, the Action contributed to broader development objectives set within relevant entity development strategies, such as the **Mid-term Agricultural Sector Development Strategy in FBIH (2015-2020),** the **FBIH Rural Development Programme (2018-2021)** and the **RS Strategic Plan for Rural Development and Agriculture (2016-2020)**[43]. The Action was also relevant from the viewpoint of **cantonal and local government development strategies** that generally refer to agri-rural development, as well as SME development and enabling business environment.

The Action directly contributed to the needs and priorities defined in the EU sector policies. That includes sectoral priorities in the context of the EU approximation stemming from the **Analytical report accompanying the Commission's Opinion on BIH's application for membership of the EU**[44] primarily related to an effective implementation of the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021) – Framework Document as well as to coordination and harmonisation of policy and implementation. In addition, it includes the **SAA**, which calls for "modernising and restructuring of agriculture and agri-industrial sector in BIH… to reach veterinary and phytosanitary Community requirements and… supporting the progressive approximation of the legislation and practices". It coincides with the European Commission's Strategy for the Western Balkans,[45] pointing at the region's significant economic potential with higher growth rates than that of the EU and its increasingly interesting market for EU goods and services that is gradually becoming part of the European value chains. Accordingly, the Action stems from and contributes to the implementation of the **Revised Indicative Strategy Paper for IPA II (2014-2020)**, aiming to "support the creation of an efficient, sustainable and innovative agri-food sector, which is competitive in the EU market and offers employment, social inclusion and better living standards for farmers and the rural population". The Action will address the challenges of insufficient institutional capacities and limited country-wide policy coordination and harmonization, as raised by the EU sector policies. Where relevant and feasible, the Action will also seek to address shortcomings in the agricultural statistics and information systems.

In the framework of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, the Action contributed to the reaching of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture, SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries, and SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production.
The Action is aligned with the strategic priorities set out in the **United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for BIH (2015-2020)** and the **UNDP Country Programme Document (2015-2020)**, namely in terms of efforts to reduce regional, economic and social disparities.

[43] Brčko District does not have adopted a sectoral or integrated development strategy.
[44] The implementation of this Action will take into full account the Opinion and related Analytical Report 2019 and contribute to the fulfilment of the key priorities and recommendations therein.
[45] A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2018.

The Action is in line with the EU planned interventions in the Western Balkans that were laid down by the European Commission in its Communication on Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19[46] and the post-pandemic recovery, adopted on 29 April 2020. The Action aims to build the private sector long-term resilience, thus catalysing the transition towards a more sustainable agri-food sector. Further, the Action is in line with the recently adopted **Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, worth EUR 9 billion**, which aims to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region, support a green and digital transition, foster regional integration and convergence with the EU.

The Action is also aligned with the **European Green Deal**[47], a new growth strategy of the EU, and the emerging Green Agenda for the Western Balkans[48]. Aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the European Green Deal seeks to put sustainability and the well-being of citizens at the centre of the economic policy, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the heart of the EU's policymaking and action. The European Green Deal is at the heart of the COVID-19 recovery and used as a framework for tackling short-term economic needs with long-term sustainability goals[49].

The Action is aligned with the general measures of the EU's response to COVID-19 and with the adopted plan to support people and businesses. The EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemics is laid down in the Joint Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19 and it follows the Team Europe approach, drawing on contributions from all the EU institutions and combining the resources from the EU Member States and financial institutions. The EU's action focuses on addressing the immediate health crisis and resulting humanitarian needs, strengthening partner countries' health, water and sanitation systems and their research and preparedness capacities to deal with the pandemic, as well as mitigating the socioeconomic impact.

The Action is also relevant to the **Climate Change Adaptation and Low-Emission Development Strategy of BIH (2014-2025)**[50], including the Strategic Outcome 3: Adaptation approaches are mainstreamed, implemented and their objectives and planned delivery are understood by an informed society with focus on agriculture-related outputs (e.g. increased public awareness of the effects of climate change on agriculture and education among farmers and families; improved irrigation approaches; agriculture included in water management programmes and workshops and team briefings; improved hail protection techniques; agricultural practices improved and responsive to climate change; development of multifunctional agriculture; increased farmers' capacities on new approaches for land cultivation and hot weather livestock management), as well new agro-climatic zoning models, with consideration of potential climate change scenarios.

The Action directly contributes to the needs and priorities defined in the EU sector policies. That includes sectoral priorities in the context of the EU approximation stemming from the **Analytical report accompanying the Commission's Opinion on BIH's application for membership of the EU**[51] and **Commission Staff Working Documents (BiH 2020, 2021 and 2022 reports) accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions** primarily related to an effective implementation of the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021) – Framework Document as well as to coordination and harmonisation of policy and implementation. In addition, it includes the **SAA**, which calls for "modernising and restructuring of agriculture and agri-industrial sector

[46] COM (2020) 315 final, 29.4.2020

[47] The European Green Deal includes a roadmap for climate ambition; clean, affordable, and secure energy; industrial strategy for a clean and circular economy; sustainable and smart mobility; greening the Common Agricultural Policy / "Farm to Fork" strategy; preserving and protecting biodiversity; towards a zero-pollution ambition for a toxic free environment; mainstreaming sustainability in all EU policies; the EU as a global leader; and working together – a European Climate Pact.

[48] The adoption of the Green Agenda in the Western Balkans is expected in November 2020 at Western Balkans Summit in Sofia. It covers five pillars: climate action, including decarbonisation, energy and mobility; circular economy, addressing in particular waste, recycling, sustainable production and efficient use of resources; biodiversity, aiming to protect and restore the natural wealth of the region; fighting air, water and soil pollution; and sustainable food systems and rural areas. Digitalisation will be a key enabler for the above five pillars in line with the concept of the dual green and digital transition.

[49] https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/news/8381/the-european-green-deal-and-covid-19-implications-for-research-and-innovation/

[50] https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1481/files/appeal/documents/Climate%20Change%20Adaptation%20and%20Low-Emission%20Development%20Strategy%20for%20BiH_0.pdf

[51] The implementation of this Action takes into full account the Opinion and related Analytical Report 2019 and contribute to the fulfilment of the key priorities and recommendations therein.

in BIH… to reach veterinary and phytosanitary Community requirements and… supporting the progressive approximation of the legislation and practices". It coincides with the European Commission's Strategy for the Western Balkans,[52] pointing at the region's significant economic potential with higher growth rates than that of the EU and its increasingly interesting market for EU goods and services that is gradually becoming part of the European value chains.

The Action is aligned with the strategic priorities set out in the **United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for BIH (2021-2025)**[53] and the **UNDP Country Programme Document (2021-2025)**, namely in terms of efforts to contribute to resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth.

ACTION OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

The **overall objective** of the Action was to modernize the agri-food sector and foster rural economy in BIH. In that light, the **specific objective** is to increase the competitiveness of agricultural production and rural jobs and services.

The Action focused on raising investment in the agri-food sector and increasing the knowledge and skill levels of agricultural producers and other participants in the value chain through the expanded provision of advisory services, as well as on improving economic opportunities in rural areas. The Action also enhanced the policy environment through a coherent and complementary set of activities, including strengthening of institutional capacities and services, as well as improving policy and regulatory frameworks. Thus, the Action's results are defined as follows:

1. Higher levels of production of safe and quality food based on introduced innovative practices, while preserving the natural resources and the countryside, are sustained; and
2. Policy actions are implemented in EU aligned manner, based on sector services and systems improved.

At an aggregate level, it was expected that the Action would contribute to an environment of improved competitiveness, measured by a 10% average increase in the BIH agricultural export index by 2024, which illustrates the relative performance of BIH agricultural exports, as a proxy for market development and competitiveness.

[52] A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2018.
[53] Finalized draft document, pending formal endorsement by the BIH Council of Ministers.

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

RESULT 1 - HIGHER LEVELS OF PRODUCTION OF SAFE AND QUALITY FOOD BASED ON INTRODUCED INNOVATIVE PRACTICES, WHILE PRESERVING THE NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE COUNTRYSIDE, ARE SUSTAINED

Under Result 1, the Action delivered a Grant Investment Package (GIP) targeting agri-food sector competitiveness. While the GIP was designed as a coherent, coordinated set of support measures whose complementarity enables impact maximisation, it was broken into three intervention lines:

1. the first intervention line focused on investment in both the farm and processing sectors;
2. the second focused on strengthening advisory and extension services to increase sectoral knowledge, skills and organisation,
3. while the third targeted strengthening and diversifying the rural economy.

Support measures under GIP entailed allocation of financial resources to select target groups on an open and competitive basis. The definition of support measures' objectives and results was informed by the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021) – Framework Document, other relevant policy frameworks and Action performance indicators. Those objectives and results were in turn guide the definition of selection criteria, including eligibility and quality criteria.

Selection criteria were defined through: (i) the analysis of existing sector policies; (ii) the collection of baseline data on demand, capacities and potentials in the sector / sub-sectors; (iii) engaging institutional partners across government levels; (iv) consulting stakeholders affected by sectoral challenges (to include vulnerable categories, areas handicapped by geographic or climate conditions, etc.); (v) ensuring compliance with national standards and seeking alignment with the Union acquis and practice; (vi) reaching out to sector-support organisations; and (vii) ensuring synergies / avoiding duplication with national support measures. Selection criteria were tailored to each support measure, ensuring their complementarities to reinforce the overall GIP impact.

In setting the thresholds for financial resources under each measure, the Action considered the expected results, eligible investments, and potential applicants' absorption and co-financing capacities. In this process, the Action also factored in the maximum number of projects per measure that could be feasibly managed and monitored. In consultations with institutional partners, EU4AGRI considered adjusting indicative amounts allocated for individual activities/support measures under the GIP, to ensure the most effective support for the sector development.

The Action inherited the methodology and templates for public calls from the EU4Business initiative, including application forms with Excel sheets, business plans, project applications, and evaluation and implementation procedures. While these tools were originally developed with expert support and close coordination with institutional partners, they were largely based on the Serbian IPARD model and adapted to the specific needs and context of the agri-food sector in BiH. The Action further refined and revised this methodology and associated documents on multiple occasions, incorporating lessons learned from implementation.

Taking this into consideration, it is important to note that different approaches were applied for various support measures and targeted beneficiaries:

1. **Simple and complex business plans** – These consisted of narrative and Excel documents, along with other required documentation, and were primarily used for public calls under Activity 1.1, "Improving Market Efficiency."
2. **Project proposals with basic budget formats** – Accompanied by required documentation, these were used for both individual and partner applications under Activity 1.2 and Activity 1.3.
3. **Concept notes** – Applicants provided a basic outline of their business idea. This approach was applied under the support measure for investment in the diversification of on-farm production. Based on the submitted concept notes and with technical support, full-fledged business plans were subsequently developed and

evaluated for final approval of financial support. In these cases, the applicant was a municipality acting on behalf of the end beneficiaries.

The delivery of the envisaged measures followed EU best practices, as well as lessons learned through relevant projects in BIH. While these measures were delivered country-wide, targeting all agri-food sub-sectors, due consideration was given to under-developed areas characterised by higher migration and low economic growth.

Public calls were designed with user-friendly guidelines and provided sufficient time for applicants to prepare their submissions—typically lasting two months. In several cases, deadlines were extended to ensure that potential applicants had ample opportunity to complete and successfully submit their applications. Active promotion of the support measures was undertaken, including 112 live info days across the country (41 in the FBiH and 71 in RS) and 41 online sessions[54] to inform about funding opportunities, encourage networking and partnerships among different stakeholders, as well as contribute to improved knowledge base and awareness. Project selection was carried out in accordance with predefined eligibility and quality criteria. As part of the evaluation process, field visits were conducted to verify the accuracy of information provided in the applications and to assess applicants' capacities to implement the proposed activities. This ensured that every applicant who met the eligibility and other relevant criteria was visited by the project team, accompanied by representatives of the partner institution. This approach resulted in more than 300 field visits to applicants under the EU4AGRI project alone.

The delivery of GIP encompassed comprehensive quality assurance, technical and financial monitoring and control of selected projects, risk management, documentation of lessons learned, and evaluation of results and impacts. This process included a total of 490 field monitoring visits.

The competitiveness support delivered under this result was coupled with technical assistance under the Result 2 (Activities 2.1 and 2.2), which focused on effective GIP delivery and institutional capacity development for result-oriented policy delivery. The GIP design covered through the technical assistance package preceded the launch of each support scheme.

Under Result 1, the expected results were defined in the Description of Action (DoA). The Action significantly exceeded these expectations, as demonstrated in the table below:

Table No. 1

Result description	Expected results	Achieved results
No. of agri-food operators to be supported with projects that increase the availability and quality of their production	320	2,041
No. of new jobs to be created in rural areas, including 100 at least each for women and youth	300 out of which 100 for women 100 for youth	307 out of which 144 for women 188 for youth
% of an increase in operational revenues of targeted agri-food operators	20%	54%
No. of agri-food operators to gain food safety or quality certifications	30	88
Total investment of EUR 14.8 million under Result 1 would leverage over EUR 5 million by stakeholders in the agriculture and rural development sector	EUR 14.8 mil and EUR 5 mil	EUR 14.76 mil and EUR 8.27 mil

Below is a detailed overview of public calls implemented under Result 1 (from March 1, 2020 to June 30, 2025).

[54] https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1C3TFgHGRV/

Table No.2: Overview of Public calls implemented under EU4AGRI

	Project	Published	Closed	Final List	Applications	Projects selected	Approval rate	Contract process TOT	Cancelled TOT	Contracting EU4Agri Recovery	Cancelled EU4AGRI Recovery	Contracting EU4Business Recovery	Cancelled EU4Business Recovery	Contracting EU4Business	Cancelled EU4Business	Contracting EU4Agri	Cancelled EU4Agri	Implem. Proj. EU4Agri	EU Assistance EUR	Co-Financing EUR
Published 2020					**439**	**60**	**13.7%**	**60**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**17**	**0**	**43**	**2**	**41**	**3,047,515**	**2,473,240**
Primary production I	EU4AGRI	07-Dec-20	15-Feb-21	27-Sep-21	228	16	7.0%	16	2					2		14	2	12	473,733	310,522
COVID 19 mitigation	EU4AGRI/Business	18-May-20	08-Jun-20	20-Aug-20	94	28	29.8%	28						15	0	13		13	816,368	332,511
Processing and marketing I	EU4AGRI	30-Jul-20	30-Sep-20	01-Apr-21	74	16	21.6%	16								16		16	1,757,414	1,830,207
Agrotourism 0	EU4AGRI	27-Oct-20	21-Dec-20		43	0	0.0%												0	0
Published 2021					**191**	**31**	**16.2%**	**31**	**3**	**4**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**27**	**3**	**24**	**1,926,778**	**957,696**
Primary production II	EU4AGRI/EU4AGRIR/EU4BusinessR	24-Nov-21	04-Feb-22	09-Sep-22	47	7	14.9%	7		2		0				5		5	333,279	279,040
Agrotourism I	EU4AGRI/EU4AGRIR/EU4BusinessR	23-Dec-21	15-Mar-22	14-Sep-22	48	5	10.4%	5	1	0	0	0	0			5	1	4	320,130	60,096
Processing and marketing II	EU4AGRI	04-Oct-21	03-Dec-21	01-Jun-22	28	6	21.4%	6	1	2	0					4	1	3	438,196	249,889
Rural infrastructure I	EU4AGRI	06-May-21	18-Jun-21	12-Nov-21	41	7	17.1%	7	1							7	1	6	375,440	161,294
Rural infrastructure II	EU4AGRI	21-Oct-21	14-Dec-21	09-May-22	27	6	22.2%	6								6		6	459,733	207,377
Published 2022					**226**	**121**	**53.5%**	**121**	**13**	**9**	**1**	**8**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**104**	**13**	**91**	**6,593,371**	**3,249,904**
Processing and marketing III	EU4AGRI/EU4AGRIR/EU4BusinessR	05-Apr-22	10-Jun-22	15-Dec-22	31	15	48.4%	15	1	0	0	0	0			15	1	14	1,491,140	1,332,729
Business plans	EU4AGRI	27-May-22	08-Jul-22	06-Feb-23	10	6	60.0%	6	1							6	1	5	97,707	529
Linking science to businesses	EU4AGRI	21-Jul-22	23-Sep-22	31-Aug-23	17	6	35.3%	6								6		6	824,813	234
Certification I	EU4AGRI	25-Jul-22	12-Sep-22	22-Feb-23	16	9	56.3%	9	5							9	5	4	28,619	20,189
Certification II	EU4AGRI	14-Sep-22	14-Oct-22	04-May-23	3	2	66.7%	2								2		2	50,885	27,526
Diversification	EU4AGRI	16-Sep-22	28-Dec-22	29-Feb-24	28	15	53.6%	15	1							15	1	14	665,763	227,522
Intervention measure I	EU4AGRI/EU4AGRIR/EU4BusinessR	21-Sep-22	24-Oct-22	24-Mar-23	16	13	81.3%	13		3	1	8				2		2	157,986	61,869
Primary production III	EU4AGRI	18-Nov-22	31-Jan-23	19-Sep-23	41	17	41.5%	17	3							17	3	14	1,156,711	762,160
Certification III	EU4AGRI	28-Nov-22	30-Dec-22	04-May-23	13	9	69.2%	9	1							9	1	8	61,025	29,798
Intervention measure II	EU4AGRI/EU4AGRIR/EU4BusinessR	28-Dec-22	10-Mar-23	01-Sep-23	21	18	85.7%	18		0	0	0	0			18		18	1,645,851	579,062
Processing and marketing IV	EU4AGRI/EU4AGRIR	29-Dec-22	06-Mar-23	22-Sep-23	30	11	36.7%	11	1	6	0					5	1	4	412,872	208,286
Published 2023					**163**	**76**	**46.6%**	**55**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**55**		**55**	**3,193,244**	**1,586,467**
Processing and marketing V	EU4AGRI	20-Apr-23	28-Jul-23	28-Dec-23	13	5	38.5%	5								5		5	463,352	260,019
Innovations and ICT solutions	EU4AGRI	04-May-23	14-Jul-23	17-Nov-23	17	7	41.2%	7								7		7	401,059	62,693
Primary production IV	EU4AGRI	19-Sep-23	20-Nov-23	11-Apr-24	38	16	42.1%	16								16		16	1,019,633	493,525
Primary production V	EU4AGRI	15-Dec-23	20-Feb-24	24-Jun-24	95	48	50.53%	27								27		27	1,309,200	770,230
Total Calls					**1,019**	**288**	**28.26%**	**267**	**18**	**13**	**1**	**8**	**0**	**17**	**0**	**229**	**18**	**211**	**14,760,909**	**8,267,306**

Under Result 1, the EU4AGRI consistently advanced the implementation of the GIP, a pivotal mechanism for enhancing competitiveness and driving innovation within BiH's agri-food sector. The GIP played a crucial role in fostering productivity growth and modernizing agricultural practices across the sector. Since March 2020, in close cooperation with institutional partners, EU4AGRI prepared and launched a total of 24 public calls, the latest being in December 2023. Notably, five of these public calls were developed and published in partnership with two EU-funded projects—EU4Business Recovery and EU4AGRI-Recovery—demonstrating a coordinated effort to maximize the impact of EU support. In addition, one call was prepared in partnership with EU4AGRI-Recovery and another with EU4Business.

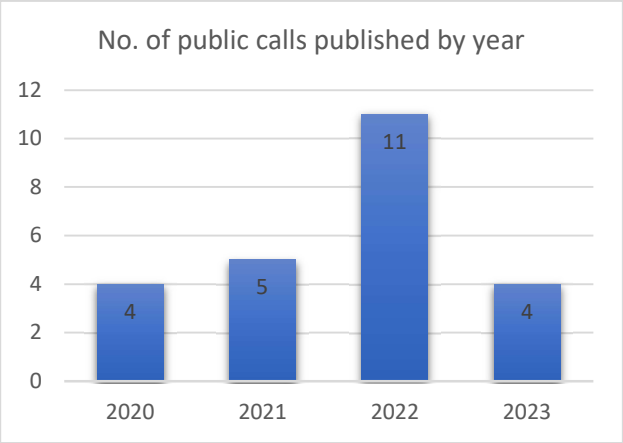
In 2024, EU4AGRI did not launch any new public calls for financial support since all available funds under GIP have been fully utilized. The table below provides a comprehensive overview of all public calls published over the period of four years, detailing those issued exclusively by EU4AGRI and those implemented in collaboration with other projects.

In April 2024, the Indirect Tax Authority of BiH (ITA) requested UNDP BiH to modify the VAT exemption/refunding modality, which had been applied in the same manner for over a decade, regardless of the donor. This change created significant challenges for the Action, causing delays in obtaining ex-ante VAT exemption certificates from the EUD BiH, which directly impacted the implementation dynamics of 45 contracted projects. To address these challenges and their effect on timely implementation, the Action requested an Addendum to the Contribution Agreement for a cost-neutral extension of the implementation period by an additional four months, until 30 June 2025.

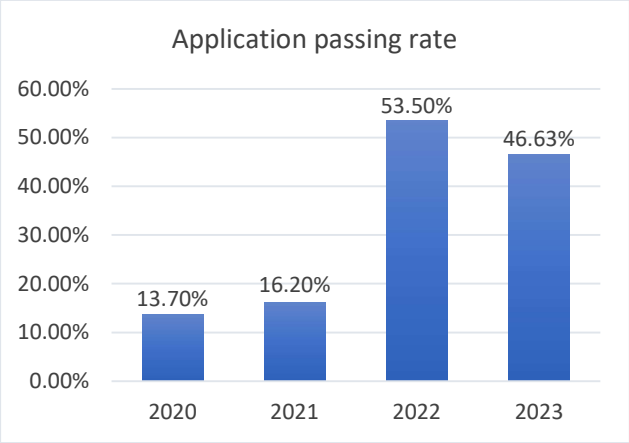
Out of 229 projects that entered the contracting process through EU4AGRI, 18 were cancelled[55] over time for various reasons, before or after signing the contract. Therefore, the final number of projects supported and successfully completed by EU4AGRI is 211.

Significant investment of effort in designing and launching public calls occurred in 2022. This year recorded the issuance of 11 public calls, the highest number launched within a single year. Out of that, seven calls were published in the second half of the year, signifying an intensified workload and a higher number of concurrent evaluation processes. This surge in activity, combined with the ongoing implementation of signed projects and the contracting process for new projects, presented a formidable challenge to the Action team and the representatives of partner institutions. Managing these complex processes within an optimal timeframe required concerted efforts and coordination, reflecting the dedication of the team to meet their objectives. The Action also invested substantial effort in the promotion of all public calls[56] for potential applicants, with the goal of providing comprehensive details and encouraging the submission of applications.

