Translating the SDG Framework in BiH in Bosnia and Herzegovina into sustainable and inclusive growth (SDG2BiH)

BIH10/00128890

Short narrative summary of key results

Reporting period: April 2022 – February 2026

Implementing Partner: UNDP in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Start Date/End Date: April 2022 – February 2026 (46 months)

Country: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Implementation modality: Direct Implementation Modality (DIM)

Introduction and Project Description

"Translating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina into sustainable and inclusive growth" (SDG2BiH) Programme is a successor to the SDG Roll-Out and Private Sector Support Project. The SDG2BiH was financed by Sweden and implemented by UNDP in partnership with UNICEF and UN Women under the United Nations' overall support extended to the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) to implement the SDG Framework in BiH. IOM joined the efforts in 2025.

The overall objective of the Programme was to contribute to accelerated achievement of SDGs in BiH by supporting governance systems and private sector engagement towards green and inclusive growth. The Programme supported the authorities in BiH in their efforts to advance their progress towards the achievement of sustainable development targets defined in the SDG Framework in BiH. The Programme was organized around two mutually reinforcing outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Authorities at state, entity and Brčko District BiH levels effectively work on planning, implementing, monitoring, and reporting on the SDG Framework in BiH and foster development partnerships.
- Outcome 2: Cantonal and local governments actively contribute to implementation of the SDG Framework in BiH.

This Programme engaged and supported a wide range of stakeholders in BiH, primarily governments and socio-economic stakeholders and strengthened their capacities for systemic implementation of the SDG Framework in BiH, which is a pre-requisite to the attainment of the SDG targets in the country.

The Programme aimed to strengthen the ability of governance systems in the country for planning, financing, and implementation towards the SDGs and supported connecting public and private finances with a view of fostering SDG commitments, fostering smart and green growth, while at the same time contributing to creating a society of equal opportunities. The stakeholders in the country were supported in kickstarting the transition towards circular and low-carbon economy by providing relevant data and analysis, promotion of circular business models, capacity development and knowledge sharing support.

Concrete changes were driven by piloting SDG localization at the cantonal and local levels. This involved raising awareness and building the capacities of local stakeholders, supporting and preparing specific projects that will improve people's lives, and showing how lower levels of government can help achieve the SDGs, with a special focus on ensuring no one is left behind. By empowering vulnerable population groups, as drivers of solutions in their communities, the effectiveness and needs-orientation of local governance systems got enhanced, and human capital investments increased.

Building on the previous interventions focused on the private sector and other stakeholders on sustainable development and the SDGs, further engagement and cooperation of the private sector and other stakeholders accelerated domestication of SDG targets and maximized results.

The SDG2BiH lasted 46 months, from April 2022 to February 2026. Though the SDG2BiH is managed and implemented by UNDP, specific sub-activities were implemented by UNICEF, UN Women and IOM.

Executive summary

Context and Strategic Approach

The "Translating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina into sustainable and inclusive growth" (SDG2BiH) Programme, extending from April 2022 to February 2026, served as a successor to the SDG Roll-Out and Private Sector Support Project. Financed by Sweden and implemented by UNDP in partnership with UNICEF, UN Women, and joined by IOM in 2025, the Programme was designed to accelerate SDG achievement by reinforcing governance systems and private sector engagement toward green and inclusive growth. The approach was structured around two mutually reinforcing outcomes: strengthening authorities at the state, entity, and Brčko District (BD) levels (Outcome 1) and empowering cantonal and local governments to drive SDG localization (Outcome 2). Central to this mission was the transition toward a circular, low-carbon economy and the steadfast application of the 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB) principle, ensuring that vulnerable populations remained at the heart of sustainable development initiatives.

Institutional Governance and Policy Milestones

A defining feature of the Programme was the systemic localization of sustainable development governance. In June 2023, the SDG Council of BiH transitioned from an informal working group to an officially appointed body by the Council of Ministers, institutionalizing policy coherence across government levels. This body successfully coordinated the preparation of the Second Voluntary National Review (VNR), presented at the UN High-Level Political Forum in July 2023. The VNR process became a model for inclusive dialogue, engaging over 1,200 young people and 55 civil society organizations. Beyond reporting, institutional integration reached the legislative level when the BiH Parliamentary Assembly amended its rulebooks in 2024 to formally embed SDG's into its oversight functions. Furthermore, strategic planning systems were modernized across all levels; in Republika Srpska (RS), the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy was completed, while the Federation of BiH (FBiH) saw an analytical overhaul of its development-planning system. In BD BiH, mid-term and annual working plans were fully aligned with the SDGs, creating a unified, data-driven planning architecture.

Financing the 2030 Agenda

To bridge the gap between policy and implementation, the Programme spearheaded the development and adoption of the SDG Financing Framework in BiH, formally endorsed by all levels of government in June 2024. This framework operationalized innovative financing instruments, supported by feasibility studies for a Strategic Investment Fund and SDG Bonds. At the entity and cantonal levels, the Programme piloted innovative financial mechanisms focusing on local government digitalization, SME competitiveness for green transition, and joint research and development (R&D) between academia and the private sector. These initiatives established a 'proof of concept' for transparent, targeted support to end-beneficiaries, setting the stage for the future scale-up of e-services and sustainable SME financing.

