



Republic of
Serbia



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EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Protecting and investing in biodiversity and water for enhanced climate resilience

First Project Progress Report

to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

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UNDP

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Note: The initial total budget of \$1,442,585.11 USD was increased by \$ 364,543.08 USD (excluding levy in the amount of \$ 3,645.43 USD) through an amendment to the Financing Agreement, according to the UNORE for SEK/USD currency exchange at the time of signing of the Amendment to the Financing Agreement.





Photo: Special Nature Reserve “Peštersko Polje”– Pavle Jovanović/UNDP

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND	3
SUMMARY OF KEY RESULTS IN 2023	4
PROGRESS TOWARDS PROJECT RESULTS	5
RISKS AND CHALLENGES	16
LESSONS LEARNED	17
PARTNERSHIPS	19
GENDER MAINSTREAMING	20
VISIBILITY	20
LOOKING AHEAD	21
ANNEX A – FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2023	22

Background

The overall objective of the project “EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Protecting and investing in biodiversity and water for enhanced climate resilience” is to support the EU environmental reform and efficient, inclusive and sustainable implementation the Green Agenda in Serbia.

The project focuses on the conservation of wetland ecosystems in Serbia through strengthening policy and base-conditions for improving biodiversity and resilience to climate change. The project aims to support the implementation of Nature based Solutions (NbS) in wetlands through innovative pilot projects and promote opportunities for mobilisation and scale-up of biodiversity financing. Through capacity building, societal dialogue and cross-sectorial cooperation, the project is to establish strong partnerships between the public sector, private companies and civil society, thus accelerating green transformation. The main goal is to improve governance and management of ecosystems through increased capacities for planning, implementation and enforcement of nature, water and climate policies by 2026.

With this project, the Government of Sweden contributes directly to the Green Agenda initiative in Serbia by strengthening Pillar 4 - Protecting and Investing in Biodiversity and Ecosystems of the EU for Green Agenda in Serbia project.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia (INCS) and the Provincial Institute for Nature Conservation (PINC) are the main beneficiaries of this project, whereas the numerous stakeholders, including protected area managers, local self-government units, civil society organizations, scientific institutions and private companies, are also actively involved, most importantly through pilot project proposals addressing NbS in wetlands, biodiversity and climate resilience, with the goal of securing long-term sustainability of project results.

Summary of key project results in 2023

In its first year of implementation (2023), the project team achieved planned results and made expected progress towards the project goal. The year ended with a milestone achievement as the New Decree on Ecological Network (drafted under this project) received the green light from the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), marking a crucial step forward in our commitment to strengthening the governance relevant for wetlands, and more importantly protected areas and ecological corridors. Simultaneously, project made progress in further legislative improvement in the realm of nature protection by engaging national consultant that developed an *ex-post* analysis for the Law on Nature Protection in intense consultation process with the MEP.

Recognizing the importance of robust data infrastructure, UNDP project team has engaged an expert that prepared an Assessment Report on the needs for upgrading the field research application (TERENSKA), with elements relevant for wetland conservation. Furthermore, project enhanced the technical capacities for biodiversity data storage and exchange at both the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia (INCS) and the Provincial Institute for Nature Conservation (PINC) through acquisition and transfer of the first batch of IT equipment to these institutions, in line with identified priority needs.

The commitment of the project to knowledge-sharing materialized in three comprehensive training sessions that UNDP project team organized, namely the training on Copernicus Services and Sectoral Information System (SIS) with 122 participants, the training on the use of the Climate Atlas of Serbia and the Disaster Risk Registry with 149 participants, as well as the online training session on Nature-based Solutions conducted in collaboration with Naturvardsverket with 124 participants.