Graph 1: No. of public calls published by years



Graph 2: Application passing rate



[55] List of cancelled projects attached in the Annex I

[56] In total 112 live info days across the country and 41 online sessions were organized since 2020.

Low application quality, at the Action beginning, significantly lowered the overall passing rate. This was especially the case with the first primary production call, and two calls on agri-tourism. Without the first primary production low passing rate of 7%, overall average passing rate would have been 41.06%, much higher than current 28.26%. This was an important signal to double down efforts on informational/educational activities on the application process resulting in much higher success rates in the subsequent period.

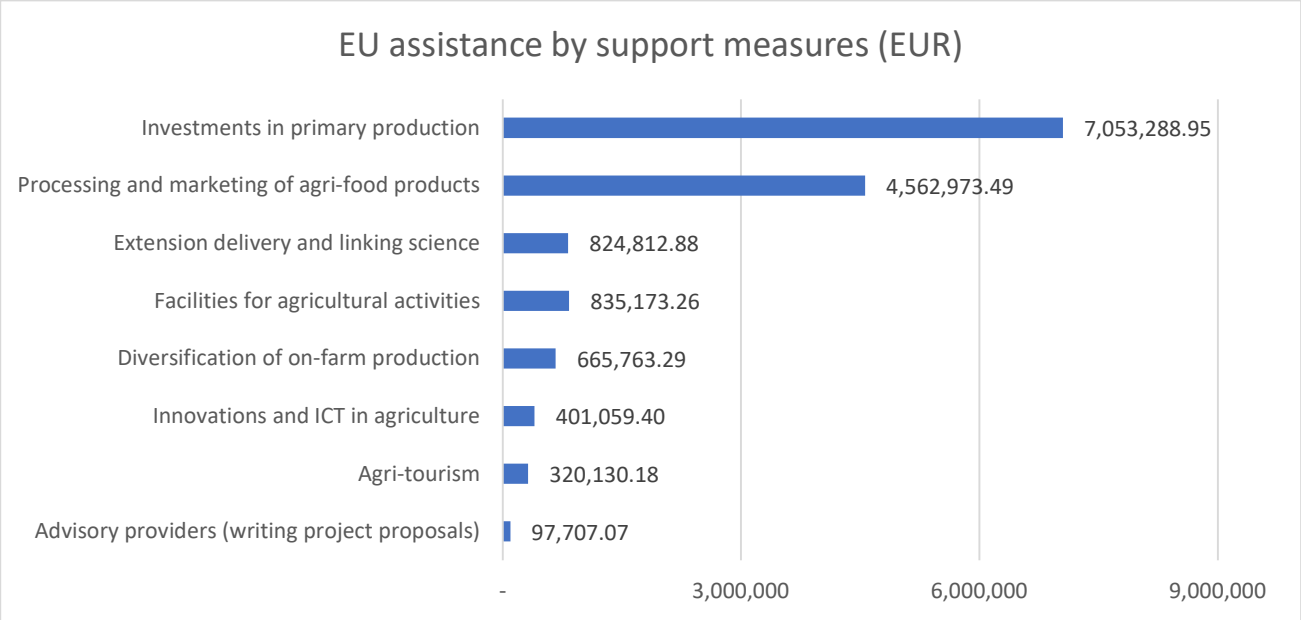
For practical purposes, the project management team developed a detailed timeline and workflow schedule for the entire GIP process—from initial design through to the completion of implementation. This tool proved highly useful for everyone involved, as it provided a clear overview of the steps, responsibilities, and expected time frames.

Moreover, the timeline helped stakeholders, the donor, institutional partners, UNDP senior management, and applicants better understand the complexity of the process. Given that some stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the duration of certain phases, the workflow schedule served as an important communication and transparency instrument, illustrating why specific steps were necessary and how they contributed to ensuring a fair, thorough, and quality-driven implementation.

GIP implementation results

Although EUR 14.8 million was initially budgeted for the GIP, a total of EUR 14.76[57] million has been allocated. Slight difference in the allocated amount over the planned GIP budget is a result of the calculated exchange rate differences in accordance with internal UNDP policies and procedures when reporting project activities in USD. This does not affect implementation of project activities, and the total planned funds are allocated in accordance with the approved amount. Primary production along with processing and marketing of agri-food products are clearly key areas of GIP implementation carrying 78.69% of allocated assistance.

Graph 3: EU assistance by support measures in EUR

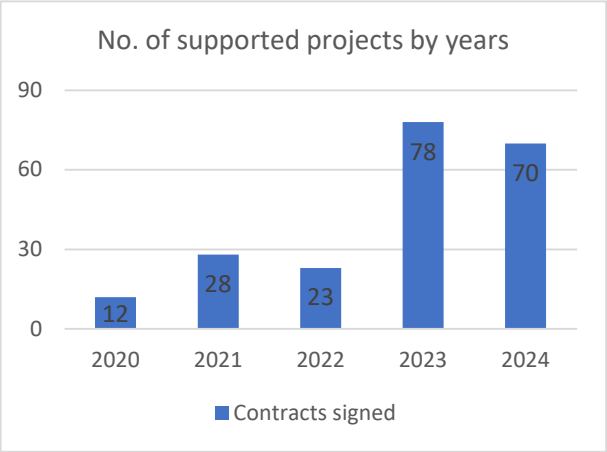


[57] This figure differs slightly from the one presented in the financial report. The discrepancy arises from the exchange rates applied to each installment received by UNDP from the EU on specific dates, which involved conversions from EUR to USD and subsequently to BAM. In contrast, the figures in this narrative report were calculated by converting the BAM value of the contracts with beneficiaries into EUR using a fixed exchange rate, providing a simplified and consistent representation of the amounts.

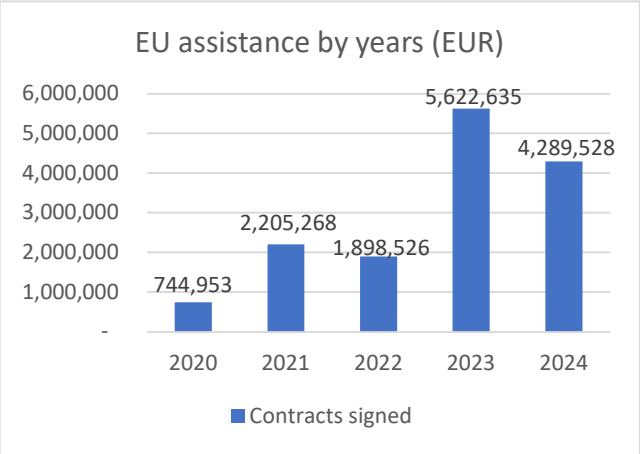
A big jump in the GIP implementation happened in Year 4 and Year 5 mostly as a result of major efforts in designing and launching 15 public calls (11 published in 2022 and 4 published in 2023). Around 70% of all assistance contracts were signed in 2023 and 2024 not just in terms of number but value as well (chart below).

The GIP fund utilization reached 100% by supporting 211 projects. The EU financial assistance is complemented by co-financing from beneficiaries' worth EUR 8.26 million. Together, this results in supported investments value of EUR 23.02 million benefiting 2,083 beneficiaries.

Graph 4: No. of public calls published by years



Graph 5: Application passing rate

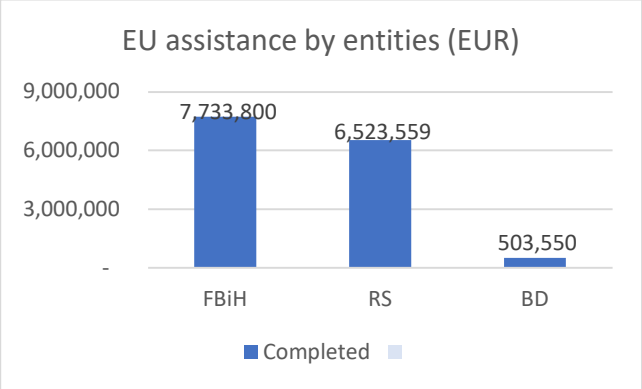


GIP implementation by entity

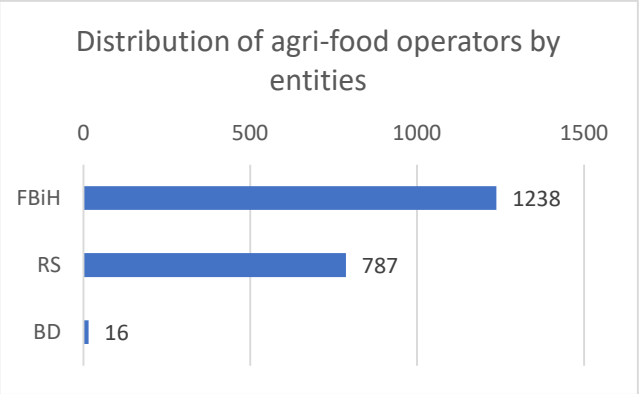
It is important to emphasize that the implementation of the GIP was designed and executed at the state level, ensuring that all 24 public calls were open to applicants from across the entire territory of BiH. This approach deliberately avoided any segmentation or preferential treatment based on entity, cantonal, or other administrative divisions. In the early stages of implementation, certain entity-level institutions expressed reservations and advocated for an entity-specific modality, arguing that calls should be administered separately within each entity. Nevertheless, the Action remained firmly committed to its mission of establishing a centralized framework, aligned with the EU's Common Agricultural Policy practice of designating accredited Paying Agencies for agricultural support schemes. Should BiH move towards such arrangements in the future, this work would represent a relevant preparatory step. The rationale behind this approach was to guarantee equal access and opportunities for all potential beneficiaries, regardless of their geographic or administrative affiliation. By applying a uniform and transparent process, the Action ensured that the only determining factor in the evaluation process was the quality and relevance of the submitted applications. In doing so, it safeguarded the principles of fairness, inclusiveness, and merit-based selection, while simultaneously reinforcing the notion of a unified and non-discriminatory development framework at the state level.

The graphs below provide insight into the distribution of investments projects by the entities, their project status (either completed, ongoing or contracting) and values of EU financial support distribution by the entities.

Graph 6: EU assistance by entities (EUR)



Graph 7: Distribution of agri-food operators by entities



GIP by gender

The Action applied gender mainstreaming throughout its implementation to ensure that activities and results respected gender equality principles. On the one hand, the GIP support measures were designed with a gender equality lens from the outset, actively encouraging the participation of women and women-led farms or agri-food businesses. In this way, the Action contributed to women's economic empowerment and to improving the quality of life in rural areas, taking into particular consideration the needs of women.

Women in rural areas possess valuable skills, knowledge and practical experience that are essential for the development of modern and sustainable agriculture. By creating equal access to financial support, knowledge, technology and market opportunities, EU4AGRI helped unlock this potential and supported woman to take on a stronger economic role within their households, communities and the wider agri-food sector.

Moreover, each of the 24 public calls integrated gender-sensitive eligibility and evaluation criteria, through which women applicants were awarded additional points. This approach not only incentivised women to apply but also ensured a fairer and more inclusive selection process that recognised their role and potential within the sector.

On the other hand, the Action recognised that policy and regulatory frameworks can play a critical role in reducing gender gaps, and therefore ensured the integration of gender equality considerations into policy and regulatory interventions, with the aim of reducing disparities and promoting equal rights, access to resources and opportunities for both women and men in the agriculture sector. A gender-sensitive monitoring framework was established and applied, enabling the tracking of progress and results also from the perspective of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Moreover, the EU4AGRI project was refined following the recommendations of the Gender Portfolio Review conducted in 2023 as part of the Country Office's efforts under the Gender Equality Seal process. Both the project document and implementation strategy were updated to strengthen gender-responsive actions, ensuring enhanced gender outcomes, particularly in reaching the most underserved and marginalized groups. Positive gender discrimination in project design and implementation ensured prioritization of women-led businesses and initiatives, with at least 25% of project beneficiaries and women-led entities targeted in grant schemes. Over 100 new jobs were created specifically for women in rural areas, improving their economic independence and reducing gender disparities in employment. Women-led businesses received financial and technical assistance, enabling them to modernize operations, adopt innovative practices, and improve their market competitiveness. Through investments in agri-tourism and socio-economic rural activities, women were supported to diversify income streams in areas such as crafts, small-scale food processing, and heritage-based tourism. Gender considerations were embedded in agricultural and rural development policies, ensuring equal opportunities and addressing disparities in resource access and decision-making roles. The project enhanced the skills and capacities of at least

80 non-state advisory service providers, targeting 25% women-led or owned operators, supporting knowledge sharing and promoting gender equity. Women farmers benefited from improved advisory and extension services, tailored training, and support in adopting sustainable agricultural practices. By prioritizing investments that created jobs for women and improved their working conditions, the project contributed to reducing the wage gap in agriculture. At least 25% of participants in non-state advisory service programs and technical training were women, enabling them to enhance their expertise and leadership roles in the agricultural sector. Women entrepreneurs gained access to grants and co-financing opportunities, addressing the financial barriers they often face in scaling their businesses. With technical support and certification assistance, several women-led businesses improved product quality and marketability, leading to increased revenues and sustainable business growth. Finally, the project incorporated gender equality indicators and sex-disaggregated data into monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and outcomes, ensuring accountability and continued focus on gender-responsive results.

As a result of this approach, out of the 307 new jobs created through EU4AGRI support, 144 were filled by women. Furthermore, out of 211 supported projects, 41 were implemented by women-led organisations. In total, among the 2,041 direct beneficiaries, 406 were women, demonstrating a tangible contribution of the Action to increasing women's participation and economic empowerment within the agricultural sector.

During the implementation of the GIP support measures, the Action carried out targeted promotional activities focused on rural women and showcased a series of success stories.[58]

The Result 1 was delivered through the set of activities described below.

ACTIVITY 1.1. IMPROVING MARKET EFFICIENCY

According to the Description of Action (DoA), this activity aims at raising the competitiveness of the agri-food sector by providing investment support for both primary agricultural production and processing. Investment support was available for a diverse set of activities, including, but not limited to: improving farm facilities and production capacities through better physical infrastructure; purchasing machinery and equipment; introducing new technologies; certification; increasing organic production; and developing the capacity of agricultural producers and agri-food processors groups along the value chain, such as associations and cooperatives. Support measures were designed to encourage sustainable productivity growth, in combination with climate change adaptation and mitigation actions.

Accordingly, the following two competitiveness support measures were envisaged:

i) **Investments in primary production (projected budget of EUR 5 mil)**
Concerning **investments in primary production**, the Action targeted farm holdings (entrepreneurs, companies and cooperatives engaged in primary production) of all sizes, with financial resources per project ranging from EUR 10,000 to EUR 150,000[59] and requiring (indicative) co-financing ranging from 20% to 35% by recipients. Through adequate criteria under individual support measures, the Action included small-scale producers, also those involved via intermediary organisations (e.g. cooperatives, companies), and

[58] https://eu4agri.ba/eu4agri-jaca-polozaj-zena-u-ruralnim-podrucjima-zene-imaju-vjestine-znanje-i-potencijal-na-kome-se-moze-temeljiti-ruralni-razvoj/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAYnJpZBExdWpzamVLa3g0TTdtaGRDY3NydGMGYXBwX2lkEDIyMjAzOTE3ODgyMDA4OTIAAR7g9Jor56kdTBEGROtvhy31Stn8VURnVl7KfVmvoZCNEAZD0bfsODlobecdmA_aem_OuvihW43Wa-1g5xas8H8eQ

[59] Originally envisaged by DoA: financial resources per project ranging from EUR 25,000 to EUR 200,000 and requiring (indicative) co-financing of 40% by recipients. As it can be concluded the range of financial support was slightly adjusted as well as required co-financing. This adjustment was done based on really needs and capacities of the agro-food operators and the sector in general.

ii) **Investments in processing and marketing of agri-food products (projected budget of EUR 3.5 mil**For **investments in processing and marketing of agri-food products**, the Action targeted agri-processing companies and cooperatives working on adding value to agricultural products and their marketing, with financial resources per project ranging between EUR 15,000 and EUR 175,000 and requiring indicative co-financing of up to 40%.

Under Activity 1.1, as defined in the Description of Action (DoA), the Action was expected to deliver a set of outputs that were exceeded multiple times, as presented in the table below.

Table 3: Expected vs. achieved deliverables

Deliverable description	Expected deliverables	Achieved deliverables
Received No. of project proposals	**300** under at least **2** GIP support measures	**788** under **16** GIP support measures
No. of implemented projects contributing to improved agri-production and processing	**80-100** benefitting at least **200** agri-food operators	**163** benefitting **1,457** agri-food operators
Leveraged amount as co-financing from the private sector	over EUR **3** million	over EUR **7.5** million
Amount of financial support to be allocated into this intervention line	Up to EUR **8.5** million	Over EUR **11.6** million

Table 4: Overview of projects under Activity 1.1. Improving market efficiency

Support measure	EU Assistance (EUR)	Co-Financing (EUR)	Total Invest. (EUR)	No. of projects	No. of agri-food operators
Investments in primary production	7,053,289	3,666,432	10,719,721	121	1,417
Processing and marketing of agri-food products	4,562,973	3,881,130	8,444,104	42	39
Grand Total	**11,617,996**	**7,512,957**	**19,130,952**	**163**	**1,456**

Analysis of the contracted projects shows that 77% were supported under Activity 1.1, which focused on enhancing agricultural practices through investments in machinery, equipment, and processing lines. This high proportion highlights the strong demand within the sector for modernizing production and processing capacities, reflecting the urgent need to improve efficiency, productivity, and the potential for value addition in agricultural outputs.

It is also noteworthy that EUR 3 million was reallocated from Activity 1.3 with prior approval from the donor. This decision was taken because it became apparent that the funds initially allocated to Activity 1.3 would not be fully utilized, whereas the demand for support under Activity 1.1 was evident and pressing. The reallocation enabled the Action to maximize impact and respond to real sector needs, directing available resources to where they could generate the greatest benefit. As a result, additional beneficiaries were able to invest in agricultural machinery, equipment, and processing lines, contributing to improved productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness across the agricultural sector.

The predominance of this activity also indicates that farmers and agricultural producers prioritize investments that directly enhance operational capabilities, such as mechanization, post-harvest processing, and the introduction of modern technologies. These investments are critical not only for increasing production volumes but also for improving product quality, reducing post-harvest losses, and enabling access to broader markets.

Overall, the strong uptake of Activity 1.1 highlights a clear trend in the agricultural sector: targeted support in machinery and equipment is a key driver for modernization, competitiveness, and sustainable growth, making it a priority area for future interventions and support programs.

Investments in primary production

Investments in the primary production were supported by EU assistance worth EUR 7.05 million[60], through 121 investment projects directly and indirectly reaching 1,417 beneficiaries. The assistance also incentivized additional EUR 3.66 million of private investment through co-financing by the beneficiaries. The total result were new investment projects in the primary production worth EUR 10.72 million.

Table 5: Overview of projects under each public call related to the primary agricultural production

	EU Assistance (EUR)	Co-Financing (EUR)	Total Invest. (EUR)	No. of projects	No. of beneficiaries
Primary production I	473,733	310,522	784,255	12	12
Primary production II	333,279	279,040	612,319	5	5
Primary production III	1,156,711	762,160	1,918,871	14	14
Primary production IV	1,019,633	493,525	1,513,158	16	14
Primary production V	1,309,200	770,230	2,079,430	27	27
COVID 19 mitigation	816,368	332,511	1,148,879	13	473
Intervention measure I	157,986	61,869	219,855	2	63
Intervention measure II	1,645,851	579,062	2,224,913	18	724
Certification I	28,619	20,189	48,808	4	4
Certification II	50,885	27,526	78,410	2	2
Certification III	61,025	29,798	90,824	8	79
Grand Total	**7,055,022**	**3,663,851**	**10,718,874**	**121**	**1,417**

Support measures for primary production account for 61% of the total EU assistance in this sector, while three intervention measures represent 37%. The certification support measure received the smallest share, accounting for only 2% of the total. To achieve the intended level of financial support, significant time and human resources were invested in designing and launching 11 public calls for primary production, as well as in evaluating a total of 612 project proposals.

As defined in the DoA concerning investments in primary production, the Action targeted farm holdings (entrepreneurs, companies and cooperatives engaged in primary production) of all sizes. However, certain deviation from DoA had to be introduced to adapt to COVID-19 outbreak and other unforeseen challenges to the agri-food sector in recent period. Public calls like COVID-19 and intervention measures were specifically designed to help mitigate shocks caused by the pandemic, climate shocks and war in Ukraine. Calls were also repeated and refined multiple times, adapting their conditions to the turbulent environment. For example, co-financing percentage was decreased to a range 20–35%, while the level of support started as low as EUR 7,000 (intervention measures) and reached the maximum EUR 150,000 depending on the nature of the public call. Other refinements were also gradually introduced to simplify the application process, increase proposal eligibility and make the calls generally closer to actual needs of potential applicants. Throughout the process, the team adapted the approach as needed, remaining open to clarifications, responding to applicants' questions, and allowing for permissible adjustments within the established deadlines during the evaluation phase. Changes were introduced to attract as many potential applicants as possible, while engaging them to learn about the process of accessing EU funds. In the end, all this helped improve the application success rate over time, especially in 2022 when it reached almost 62%.

The first public call proved to be particularly challenging, taking place at the end of 2020 under COVID-19 restrictions and resulting in an unexpectedly high number of applications (228), all submitted in paper format. This demonstrated both the urgent need for financial support within the agricultural sector and, at the same time, a

[60] This significantly exceeds the initial budget of EUR 5 million, driven by the sector's high demand. Most of the funds were reallocated from Activity 1.3 with EUD's approval, while the reasons for lower spending under Activity 1.3 are explained in the corresponding section.

limited understanding of the requirements and nature of the support measures offered through the Action. More than half of the submissions did not meet even basic eligibility criteria and could be considered simple expressions of interest rather than formal applications. Ultimately, this call resulted in the approval of only 12 projects and generated criticism from stakeholders regarding the structure and clarity of the call itself. Drawing lessons from this experience, the Action, together with the designated working group, redesigned the public call to provide clearer instructions, better criteria and a more transparent process. In parallel, a more intensive promotion campaign and a series of information sessions were organized to better prepare potential applicants. At the same time, both public and private agricultural advisory providers were trained and capacitated to provide appropriate support to farmers in future application cycles. Since this call, the quality of applications has gradually improved, resulting in higher compliance with requirements, stronger project proposals and, ultimately, a significantly greater number of successfully implemented investments[61].

A total of 74 projects[62] were supported through five public calls for investments in primary agricultural production. These investments were predominantly directed towards agricultural machinery, including tractors—31 of which were purchased through EU4AGRI support—tractor attachments, harvesting equipment and other types of production technology, as well as solar systems for on-farm energy supply. When analyzing sector participation within the supported projects, it is evident that most beneficiaries operate in the dairy sector (41%), followed by those engaged in grain production (20%), cattle breeding and fruit and vegetable production (18% each).