Private Sector Engagement and the Green Transition

The private sector's role in sustainable development was significantly elevated through the SDG Business Pioneers Award (SDG BPA). Participation in the award grew at a compound annual rate of 78%, expanding from 85 companies in 2022 to 484 in 2025. This momentum translated into concrete results, with over 50% of participating companies reporting reductions in plastic use and 42% implementing emission-reduction measures. Complementing the awards, a Circular Accelerator provided technical support and mentoring to SMEs, enabling them to develop bankable 'Circular Economy Transition Plans.' The transition was further supported by the launch of a Green Transition Web Platform and comprehensive mapping of circular opportunities in the construction and packaging industries, providing the data necessary to transition toward resource valorization.

Social Inclusion and Care Economy Model

Under the LNOB principle, the Programme pioneered transformative care economy models to address gender-based inequalities and service gaps. The 'Gerontodomaćice' model professionalized home-based care for the elderly, resulting in 217 certified caregivers and 49 formal jobs for women in 18 local communities. In Bijeljina, the 'Entrepreneurs in Care' model empowered women to convert informal care work into formal micro-businesses. These efforts were amplified by the 'Nemam ti kad' awareness campaign, which reached wide audiences and won a golden award at the No Limit BH Advertising Festival. Concurrently, UNICEF-led efforts established Social Protection and Inclusion (SPI) Commissions in seven local governments, defining multisectoral referral mechanisms to ensure that social services are coordinated, inclusive, and sustainable.

Localization and Sub-national Impact

The Programme's localization strategy transformed 8 local governments and 3 cantons into leaders of SDG implementation. Through the SDG2BiH Grant Scheme, 14 projects totaling BAM 2,156,188 were implemented, with an impressive average domestic co-financing rate of 35%. These projects directly benefited 43,772 citizens, introducing 13 new or improved public services, including six inclusive playgrounds and specialized vocational classrooms. Technical documentation for 11 large-scale infrastructure projects was prepared, making them investment-ready. In partner cantons like Tuzla, Una-Sana, and West Herzegovina, regulatory reforms and grant schemes enhanced service delivery in health, education, and economic development, demonstrating that lower levels of government are critical drivers of the 2030 Agenda.

Lessons Learned and Operational Reflections

The 46-month implementation period yielded critical insights. First, the participatory approach was essential for ensuring domestic ownership of both the processes and the results. Second, the SDG agenda proved to be largely apolitical, providing a stable platform for development prioritization across diverse governance levels. Third, integrated programming that links public reform with private sector transformation fosters stronger policy coherence. While institutional sustainability is largely secured through the SDG Council, the long-term financial viability of SDG-linked financing tools remains an ongoing challenge that requires continued focus beyond the Programme's lifecycle.

Lessons learned (including opinion of the evaluation)

Taking into consideration the Programme's experience and learnings from previous similar initiatives, the following key lessons should be considered:

• The participatory and consultative approach applied, paired with continuous capacity development and awareness raising, proved crucial for success and domestic ownership of both processes and results. Stakeholders valued the opportunity to co-create solutions, contribute ideas, and jointly own the achievements, ensuring lasting commitment beyond the Programme's duration.

• Continuous empowerment of institutional partners strengthened their readiness and confidence to lead SDG processes independently. This approach, built on flexibility rather than prescriptive actions, enabled national counterparts to take initiative, adapt to evolving contexts, and drive implementation forward.

• Anchoring the Programme within the national SDG Framework in BiH ensured relevance to BiH's priorities and enhanced policy coherence across governance levels. The SDG Agenda proved to be largely apolitical due to it allowing for prioritization based on priorities of a specific government level or body. Continued investment in vertically and horizontally aligned strategic planning systems remains essential to sustain the systemic implementation of the SDG Framework in BiH.

• Integrated programme design that linked public reform, local implementation, and private sector transformation proved effective in promoting coherence and systemic change. Cross-sectoral results were strongest where inter-agency teams shared planning, budgeting, and implementation responsibilities (UNICEF/UNDP LNOB Grant Scheme).

• Innovation and exploration remained defining characteristics of the intervention. Piloting of circular economy and decarbonization models provided practical pathways for businesses to engage in sustainable transformation, demonstrating that smaller, targeted investments can yield significant positive impact. However, businesses still require further support to build the necessary human capital and technical expertise to scale such initiatives.

• Strong financial management, transparency, and high budget execution rates contributed to efficient delivery and reinforced donor confidence. Nevertheless, a hybrid governance model combining centralized finance with decentralized delivery led to occasional delays, underscoring the need for streamlined decision-making and delegated operational authority.

• Institutional sustainability of SDG coordination has been secured through the SDG Council. However, financial sustainability remains a challenge, as SDG financing tools and private-sector mechanisms are not yet fully operationalized to ensure continuity and scalability.

• The Programme contributed to behavioural and systemic changes, including improved intergovernmental coordination and stronger alignment of private sector practices with ESG standards. Nonetheless, attribution of such systemic outcomes remains complex, underscoring the importance of establishing baselines, longitudinal data, and joint evaluation mechanisms to track and evidence long-term impact.