As the focus of the project is on the implementation of NbS in protected wetlands, we proactively shaped the draft of the upcoming Challenge Call for innovative project proposals. With the future project proposals in mind and the potential sites for their implementation, we have undertaken field visit to the RAMSAR site, the Special Nature Reserve "Peštersko polje," with representatives of MEP, INCS and the protected area management. Furthermore, we have initiated a formal assessment of potential sites through the engagement of a national consultant who is evaluating at least 10 protected areas with wetlands for the implementation of Nature-based Solutions.

In order to reach out to the wider audience, we have communicated the strategic vision of the project during the Project Kick-Off event, and developed a comprehensive communications plan to guide future outreach activities.- UNDP project team also joined two seminars organized by MEP for protected area managers in order to engage with stakeholders, foster a dialogue and announce opportunities that will be available through this project.

In summary, 2023 was a year marked with successfully setting the grounds for project milestones, by providing policy support and technological advancement to the main beneficiaries, comprehensive capacity building activities for stakeholders and the strategic communications and on-the-ground initiatives, thus contributing to our collective mission of improving the conditions for wetland and nature conservation in Serbia.

PROGRESS TOWARDS PROJECT RESULTS

The project results achieved in 2023, set according to the pre-define annual targets at the output level, are given in this section, with the overview in Table 1 below, and with a more detailed description in the narrative. The financial data corresponding to the presented activities is given in the Financial Report in Annex A, where the actual expenditures and budget balance are given.

Table 1. Summary overview of the progress in 2023

EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Get Started		
Output 1- Regulatory and strategic planning framework underpinning nature-water-climate nexus approach improved		
Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
1.1 Draft Law on Nature Protection aligned with the nature protection EU acquis and relevant MEAs	First draft	Ongoing
1.2 # of adopted Bylaws	Working groups established	Bylaw 1 – Completed * Bylaw 2 – Ongoing
1.3 # of trained staff of the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia and Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province using the tailor made capacity building programme	15	Ongoing
1.4 # of trained protected areas managers using the tailor made capacity building programme	25	Ongoing
1.5 # of trained staff of the water management authorities and agencies: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management-Republic Directorate for Water, Public Water Enterprises" Srbijavode" and "Vode Vojvodine" using tailor made capacity building programme	20	Ongoing
1.6 # of trainings included in learning modules of NAPA	1	Ongoing
Output 2- Capacities on sustainable and participative management of protected areas and the water-related ecosystems are increased, as well as the capacities on NbS and gender-sensitive, climate adaptation planning		
Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.1 Assessment Report of protected area's role in achieving climate change adaptation and mitigation goals	1	Ongoing

2.2 # of Nature based Solutions integrated in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures of NDCs	0	0
2.3 # of trained staff of competent authorities on Copernicus Services and Sectoral Information System (SIS)	0	Completed **
2.4 # of trained persons on the use of Climate Atlas of Serbia and Disaster Risk Registry in 10 municipalities with focus on impacts of climate change on nature conservation and water management by promoting the multi-functional purpose of freshwater ecosystems	0	Completed**
2.5 # of persons from the women's rights organizations trained on the protection of biodiversity, climate adaptation and mitigation	0	0
2.6 # activities in synergy with other Swedish funded projects, ie Swedish expertise on spatial planning and nature management	10	Ongoing
2.7 Upgraded application for field research developed for Natura 2000 mapping purposes	0	Ongoing
2.8 Upgraded information systems and biodiversity databases in the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia and the Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province	0	Ongoing
2.9 National wetland inventory completed according to the Ramsar Framework for Wetland Inventory	0	Ongoing
2.10 Updated Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) based on new data for Serbia	0	0
2.11 # of users of mobile application for citizens science	0	Ongoing
2.12 Wetland Restoration Action Plan completed	0	0
EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Take Action		
Output 3 - NbS implemented in pilot site		
Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
3.1 # of preselected pilot sites with high potential for climate adaptation through implementation of NbS	0	Ongoing
3.2 Call for proposals for Nature based Solution challenge launched	0	Ongoing
3.3 # of identified pilot sites for potential implementation of NbS	0	Ongoing