The decision to introduce a dedicated certification support measure was driven by a DoA indicator requiring at least 30 agri-food operators to obtain quality and safety certifications by 2024. Although certification was eligible under other support measures, uptake was minimal, with only one beneficiary pursuing HACCP certification. To mitigate the risk of not achieving the target, the Action proposed and received approval from the EUD BiH and the working group to launch a specialized certification-focused public call. Despite the strong opportunity offered, application numbers remained lower than expected, leading the Action to relaunch the call multiple times, resulting in three public calls to reach the target number of certified beneficiaries. The high number of beneficiaries[63] under the third public call for support to certification investments is largely attributed to the introduction of designation of origin and geographical origin certification[64] within this call. Specifically, four organizations applied on behalf of groups of producers and successfully completed the certification process[65]. This marked the first time in BiH that producer organizations, together with their member producers, were certified under the schemes. Until now, the established practice had been for certification to be granted solely to the producer organization itself, without extending individual certification to the members. This approach therefore represents a significant shift, as it not only strengthens the collective position of producer organizations but also empowers each individual producer by granting them independent certification and direct access to the market.

As a result, each individual producer within these groups was granted their own certificate of designation of origin, enabling them to independently market and sell their products under the recognized certification. This approach not only expanded the overall outreach of the call but also strengthened collective branding, enhanced market visibility, and provided long-term benefits to a wider pool of producers.[66]

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[61] https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1FLf3S8DuN/

[62] In total 72 unique beneficiaries (Jelena d.o.o. Kozarska Dubica previously was supported through public call for Covid-19 measures and Dado Komerc d.o.o. was supported through Intervention measure II)

[63] In total, 80 producers were certified. Of these, four obtained certifications in line with other recognized food safety standards, while four producer organizations including 72 individual members, were certified under designation of origin or geographical origin schemes. https://zo.fsa.gov.ba/hr/pocetna-hr/

[64] A designation of origin certificate is a formal recognition that a product possesses specific qualities, characteristics, or a reputation that are essentially linked to its geographical origin. This certification confirms that the production, processing, and preparation of the product take place within a defined area and according to established standards. For agricultural and food products, such certification guarantees that unique local conditions—such as climate, soil, traditional know-how, or cultural practices—directly influence the product's identity and quality.

[65] https://www.ljportal.com/video-dani-maslinova-ulja-u-mostaru-zlatne-kapi-masline-u-hercegovini-93841/, https://eu4agri.ba/en/the-european-union-invested-in-the-protection-of-the-origin-of-herzegovinian-olive-oil/

[66] According to the certification body, each producer who obtains a designation of origin certificate is independently certified, which allows them to market and sell their products individually under the recognized designation. This is a key distinction from the GLOBALG.A.P. certificate, where certification is typically held by a company or an association. In such cases, individual farmers included under the GLOBALG.A.P. scheme cannot sell their products independently; they can only market them through the certified company or organization. The designation of origin approach therefore provides greater autonomy and direct market access to individual producers, while at the same time contributing to the collective branding and visibility of the product group.

Investments in processing and marketing of agri-food products

Although the progress achieved in supporting the processing and marketing of agri-food products is significant, it remains modest when compared to the substantial expansion observed in primary production The total EU assistance to investments in processing reached EUR 4.56 million.

Table 6: Overview of number of supported projects and funds allocation per public calls for processing and marketing

	EU Assistance (EUR)	Co-Financing (EUR)	Total Invest. (EUR)	No. of projects	No. of beneficiaries
Processing and marketing I	1,757,414	1,830,207	3,587,621	16	14[67]
Processing and marketing II	438,196	249,889	688,085	3	3
Processing and marketing III	1,491,140	1,332,729	2,823,869	14	14
Processing and marketing IV	412,872	208,286	621,158	4	4
Processing and marketing V	463,352	227,994	691,346	5	4[68]
Total support:	**4,562,973**	**3,849,105**	**8,412,079**	**42**	**39**

Besides efforts in implementation, significant resources were also invested in design, publishing and promoting five (5) public calls supporting investment in processing and marketing of agri-food products. One call per year was published, except for 2022, when there were two calls. Significant efforts were also made to evaluate 176 investment proposals in all five public calls.

Like the primary production, designing of calls here also had to be adjusted to the difficult new environment caused by constant external shocks. For example, the Action targeted agri-processing companies and cooperatives enhancing the value-added of their products and improving their marketing and sales, with support per project ranging between EUR 15,000 and EUR 150,000. In view of COVID-19, slight adjustments were also introduced by reducing the required co-financing by the applicants to overcome challenges related to access to finance and liquidity. The required co-financing was thus set at 35%, against the indicative co-financing of up to 50% envisaged in the DoA. These and other refinements in the call designs, along with many info sessions resulted in doubling application success rates since 2022 to over 40%.

A total of 45 beneficiaries were supported through five public calls for investments in the processing and marketing of agri-food products. Most of these investments focused on modernizing processing capacities through the purchase of advanced production equipment, while several beneficiaries also introduced laboratory equipment to improve quality control and compliance with food safety standards. In addition, a notable share of investments was directed towards the installation of solar energy systems, supporting the transition toward more sustainable and cost-efficient processing operations.

When analyzing sector participation, it is evident that more than 55% of supported beneficiaries come from the fruit and vegetable (27%) and meat processing (29%) sectors.

[67] Meggle Mljekara d.o.o. was also supported through public call for Intervention measure II and Mljekara Pađeni d.o.o. Bileća was also supported through public call for inovations and ICT solutions.
[68] Čapljanka d.o.o. Sanski Most was also beneficiary of public call for Intervention measure II

ACTIVITY 1.2 STRENGTHENING ADVISORY AND EXTENSION SERVICES TO FARMERS AND OTHER AGRI-FOOD OPERATORS BY NON-STATE ACTORS

According to the DoA this activity was focused on **enhancing advisory and extension services across BIH**, with an emphasis on ensuring both wider availability to farms and agri-food enterprises, as well as higher quality of services provided. Advisory and extension services play an essential role in improving know-how, technical capacity and encouraging innovative practices across the sector, which coupled with investment support will contribute to improved competitiveness and productivity, market development, and ultimately income levels.

In total, up to **EUR 1.5 million was initially allocated to address building advisory capacity**, emphasising the importance of training, reinforcing advisory/extension structures, and ensuring broader provision of support to agri-food stakeholders. Support measures targeted non-state or private actors which acted in support of the public extension services. Combined with technical assistance provided under Result 2 (Activity 2.2), support measures helped the evolution of existing advisory and extension service provision models, ensuring a complementary and coordinated approach and promoting partnerships of public and private sector entities. This contributed to development of a system that addressed gaps in knowledge to ensure better access to markets and financing, as well as enhance the overall competitiveness of the agri-food sector.

This activity provided **support for diverse and demand-driven advisory services**, including: practical demonstrations and in-the-field trials regarding the use of machinery and technologies for crop cultivation, sustainable plant protection and the implementation of hygiene, animal welfare and health standards; provision of information on agricultural market trends; advice on farm management, operations, logistics, marketing and investments; climate change mitigation and adaptation practices; capacity building of structures providing professional training and education for farmers; support in identifying financing sources and writing project proposal and business plans for farms and agri-businesses; advice for rural economy diversification; piloting of innovative technology-based services to support beneficiaries in a more cost- and time-effective way; promoting farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange and multi-actor knowledge networks; innovative agricultural (social) media; encouraging use of ICT in agriculture and food processing, etc.

Support for non-state providers of advisory and extension services targeted education and professional training organisations, business development services, local development agencies, rural development centres, associations of farmers, cooperatives, etc. Support measures also facilitated partnerships for the delivery of extension and advisory services in the sector.

In defining support measures to strengthen advisory and extension services to farmers and agri-food operators, the Action ensured **complementarities with the other two groups of support measures**. The Action considered the relevant legislation and carefully considered potential applicants' capacities, current service supply, as well as demand in relevant geographic area and / or sub-sector.

Selection criteria for eligible activities was guided by the intent to disrupt and improve current modes of extension service delivery, by increasing its quality and accessibility, strengthening service providers' capacities, and contributing to attracting future EU pre-accession funding.

The following three support measures were envisaged:

i) Support for agricultural extension delivery and linking science/research to farming (planned EUR 800,000);
ii) Support to advisory service providers for identification of funding opportunities and preparation of project proposals and business plans for agri-food operators (EUR 300,000);
iii) Support to innovations and ICT in agriculture (EUR 400,000).

Under Activity 1.2, as defined in the Description of Action (DoA), the Action was expected to deliver a set of outputs that were reached to some extent, as presented in the table below.

Table 7: Expected vs. achieved deliverables

Deliverable description	Expected deliverables	Achieved deliverables
Received No. of project proposals	**150** under at least **3** GIP support measures	**44** under **3** GIP support measures
No. of implemented projects contributing to improved agri-production and processing	**60** strengthening capacities of **80** service providers and at least **1,000** agri-food operators/other rural stakeholders.	**18** strengthening capacities of **34** service providers and **803** agri-food operators/other rural stakeholders.
Amount of financial support to be allocated into this intervention line	Up to EUR **1.5** million	Over EUR **1.3** million

Table 8: Overview of projects under Activity 1.2.

Support measure	EU Assistance (EUR)	Co-Financing (EUR)	Total Invest. (EUR)	No. of projects	No. of agri-food operators
Linking science to businesses	824,813	234	825,046	6	9
Innovations and ICT solutions	401,059	62,693	463,752	7	7
Business plans	97,707	529	98,236	5	113
Grand Total	**1,326,898**	**75,407**	**1,402,305**	**18**	**129**

Given the available funds for this Activity most of the allocated budget was utilized. However, the number of implemented project is significantly lower than projected (18 vs. 60) as well and number of supported service providers (80 vs. 34) and agri-food operators/other rural stakeholders (1,000 vs. 803).

The application requirements were designed to be simple and user-friendly, and potential beneficiaries were involved early in designing the public call to ensure alignment with their capacities. Despite this, many applications were submitted late and were of lower quality than expected, particularly given that applicants were academic institutions familiar with the call requirements. As a result, this call required the longest evaluation process, with multiple rounds of revisions. Ultimately, the effort led to six projects demonstrating innovative applications of ICT and AI in agriculture.

Similarly, the public call for business plans was intentionally designed to be simple, and the project team conducted an intensive promotion campaign. Nevertheless, only 10 applications were received, indicating limited engagement despite the support and visibility efforts. Of these, five applications successfully passed the evaluation stage and were subsequently implemented, ultimately benefiting a total of 113 beneficiaries.

Additionally, the public call Innovations and ICT solutions was crafted to encourage partnerships between IT and agri-food companies, creating opportunities for different industries to leverage their capacities. However, the response to this call was also surprisingly low, reflecting challenges in mobilizing participants even when the call offered clear opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. However, 7 projects were selected and supported, bringing forward success stories and practical examples of ICT solutions in agriculture, such as digital monitoring of production processes, precision-farming tools, smart irrigation, and improved traceability systems.

These experiences highlight that even well-designed, collaborative, and actively promoted support measures may face low uptake due to factors such as applicant motivation, sector readiness, and timing of submissions. They underscore the importance of ongoing outreach, follow-up, and capacity-building to encourage meaningful participation and higher-quality submissions.

Investments in support for agricultural extension delivery and linking science to farming

For the support to delivery of agricultural extension services and the linking of science and research to farming, the Action provided financial resources ranging between EUR 50,000 and EUR 200,000 per project, requiring co-financing of 0%[69].

Under this measure **EUR 824,812.88**were utilized through **six selected projects**. The public call, however, revealed significant weaknesses in the applications submitted by universities and scientific institutions. Even though all relevant institutions were actively involved in the design of the call and were thoroughly informed of its requirements through information and consultation sessions, the response was disappointing: out of 17 submitted applications, only six met the minimum criteria for selection. Most proposals lacked genuine research focus. Instead, they tended to either request funding primarily for ongoing staff costs or to combine several unrelated small-scale activities into a single application, rather than presenting substantive scientific research with practical application for farmers and the agri-food sector through advisory service providers. The process was further complicated by numerous challenges during submission, which created additional difficulties for the project team.

Originally, this activity was intended to begin immediately after the inception phase. However, its launch was postponed until mid of 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Action redirected its efforts toward supporting farmers and private sector actors in the agri-food industry to mitigate the severe economic impacts of the crisis. The implementation of the six selected projects was also marked by substantial challenges and delays. Contributing factors included complex public procurement procedures, supplier delays in delivering equipment and goods, and internal bureaucratic obstacles within the universities. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles and the need for multiple extensions of project timelines, all six projects were eventually completed.

Their completion delivered strong results and outreach, demonstrating the value of effectively linking science and research with farming. Most projects focused on automating research and production through sensors, drones, and multispectral imaging. Notable progress was achieved through the Precision Agriculture project at the Agricultural Institute of RS in Banja Luka, which introduced remote soil nitrogen sensing and enabled farmers to apply precision practices, with potential for service commercialization. Additionally, the Faculty of Agriculture in East Sarajevo and INGEB Sarajevo developed online platforms providing farmers with production recommendations and land quality monitoring, indicating strong potential for sustained, long-term impact.

Investments in support to advisory service providers for identification of funding opportunities and preparation of project proposals and business plans for agri-food operators

When it comes to this support measure, financial resources per project was up to EUR 20,000, requiring co-financing at the level of 0%[70]. The amount of EU assistance, as well as the required co-financing, was adjusted based on a demand and supply assessment of advisory service providers, conducted as part of the technical assistance under Result 2. The assessment revealed that the capacities of non-state advisory service providers remain underdeveloped, and the actual number of providers operating in the sector was far below the estimates and expectations initially set by the DoA. Different organizations providing advisory services were identified by research[71], however 49% have no income from advisory service while 66% of private advisors have a lack of financial resources and struggle with low demand for advisory services

Under the support measure aimed at strengthening advisory service providers in identifying funding opportunities and preparing project proposals and business plans for agri-food operators, only EUR 97,707 of the available EUR

[69] Originally DoA envisaged the range between EUR 20,000 and EUR 75,000 per project, requiring co-financing of approximately 15%
[70] Originally DoA envisaged the range between EUR 10,000 and EUR 50,000, requiring co-financing at the level of up to 15%
[71] Assessment of Supply and Demand for Extension Services in BiH

300,000 was utilized, resulting in the implementation of five projects. One of the initially selected applicants withdrew and cancelled its proposed project before the contract with UNDP was signed. Ultimately, **five advisory service providers** successfully carried out activities, delivering business plan training to 108 agri-food businesses, thereby enhancing their capacity to access funding and improve the sustainability of their operations.

The Action had anticipated a much stronger response to this call, particularly given the simplified application procedure and the fact that no co-financing was required from applicants. The Action also made considerable efforts to promote the call among all known non-state advisory service providers across the country. However, the limited response suggests that these providers currently lack the institutional and technical capacities necessary to prepare competitive applications and fully take advantage of such opportunities.

Investments in support to innovations and ICT in agriculture

Finally, to support innovation and ICT solutions in agriculture, the Action engaged extension service providers in digitalisation of the agri-food sector and the adoption of ICT and other high-technology approaches through partnerships with agri-food operators and ICT companies. Financial assistance per project ranged between EUR 25,000 and EUR 100,000, with required co-financing at the level of 30%[72]. Out of 17 received applications seven were selected to be financially supported in total amount of EUR 401,059 while co-financing EUR 62,684. It is important to note that each project included the partnership of at least two members – an ICT company and agro-food operator which means that through these seven projects 14 entities which boosted demand-driven knowledge of 67 agro-food operators.

The partnerships facilitated the development of IT solutions aimed at enhancing the operations of agricultural companies. In some cases, efforts focused on improving accounting, bookkeeping, and marketing practices, while in others, support was provided for the creation of AI-based systems. One notable example is the collaboration between the IT company OD Content BA and the agricultural enterprise EXZO, which led to the development of a prototype online agricultural advisor based on neural network. This system generates notifications for producers based on data collected from a network of local meteorological stations and crop condition readings obtained via multispectral cameras.

While discussing this topic it is important to note that digitalisation is a key priority under the EU Common Agricultural Policy, as it contributes to higher productivity, sustainability, climate resilience and improved competitiveness of the agri-food sector. EU4AGRI supported digitalisation not only through ICT-focused initiative, but across all support measures, investing EUR 2.96 million in digital solutions—while beneficiaries additionally co-funded EUR 1.62 million. This approach directly promoted the modernisation of agricultural practices, more efficient use of resources, data-driven decision making, and alignment with EU standards. These investments strengthened the technological capacity of farmers and processors and laid important foundations for future integration with CAP requirements, fostering a more innovative and sustainable agricultural sector in BiH[73].

[72] range between EUR 15,000 and EUR 70,000, with required co-financing at the level of around 15%
[73] https://eu4agri.ba/inovacije-i-razvoj-eu4agri-mijenja-lice-bh-poljoprivrede/

ACTIVITY 1.3 STRENGTHENING THE RURAL ECONOMY AND ITS DIVERSIFICATION

This activity addressed the need to **support rural income and jobs for better quality of life in rural areas**. As the agricultural sector modernised, employment could be expected to both decline in overall terms and shift away from subsistence labour towards more skilled forms of farm and rural work. Consequently, there was a need to support the development of alternative income streams and create an environment that is conducive to new business opportunities.

Ensuring a better quality of life in rural areas by supporting rural jobs and services was targeted by **investment in the diversification of on-farm production**, with an emphasis on crops and activities like herbs and mushrooms, apiculture, aquaculture, etc. The focus was on sub-sectors of less strategic importance but of potentially disproportionate economic return at farm level, as well as on value-adding investments like small on-farm processing, introducing smart farming solutions, etc.

Further, the Action supported **facilities for agriculture-related activities**, such as green markets, purchase and distribution infrastructure and services; as well as improving the quality and availability of produce for market and the development of marketing.

The development of rural economy also encompassed non-agricultural activities. Support was provided for the **development of rural tourism**, which opened possibilities to develop additional income streams, including for service providers and rural crafts and products, having in mind BIH's rich cultural, natural, historic and gastronomic heritage.

In total, up to **EUR 4.8 million was originally planned to be allocated** under the following four measures:

i) **Investment in diversification of on-farm production (EUR 1.4 million);**
ii) **Investment in facilities for agricultural activities (EUR 1 million);**
iii) **Investment in agri-tourism (EUR 1.3 million); and**
iv) **Investment in rural socio-economic activities (EUR 1.1 million).**

It is important to note that the support measure for investment in rural socio-economic activities was not implemented as a separate measure as originally envisaged. This was largely due to the limited capacities of targeted stakeholders to prepare project proposals and to establish effective partnerships with each other. Some components of these socio-economic support measures were, however, integrated through the diversification of economic activities and agritourism, providing alternative opportunities for income generation and community development.

Table 9: Expected vs. achieved deliverables

Deliverable description	Expected deliverables	Achieved deliverables
Received No. of project proposals under at least four GIP support measures	**500** under at least **4** GIP support measures	**44** under **3** GIP support measures
No. of implemented projects that contribute to development and diversification of rural economy, to the benefit of at least 2,000 agri-food operators and other rural development stakeholders	**160** benefiting at least **2,000** agri-food operators and other rural development stakeholders	**30** benefiting **486** agri-food operators and other rural development stakeholders
Amount of financial support to be allocated into this intervention line	Up to EUR **4.8** million	EUR **1.8** million

Table 10: Overview of projects under Activity 1.3. Strengthening the rural economy and its diversification

Support measure	EU Assistance (EUR)	Co-Financing (EUR)	Total Invest. (EUR)	No. of projects	No. of agri-food operators
Investment in facilities for agricultural activities I	375,440	161,294	536,734	6	157
Investment in facilities for agricultural activities II	459,733	207,377	667,110	6	236
Investment in agri-tourism	320,130	60,096	380,226	4	14
Investment in diversification of on-farm production	665,763	227,522	893,285	14	49
Grand Total	1,821,066	656,289	2,477,356	30	456

Strengthening the rural economy and its diversification accounted for the smallest portion of the total EU support under the Action, representing only 12%. This relatively low allocation can be attributed to several factors. First, the limited capacities of target beneficiaries to design and implement socio-economic projects reduced the potential impact of this support measure compared to investments in agricultural production and processing, where the demand and readiness were higher. Second, initiatives in rural diversification, including agribusiness, agritourism, and other income-generating activities, often require more complex planning, partnerships, and technical support, which increases implementation risks.

Additionally, the low response rate to public calls under this measure further constrained the scale of support. Many municipalities and local actors were either unfamiliar with project development processes or lacked the resources and incentives to engage in these types of collaborative socio-economic initiatives. Despite intensive promotion campaigns, technical guidance, and consultation during the design phase, uptake remained limited.

However, the projects that were supported performed very well and achieved excellent results. The Action actively promoted successful stories to serve as showcases, demonstrating the feasibility and potential impact of such initiatives. This approach aimed to encourage other stakeholders in rural areas to explore similar socio-economic and diversification opportunities, highlighting those well-designed interventions can deliver tangible benefits even in challenging contexts.

Consequently, while rural economic diversification remains a strategic priority, the combination of limited beneficiary capacity, higher implementation complexity, and low initial engagement resulted in a relatively small share of the EU support being allocated to this area. Nevertheless, the success of the implemented projects provides a valuable model for replication and scaling-up in future initiatives.

Investment in diversification of on-farm production

For **investment in the diversification of on-farm production**, the Action targeted farm holdings and cooperatives, with financial assistance per project ranging from EUR 25,000 to EUR 100,000, requiring co-financing at the level of 25%. The required co-financing was decreased from 40% that was originally envisaged by DoA.

This support measure stands out from all other support measures developed under the Action due to its unique two-stage application process. Interested applicants were first required to submit a concept note outlining their proposed project, which served as the basis for initial evaluation and selection. Selected projects then received technical support, during which the concept notes were further developed into full business plans before final approval for financial support.

The structure of the measure required a lead applicant to represent a group of stakeholders. Under LOT 1, the lead applicant had to be a municipality or city applying on behalf of at least three agri-food operators, crafts, companies, or cooperatives. Under LOT 2, the lead applicant was also a municipality, representing at least one partner such as

an association, private institution, or private company. In this setup, municipalities did not receive any direct financial benefit from the projects; their role was limited to coordination and, in some instances, providing co-financing on behalf of their partners.

During the design of this support measure, all municipalities were invited to participate, and the Action organized at least two dedicated coordination sessions to gather input and encourage collaboration. Despite this inclusive approach, the response rate remained limited, indicating challenges in mobilizing municipal engagement.

The promotion campaign for the public call was extensive. It included sending individual letters to mayors, contacting each municipality by phone, and organizing dedicated information sessions to explain the process and encourage participation. Even with these efforts, only 28 out of 143 municipalities and cities submitted applications, highlighting the limited engagement of local authorities in this type of collaborative initiative, despite the significant funding opportunity and the structured technical support provided.

Providing technical support encountered significant challenges in working with both municipalities and end beneficiaries. In many cases, municipal focal points showed limited interest in actively cooperating or supporting their partners, which reduced the effectiveness of coordination efforts. Similarly, project partners were often reluctant, lacked the necessary knowledge, or demonstrated limited motivation to engage in the technical support process.

These factors significantly extended the duration of technical support, which lasted up to 12 months. The technical support teams had to invest substantial time in guiding beneficiaries through project development, reporting, documentation, and compliance with procedural requirements. This involved repeated consultations, on-site visits, and step-by-step mentoring to ensure that partners could fulfil their obligations and fully utilize the resources provided under the Action.

Despite these challenges, the extended and intensive technical support was crucial for enabling beneficiaries to successfully implement their projects, strengthen partnerships, and achieve the intended outcomes[74]. This experience also highlighted the importance of early engagement, capacity-building, and continuous follow-up when working with stakeholders who are inexperienced or less motivated, particularly in collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Investment in facilities for agriculture-related activities

Concerning **investment in facilities for agriculture-related activities**, the focus was on local governments, LAGs[75], cooperatives and companies (ideally acting in partnership), with financial assistance per project ranging from EUR 20,000 to EUR 100,000 and requiring co-financing at the level of 25%.

This support measure was implemented through two consecutive public calls, each designed to identify and fund eligible projects. The first public call received 41 applications, but the overall quality of submissions was very low, resulting in only 7 projects being selected for financial support.
Following this outcome, the Action organized a “lessons learned” session with all applicants whose submissions failed to meet the criteria, as well as with other stakeholders interested in the call. The session aimed to provide guidance on improving proposal quality, understanding eligibility requirements, and effectively designing projects to maximize the potential for financial support.

[74] https://eu4agri.ba/seoski-turizam-zivi-u-gacku-uz-podrsku-evropske-unije-kroz-eu4agri/, https://eu4agri.ba/bungalovi-i-toralice-uz-podrsku-eu-postaju-novi-adut-seoskog-turizma-u-gacku/,

[75] Although many Local Action Groups (LAGs) were established and supported through UNDP and other donor-driven initiatives, only a few remain active today. The formation of LAGs in BiH has so far been carried out almost exclusively at the initiative of international donors through specific projects, rather than through a systematic national framework.

The second public call, which incorporated slight adjustments based on the lessons learned, attracted 27 applications. Despite these efforts, only 6 projects met the criteria and were recommended for financial support. It is important to note that some municipalities failed to apply the lessons learned from the first call. Instead of revising or improving their proposals, they merely copied and pasted previous applications, thereby missing the opportunity to secure significant support for their local markets and rural infrastructure. This highlights the ongoing challenges of limited capacity, lack of engagement, and insufficient attention to guidance, even when technical support and advisory sessions are provided.

Overall, this experience underscores the critical importance of capacity-building, active stakeholder engagement, and tailored technical support to ensure that available funding reaches well-prepared and impactful projects. This support measure proved to be particularly challenging to implement due to a combination of factors. First, tender processes in accordance with local legislation were often lengthy, significantly affecting the timely execution of investments. Second, the capacities of municipalities were limited, particularly in terms of human resources, coordination, project management, reporting, and overall administrative support. These limitations posed substantial obstacles to smooth project implementation and required additional support from the project team.

As a result, all 12 projects[76] that successfully implemented their investments required multiple contract extensions, with implementation periods ranging from 18 to 24 months, well beyond the initially planned timeline. Despite these challenges, the projects were eventually completed, demonstrating the importance of continuous technical support, close monitoring, and adaptive management when working with local authorities and complex investment projects.

This experience highlights the critical need for capacity-building at the municipal level, the importance of realistic timelines for investment projects, and the necessity of proactive planning to address procedural and administrative delays in similar future initiatives. Equally important is addressing the perception among some municipalities that project implementation is someone else's responsibility. Municipalities need to take ownership, lead the process, and actively prepare themselves to manage future funding opportunities effectively. Strengthening this sense of responsibility and leadership at the local level is essential for ensuring that investments are efficiently executed and that the potential benefits reach local communities as intended.
Despite the implementation challenges, the Action actively celebrated the excellent results achieved in partnership with the selected municipalities. Several official openings of local markets were organized, attended by key stakeholders including the EUD Ambassador, UNDP Resident Representative, Mayors, and other local officials, in cities such as Banja Luka, Trebinje, and Mostar. These events provided an opportunity to showcase the successful projects, recognize the efforts of local authorities and beneficiaries, and raise awareness of the impact of the Action.

In addition to these on-site events, other project locations and achievements were highlighted through UNDP communication channels as success stories. This approach not only acknowledged the accomplishments of participating municipalities and beneficiaries but also aimed to inspire other local authorities and stakeholders to pursue similar initiatives, demonstrating that well-coordinated and technically supported projects can deliver tangible benefits for rural communities.

[76] https://eu4agri.ba/eu4agri-razvija-trzisnu-ruralnu-infrastrukturu-gradska-trznica-mala-tepa-u-novom-ruhu/, https://eu4agri.ba/obnovljena-gradska-pijaca-u-rudom-ponovo-na-usluzi-gradjanima/, https://eu4agri.ba/modernizacija-gradske-trznice-u-gracanici-uz-podrsku-evropske-unije/, https://eu4agri.ba/eu4agri-pijacni-prostor-u-samcu-dobija-novo-lice/, https://eu4agri.ba/eu4agri-svecano-otvorio-koncept-urbanih-trznica-u-banjoj-luci-na-5-lokacija/

Investment in agri-tourism

Targeting farm holdings, companies, cooperatives, associations and local governments, **investment in agri-tourism** will entail financial support ranging from EUR 25,000 to EUR 125,000[77] per project, requiring co-financing at the level of 15%.

The first public call under this support measure was launched in 2020, following extensive coordination meetings with key stakeholders in the tourism and agritourism sectors, despite the restrictions and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. A key recommendation from the sector during the design phase was to target entire destinations rather than individual projects, adopting a comprehensive approach that brings together multiple stakeholders around an integral touristic product or offer at a single location. This approach was recommended because an integral touristic product—combining accommodation, local food, cultural experiences, and other complementary services—enhances the attractiveness and competitiveness of the destination, creating synergies that individual initiatives alone cannot achieve. Additionally, small farmers, individual operators, and micro-enterprises often lack the capacity, experience, or resources to prepare project proposals or independently access funding. By promoting partnerships among different stakeholder profiles, the public call aimed to pool expertise, resources, and management capacities, enabling smaller actors to participate in and benefit from development initiatives that would otherwise be beyond their reach.

Based on these recommendations, the public call required applicants to form partnerships and offered a simplified application format to encourage participation. Despite these efforts and the reduced complexity of submission requirements, the call resulted in 43 applications of surprisingly low quality resulting in 0 selected projects for financial support.

Given the outcomes of the first round, the Action conducted a second round of consultations with stakeholders and partner institutions to adjust the public call based on lessons learned from the initial experience. Adjustments aimed to improve the clarity of requirements, support partnership formation, and better guide applicants in developing feasible projects. Despite these improvements, the second call still received 48 applications, of which only 5 were recommended for financial support, reflecting ongoing challenges in stakeholder capacity and project readiness. Furthermore, one beneficiary ultimately withdrew from the process after 12 months of engagement during the contracting stage, despite extensive support and efforts by the project team to finalize the agreement.

However, despite the challenges in the application and contracting processes, the projects that were supported achieved excellent results[78]. The Action actively promoted these successful stories to highlight the tangible impacts of the interventions, showcase best practices, and inspire other stakeholders in the tourism and agritourism sectors. By sharing these success stories, the Action not only recognized the efforts of beneficiaries and municipalities but also demonstrated that well-coordinated, partnership-based initiatives can deliver meaningful benefits for local communities and contribute to the development of integral touristic products.

[77] The maximum amount was significantly increased in comparison to the DoA where it stated that financial support ranging from EUR 10,000 to EUR 50,000 per project, requiring co-financing at the level of 25%.

[78] https://eu4agri.ba/kako-obuka-i-eu-fondovi-jacaju-poljoprivredu-u-han-pijesku/,

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/bosnia-and-herzegovina/otkrivamo-najljep%C5%A1u-pri%C4%8Du-una_bs,
https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1FyML3Pzsd/

RESULT 2. POLICY ACTIONS ARE IMPLEMENTED IN EU ALIGNED MANNER, BASED ON SECTOR SERVICES AND SYSTEMS IMPROVED.

Under Result 2, the Action offered technical assistance to enable the implementation of GIP under Result 1, while engaging institutional partners and ensuring the anchoring of relevant knowledge, skills, and practices for result-oriented public policy delivery in the sector.

In parallel, the Action worked on strengthening public advisory services, which, together with support for non-state advisory services through GIP under Result 1, contributed to wider availability and higher quality of services provided. Upgrading the agriculture information systems was also supported, considering their importance for evidence-based policy design, monitoring, and evaluation.

Finally, under this result, the Action offered support for policy and regulatory improvements in line with priorities for approximation with the Union acquis.

Technical assistance was designed to strategically and coherently advance public systems in the sector, in line with institutional partners' priorities and commitments. It ensured synergies and complementarities among activities under this result and offered a focused approach to comprehensively address targeted issues (e.g., in the wine sector), as opposed to piecemeal, unrelated, ad-hoc activities in multiple areas where results may have been marginal or not visible at all.

Under Result 2, the Action supported at least 40%[79] of policy actions stemming from the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BiH (2018–2021) – Framework Document, which were implemented through GIP in an EU-aligned manner, while strengthening institutional capacities for result-oriented policy delivery.

ACTIVITY 2.1. ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES FOR COORDINATED POLICY DELIVERY (IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITY: UNDP)

Under this activity, UNDP managed the GIP, including its participatory design, consultations with institutions and relevant international community actors, management of calls for proposals, selection, award and administration of contracts, as well as monitoring and evaluation of results. UNDP applied its procurement, contractual, and quality assurance systems to ensure transparent, effective, and accountable GIP delivery. For quality GIP delivery, the Action considered the maximum number of projects per measure that could be feasibly managed and monitored.

Technical assistance was engineered to ensure effective GIP delivery, enabling institutional partners to acquire new knowledge and skills, with an overall contribution to the advancement of public systems in the sector. The Action delivered process-based, customized technical assistance to relevant institutional partners throughout the GIP cycle (design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation). The intensity of assistance was scaled down over time to reduce the burden on recipients. To the extent possible, technical assistance for GIP management was synchronized with public budget and institutional mid-term/annual planning cycles, ensuring complementarities with national support measures in the sector and introducing an improved grant scheme management approach.

This activity was implemented through two sub-activities:

- Sub-activity 2.1.1. Design and implementation of policy support measures
- Sub-activity 2.1.2. Monitoring and evaluation of policy support measures

[79] Final Project Evaluation, page 7 and 8, Evaluation Findings, Relevance

These sub-activities focused on ensuring high-quality design, implementation, and delivery of the Grant Investment Package (GIP), aligned with sector policies, EU practices, and the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BiH (2018–2021). It included policy reviews, baseline data collection, stakeholder consultations, and dissemination of GIP information, as well as capacity-building support to institutional partners and GIP recipients. Technical assistance was delivered through training and learning-by-doing, covering policy context, support scheme conceptualization, GIP design, promotion, and evaluation, while inter-institutional working groups guided coordinated policy delivery. A robust monitoring and evaluation framework was established, supported by sex-disaggregated data and reporting guidelines, enabling systematic tracking, evaluation of results, and capturing lessons learned.

Overall, the activity strengthened institutional capacities for evidence-based, results-oriented policy implementation and improved delivery of sector-specific support measures.
Under Activity 2.1, the Action was expected to have the following deliverables:

Table 11: Expected vs. achieved deliverables

Expected description	Achieved deliverables
An inter-institutional working group engaged in the design of public support measures, contributing to improved policy coordination;	An inter-institutional working group engaged in the design of public support measures, contributing to improved policy coordination;
Knowledge and skills of at least **20** representatives of partner institutions strengthened in the area of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public support measures;	Knowledge and skills of **45** representatives of partner institutions strengthened in the area of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public support measures;
Assessments to measure entry, mid-term and exit capacity of relevant partner institutions conducted, with focus on design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy actions;	Assessments to measure entry, mid-term and exit capacity of relevant partner institutions conducted, with focus on design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy actions;
Review of partner institutions' functions and structures conducted to optimize delivery of policy actions;	Review of partner institutions' functions and structures conducted to optimize delivery of policy actions;
Comprehensive M&E framework designed for GIP support measures;	Comprehensive M&E framework designed for GIP support measures;
Developed a standardized comprehensive training package on management of public support measures in agriculture and rural development;	Developed a standardized comprehensive training package on management of public support measures in agriculture and rural development;
At least 9 GIP support measures designed based on sound analyses and consultations with stakeholders;	**11** GIP support measures designed based on sound analyses and consultations with stakeholders;
At least 9 GIP support measures implemented, monitored and evaluated;	**11** GIP support measures implemented though 24 public calls, monitored and evaluated;
Ca 2,000 potential applicants informed about GIP support measures through ca 40 promotional events / info days held throughout the country;	Over **50,000** potential applicants informed about GIP support measures through ca **153** promotional events / info days held throughout the country or online
At least 320 agri-food operators recipients of GIP support enhance their knowledge and skills in project implementation, monitoring and reporting.	At least **2,041** agri-food operators recipients of GIP support enhance their knowledge and skills in project implementation, monitoring and reporting.

As underline above this activity focused on ensuring high-quality design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the GIP, with active engagement of institutional partners via inter-institutional working groups. The Action built on the existing Inter-institutional Working Group for Agriculture and Rural Development, comprising Programmatic and Operational subgroups and bringing together representatives from the BiH Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, the FBiH Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry, the RS Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, and the Department of Agriculture in Brčko District. The Group was expanded to cover two sectors—agriculture and tourism—with 45 institutional members in total, who strengthened capacities in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating public support measures.

Technical assistance was delivered using a customized, stage-based learning approach, conceptualized based on the UNDP tool DESIGN OF PUBLIC GRANT SCHEMES: A FUNCTIONAL MANUAL FOR PRACTITIONERS. The support

encompassed the full GIP lifecycle: policy context and linkages to public priorities, support scheme conceptualization, GIP design (outcomes, outputs, indicators, eligible applicants, activities, costs, selection criteria, monitoring and evaluation plan), promotion, evaluation of applications, and contracting. Institutional partners co-owned the design process, providing feedback and actively participating in public call development, ensuring capacity development and gradual routine adoption of GIP methodology for public financial incentives.

THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- **Coordination and Consultations:** The technical assistance to institutional partners was delivered via a customized and stage-based learning process, which follows the comprehensive GIP design process, mirroring the general principles and approach embraced by the EU. The general stages through which technical assistance is delivered include policy perspective and context (linkages with public policy priorities and budget), support scheme conceptualization (demand scanning, pre-feasibility, and conceptual outlook), GIP design (outcomes, outputs, indicators, eligible applicants, activities and costs, selection criteria, monitoring and evaluation plan, detailed elaboration of the application package), as well as evaluation of applications and contracting. Over three and half years (April/May 2020 to December 2023), 25 coordination meetings were organized for the design of 24 public calls for 11 support measures:
    1. Investments in primary production (five public calls),
    2. COVID-19 mitigation (one public call),
    3. Intervention measure (two public calls),
    4. Certification (three public calls),
    5. Processing and marketing of agri-food products (five public calls),
    6. Support for agricultural extension delivery and linking science/research to farming (one public call),
    7. Support to advisory service providers for identification of funding opportunities and preparation of project proposals and business plans for agri-food operators (one public call),
    8. Support to innovations and ICT in agriculture (one public call),
    9. Investment in agri-tourism (two public calls, one canceled),
    10. Investment in diversification of on-farm production (one public call),
    11. Investment in facilities for agricultural activities (two public calls).

    Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, consultations for the GIP design were conducted online, requiring the Action to adapt its technical assistance delivery approach. Under the agreed modality, the Action team prepared an initial (zero) draft of each GIP public call and shared it with institutional partners for review and feedback. This was followed by several online consultation sessions, during which individual sections of the public call were jointly discussed, amended, and agreed upon.

    Depending on the structure and complexity of each support measure, the consultation process varied in length. In addition to state- and entity-level representatives, cantonal ministries of agriculture were also engaged in reviewing and commenting on the drafts, ensuring wider institutional ownership.

    Once all comments were incorporated, the final version of each GIP public call was endorsed by the Sectoral Working Group, following verification by the EU Delegation, and unanimously approved for publication. All finalized public calls were regularly shared with members of the Project Board. On several occasions, other relevant stakeholders — including potential beneficiaries — were consulted during the early stages of the public call design for various support measures (e.g., agri-tourism, diversification of economic activities, linking science and business, primary agricultural production, and others).

- Based on the proposal of partner institutions, the Action organized extended joint meetings of the Programmatic and Operational Working Groups in 2021 and 2022. Continuous coordination between institutional partners and the Action focused on discussing implementation challenges, sharing information, and providing recommendations to improve future cooperation. An additional extended coordination meeting was held in 2023, again serving as a platform to review progress, exchange lessons learned, and strengthen

collaboration among all involved partners. The 2023 meeting also provided an opportunity to present the GIP software and discuss the next steps for its transfer to institutional partners.

- As part of the effort to continuously improve the GIP design and evaluation process, the Action improved the business planning model used in the public calls. The changes affected the Excel forms as well as narrative part of the application. The new model was introduced during the Business Planning Training Programme. In order to capture challenges and issues faced by the applicants and their consultants, the Action conducted the phone interviews with cca. 30 consultants in February 2022. In general, their feedback on the new model was positive and they provided some constructive suggestions and recommendations. This was taken into the consideration while preparing a new, redesigned public calls.

- **Info-Sessions:** The Action held multiple info-sessions per call, providing detailed guidance on application requirements and hands-on support for prospective applicants. Additional sessions involved 46 advisors/consultants to strengthen advisory services in the sector. Online sessions and email correspondence facilitated consultations, especially during COVID-19 restrictions.
  The promotion of public calls was conducted in a systematic and continuous manner, aiming both to maximize outreach and to provide technical assistance to applicants requiring additional support. Promotion activities included disseminating information about launched public calls through institutional partners, who shared the information via their websites and other public communication channels, as well as with other interested parties such as producers' associations. Additionally, the Action organized at least two info-sessions per public call for agri-food operators, providing detailed guidance on application requirements, hands-on support throughout the application process, and Q&A sessions. Active promotion also included 112 live info days across the country (41 in FBiH and 71 in RS) and 41 online sessions, which informed stakeholders about funding opportunities, encouraged networking and partnerships, and enhanced the overall knowledge and awareness of the sector.

- **Business Planning Academy (BDA):** The Action delivered a comprehensive, interactive Business Planning Academy in two cohorts (2021 and 2022), consisting of five basic and five advanced modules tailored for institutional partners and business development advisors/consultants. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the training was organized entirely online. A total of 116 participants enrolled across six groups, of whom 59 successfully completed the training (51% completion rate).

  Public sector participation: Out of the 116 participants, 52 were from public institutions, including 21 representatives of partner institutions—only 10 of whom successfully completed the program. The remaining 31 public-sector participants (representatives of cantonal ministries providing advisory services and the RS Agency for Payments) were included following project board recommendations, with 11 successfully completing the training.

  Private sector participation: The remaining participants (64) were from the private sector, with **38** successfully completing the program. Many later applied their newly acquired skills as independent consultants supporting applicants to the Action's public call.
  Training effectiveness was confirmed through a pre-training and post-training knowledge assessment. The preliminary questionnaire showed a modest initial understanding of the subject, with participants scoring 68% correct answers. After completing the training, the accuracy rate increased to 87%, and over 95% of participants demonstrated improvement in their final assessment results. This sub-activity ultimately contributed to the creation of a new market niche of consultants equipped with specialized knowledge and practical skills relevant to rural development and business planning.

- **GIP Software Development -** The Action designed and implemented a GIP software platform to support online application submission, evaluation, and monitoring/reporting:
  - **Module 1:** Online submission of applications.
  - **Module 2:** Evaluation of applications.
  - **Module 3:** Monitoring and reporting.

Out of 24 public calls, 19 were published and managed through the GIP software. In addition, 18 further public calls were also launched using this system. The platform was utilized by various stakeholders, including EU4Business Recovery, EU4AGRI-Recovery, as well as government institutions such as the FBiH Ministry of Development, Entrepreneurship and Crafts and the FBiH Ministry of Education, among others. The software improved transparency, efficiency, and accessibility for both applicants and institutional partners, enabling stage-based evaluation and comprehensive tracking of implementation. Training was provided to working group representatives, and select ministries began testing or adopting the platform.
The GIP software, once fully developed and operational, reached a critical stage in which discussions intensified regarding its potential transfer to partner institutions. These discussions involved the ministries of agriculture in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS), as well as the Department for Agriculture of Brčko District. The Action team held numerous consultations and delivered detailed, tailored presentations of the software to each institution, including a larger presentation event attended by all key stakeholders.

Despite these extensive efforts, both the FBiH Ministry of Agriculture and the Brčko District Department for Agriculture informed the Action that they did not perceive a need for the software system. The RS Ministry of Agriculture initially expressed interest and entered the testing phase; however, after the consultations and the main presentation event, the Ministry unexpectedly withdrew from the process without providing any explanation.

While the agriculture institutions ultimately did not adopt the system, other government bodies in FBiH recognized its value and used it successfully for managing their public calls. For example, the Ministry of Development, Entrepreneurship and Craft, as well as the Ministry of Education, made full use of the GIP software. The Ministry of Education even replicated the EU4AGRI public call for linking science and business and recently published its own call through the GIP platform. Additionally, the FBiH Ministry of Tourism and Environment expressed interest in applying the software and used it in 2025.

The key steps of the GIP design and implementation process were:

1. **Support measure design** (minimum 2 months) – The design of each support measure was a carefully coordinated process, lasting at least two months. This stage involved intensive collaboration and consultations with partner institutions to ensure that all perspectives were considered, and consensus was reached on the structure, eligibility criteria, and implementation modalities of the support measure. This collaboration resulted in at least 30 coordination meetings with the representatives of the partner institutions that were the members of the program working group responsible for the design of the support measure.
   Once the design was finalized, the public call required approval from the European Union Delegation (EUD), which added an additional layer of review and quality assurance. This rigorous design process ensured that support measures were well-structured, feasible, and aligned with both project objectives and the expectations of the donor.

2. **Public Call Announcement (typically 2 months)** – The publication phase of each public call usually lasted around two months. This stage involved intensive promotion and outreach activities, including presentations, both online and in-person information sessions (112 live info sessions and 41 online info session), as well as coordination of question-and-answer sessions to clarify eligibility, procedures, and submission requirements.
   In many cases, applicants requested additional time to prepare their submissions, which led to extensions of the original deadlines. Typically, public calls were extended by one to two weeks to ensure that all interested applicants had a fair opportunity to submit complete and compliant applications. These extensions helped improve the quality of submissions and supported broader participation across target groups.

3. **Evaluation of received applications (3 to 8 months)** – The evaluation phase was highly complex and time-intensive, requiring the coordinated involvement of a substantial number of project staff as well as

representatives of the partner institution. All evaluation activities were conducted in accordance with UNDP's internal policies and procedures, ensuring transparency, accountability, and consistency throughout the process. While these safeguards strengthened the integrity of the selection, they also contributed to the overall duration of the evaluation period.
To ensure balanced expertise and objective assessments, the evaluation committee was structured into three separate teams, including a dedicated field verification team that conducted 310 field visits. Each team was composed to reflect the specific competencies required at different stages of the process. This division of responsibilities enhanced the quality and reliability of evaluations, while also increasing the level of coordination, planning, and documentation required.

The evaluation process included due diligence or other checks, depending on the applicant's registration format, in accordance with UNDP policies and procedures. A formal appeal mechanism was also in place, allowing applicants to request a review of decisions. Managing appeals required additional time, as each case needed careful reassessment, justification, and documentation, extending the overall evaluation timeline.

Once a preliminary list of successful applicants was prepared according to UNDP internal policies, an independent commission reviewed the entire process and conducted quality assurance. Following approval, the preliminary list became final and was submitted to Project Board members for endorsement, after which it could be publicly published.

In many cases, the evaluation period was additionally prolonged by **slow or incomplete responses from applicants** who were asked to submit missing documents or clarifications. Delays in providing these materials hindered the workflow of the evaluation teams and extended subsequent verification and approval steps. Despite these challenges, the project team maintained a rigorous, evidence-based assessment process to ensure that all applications were evaluated fairly, accurately, and in accordance with the predefined eligibility and quality criteria.
For context, it is important to note that lengthy evaluation processes are not unique to this project. According to the **2018–2019 Implementation Report of IPARD II in Serbia**[80], the average time from the receipt of an application to the adoption of a final decision exceeded **270 days**, illustrating the complexity and administrative demands typically associated with this type of investment support.

4. **Contracting with selected beneficiaries (in average 3 months but sometimes it was up to 12 months)** – The contracting stage, which followed the evaluation and approval of applications, was itself a complex and time-intensive process, lasting between 3 and 12 months. The wide variation in duration was largely due to challenges experienced by some beneficiaries in fulfilling the contractual requirements.
   Several factors contributed to the extended timelines. Some beneficiaries were slow to respond to requests for signatures or additional documentation required to finalize contracts. Others faced external constraints, such as difficulties in obtaining loans or bank guarantees, delays in securing offers from suppliers, or prolonged procedures for obtaining construction and other relevant permits. These obstacles often necessitated repeated follow-ups and coordination between the project team, the beneficiaries, and relevant authorities or financial institutions.
   Despite these challenges, the contracting process was carried out meticulously in accordance with UNDP policies and procedures, ensuring that all contractual obligations, financial safeguards, and implementation requirements were properly addressed before project funds were released. This thorough approach minimized risks, safeguarded project resources, and prepared the ground for successful project implementation.

5. **Monitoring and implementation of contacted projects/investments with selected beneficiaries (from 6 to 24 months, in average 18 months)** - The implementation phase was the most complex and demanding

[80] https://uap.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/annual-implementation-report-on-ipard-ii-programme-for-period-2018-2019.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

stage of the project, lasting between 6 and 24 months, with an average duration of 18 months. While the public calls typically envisaged 12 months for project implementation, in most cases beneficiaries required extensions to complete their activities. During the implementation of 211 projects the project staff conducted 490 field visits to the beneficiaries.

Over 90% of beneficiaries requested an extension of their contracts with UNDP to allow additional time for project completion. This indicates that initial planning by many beneficiaries was insufficient. In some cases, however, extensions were justified due to external factors, including:

- Delays in the delivery of equipment or materials,
- Adverse weather conditions that hindered construction works,
- Challenges in recruiting sufficient workforce to carry out planned activities.

At least half of these beneficiaries requested multiple extensions, with some contracts extended several times to accommodate ongoing delays. For example, the contract with the City of Bihać was extended seven times to allow the completion of planned activities.

The process was particularly demanding because many beneficiaries had no prior experience preparing reports on fund utilization, compiling verification documentation, or fulfilling administrative and technical requirements. The GIP team provided continuous technical support, guiding and mentoring beneficiaries throughout the implementation process, including step-by-step instructions on reporting, documentation, and compliance with project procedures.

Despite the support offered, the team often encountered resistance from beneficiaries, including delays in responding, lack of motivation, and reluctance to comply with reporting obligations. Managing these challenges required considerable time, effort, and coordination to ensure that projects were successfully completed in line with the objectives of the support measures.

- Against the GIP performance indicators set out in each public call, and in close cooperation with the Inter-institutional Working Group, the Action supported the development of a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. The framework included a clear methodology, structure, and tools to monitor progress, manage risks, evaluate GIP results, and capture lessons learned, effectively closing the policy cycle. It was built upon the previously developed EU4Business framework, with additions reflecting EU4AGRI specificities and relevant indicators. A comprehensive database allowed evidence-based monitoring and evaluation of support measures and was regularly updated with data from GIP monitoring and technical assistance. This enabled real-time evaluation of effects against the Action's performance indicators. The Action delivered capacity-building activities for institutional partners through online and practical training. The Action organized several online trainings followed by field visits to monitor GIP implementation. The response rate of the partner institution representatives was quite low to this activity and up to 10 representatives participated, gaining hands-on experience across the full GIP cycle, from design and implementation to monitoring. This practical engagement strengthened institutional capacities.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

- **The assessment/functional analysis** of institutional functions, structures, and capacities of the entity ministries of agriculture and the Department of Agriculture in Brčko District was carried out in the last quarter of 2022 and early 2023. The assessment focused on the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policy actions contributing to the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023–2027 – Framework Document. It primarily examined the analytical and monitoring capacities of the institutions, aiming to identify obstacles and gaps in their analytical and monitoring functions and to strengthen their ability to design and deliver evidence-based policies. Although the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina (MoFTER BiH) initially confirmed its participation during a bilateral meeting with senior officials of MoFTER and UNDP, it did not

take part in the functional analysis. Building on the findings, the Action provided **tailored technical assistance** to each of the three institutions, which reached its final stage of implementation:

- **Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Republika Srpska:** A new reporting template/modality between the Agricultural Payments Agency and the Ministry was developed, including the structure and content of an annual report aligned with reporting practices of EU agricultural payment agencies. The proposal included improvements to existing data collection systems and forms (e.g., requests for capital investment payments, Forms 2 and 5, as defined in the 2024 Rulebook on Incentives for Capital Investments). A support measures calendar—an easy-access tool for updating the status of support measures—was also proposed for further internal development and implementation.
- **Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Brčko District:** A proposal for a new organizational structure was developed, focusing mainly on establishing a dedicated department/unit for agricultural payments, including job descriptions, mandates, competencies, and responsibilities, based on examples from neighboring countries.

Within this activity, **customized training programmes** were designed and delivered for each institution. Trainings were tailored to institutional needs and focused on sharing EU and regional best practices. All sessions were conducted on-site. A smaller-scale training cycle was also organized for representatives of cantonal ministries/departments for agriculture and rural development, and extension services. In total, **34 government representatives** were trained in topics such as:

- EU strategies, funds, and mechanisms;
- Principles of the Law on Development Planning and Management;
- Assessing efficiency of support measures against strategic documents;
- Best practices in strategic planning;
- Examples of efficient monitoring and reporting in agriculture and rural development;
- Key principles and mechanisms of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

As part of this technical assistance, the Project also organized a **two-day interactive workshop** titled *"Risk Mapping in the Preparation and Implementation of Support Programs in Agriculture and Rural Development"* in September 2023. The workshop gathered **17 representatives** from key agriculture and rural development institutions in BiH and provided a comprehensive overview of existing and potential risks in allocating support funds, while also identifying future needs and critical factors relevant for BiH's EU integration and access to pre-accession funds for agriculture and rural development.

- **Study trip:** As envisaged in the Description of the Action and as per Project Board approved 2022 Annual Work Plan (AWP), the Action organized a study tour as part of the technical assistance provided to the institutional partners. The study tour was organized in collaboration with the Agency for Payments in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Rural Development of the Republic of Croatia and it took place in Zagreb, Croatia. The objective of the study tour was to provide knowledge sharing and best practices from Croatian institutions for designing and implementing the rural development support measures. Specifically, the government representatives of BiH acquired better knowledge and understanding of the process of designing and implementing support measures that are being applied in Croatia. The proposed study tour was comprised of two parts: interactive workshops for the participants to present practical experiences in designing and implementing support measures and experiencing on-farm monitoring procedures to selected beneficiaries of support measures. During the study tour, the participants learnt the following:
  - process of defining public calls for support measures;
  - evaluation process;
  - tools used in the processing and evaluation of received proposals;
  - contracting, implementation, and monitoring;
  - Field visits to at least 2 investments/projects in agriculture sectors.

The knowledge transfer delivered to the project's partner institutions served as a valuable input for the design, evaluation, and monitoring of future rural development support measures and improvement of operational approach and procedures in the implementation of the designed measures. 19 representatives nominated by the partner institutions attended the study tour to Croatia.

- The Action conducted **an assessment of the potential for diversification of rural economic activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina** between December 2022 and May 2023 (postponed from earlier due to COVID-19). The key findings are summarized below, while the full analysis is provided in the Annex XVIII.
  The assessment confirmed that the policy, institutional and legal framework for diversification in BiH is formally in place and broadly aligned with regional practices. However, as in neighboring countries, implementation through rural development measures financed by agricultural budgets remains limited.
  Comparative analysis shows that IPARD programmes in neighboring countries typically allocate around 20% of their financial portfolio to diversification measures. While some countries include multiple sub-measures, the assessment indicates that focusing on a smaller number of high-potential areas is more effective. The new CAP framework reinforces integrated value-chain approaches, support to start-ups, cooperation models, and LEADER-type interventions.

  Findings from the desk review and field survey in BiH demonstrate that diversification is generally perceived narrowly, mostly linked to new agricultural production. Nevertheless, 43% of surveyed respondents expressed interest in starting new businesses, with preferences oriented toward new agricultural lines, rural tourism, on-farm processing, beekeeping, and timber/non-timber forest products. Although still limited in number, several promising examples of diversified rural businesses demonstrate market viability and provide inspiration for replication. To stimulate diversification on and off the farm, the assessment highlights several priority areas for intervention:
  1. Strengthening entrepreneurial capacities through training, coaching, networks, and start-up support schemes.
  2. Promoting green rural economy models that leverage natural resources while applying sustainable practices.
  3. Digitalization, given that only one in seven businesses has an online presence.
  4. Piloting new rural development concepts such as village hosts, smart villages, and collaboration hubs.
  5. Ensuring flexible, inclusive support measures and establishing knowledge-sharing platforms to encourage innovation and resilience in rural economies.

ACTIVITY 2.2. STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL ADVISORY SERVICES (IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITY: CZDA AND UNDP)

This activity provided demand-driven technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of institutional advisory services, which—together with the efforts under Result 1 (Activity 1.2)—helped advance the overall extension service system in BiH. The focus was placed on building capacities for sustainable management and improving the economic and environmental performance of farm holdings and agri-food businesses. The activity also supported dissemination of information on relevant national and EU legislation, policy changes, and available financial support measures.

Designed in synergy with Result 1 (Activity 1.2), the technical assistance supported the evolution of advisory service provision by ensuring a complementary and coordinated approach between public and non-state sector entities. Ultimately, these efforts contributed to improving the quality, type, and effectiveness of advisory services, while preparing the sector for deeper integration with the EU and future EU pre-accession measures. Assistance targeted advisory services in the entities, Brčko District, and cantons, as well as local government agricultural specialists who form part of the broader extension service system.
The activity was jointly delivered by CzDA and UNDP, with responsibilities allocated as described in the related sub-activities.

Table 12: Expected vs. achieved deliverables

Expected description	Achieved deliverables
Agri-food operators' demands, needs and development opportunities, as well as prevailing knowledge and skill gaps reviewed;	Agri-food operators' demands, needs and development opportunities, as well as prevailing knowledge and skill gaps reviewed;
Assessment of the existing advisory service offer by non-state service providers undertaken;	Assessment of the existing advisory service offer by non-state service providers undertaken;
Consolidated a core portfolio of modern training programmes for the future use by institutional and non-state advisory service providers, considering relevant previous and ongoing activities of institutional partners;	Web presentation site and on-line platform for advisory work in Federation BiH developed; on-line platform includes Register of advisory services and training platform.
Advanced agricultural forecasting capabilities of institutional advisory services;	Advanced agricultural forecasting capabilities of institutional advisory services, through provision of 20 meteo stations (5 by UNDP and 15 by CzDA), forecast software and staff training.
Institutional extension system reviewed, and recommendations for system improvements provided;	A comprehensive "Evaluation report on policy and legislation in agriculture, with focus on the wine sector, institutional advisory services and information system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the current situation and proposed project interventions" was prepared, resulting in the drafting of two entity-level extension strategies that translate the review findings into structured recommendations for system improvements and future development.
Knowledge and skills of at least 60 institutional extension officers strengthened in targeted topics;	The knowledge and skills of more than 90 institutional extension officers were strengthened through a series of targeted training programs, workshops and practical capacity-building activities.
Improved service delivery of institutional advisory services as a result of improved analytical tools, equipment and/or materials.	The service delivery of institutional advisory services was improved through the provision and operational use of 15 meteorological stations and RIMpro licenses, which enhanced forecasting, data analysis, and the overall quality and timeliness of advisory services.

Sub-activity 2.2.1. Demand scan of extension service users and assessment of supply by non-state advisory services (implementation responsibility: UNDP)

This sub-activity envisioned to simultaneously conduct two assessments – 1) demand scan among agri-food operators (farmers / producers and processors) to collect information and evidence on specific needs and opportunities and gather information on the level of awareness among target groups about the available extension services across the country; and 2) assessment of the existing advisory service offer by non-state advisory service providers in order to obtain information about those service providers interested to deliver advisory services to farmers / agri-food operators, screen their capacities, existing services and profiles, as well as their territorial coverage.

The combined reports recorded the needs and views of advisory services users (farmers and processors) and suppliers of services (private advisory service providers) key gaps in the use of extension services have been identified. The Report presents key strategic recommendations that could set a pathway for enhancing accessibility of advisory services in BiH, build capacities of stakeholders and boost application of innovative practices. Furthermore, the findings informed the design of support measures to non-state / private advisory services planed under Activity 1.2. Both assessments have been conducted during the summer of 2021. To put it in a wider perspective, with improvement of extension services the entire sustainability of the agricultural value chain can be lifted. The report with key findings and recommendations was presented to the partner institutions and other stakeholders in Teslic, November 2021. The key findings of this assessment are used in design of support measures for strengthening advisory and extension services were published in May 2022.

In 2023–2024, EU4AGRI developed and launched an online platform for public advisory services in the Federation of BiH, in coordination with the FBiH Ministry of Agriculture and cantonal advisory services. The process included workshops, expert consultations, procurement, and administrator training. The platform, now hosted at https://savjetodavnafbih.ba/, integrates educational content—including textual materials on advisory methods and digital agriculture, and videos on drone use and plowing techniques[81]—while cantonal ministries actively contribute updates. The platform enhances accessibility, knowledge sharing, and the overall effectiveness of agricultural advisory services in FBiH.

Sub-activity 2.2.2. Review of existing institutional advisory services and their needs for capacity development (implementation responsibility: CzDA)

This sub-activity focused on identifying areas for strengthening institutional advisory systems to improve the quality of services provided to agri-food operators. The activity covered a comprehensive review of existing advisory services in BiH, in line with relevant legal and policy frameworks, using information available from institutional partners, with the aim of determining priority needs and actions for system strengthening.

During the first year of implementation, an analysis of the current status of public agricultural advisory services was conducted, including the identification of gaps, review of policy and regulatory frameworks, and assessment of needs to form priority capacity-building interventions. The findings were shared and discussed with institutional partners in November 2020 to support joint planning of subsequent activities.

The findings were further discussed with relevant government institutions through a series of bilateral consultations. Priority actions were selected and agreed with the institutions, forming the basis for subsequent support, taking into account current priorities of advisory services and the key areas identified by project experts and other relevant analyses.

Further details on the specific activities and support provided to advisory services are presented under Sub-activity 2.2.3, highlighting the implementation and operational aspects of the Project's assistance.

Sub-activity 2.2.3. Technical assistance to strengthen institutional advisory services (implementation responsibility: CzDA)

Strengthening accessible and high-quality institutional advisory services was a central focus of this sub-activity, aiming to support evidence-based decision-making and drive improvements in agricultural productivity. Efforts were guided by priority needs identified in sectoral assessments, with particular attention to reinforcing both institutional and non-state advisory service providers and fostering effective coordination among project partners. An important pillar of this work was the development of agricultural forecasting capabilities, enabling timely decisions for crop management, pest and disease prevention, and climate adaptation. Alongside these initiatives, the Project implemented several complementary activities, described in the sections that follow, further supporting institutional capacity and sector development.

Due to budget constraints, responsibilities for establishing the pest and disease forecasting platform were shared between partners. CzDA financed 15 agro-meteorological stations, while UNDP contributed 5 additional stations equipped with crop- and pest-specific modules. Together, this network of 20 stations enabled systematic collection of local weather data, significantly improving forecasting accuracy, supporting more efficient crop management, and contributing to reduced chemical and water use in line with EU Green Deal objectives.

[81] https://www.facebook.com/share/v/17ex8Zjdyu/

All stations were procured and installed by June 2023 and formally handed over to the Federal Institute of Agriculture Sarajevo (FIAS) and the Federal Agro-Mediterranean Institute Mostar (FAZ), which are now responsible for their operation and maintenance. Following a series of workshops delivered by CzDA experts – including hands-on training sessions for end users – the stations became fully operational. Data collection for system calibration and fine-tuning was completed, ensuring reliable forecasting outputs.

The installation of the agro-meteorological stations was followed by a series of workshops held both in BiH and in the Czech Republic, during which advisors and end-users received comprehensive training on station operation, data collection, and practical application. These sessions not only facilitated effective knowledge transfer but also introduced best practices from the Czech forecasting system, serving as a model for BiH.

Consultations with the Ministries of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of FBiH and RS confirmed the demand for a modern, integrated software solution for agricultural monitoring and forecasting, with a particular focus on fruit and grape production. In response, the Project prepared detailed technical specifications for a software platform designed to:

- integrate all existing and future agro-meteorological stations in BiH;
- enable automated, real-time data collection, validation, and processing;
- generate predictive models based on biological and climatic parameters;
- provide actionable recommendations for optimal plant protection measures.

Due to delays in developing the domestic software platform, the commercial RIMpro software was selected as an interim solution for the 2024–2025 seasons. The Project secured the necessary licenses and provided access to the RIMpro system for two institutes from FBiH and the Extension Service from RS. By early 2025, all stations were successfully connected to the RIMpro platform, covering key fruit-growing and viticulture regions. Over 40 advisors received training in data interpretation, risk assessment, reporting, and the formulation of recommendations. The RIMpro platform combined local meteorological data with validated biological models for major pests and diseases, delivering real-time forecasts that supported:

- timely and targeted pesticide applications;
- reduced risk of resistance development and environmental contamination;
- increased yields and improved product quality.

In parallel, the Project acted in strengthening the organizational and technical capacities of agricultural advisory services across BiH. More than 15 workshops, seminars, and training sessions engaged over 50 advisors from both entities, focusing on enhancing advisory service organization, management, and delivery quality. Training programs were developed in line with EU best practices and covered topics such as integrated production, organic farming, product labelling, animal feeding, and EU quality schemes including PDO and PGI. Sessions combined theoretical input with practical exercises and case studies.

As a result, advisory staff capacities were significantly strengthened, enabling them to provide high-quality, tailored support to farmers and to contribute to sustainable agriculture and improved competitiveness in line with EU standards. Building on the technical initiatives implemented under this sub-activity, the Project also focused on strengthening the strategic and institutional framework for agricultural advisory services in BiH.

As part of the broader technical assistance, the Project supported the preparation of medium-term Strategies for the Development of Agricultural Advisory Services, recognizing that robust institutional frameworks were essential for delivering consistent, high-quality advisory services. The strategies were designed to:

- strengthen institutional capacities to provide effective and reliable advisory services;
- improve coordination and integration across advisory systems;
- promote digitalization and effective knowledge transfer;
- prepare institutions to access EU funding, participate in European markets, and implement EU standards on sustainability, innovation, and competitiveness.

The strategy development process was highly participatory and inclusive, involving all relevant local stakeholders. Throughout 2023, numerous workshops, meetings, and working sessions were organized. The approach was guided by EU best practices and included a study visit to the Czech Republic in 2022, as well as knowledge exchange sessions with Slovenian experts in 2023. An international consultant adapted the methodology to EU standards and advised institutions on ensuring a coordinated and integrated approach, taking into account the complex organizational structure of advisory services in BiH (in FBiH, advisory services operate at federal, cantonal, and local levels, while in RS they were organized through the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management via a network of regional centres).

Both strategies were drafted and evaluated in 2024 and are currently undergoing the formal adoption process. Once adopted, they will serve as a policy framework for the long-term strengthening of advisory systems, ensuring institutional resilience and supporting BiH agriculture in its transition toward greater competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience to climate and market challenges.

ACTIVITY 2.3. ENHANCING INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITY: CZDA)

Agriculture information management systems are essential for evidence-based policy design, monitoring and evaluation of sector performance and needs. Therefore, this activity offered customized support towards upgrading the agriculture information systems as key analytical tools for effective policy delivery. The improvement brought consolidation of fragmented data based on common data standards, information system technical upgrades, improved communication and data exchange among system stakeholders at various government levels, based on EU standards and principles. The assistance covered both stock-taking analysis and identification of the critical gaps and needs in the data management systems, as well as subsequent support to address these needs towards a coherent agriculture information system and services.

Table 13: Expected vs. achieved deliverables

Expected description	Achieved deliverables
Existing agriculture information systems and operational methodologies reviewed, and recommendations for consolidation and technical modernisation provided	A detailed Evaluation report of BiH's agro-food ICT systems was carried out, highlighting structural limitations of existing software, including recommendations for consolidation and technical modernisation.
Knowledge and skills of at least 8 institutional staff improved	More than 30 institutional staff strengthened their knowledge and skills through a series of workshops, training sessions, study visits, and practical exercises on operating and maintaining the newly developed Vineyard and Wine Register software.
Drafted at least 2 guidelines, protocols, user manuals and/or technical specifications for upgrading targeted subcomponents of the agricultural information systems	Technical specifications were created to support the upgrade of targeted subcomponents of the fully operational Vineyard and Wine Register, ensuring smooth system use, legal compliance, and alignment with EU standards.
Improved/modernised data collection/consolidation/ management/ analysis	Data collection, consolidation, management, and analysis in the wine sector were modernized through the implementation of the fully developed Vineyard and Wine Register. Auxiliary equipment (GPSs, drone, laptops) was provided to facilitate field data collection, monitoring, and effective use of the system.

Sub-activity 2.3.1. Review of existing agriculture information management systems

A preliminary review of BiH's agro-food ICT systems at the state, entities, and Brčko District levels, was carried out by Czech experts in 2020, revealed that modifying existing entity-level software was impractical due to structural limitations, non-modular designs, and lack of integration capabilities. The Action focused on developing a new, modular IT solution for the vine and wine sector, aligned with EU requirements, which could be upgraded in the future and support authorities in data-driven decision-making and EU alignment of the sector.

Based on initial analysis, it was concluded that practical modifications to entity-level ICT systems were largely impractical and ineffective due to structural limitations of the existing ICT architecture. These included the use of different software solutions at various administrative levels, the lack of possibility to upgrade software to the required integration levels, and the reliance on tailor-made software developed by companies that were no longer operating in BiH. Upgrading current platforms to achieve alignment with EU requirements would also face significant challenges.

Furthermore, existing software solutions were not modular, which made it difficult to integrate new modules or digital tools. For instance, newly installed software could create conflicts with existing systems, requiring operators to perform the same tasks multiple times. The lack of API integration further hindered interoperability. Consequently, modifications to current ICT systems were deemed out of scope for this task, as it was not intended to alter existing software at any administrative level. Many current solutions were closed-source software, modifiable only by the original producer, while those that were open-source were often too complex or costly to adapt. In many aspects, installing new modular software was more practical and efficient than modifying existing systems.

The Action therefore focused on supporting the development of a new IT solution capable of assisting BiH authorities in aligning with EU requirements in the vine and wine sector. This new solution was designed to be customizable and easily upgradeable, allowing future integration with new and existing ICT systems at all levels. This ensures that the software can accommodate additional functionalities required during the EU harmonization process.

Sub-activity 2.3.2. Supporting improvements in the sector information systems

Under this sub-activity, the Project supported the modernization of BiH's viticulture and wine sector by providing technical assistance to develop and establish the Vineyard and Wine Register. This initiative was designed to combine legal harmonization, IT development, and capacity-building, ensuring that BiH could fully align its wine sector with EU legislation.

The Vineyard and Wine Register is a web-based platform for recording vineyard parcels, grape varieties, harvest and production volumes, and wine stocks, enabling full traceability from vineyard to final product. The system serves as a central digital instrument for harmonizing respective BiH legislation with EU requirements and provides a foundation for quality control, policy-making, sectoral analysis, and export promotion.

To implement the system effectively, the Project delivered capacity-building activities, including workshops, trainings, and study visits to the Czech Republic. Over 30 participants from state, entity, cantonal, and local institutions were trained to operate, maintain, and develop the system. Practical exercises allowed participants to simulate data entry, test reporting scenarios, and understand how the Vineyard and Wine Register supports traceability, production declarations, and compliance verification. A Technical Operating Working Group, established by the Action and consisted of representatives from all relevant local institutions, guided the participatory design of the system, ensuring it was tailored to the complex BiH structure and needs while fully aligned with EU standards.

The software platform for the Vineyard and Wine Register satisfies all key requirements, including:

- Georeferenced identification of vineyard parcels
- Recording of production potential and vineyard area
- Mandatory annual production and stock declarations
- Classification of wines by category and quality
- Full traceability from vineyard to final product

To ensure smooth implementation and effective management of the Vineyard and Wine Register, the Project supplied 17 equipment sets, each consisting of one laptop and one GPS device, enabling the digitalization of field data collection and improving overall efficiency of registry usage and maintenance. In the Federation of BiH, the sets were delivered to the Federal Agro-Mediterranean Institute in Mostar, as well as to the following cantonal and municipal authorities: Mostar, Čapljina, Čitluk, Neum, Ravno, Stolac, Ljubuški, Široki Brijeg, Sanski Most, Žepče, Grude, and Tomislavgrad. In Republika Srpska, equipment was provided to the Ministry of Agriculture, with two sets allocated to Banja Luka for the northern region and two sets to Trebinje for the southern region. In addition, a drone was procured and delivered to the Inspectorate to strengthen field inspection capacities, enabling more precise monitoring of vineyards, early detection of irregularities, and improved enforcement of regulations. These investments ensured that all relevant institutions were adequately equipped, supporting the long-term sustainability and reliability of the Vineyard and Wine Register.

By May 2025, the software platform for the Vineyard and Wine Register was fully developed and operational, representing a significant step forward in data management, traceability, and compliance with EU practices. The system enables monitoring and quality assurance, supporting the sustainable growth of BiH's wine sector.

ACTIVITY 2.4. POLICY AND REGULATORY IMPROVEMENTS TO REINFORCE POLICY DELIVERY (IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITY: CZDA AND UNDP)

The need to harmonize the legal framework of BiH with the EU *acquis* remains a constant challenge for the public bodies that implement agricultural policy. EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) remains quite complex, with possible new challenges with the new CAP framework. According to the previously defined approach, this activity provided support for the implementation of policies defined by strategic plans adopted at the level of BiH, and provided the assistance in necessary harmonization of sectoral legislation with current and relatively frequently changing relevant regulations in the EU. Institutional stakeholders need support in the field of effective implementation of existing sector-related standards and regulations, but also in the field of organized and meaningful necessary transposition of relevant sectoral legislation of the EU into the legal system of BiH.

Table 14: Expected vs. achieved deliverables

Expected description	Achieved deliverables
Existing policy and regulatory framework in the agriculture sector reviewed, and priorities and opportunities for regulatory and policy improvements identified	A comprehensive Evaluation report of the existing legal and institutional framework in the wine sector was conducted, identifying priorities and opportunities for aligning national legislation with EU requirements.
Knowledge and skills of at least 8 institutional staff improved	The knowledge and skills of over 30 institutional staff were strengthened through workshops, trainings, and practical exercises covering EU regulatory requirements, official control systems, PDO/PGI procedures, and operational use of the Vineyard and Wine Register.
Drafted at least 3 policies/standards/regulations	The Law on the Organization of the Wine Market in BiH was drafted and adopted, alongside pre-drafted secondary legislation including 11 by-laws covering vineyard and wine registers, labeling, product categories, oenological practices, laboratories, PDO/PGI procedures, and organic wines, establishing a fully operational and EU-aligned legal framework for the sector.
Conducted external review of the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021) – Framework Document	New document developed and adopted with support of EU4AGRI / Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BiH 2023-2027

Sub-activity 2.4.1. Review of existing policies and regulations, and progress towards the EU alignment (implementation responsibility: CzDA)

Throughout the project implementation, the CzDA, building on plans developed in close cooperation with BiH institutional partners, provided tailored technical assistance aimed at supporting policy alignment and strengthening the functioning of institutional structures. A central focus of this support was the development of a comprehensive legislative framework for the wine sector, including the drafting of the Law on Wine and related secondary legislation, representing a key step towards harmonization and approximation with EU requirements.

Under this sub-activity, the Action provided targeted and systematic technical assistance to strengthen institutional capacities and harmonize legislation, with a particular focus on the wine sector, recognized as a priority for EU compliance. This assistance encompassed the interpretation of relevant EU legislative requirements and best practices, the provision of technical expert advice on topics identified by institutional partners (e.g., the Vineyard and Wine Register), and the facilitation of working group meetings dedicated to developing concrete legal solutions for the sector. By combining these efforts, the Project contributed to the establishment of a robust and EU-aligned legal and institutional framework, supporting the sustainable development and competitiveness of the wine sector in BiH. The Project acted as a platform connecting all relevant levels of government, facilitating the alignment of positions, knowledge transfer, and exchange of experience.

The first step involved a comprehensive review of the existing legal and institutional framework in the wine sector. Czech experts conducted field visits and interviews with key stakeholders, including MoFTER, entity-level ministries, Brčko District authorities, the Directorate for EU Integration, entity inspectorates, and agricultural institutes. To ensure a coordinated and practical approach, the Project established a Technical Operations Group consisted of representatives from the responsible institutions. This group developed and continuously refined a work plan outlining the steps needed for drafting the necessary laws and secondary legislation.

Through regular meetings, consultations, and hands-on discussions, the group actively guided the legislative drafting and implementation process, ensuring collaborative work which provided a structured operational framework and supported the successful development and subsequent implementation of the Wine Law and its implementing regulations.

Sub-activity 2.4.2. Support the development of policies and regulations in the agri-food sector that ensure alignment with the Union acquis (implementation responsibility: CzDA)

In this sub-activity, technical assistance was provided for the preparation of the legal framework for the sector and supported:

- Drafting the Law on the Organization of the Wine Market in BiH, adopted by the House of Representatives in August 2023.
- Drafting the expert pre-drafts of secondary legislation and methodological guidelines covering vineyard and wine registers, labelling, PDO/PGI procedures, oenological practices, laboratories, and organic wines. All drafts were aligned with EU Regulation (EU) 2021/2117 and other relevant acts and underwent several rounds of expert discussion and revisions within the working group to ensure they were legally sound and operationally implementable.
- Numerous workshops and practical trainings that were held for administrative staff, inspectors, advisory services, and producers, introducing EU requirements, official control systems, and PDO/PGI procedures.

The adoption of the Law on the Organization of the Wine Market in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2023, together with the pre-drafted secondary legislation, represented a strategic measure to align national wine regulations with EU standards. Following Croatia's proposal, the European Commission established November 2024 as the deadline for full legislative harmonization, enabling BiH wine producers to access EU markets, under a compliant and transparent regulatory framework.

The expert pre-drafts of secondary legislation were prepared to allow easy integration of future EU regulatory amendments, ensuring continuity after the project's end. Numerous working meetings, thematic workshops, and practical trainings were held with institutions at all levels, inspectorates, and producers to ensure that the new system was aligned with EU requirements and met local sectoral needs.

The Action supported the preparation of the following secondary legislation (by-laws):

- Rulebook on recognized grape varieties in BiH;
- Rulebook on product category definitions of the winemaking sector;
- Rulebook on oenological practices;
- Rulebook on placing on the market and transporting wine and other products of the wine sector;
- Rulebook on labeling and presentation of wine;
- Rulebook on protected designations of origin, protected geographical indications and traditional terms in the wine sector;
- Rulebook on vineyard and wine register, mandatory declarations, accompanying document, and inward/outward registers;
- Rulebook on oenological laboratories and physico-chemical analyzes of wine
- Rulebook on organoleptic evaluation of wine;
- Rulebook on organic wines;
- Rulebook on the methods of physico-chemical analysis of the wine sector products

To support the effective implementation of the **Law on the Organization of the Wine Market in BiH** and its secondary legislation, numerous workshops and practical trainings were organized for administrative staff, inspectors, advisory services, and wine producers. Participants received detailed guidance on EU regulatory requirements, official control systems, and PDO/PGI procedures, enabling them to understand and apply the new legal framework effectively. These events strengthened institutional capacity and sectoral readiness for compliance with EU standards.

The Action made a significant contribution to the strategic objective of strengthening the capacities of BiH institutions to align with and implement EU *acquis* in the agricultural sector. The successful drafting and adoption of the BiH Wine Market Law, preparation of secondary legislation, and establishment of the vineyard and wine register laid a solid foundation for modernizing the sector and enhancing the competitiveness of domestic producers. At the same time, capacity building for institutions and producers ensured readiness for the implementation of EU standards and the effective use of future pre-accession funds. Thus, this activity not only improved the regulatory framework but also reinforced administrative and operational structures crucial for BiH's ongoing EU integration process. While the the Law on the Organization of the Wine Market in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been adopted, full operational use and by-law enforcement depend on local institutional capacities. The Project provided a robust framework for ongoing maintenance, development and sector-wide compliance with EU practices.

Sub-activity 2.4.3. Review of the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021) – Framework Document (implementation responsibility: UNDP)

Following the involvement of relevant institutional partners in GIP implementation and hands-on technical assistance on GIP management, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations (MoFTER) initiated the development of a new Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BiH (SPRD). Initially, there were discussions on reviewing the existing SPRD 2018-2021 – Framework Document; however, MoFTER requested technical assistance from the Action to prepare a new strategic framework to guide sector development beyond 2021.

At that time, the preparation of a state-level strategic document depended on the adoption of entity and Brčko District strategies. By the end of 2021, the FBiH Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry had not yet prepared its new strategic document, while the RS and BD already had theirs in place. In summer 2021, the

Action provided expert support—including guidance, inputs preparation, document compilation, and quality assurance—to the Coordination Board and Thematic Groups established by the FBiH Ministry. However, the Ministry postponed planned activities until late fall, delaying the completion of the draft Situation Analysis, which was finalized in December 2021. Part II of the document (vision, objectives, measures, indicators, monitoring and evaluation framework, budget, action plan, greening, etc.) was prepared by the expert team and provided to the inter-departmental working group for review in November 2022. Between June 2022 and May 2023, five consultative meetings were held with MoFTER representatives, the 12-member Inter-Departmental Working Group, and the Action/Expert Team. During this period, Part I of the strategic document (situation and SWOT analysis) was fully developed and endorsed by the Inter-Departmental Working Group, translated into English, and delivered to EUD BiH for comments in January 2023. The expert team also addressed MoFTER's additional requests regarding the comprehensive monitoring framework. Delays in providing the requested data from the inter-departmental working group prolonged the completion of the Draft SPRD by approximately one year.

The Action dedicated substantial effort to finalize the Draft SPRD 2023-2027 – Framework Document and delivered it to MoFTER before the end of 2023. The document was proofread, translated into Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, and English, and submitted for official endorsement. It was forwarded to the Council of Ministers of BiH, which adopted it on February 9, 2024, and then to the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. The House of Representatives adopted the strategic plan on April 2, 2024, followed by the House of Peoples on October 10, 2024. The SPRD 2023-2027 establishes strategic goals to gradually harmonize BiH's agriculture and rural development with the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and attract investments.

LOGFRAME MATRIX UPDATED WITH RESULTS

Indicator	Ref. values	Current value (Jun 2025)	Targets
Total investment generated via IPA II in agri-food sector and rural development (EUR)	0 (2019)	EUR 14,760,909	EUR 14,800,000
New generated value in relation to IPA funds disbursed through the Action (competitiveness measured by the percentage increase in BIH agricultural export index, as a three-year annual average)	Average percentage increase of 13% (2015-2017 against 2010 as a reference)	6.7%[82] Average annual growth 2021-23	15%[83] (by 2024)
Share of employment in agriculture in total employment, sex disaggregated	15.7%, 38% of women (2018)	7.7%, 5.7% women[84]	13%, 38% of women (2023)[85]
Number of agri-food operators (physical and legal entities) supported through IPA action with projects which increase quality/quantity of agricultural products	0 (2019)	2,041	320 (by 2024)
Number of new jobs created, including for youth and for women in rural areas (sex disaggregated)	0 (2019)	307 (144 women; 188 youth)	300 out of which 100 women and 100 youth (by 2024)
Percentage increase in targeted agri-food operators' revenues as a result of the Action	0 (2019)	54.08%	20% (by 2024)
Number of agri-food operators with certification in quality and safety standards as a result of the Action	0	88	30 (by 2024)
Level of approximation of policy actions[86] with the EU	Not satisfactory (2019)	Limited progress	Good (2023)[87]
Level of institutional capacities for result-oriented policy delivery through competitiveness support measures	Insufficient (2019)	Improving	Sound (2023)

[82] Significant decrease of agricultural export activities in 2023 of -0.8% had negative impact in the indicator. In 2022, the average annual growth reached 11.2%.

[83] For measuring new generated value, the IPA 2018 Action Document offered various possible parameters for consideration (e.g. increase in farm revenues, increase in salaries and fees for farmers/workers, number of farms converted from subsistence farms to economically viable farms, % of GDP generated through agriculture, etc.), setting the target value at 40% regardless of the selected parameter. During the consultations, the institutional partners agreed to measure competitiveness by the percentage increase in BIH agricultural exports, with a target value set at 15% based on trends from 2015 to 2017.

[84] Share in 2022 according to Agency for Statistics BiH (BHAS). BHAS revised its LFS data starting 2020 due to a bigger sample based on the latest population census. Share of agriculture in the revised series went down considerably from 18% in 2019 to only 12% in 2020. https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fbhas.gov.ba%2Fdata%2FPublikacije%2FVremenskeSerije%2FLAB_15.xls&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

[85] Because the total employment level in agriculture captures many variables beyond this Action, it is difficult to establish a reliable quantitative target. Also, this indicator is inevitably decreasing due to, among else, increased productivity and modernization (the baseline of approximately 18% in IPA 2018 Action Document is from 2016, hence it is outdated from the point of the Action referential values). Although the support to rural economic development and diversification will contribute to job creation, it will not necessarily impact this indicator.

[86] Policy actions stand for specific strategic measures defined in the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021) – Framework Document.

[87] At least 40% of policy actions stemming from the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BIH (2018-2021) – Framework Document implemented through the Action in an EU aligned manner.

PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE

MANAGEMENT

UNDP in BIH assumed full responsibility and accountability for the overall management of the Action, including monitoring and evaluation of interventions, achieving of the objectives and specified results/outputs, and the efficient and effective use of resources.

The Action institutional structure comprises the Project Board, Project Assurance and Project Team, interacting in a broader project context with partners and all interested stakeholders. The Project Board was established in May 2020, with 18 institutional partners having nominated their representatives. The members of the Project

Project Board included representatives of the following institutions:

1. BiH Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations,
2. Directorate for the European Integration of BiH,
3. FBiH Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry,
4. FBiH Government Office for EU Integration,
5. RS Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management,
6. RS Ministry of EU Integration and International Cooperation,
7. Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Brčko District,
8. Department of EU Integration and International Cooperation of Brčko District,
9. Posavski Canton
10. Office for European Integration of the Government of West Herzegovina Canton
11. Canton 10 Livno, Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry
12. Canton Sarajevo/Ministry of Economy of the Sarajevo Canton
13. Tuzla Canton, the Agricultural Institute
14. Bosnia-Podrinje Canton Goražde, Ministry of economy, Agriculture department
15. Central Bosnia Canton, the office for European integration
16. Department for Development and International Projects of Zenica-Doboj Canton
17. Hercegovina-Neretva Canton Mostar, Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water management
18. Una Sana Canton Bihac, Ministry of Agriculture

Besides the institutional partners the Project Board members also include the representatives of:

1. EU Delegation to BIH,
2. CzDA,
3. UNDP.

The **Project Board** oversees the Action implementation. It reviews and endorses annual work plans and progress reports, monitors the implementation progress, provides strategic guidance and consents to selected strategic and operational issues. The Board meets two times a year, or as per ad hoc need, when necessary or raised by the Implementers. UNDP serves as the secretariat to the Project Board, responsible for sending out invitation for meetings, preparing meeting agenda and materials, as well as meeting minutes. The Project Board was informed during the process of defining the GIP concept, while ultimate decision on selection of projects will lie within the responsibility of the Organisation.

During the reporting period, 12 Project Board meetings took place, as follows:

- 1st Project Board meeting took place on 4 June 2020. The meeting was utilized to present main objectives and targets of the Action as well as to showcase the Annual Plan and Detailed Grant Investment Package (GIP) plan for 2021.
- 2nd Project Board meeting took place on 8 September 2020. The purpose of the Project Board meeting was to formally review and adopt the minutes from the first session, present and confirm the Rulebook governing the work of the Board, and discuss progress made during the Inception Phase, including results

of the public call focused on COVID-19 recovery. The meeting also aimed to agree on next steps for implementation and address any additional issues raised by members.

- 3rd Project Board meeting took place on Thursday, 17 December 2020. The purpose of the Project Board meeting was to present the agenda and overall project progress, and to provide a detailed overview of ongoing GIP activities. This included updates on support measures aimed at mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on the agri-food sector, investments in processing capacities and marketing of agri-food products, support for rural tourism, as well as information on upcoming calls and activities.
- 4th Project Board meeting took place on 31 March 2021 and was also held jointly with the first Project Board meeting for the EU4AGRI Project. The Project Board meeting was convened to present and review key achievements from the first year of EU4AGRI, including a progress report highlighting results and lessons learned. The meeting also included presentations of the annual work plan for March 2021–February 2022, with a focus on technical assistance and capacity-building activities, as well as the draft annual work plan for the EU4AGRI-Recovery initiative (January–December 2021). The session provided an opportunity for discussion, consideration of other business, and agreement on next steps, ensuring alignment and coordination among all stakeholders.
- 5th Project Board meeting took place on 2 November 2021 and was also held jointly with the second Project Board meeting for the EU4AGRI-Recovery Project. The session was held to present and review key achievements of EU4AGRI in 2021, highlighting progress made, results achieved, and lessons learned. It also included a presentation on the next steps for the project, ensuring alignment among stakeholders and setting priorities for continued implementation.
- 6th Project Board meeting took place on 29 March 2022 and was also held jointly with the third Project Board meeting for the EU4AGRI-Recovery Project. The session began with an introduction, followed by a presentation of key achievements of EU4AGRI in 2021, highlighting the progress and results accomplished during the year. The meeting also included a presentation of the Annual Work Plan for EU4AGRI, outlining planned activities and priorities for the upcoming period.
- 7th Project Board meeting took place on 22 November 2022 and was also held jointly with the forth Project Board meeting for the EU4AGRI-Recovery Project. The session began with an introduction, followed by a presentation of key achievements of EU4AGRI in 2022, highlighting the progress and results accomplished during the year. The meeting also included a presentation of the Annual Work Plan for EU4AGRI, outlining planned activities and priorities for the upcoming period.
- 8th Project Board meeting took place on 30 March 2023 and was also held jointly with the fifth Project Board meeting for the EU4AGRI-Recovery Project. The Project Board meeting took place in the field at MI-TRIVAS company, following the recommendation of some Project Board members to hold the session on-site. The visit included a tour of the facility and discussions with company representatives, providing an opportunity for direct engagement with stakeholders. The session also featured a presentation of EU4AGRI's key achievements in 2022 and the Annual Work Plan for 2023. Strategic considerations were discussed, including the rural tourism support measure, the reallocation of GIP funds, and lessons learned from EU4AGRI that are relevant for the country's progress toward EU integration, highlighting sector-specific challenges and opportunities.
- 9th Project Board meeting took place on 28 November 2023 and was also held jointly with the sixth Project Board meeting for the EU4AGRI-Recovery Project. The session began with an introduction, followed by a presentation of key achievements of EU4AGRI in 2023, highlighting the progress and results accomplished during the year. The meeting also included a presentation of the Annual Work Plan for EU4AGRI, outlining planned activities and priorities for the upcoming period.
- 10th Project Board meeting took place on 28 March 2024 and was also held jointly with the seventh Project Board meeting for the EU4AGRI-Recovery Project. The Project Board meeting took place at Vinarija Nujic in Ljubuški, starting with a tour of the facility and discussions with company representatives to facilitate direct engagement with stakeholders. The session included presentations of EU4AGRI's key achievements in 2023 and the Annual Work Plan for 2024, as well as the EU4AGRI-Recovery achievements and work plan for the same period. The meeting concluded with a discussion and consideration of other business, ensuring alignment among Project Board members on future activities and priorities.
- 11th Project Board meeting took place on 7 November 2024. The meeting at UN House began with an introduction by Victor Munteanu, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, and a representative from the

EU Delegation to BiH. It featured presentations of success stories through short films, followed by an overview of EU4AGRI's key achievements in 2024. The session concluded with a discussion on "Agriculture and rural development in BiH beyond 2024," focusing on the impact of sector support and its relevance for the country's further progress along the EU integration path.

- 12th Project Board meeting took place on3 June 2025. The final project board session opened with introductions by Mr. Stefano Ellero, Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to BiH, and Mr. Renaud Meyer, UNDP Resident Representative to BiH. This was followed by a presentation of EU4AGRI's key achievements in 2025, and a discussion with closing remarks. A panel discussion then addressed the challenges and opportunities of agriculture and rural development in BiH along its EU approximation path, reviewing results achieved, lessons learned, and prospects for the agri-food sector. Panellists included representatives from the EU Delegation, UNDP, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, and academic institutions, providing a broad perspective on sector progress and priorities.

Presentations and minutes from the Project Board meetings are available in Annex XIII.

The Action **assurance role** supports the Project Board by carrying out objective and independent Action oversight and monitoring functions. This role ensured Action milestones were managed and completed. Action Assurance was independent of the Project Manager. The role of Action Assurance was performed by the UNDP Sustainable Growth Sector Leader in close consultations with the Contracting Authority (EU Delegation).

The Action used the existing **inter-institutional working group(s)** under the EU4AGRI, to steer the delivery of support. They guided the design, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of support measures under GIP. Core members includes representatives of the BIH Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, the FBIH Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry, the RS Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, BD, the RS Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology, FBIH Ministry of Environment and Tourism, RS Ministry of Trade and Entrepreneurship, FBIH Ministry of Development, Entrepreneurship and Crafts. As relevant, other institutions (such as RS Agricultural Payment Agency, entity ministries of tourism, BIH Food Safety Agency, BIH Veterinary Office, BIH Plant Health Protection Administration etc.) were also involved in the Action e.g. under TA to support GIP delivery or other relevant areas of work. As per contractual provisions, it was appropriately ensured that there is no conflict of interest regarding the GIP and any other part of the Action (e.g. involvement in inter-institutional working groups was considered as non-eligibility criterion for the GIP). **Members of the working group(s) were not members of the Project Board**.

The **Advisory Board** was not officially established; however, the Action maintained intensive and continuous communication, consultation, and information sharing with a broad range of experts and stakeholders from the sector. These included socio-economic partners such as representatives from the private sector, NGOs, local governments, and academia. This engagement not only allowed the Action to gather insights and exchange best practices but also provided stakeholders with the opportunity to actively participate in the design of support measures, advisory services, and other interventions, ensuring that the Action's activities were better aligned with sector needs, including inputs from agri-food operators and providers of business development and advisory services.

Further, the Action ensured cooperation with other projects and programmes in the sector, seeking to add value, maximise development results and avoid duplication.

The Action's team staffing

The project staff was based in the project office in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar. There were also relevant CzDA staff in its HQ (Prague).

REPORTING

ANNUAL REPORTS

Based on the monitoring and joint reflections on results with the CzDA, UNDP submitted to EUD consolidated annual progress reports against the results matrix. The following reports were prepared and submitted:

1. Annual Report for 2020
2. Annual Report for 2021
3. Progress Report October 2022
4. Annual Report for 2022
5. Annual Report for 2023

All submitted Annual Reports (Annex XIV) provide a complete account of all relevant aspects of the implementation of the Action for the period covered. The reports describe the implementation of the Action according to the activities envisaged in Annex I to Contribution Agreement as well as the degree of achievement of its Results (Outcomes or Outputs) as measured by corresponding Indicators.

EVALUATION ASSESSMENTS

Final independent evaluation of the Action

Initiated in 2024 and finalized in early 2025, providing comprehensive recommendations for future initiatives. .

The Action engaged the Service Provider (Ms. Radmila Miković, proven expert within the required thematic (evaluation and monitoring area), with 25 years of experience in international development and cooperation in Serbia, Western Balkans, and EU) for the performing the final evaluation of the Action.

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide an impartial review of the Action, in terms of its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, impact and the overall Action performance.

The evaluation methodology was based on standard international practices in project evaluation relying on the OECD DAC Evaluation Quality Standards (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) in order to answer the evaluation questions (EQs) identified in the ToR. The evaluation had three phases: Inception, Fieldwork, Synthesis phase. Data collection was done through desk research, survey, KIIs, FGDs, and site visits. Collected data were both quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed applying software solutions, data, investigator and methodological triangulations. General and specific findings have been grouped against EQs and then interpreted against evaluation criteria. The Evaluation managed to consult with 450 Action stakeholders (39% of whom were women) through a survey with 330 respondents, 15 FGDs, and 30 KIIs involving 120 respondents, as well as 18 site visits to 15 different locations. The Evaluation applied a multi-level analysis to develop an understanding of change processes influenced by the Action, including the degree of stakeholder buy-in and ownership, and assessed how these changes occurred and the specific contribution of the Action to them. Based on the findings, the Evaluation formulated strategic recommendations for consideration by the Action owners, with a view to improving the effectiveness of similar interventions in the future.
The evaluation engaged all relevant stakeholders in structured conversations, which enabled collective insights and distilling of key lessons learned in relation to (signals of) transformative change induced by the Action, mistakes, as well as important cross-cutting issues, such as innovation, gender equality and leaving no one behind. The evaluation used multiple-level analysis to generate an understanding of change processes influenced by the Action, related buy-in and ownership by the stakeholders, and assessed how this change was made and what was the specific contribution by the Project to that change. The evaluation formulated strategic recommendations for consideration by the Action owners (UNDP, CzDA, EU, relevant institutions at state-entity-cantonal government levels, agri-food business operators, business development service provides), towards more effective implementation of similar interventions in future.

The insights, best practices, and recommendations derived from the final evaluation will be utilized by the Project Board, EU, UNDP, and other stakeholders in enhancing decision-making and adapting successful programming modalities to suit the evolving context of the agriculture and rural development sector. The Report containing the final independent evaluation of the Action is provided in Annex VIII.

Impact Assessment of the support measures under GIP

GIP impact assessment was conducted by an independent expert and completed by the beginning of 2025.
The Action engaged the Service Provider (Mr. Zlatan Musić, proven expert with more than 20 years of direct professional experience in monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes) for the performing the Impact Assessment of the support measures under GIP implemented by the Action.

The overall objective of the Impact Assessment is to evaluate and validate the overall impact of the support measures under GIP implemented by the Action on targeted beneficiaries within the agriculture and rural development sector. It aims also to validate whether the technical assistance implemented to reinforce these support measures have effectively addressed critical structural issues in the sector, such as enhancing institutional capacities, promoting policy, legislative and administrative harmonization throughout BiH to ensure that public support measures to agriculture and rural development are strategically designed and implemented to achieve a more cohesive and inclusive outreach, thus maximizing their effectiveness and impact. The Impact Assessment is structured around comprehensive evaluation criteria, that in addition to the impact evaluation criteria also encompasses relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the support measures.

Key lessons learned highlight the importance of adaptive public call design, beneficiary-centered approaches, inclusivity, strong communication, and continuous capacity building. EU4AGRI demonstrated that targeted financial support, combined with technical assistance and policy work, can deliver tangible and lasting improvements in the agricultural sector and provide a solid foundation for future EU-aligned rural development initiatives.

The Report containing the Impact Assessment of the support measures under GIP implemented by the Action (including its annexes) is provided in Annex IX.

AUDITS CARRIED OUT DURING ACTION IMPLEMENTATION

During the implementation of the Action, three control exercises were conducted, and the corresponding reports are included in the annexes to this report. These comprised one Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) mission and two DIM audits.

ROM MISSION

The ROM is the external monitoring system of the European Commission (EC), aimed at enhancing the EC's internal control, accountability and management capacity with a strong focus on results. It supports HQ and EU Delegations in their internal monitoring and reporting functions, complementing their work with an independent and external monitoring service provided along the different phases of the intervention cycle.

The ROM mission was carried out for both EU4AGRI-Recovery and EU4AGRI Actions contemporary in 2023. The field phase for both Actions took place from the 6 February to the 1 March 2023. The ROM mission was performed by Ms. Biljana Stanišić Dragoljić, ROM Expert. In addition to field visit the Actions' team provided the ROM Expert with required supporting documentation and information. On 16 May 2023 EU Delegation shared with UNDP and CzDA the ROM Report containing recommendations. Upon receiving the ROM Report, the Actions' team provided its comments to EU Delegation. The final ROM Report is provided in Annex XII.

DIM AUDITS

1. The UNDP Office of Audit and Investigation (OAI), through PKF Littlejohn LLP (the audit firm), from 10 to 13 June 2024, conducted an audit of the Action which was implemented by UNDP. The audit firm conducted a financial audit in accordance with the International Standards of Auditing (ISA), the 700 series, to express an opinion on whether the financial statements presented fairly, in all material aspects, the Action's operations. The audit covered the Action's Combined Delivery Report, **which included expenses for the period 1 January to 31 December 2023** and the accompanying Funds Utilization statement as of 31 December 2023. The audit did not include activities and expenses incurred or undertaken at the "responsible party" level or expenses processed and approved in locations outside of the country. The audit did not cover the statement of assets as no assets were held by the Action. In addition, the audit did not cover the statement of cash as no separate bank account was established and maintained by the Action. Based on the report submitted by the audit firm, the audit did not result in any recommendation.
2. The UNDP Office of Audit and Investigation (OAI), through PKF Littlejohn LLP (the audit firm), from 23 to 27 June 2025, conducted an audit of the Action which was implemented by UNDP. The audit firm conducted a financial audit in accordance with the International Standards of Auditing (ISA), the 700 series, to express an opinion on whether the financial statements presented fairly, in all material aspects, the Action's operations. The audit covered the Action's Combined Delivery Report, **which included expenses for the period 1 January to 31 December 2024** and the accompanying Funds Utilization statement as of 31 December 2024. The audit did not include activities and expenses incurred or undertaken at the "responsible party" level or expenses processed and approved in locations outside of the country. The audit did not cover the statement of assets as no assets were held by the Action. In addition, the audit did not cover the statement of cash as no separate bank account was established and maintained by the Action. Based on the report submitted by the audit firm, the audit did not result in any recommendation.

   The final DIM Audit Reports are available in Annex VIII.

STRUCTURE OF THE BUDGET

SOURCES OF FUNDING

The total eligible costs of the Actions are estimated at EUR 20,301,119.80 as set in Special Conditions and Annex III of the signed Contribution Agreement no. 2019/413-765. The EU contribution amounts to maximum of EUR 20,000,000.00.
During the implementation period from 1 March 2020 to 30 June 2025, UNDP received six instalments in the total amount of EUR 20,000,000.00 and reported EC share of costs amounting to EUR 20 million, as noted in the table below.

INCOME RECEIVED	Date	EUR
1st instalment	23 December 2019	2,923,294.69
2nd instalment	10 September 2021	5,205,107.28
3rd instalment	19 December 2022	3,000,000.00
4th instalment	29 August 2023	4,688,516.57
5th instalment	25 March 2024	3,000,000.00
6th instalment	20 November 2024	1,183,081.46
TOTAL INCOME received as of 30 June 2025		**20,000,000.00**

Total costs of the action	% EU share	EUR
EUR 20,301,015.76	**98.52%**	**EUR 19,999,895.95**

A simple summary of the total funds utilised under two budget headings/two results and Action management and evaluation is provided in the table below:

PLANNED ACTIVITIES	PLANNED BUDGET (EUR) TOTAL	FINANCIAL YEAR 5 (2024/2025)
RESULT 1: Higher levels of production of safe and quality food based on introduced innovative practices, while preserving the natural resources and the countryside, are sustained	**14,505,850.39**	**14,516,149.24**
RESULT 2: Policy actions are implemented in EU aligned manner, based on sector services and systems improved	**2,801,181.10**	**2,787,821.07**
Action management and evaluation	**1,685,677.10**	**1,686,031.04**
Remuneration of the Organization (maximum 7% of subtotal of direct eligible costs of the Action to be financed by contracting Authority)	**1,308,411.22**	**1,311,014.41**
TOTAL	**20,301,119.80**	**20,301,015.76**

For a more detailed view of the expenses incurred during the project implementation period, please refer to the financial report contained in Annex IV.

SUSTAINABILITY, COMPLEMENTARITY AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ACTION

The sustainability of the Action's results can be assessed across several interrelated dimensions: technical and institutional capacity, policy framework, sector resilience, environmental sustainability, financial sustainability, and risk factors.

TECHNICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

On the technical and GIP support side, the majority of agri-food and non-agri-food operators confirmed that they initiated new activities as a direct result of the support received through the Action. In parallel, institutional partners benefited from targeted inputs aimed at strengthening their capacities, including initial financial and technical support to address critical gaps and to support a new cycle of institutional development. These interventions have established a solid foundation for further institutional upgrading; however, the continuation and scaling of these efforts will depend on the willingness and ability of institutional actors to assume a leadership role once the Action concludes.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL UPTAKE

On the policy side, relevant strategic and legal frameworks at both state and entity levels have been adopted and are ready for implementation. While many stakeholders raised concerns about the quality of the consultative process—largely influenced by political decision-making and the need for consensus across multiple governance levels—the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of BiH (2023–2027) has been formally adopted. Achieved through strong political consensus, the document provides an important strategic framework for the development of the sector in the coming years.

Early evidence of institutional sustainability can also be observed through initial uptake of Action-developed methodologies. Notably, the Brčko District Department for Agriculture has incorporated selected elements of the support-measure design and implementation methodology developed under the Action into its own practices, indicating relevance and applicability within existing public-sector systems.

In addition, the Office for Harmonization and Coordination of Agricultural, Food and Rural Development Payment Systems of Bosnia and Herzegovina has prepared a draft Plan for Harmonization that integrates support measures developed through the Action. The plan is currently undergoing consultation and approval procedures with entity-level stakeholders and is expected to be submitted for adoption by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. While these developments indicate progress toward institutionalization, the long-term sustainability of results will depend on the formal adoption and consistent implementation of the plan across all competent authorities.

STRENGTHENING SECTOR CAPACITY AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY

The Action contributed to strengthening sector capacities by building on an established model for the design and delivery of support measures aligned with EU requirements. Capacity development interventions were designed to support beneficiaries during the recovery phase while also ensuring a smooth transition beyond the conclusion of Action support.

In addition to grant financing, the Action provided targeted technical assistance aimed at **strengthening the capacities of agri-food and non-agri-food operators to better understand their business operations, develop high-quality business plans, and access financial support in line with EU methodologies and requirements**. Through training and advisory support, beneficiaries enhanced their understanding of financial planning, investment readiness, eligibility criteria, and compliance with EU standards, thereby improving their preparedness to engage with future national and EU-funded support instruments, including IPARD-like mechanisms.

The Action also delivered capacity-building activities for business development advisory service providers, strengthening their ability to support agri-food operators in analyzing business operations, preparing business plans, and navigating access to financial support in accordance with EU procedures. This reinforced the role of advisory services as a key enabling mechanism within the sector, particularly in rural areas, and contributed to longer-term sustainability by embedding knowledge and skills within local support structures.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability was integrated into the GIP support measures, with a focus on mitigating negative environmental impacts and enhancing positive environmental outcomes. The Action promoted sustainable land use and the protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

In particular, through the support measure on improving industrial resource efficiency and circular value chains, beneficiaries improved their environmental performance by reducing negative environmental impacts and promoting more rational and sustainable use of natural resources. This was further reinforced through dedicated training programmes for GIP beneficiaries, focusing on resource efficiency and circular value chains, as well as the development of transition plans toward more resource-efficient and circular business models.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Financial sustainability was embedded in the design of the GIP support measures through rigorous business planning requirements and return-on-investment assessments. The overall investment package strengthened sector resilience to economic shocks while improving competitiveness and productivity.

Continuous technical assistance, in addition to grant funding, supported beneficiaries in ensuring business continuity, optimizing supply chains, developing new products and services, and accessing new markets. Importantly, the Action avoided subsidization-based support models and instead promoted competitiveness and market-oriented growth. Mandatory co-financing by beneficiaries further reinforced financial sustainability by ensuring ownership and commitment to the supported investments.

RISKS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Despite these positive developments, stakeholders identified several risks that could jeopardize the long-term sustainability of results. These include insufficient financial support to agri-food operators from both state and EU sources, climate change impacts, youth outmigration, lack of an enabling policy environment and sustained political support for ARD, market price volatility driven by global crises, and an overall unfavorable socio-economic context in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

COMPLEMENTARITY, SYNERGY WITH OTHER RELEVANT ACTIONS

During its implementation, the Action was closely aligned with two initiatives - The Action European Union Support to COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience of Agriculture and Rural Development in BiH **(EU4AGRI-Recovery)** and COVID-19 Investment Response (**EU4BusinessRecovery**). Both were closely linked to the EU-funded projects supporting the agri-food sector. As UNDP was engaged in the implementation of these initiatives, and as they overlapped for a period of several years, a synergistic approach to management was applied i.e., public calls jointly designed, published and administered. This enabled continuity and coherence of work with institutional partners, maximizing performance as well as cost-effectiveness.

The Action ensured complementarities in rural tourism with the **Via Dinarica Project** (2018-2021), where relevant. Via Dinarica is an initiative implemented by UNDP, financed by USAID and AICS, that supports the creation of competitive tourism offer of the rural areas included into the Dinaric arch, for the purpose of achieving sustainable socio-economic development.

Considering that co-funding capacities of potential applicants are an important factor for successful GIP delivery under Activities 1.1, 2.1, 2.2 and 3.1, the UNDP explored partnerships with the banking sector to establish dedicated financial products helping potential applicants to secure co-funding. Within the framework of the EU4AGRI project, a special credit line of Sparkasse Bank for agricultural projects wase made available with special benefits - crediting of the necessary co-financing for grants with special conditions and the possibility of using certain guarantee lines. The goal of this partnership, which UNDP as the implementer of the EU4AGRI project achieved with Sparkasse Bank, was to facilitate the agricultural sector's access to financial resources and enable the co-financing of EU4AGRI investments whose purpose was to modernize and improve the competitiveness of the sector, and further economic growth and development of BiH.

MAINSTREAMING

Gender equality: The Action embraced gender mainstreaming as a tool to ensure that activities and results respect gender equality principles. On the one side, the GIP support measures applied a gender equality lens from the design stage, encouraging participation of women and women-led farms / agri-food businesses in the economic activities supported by the Action. Thus, the Action contributed to the economic empowerment of women, as well as to improving quality of life in rural areas, particularly having in mind the needs of women. Gender-sensitive monitoring framework enabled monitoring and progress and results also from the viewpoint of gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition, capacity building was implemented in a gender-sensitive way and gender-sensitive language was utilized during the Action implementation. The Action's team enabled access of men and women to trainings and information.

Environmental protection: Having in mind the investment nature of the intervention, and the close connections between agriculture and environment, the Action focused on the greening, circularity, and environmental protection aspects across its activities. Due emphasis was placed on ensuring the adoption of sustainable agriculture, sustainable use of natural resources and environmental protection throughout the GIP-supported investments. Additional steps were undertaken during the selection stage to ensure that no measures implemented within the GIP result in any negative effects towards the environment. Possible negative impacts on environment in addition to climate change mitigation and adaption, were key issue to be solved through GIP investments and adaption of green and circular business models. Through the implementation of the support

measure on improvement of industrial resource efficiency and circular value chains the Action beneficiaries improved their environmental performances, while through the implementation of support measure to improve adaptation to climate change in primary agricultural production the Action beneficiaries improved their resilience to climate changes negative impacts. In addition, the Action ensured that capacity building of agri-food operators further strengthened the implementation of sustainable agriculture principles and farming practices.

Disaster risk reduction: The 2014 floods severely affected BIH's economy and livelihoods, with particularly devastating effects on the agriculture sector. Therefore, agriculture is increasingly vulnerable to natural hazard-induced disasters. Farmers and local communities in general are direct custodians of the environment and the way they manage natural resources affects natural hazards from becoming crises. The Action supported disaster risk reduction measures as part of the GIP investments by reducing the vulnerability of beneficiaries to climate changes negative impacts, as mentioned in previous paragraph.

Social inclusion: Beneficiaries and communities at large had equal access to and benefited from the common rural infrastructure, services and financial support provided by the Action, without discrimination due to sex, ethnic group, social status. The Action focused on encouraging socially excluded groups to benefit from support measures, thus contributing to their social integration and better livelihoods. The Action sought to promote solidarity-based form of association among socially excluded groups to produce, process, commercialise and offer to the market agri-food products. Among beneficiaries a cooperative founded by women victims of domestic violence and a socially responsible company which employs people with disabilities providing them occupational rehabilitation.

Safety: The total mine-suspected area in BIH covers 965 km^2 (1.97% of the entire area of the country), of which agricultural land constitutes 26%[88]. While the Action did not envision support for mine clearance activities, it ensured that the assistance provided was utilised with highest considerations of human safety, where no investments was made in **mine-suspected or mine-contaminated areas**.

[88] 2020 data, BIH Mine Action Centre (BHMAC).

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The table below represents the identified risks and the mitigation measures implemented during the Action implementation.

Risk	Likelihood of occurrence	Potential impact	Mitigation measure
Unfavourable economic trends, including those triggered by COVID-19, and political instability	Medium	Medium	The Action's team closely monitored all relevant economic and political developments that may have an impact on its results as measured through indicators. Grant beneficiaries were closely monitored throughout Action implementation and supported through technical support. Relevant adjustments were made to some projects to ensure the achievement of Action indicators. Critical trends were reported to the EU Delegation for consideration, and mitigation measures were jointly decided upon.
2022 General elections may pose risks to dynamics and time effectiveness of the Action implementation	Medium	Medium	The Action system of collaboration with stakeholders ensured that the post-election context did not affect the sustainability of its results. The Action's goals were also aligned with relevant mid and long-term policies, so that they remained relevant regardless of any changes, including personnel etc.
Governments in BIH insufficiently committed to country-wide policy coordination and harmonisation (lack of consensus)	High	High	The Action adopted an inclusive and consensus-based approach, resting on the spirit of cooperation and guided by the interests of sector stakeholders. Government ownership was instigated via professional and open interaction with the institutions, provision of quality support and delivering on agreed commitments. The Action engaged institutional partners in technical bodies to co-design support measures, as well as in the overall steering. Institutional partners were encouraged to periodically share information on the Action progress and achievements with the entity/BD governments and the BIH Council of Ministers.
Trade agreements have detrimental effects on BIH agri-food exports	Low	Medium	The Action's team closely monitored relevant developments that may have an impact on its results and performance indicators. The project closely accompanied and advised the supported beneficiaries in order to mitigate negative effects.
Agri-food operators fail to recognize the benefits of green and circular practices to advance their farming and businesses	Low	Low	The GIP was designed and implemented to support and reinforce the adoption of green and circular business models. The Action also invested in strengthening of business development and advisory services capacities for agri-food operators' COVID-19 recovery, including by building back better, which contributed to these efforts via improved quality, type and effectiveness of advice. Regular monitoring of recipients of financial support secured implementation in line with required greening principles, revealing at the same time, potential areas for support for throughout the implementation period.
Insufficient number of agri-food operators / other stakeholders targeted by GIP meeting basic requirements for financing / having adequate absorption capacities	Low	Medium	Design of the GIP was informed by the analytical work, including considerations on key stakeholders' absorption capacities and sector-specific needs. This helped to determine funding priorities and criteria for eligible applicants. The selection criteria have taken into consideration the capacities of beneficiaries for implementing the support measures. To capacitate potential applicants, as well as to support organizations, the Action's team organised information days and sessions on the application procedures and requirements and provided technical support during the application process. In addition, the Action's team provided support to selected beneficiaries before and after the signing of the implementation agreements.

Risk	Likelihood of occurrence	Potential impact	Mitigation measure
Adequate financial products not available to agri-food operators / agri-food operators unable to ensure GIP-required co-financing	Low	Low	UNDP explored partnerships with the banking sector to establish dedicated financial products helping potential applicants to secure co-funding.
Severe weather and natural disasters	Low	Medium	Action planning considered the risk of severe weather and natural disasters. During the Action implementation period, the already difficult situation in the agri-food sector in BiH caused by the COVID-19 and by the conflict in Ukraine was further worsened by ongoing climate changes negative effects. In response to these challenges, the Action prepared and published a new support measure to improve the adaptation to the above-mentioned negative impacts in the agri-food sector in BiH and support the agri-food operators (farm holdings, cooperatives, companies) in their efforts to ensure business continuity and strengthen resilience of their operations considering the increased climate variabilities. In addition, through the implementation of the support measure on improvement of industrial resource efficiency and circular value chains the Action beneficiaries improved their environmental performances and introduced new greener business models which made them more resilient to different risks, among which to climate changes negative effects.
Unfavourable EUR / USD / BAM exchange rate	Low	Medium	The Action applied pro-active early warning and financial planning and management system.
Institutional partners not committed to the improvement of the business environment in the COVID -19 specific circumstances	Medium	Medium	Through GIP management, the Action provided systemic technical support and capacity development to institutional partners with the goal to prepare the ground for gradual adoption of EU practices and their anchoring within relevant institutions.
Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the agri-food sector in the country	High	High	Agri-food operators have been facing difficulties in placement of their goods in the markets, due to both logistic challenges when it comes to export of their products, but also due to changing consumer preferences in light of the pandemic (shift from luxury to basic goods). The Action worked on helping beneficiaries by training them on how to ensure business continuity and resilience in order to upgrade their knowledge and skills when it comes to the importance of business continuity planning and resilience in the agri-food sector. In addition, the Action delivered a training related to business continuity planning of business development advisory service providers which were supported to play a vital role at the frontline of the response to the pandemic in rural areas. Economic recession trends resulted in difficult access to finance. The Action mitigated this risk by decreasing co-financing requirements set out in the initial GIP thus enabling easier co-funding. Both agriculture as well as food processing industry are labour intensive where COVID-19 infections within the agri-food operators temporary ceased the operations. The Action mitigated this risk by supporting the investments in PPE and occupational health and safety equipment through GIP.
Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Action's implementation methodology and dynamics	High	High	The Action was in its initial phase during the COVID-19 pandemic and thus encountered difficulties to ensure envisioned institutional partners involvement due to the COVID-19 related restrictions. This considerably effected the processes that relate to project staff onboarding process, procurement preparation and other activities that require extensive communication with project stakeholders. In addition, Action activities were very field intensive and thus

Risk	Likelihood of occurrence	Potential impact	Mitigation measure
			required presence of Action staff and experts on the ground, involving a lot of interaction with the stakeholders and beneficiaries. Due to COVID-19 restrictions imposed, most of these activities have been disrupted in some way. The Action work plan had to be adjusted to adopt its response to economic recovery needs of the agri-food operators, thus delaying GIP related activities. In addition, the Action introduced more digital tools to move the communication online where possible. However, in certain cases, it was not possible to organize the work online thus resulting in delay of activities until travel restrictions were lifted.
Global economic crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine.	High	Medium	The Action's team pro-actively monitored the situation and adjusted the approach where feasible. The spill over effects of the global crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine impacted companies in BIH. The Action's team closely accompanied and advised the supported beneficiaries in order to mitigate negative effects. Also, the Action adjusted the GIP to provide direct support to those agri-food producers who were impacted by the crisis, so as to mitigate the negative effects.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED AND MITIGATION MEASURES TAKEN

DELAYS AND CHANGES

UNDP INTERNAL RESTRUCTURING

UNDP conducted internal restructuring, which coincided with the Year 1 of Action implementation. This relates to the establishment of a new sector in UNDP BIH Programme, focused on sustainable and inclusive economic growth, with direct implications to the EU4 family of projects' management structure and their budgets. The new Sustainable Growth Sector was established to better align the current programme portfolio to the UNDP's Country Programme 2021-2025 through programme units - sectors - that are clearly organized around the programme outcomes (areas). The economic development portfolio that existed under the former Regional and Rural Development (RRD) sector has now been moved to the newly established Sustainable Growth Sector. At this point, the Sector includes EU4 family of projects and five other projects in the respective area. The transition period and clustering of projects has been concluded in October 2021. The new sector was expected to drive UNDP's sustainable economic development initiatives around circular economy, digital economy, skills for the future and entrepreneurship and building quality of life for BIH citizens through economic means. The recruitment procedures for both sectoral positions (Sustainable Growth Sector Leader and Sustainable Growth Sector Associate) have been successfully completed during the Year 2 of Action implementation. This subsequently impacted dynamics when it comes to implementation and recruitment process within the Sector, which pertains to this ongoing intervention as well.

AMENDED TIMELINES FOR ACTION IMPLEMENTATION

The Action began implementation in early 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which, together with political instability, global economic shocks, and low beneficiary absorption capacity, caused significant delays in the implementation of Grant Investment Package measures. These challenges required multiple relaunches of public calls and led to the approval of a 12-month no-cost extension until 28 February 2025 (**Addendum No. 1,** signed on 29 January 2024). The request for addendum was initiated due to a number of external factors, as previously communicated and outlined below:

- EU4AGRI began implementation amid the COVID-19 outbreak and thus encountered difficulties to ensure envisioned institutional partners involvement due to the COVID-19 related restrictions. This considerably effected the processes that relate to project staff onboarding process, procurement preparation and other activities that require extensive communication with project stakeholders. In addition, the Action work plan had to be adjusted to adopt its response to economic recovery needs of the agri-food operators, thus delaying GIP related activities.

- Ongoing geopolitical tensions (both local and global) had negative impact on the economic situation in the country, thus underpinning already significantly uncertain investment climate. The war in Ukraine has led to further price increases and disruption of the global economy, impacting trade, causing energy crisis, soaring inflation affecting the region’s economies and lack of consumer and business confidence. This influenced the number of GIP applications received, especially for public calls for processing and primary production. In addition, continued low absorption capacity of targeted beneficiaries, and in particular low quality of investment projects, resulted in the low passing rate for the firstly published GIP calls, and necessity to re-launch these public calls, reducing the time available for the implementation of selected projects.

Subsequent changes to VAT exemption procedures introduced in April 2024 had an additional and significant impact on implementation. As a result, a further four-month no-cost extension was requested, extending the implementation period until 30 June 2025 (**Addendum No. 2**, approved via email on 29 February 2025). The Contribution The Agreement was originally planned for a 60-month implementation period starting on 1 March 2020, with a total estimated budget of EUR 20,479,808.00. With the approved extension, the implementation period was extended to 64 months, while the total estimated cost decreased to EUR 20,301,119.81.

The justification for Addendum No. 2 included:

- A delay exceeding four months in the implementation of 45 agri-food sector investments due to the requirement to obtain VAT exemption certificates from the European Union Delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUD BiH). This precondition significantly disrupted implementation timelines, particularly for contracts with a six-month execution period.
- Upon issuance of VAT exemption certificates, UNDP promptly notified beneficiaries to proceed with procurement and contracted activities. However, due to the lost implementation time, an extension became necessary to ensure proper and complete delivery. A total of 43 beneficiaries had projects scheduled for completion in 2025.
- The extension enabled the completion and operationalization of key information systems under the Action, notably the Wine Register. Implementation of this system experienced delays beyond the control of the implementing partners. The additional time ensured full deployment, system start-up, and comprehensive staff training to achieve the intended results.
- Under Sub-activity 2.4, UNDP BiH had planned to upgrade the Wine Register system developed by CzDA through additional modules, based on agreements with institutional partners and with a dedicated budget of EUR 100,000 provided by CzDA. However, due to significant delays caused by the selected supplier, insufficient time remained to implement these enhancements. The implementing partners jointly decided not to proceed and formally informed institutional counterparts. While the additional modules would have provided enhanced functionality, the core system remained fully operational and in line with the originally agreed functionality. The allocated amount was therefore excluded from the revised budget (Annex III).
- The extended timeframe also supported the preparation and finalization of by-laws necessary for the effective functioning of the wine market. Although partially supported by the project, progress on these strategic documents was delayed due to institutional inactivity. Activities subsequently resumed and benefited from the additional time.
- The adoption of the Law on the Organization of the Wine Market in BiH in August 2023 represented a major milestone for the EU4AGRI Action. The finalization of by-laws and operationalization of the Wine Register were essential next steps to ensure full implementation of the law.

TRANSFER OF TITLE OF THE EQUIPMENT AND FURNITURE

In accordance with the Contribution Agreements No. 2019/413-765 (EU4AGRI) signed between the European Union, UNDP BiH, and CzDA on 13 December 2019, all equipment, furniture and major supplies purchased with the EU Contribution were transferred to project beneficiaries.

LESSONS LEARNT

The Action implementation has yielded the following critical lessons:

1. PROGRAMME DESIGN, SCOPE, AND TIMELINES

A key lesson from the Action is that **highly complex objectives combined with multiple support measures require realistic timelines and sequencing**. The Action initially planned nine public calls but ultimately implemented 24, significantly increasing operational demands. External shocks—including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine—further disrupted markets and implementation dynamics.

Experience shows that the **full lifecycle of a support measure (design, publication, evaluation, contracting, implementation, and monitoring) requires between 20 and 36 months**, far exceeding initial assumptions. More than 90% of beneficiaries required contract extensions, underlining the importance of setting realistic implementation periods and ensuring applicants fully understand project complexity before approval. Future interventions should therefore adopt **less ambitious timelines and phased implementation approaches**.

2. ABSORPTION CAPACITY AND THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Limited absorption capacity within the agri-food sector emerged as a major constraint, particularly in the early stages. Low-quality applications, weak project preparation, limited experience with EU-style procedures, and an underdeveloped consulting market contributed to a low passing rate of 14% in the first five calls.

However, **intensive technical assistance, consultant capacity-building, and targeted awareness campaigns proved highly effective**. These measures increased the average passing rate to 48% in the final five calls, with some calls exceeding 80%. This demonstrates that **grant financing alone is insufficient** and must be paired with continuous, hands-on technical support to achieve meaningful results.

3. DEMAND PATTERNS ACROSS SUPPORT MEASURES

The highest demand was consistently observed for **primary agricultural production and processing**, reflected in 14 public calls (9 for primary production and 5 for processing). Each call was progressively refined based on lessons learned and applicant feedback, improving relevance and effectiveness.

In contrast, **rural diversification and rural tourism proved the most challenging support measure**. Despite extensive outreach and simplified templates, application quality remained low. Limited understanding of rural diversification concepts, weak engagement by local governments, and low beneficiary awareness significantly constrained results. While the final call incorporated targeted technical assistance to develop full proposals from concept notes, these challenges indicate that **rural diversification requires longer-term awareness-raising, stronger local facilitation, and tailored capacity-building**.

4. ADVISORY SERVICES AND SCIENCE–BUSINESS LINKAGES

The public call for agricultural advisory services and science–business cooperation revealed **systemic weaknesses within universities and research institutions**. Despite their involvement in call design and clear communication of requirements, most applications were poorly prepared and focused on covering existing costs rather than proposing applied research with tangible benefits for farmers and businesses.

Frequent procedural issues—late submissions, missing documentation, and limited understanding of competitive funding—highlight the need for **substantial institutional capacity-building before such actors can effectively engage in EU-style funding mechanisms**.

5. INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT, GOVERNANCE, AND INTEGRITY

Active engagement of institutional partners proved essential for achieving objectives and fostering ownership of results. However, **engagement levels varied significantly across institutions**, and both vertical and horizontal

coordination remained weak. While some partners provided substantive input during design, others remained passive throughout evaluation and monitoring processes.
Serious challenges were identified related to **confidentiality breaches, political pressure, and bias during evaluation processes**. Information leakage toward applicants and media, as well as advocacy for specific applicants by some evaluation committee members, created significant operational pressures. These experiences underscore the importance of **clear accountability mechanisms, reinforced ethics standards, and continuous capacity-building for institutional partners** involved in grant management.

6. MONITORING, COMPLIANCE, AND BENEFICIARY READINESS

The Action ensured **100% monitoring coverage of supported investments**, including post-completion follow-up. However, the monitoring process was resource-intensive and demanding for both beneficiaries and the Action team. Beneficiaries often lacked the capacity to comply with reporting requirements, justify changes due to market fluctuations, and manage administrative obligations.
Continuous technical assistance was therefore essential to ensure compliance, reduce implementation risks, and safeguard investment quality. This confirms that **monitoring and proactive follow-up are critical components of grant-based interventions**, not optional add-ons.

7. FLEXIBILITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

External factors such as supply-chain disruptions, permit delays, weather conditions, and financing constraints frequently affected implementation. The Action demonstrated that **flexibility within contractual and procedural frameworks is essential** to manage such risks without compromising integrity or results. Structured flexibility allowed projects to adapt while maintaining accountability.

8. DIGITAL CAPACITY AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS

The suspension of face-to-face activities during Year 3 highlighted the sector's and institutions' **limited readiness for digital delivery of capacity-building**. This experience confirmed the importance of investing in digital infrastructure, equipment, and skills to ensure continuity of operations during crises. Needs assessments conducted by the Action provided a basis for targeted support to institutional partners in this area.

9. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ACCESS TO FINANCE

Co-financing requirements (minimum 35%) strengthened ownership and financial sustainability but posed challenges for SMEs affected by COVID-19. While co-financing remains essential, the Action identified the need to **complement grant schemes with improved access to external financing**, including cooperation with commercial banks and development finance institutions, to broaden participation and resilience.

10. GENDER MAINSTREAMING AS A CROSS-CUTTING LESSON

Integrating gender considerations throughout design and implementation proved to enhance outcomes for women in agriculture, including leadership, economic participation, and market access. Targeted measures, gender-sensitive indicators, and capacity-building were critical success factors. Future interventions should further strengthen impact through tailored financial products for women, digital skills development, and targeted awareness campaigns.

COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

The Action was fully aligned with visibility and communication requirements designed for the action EU4AGRI.

The aim of the Communication and Visibility Strategy was to raise awareness among targeted audiences about the activities and achievements of both projects. The Strategy provided clear guidance on effective communication of the Action and ensured consistent visibility of the European Union (EU) as the key contributor to rural development and the competitiveness of the agriculture sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

Communication and visibility activities consistently supported the effective implementation of the Action by ensuring high-quality, timely, and transparent dissemination of information on objectives, public calls, results, and impact. All activities were implemented in close coordination with UNDP BiH, the Czech Development Agency (CzDA), and the EU Delegation to BiH, in line with EU visibility standards and the EU4AGRI Communication and Visibility Strategy. Over time, these activities expanded significantly in scale, geographic coverage, audience reach, and overall media presence.

EVENTS

From 2020 to 2025, EU4AGRI implemented a steadily expanding portfolio of events, combining online, hybrid, and in-person formats.

- **Public calls and info sessions:**
  - During the implementation of the Action, a total of 112 live and 41 online information sessions were organized in relation to the 24 public calls. These sessions served as a key outreach and awareness-raising mechanism, providing potential applicants with detailed guidance on eligibility criteria, application procedures, and implementation requirements. All online information sessions were streamed live via the EU4AGRI Facebook page and subsequently made available for re-watch on the same platform, ensuring continued access to information beyond the live events. Collectively, the information sessions generated substantial engagement on social media, indicating strong interest from a wide range of stakeholders across the country. Overall, approximately 52,000 individuals were reached through various communication channels, with Facebook-based online information sessions accounting for the majority of the outreach and reaching more than 50,000 people. This level of visibility and interaction significantly contributed to broad awareness of the public calls and supported inclusive access to project opportunities.
  - Info sessions were supported by regular newsletters distributed to a growing database of agri-food operators (from ~2,100 in 2021 to over 4,500 by 2023).

- **Field visits and high-level events:**
  - Over **15 field visits** were organized for senior EU Delegation and UNDP representatives to the most successful beneficiaries across BiH.
  - Multiple visits were attended by the **Head of the EU Delegation / EU Special Representative**, strengthening visibility of EU support on the ground.
  - High-level and promotional events related to **Revitalizing Rural Markets in BiH** were organized or visited in **Trebinje, Banja Luka, Rudo, Zenica, Šamac, Gračanica, Mostar, and other municipalities**.

- **Thematic and promotional events:**
  - Participation and presentations at fairs, festivals, and conferences (Urban Agri Fest, PIT FoodCon, domestic product fairs).
  - Media workshops for journalists in multiple cities to strengthen agricultural reporting.
  - Specialized workshops, study visits, signing ceremonies, Europe Day events, World Food Day, photo contests, and sector-focused conferences.

- **Final phase:**
  - Preparations are ongoing for the **EU4AGRI final event in February 2025**, with dedicated visibility materials developed.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Media engagement increased substantially over time, both in volume and diversity of outlets.

- **Media presence:**
  - From 2020 to 2024, EU4AGRI generated **well over 8,000 media mentions** in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
  - Annual coverage grew from **347 mentions in 2020** to **over 2,000 mentions annually** in later years.
  - Coverage included **online portals, print media, television, and radio**, with all mentions reported as positive.
- **Press and broadcast activities:**
  - More than **90 press releases** were distributed nationally across FBiH, RS, and BD.
  - Over **2,000 radio appearances** (interviews and jingles) were broadcast during the Action's lifetime.
  - Hundreds of print articles and promotional features were published.
- **Storytelling and campaigns:**
  - More than **40 beneficiary success stories** were produced and shared with media.
  - Flagship campaigns such as **"2000 stories"** highlighted EU4AGRI's impact through articles, graphics, and TV features, including coverage by **BHT1 and Al Jazeera Balkans**.
  - Specialized content promoted policy milestones (e.g. Strategic Plan and Law on Wine).
- **Journalist engagement:**
  - The Action organized three media workshops that took place in Bijeljina (May 2023) and Mostar (October 2023) and Tarčin (April 2024) – gathering more than 45 journalists with the aim of enhancing media coverage and understanding of EU4AGRI & EU4AGRI-Recovery.

WEBSITE

- **www.eu4agri.ba** served as the primary communication platform throughout implementation.
- The website accumulated **over 4 million page views**, growing from ~170,000 views in the first year to several million annually in later phases.
- Content included public calls, news, success stories, videos, beneficiary maps, and downloads.
- The website interface and content were **refreshed multiple times**, including major upgrades to the **interactive beneficiary map** (2023 and 2024).
- Moreover, 42 newsletters were distributed to over 4,588 registered agri-food operators, providing details about the info sessions and open public calls.

SOCIAL MEDIA

- EU4AGRI's Facebook presence expanded steadily from **~4,000 followers in 2020** to **nearly 11,000 followers by 2025**.
- Across the Action, **700+ social media posts** were published, covering public calls, events, success stories, campaigns, and policy achievements.
- Posts generated **hundreds of thousands of direct reach**, tens of thousands of visits, and sustained engagement with beneficiaries and the wider public.
- Social media was also used as a two-way communication channel, responding to **hundreds of direct messages and inquiries**.

VISIBILITY MATERIALS

Visibility materials evolved in both quantity and sophistication to support field activities and events.

- Developed and distributed materials included:
  - Project roll-ups, stickers for beneficiary equipment, agri-machines, laptops, and IT equipment
  - Branded promotional items (bags, notebooks, umbrellas, aprons, keychains, flags, flyers)
  - Updated **branding manuals and templates**, aligned with EU, UNDP, and CzDA visibility requirements
- Dedicated PR and visibility materials were produced for major campaigns and the **final EU4AGRI event in 2025**.

VIDEO AND MULTIMEDIA CONTENT

- More than **15 video products** were produced, including:
  - Educational videos
  - Beneficiary success stories
  - Promotional teasers for public calls
  - Campaign videos and official statements
- Videos reached **tens of thousands of viewers** through social media and online platforms.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Guidance document on visibility for beneficiaries

Document on project visibility guidance was prepared and distributed to project beneficiaries. This document included information about the projects, its donor and general visibility. Also, for each finalized investment, project team has prepared alu board with project branding.

Overall, communication and visibility activities showed **continuous growth in scale, geographic coverage, audience reach, and strategic impact**, significantly strengthening public awareness of EU support to agriculture and rural development in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the 2020–2025 period.

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