3.4 # of NbS implemented	0	0
3.5 Assessment Report on sites with high potential for implementation of NbS in the future	0	0
EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Scale-up		
Output 4 - Additional financing identified for ecosystem restoration to increase the climate resilience of floodplains and related ecosystem services		
Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
4.1 National nature/biodiversity/ecosystems financing plan prepared	0	0
4.2 Designed financing mechanism to support nature/biodiversity/ecosystem investments (e.g., investments into NbS and ecosystem maintenance/restoration)	0	0
4.3 # of trained persons on gender-responsive budgeting for monitoring national spending of nature protection and climate change related funding	0	0
4.4 Road map for gender mainstreaming in nature, water, and climate policies	0	0
5.1 # of implemented campaigns and stakeholder dialogues	0	Ongoing

** Bylaw 1 originally planned for 2024 ** Trainings originally planned for 2024, 2025 and 2026*

A UN-to-UN Cooperation Agreement was signed on 22 March 2023 between UNEP and UNDP for the purpose of implementing a number of activities on the project. Since the signing, UNEP initiated administrative procedures to set the structure and mechanisms for funding allocation and implementation of agreed activities. Due to internal reform in UNEP Delivery Model and the necessity to align the country-level project activities with the UNEP global Programme Coordination Project (PCP) on Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity, one of the 13 designed programmes as vehicles for implementation of UNEP Mid-Term Strategy, UNEP Europe Office made a submission of a 'concept' on EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Protecting and investing in biodiversity and water for enhanced climate resilience for consideration of the Concept Approval Group (CAG) to be included in the global PCP framework, as the first formal step of the new procedure. The PCP with the suggested concept was cleared by the CAG and approved in June 2023. Given the scrutiny of UNDP review and approval procedure, it was also confirmed that the preparation of UNEP stand-alone Project Document and submission to the Project Review Committee (PRC) is not necessary.

On 13 July 2023, the Europe Office submitted PCA Advance request form to UNDP, requesting payment of the first instalment of \$ 57,132.00 as per signed UN to UN Agreement. The payment was approved and processed on 8 August 2023.

The UNEP Vienna Programme Office established a contributing team composed of a regional programme coordinator, a regional biodiversity expert and a national project

coordinator, to provide oversight and guidance to implementation of project activities under UNEP’s responsibility.

PROJECT RESULTS IN 2023 - NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

EU FOR GREEN AGENDA IN SERBIA: GET STARTED

Output 1- Regulatory and strategic planning framework underpinning nature-water-climate nexus approach improved

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
1.1 Draft Law on Nature Protection aligned with the nature protection EU acquis and relevant MEAs	First draft	Ongoing

Project team has initiated work on the development of the new Law on Nature Protection with the engagement of a national consultant for the purpose of development of an *ex-post* analysis for the existing Law on Nature Protection. The national consultant developed a draft *ex- post* analysis, which was submitted and approved by MEP in December of 2023. The final version, to be approved in early 2024 shall serve as a reference for the development of the draft new Law on Nature Protection in 2024. MEP is expected to establish a working group for the development of this legal act. The work on the new Law on Nature Protections shall take place in 2024.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
1.2 # of adopted Bylaws	Working groups established	Bylaw 1 - Completed Bylaw 2 – Ongoing

In the meantime, MEP established a Working Group (WG) for the development of the draft new Decree on Ecological Network in March 2023. UNDP immediately engaged a national and an international consultant to assist the WG in the development of this legal act. The consultants held regular online meetings with the WG and in close cooperation produced the articles of the draft Decree. MEP formally accepted the draft Decree and an accompanying report with recommendations in December of 2023. The draft new Decree on Ecological Network was completed ahead of the original schedule (during 2024), as the engaged consultants provided all the necessary assistance to the WG in 2023.

With regards to the second bylaw, MEP expressed the need for support in development of the Decree on Appropriate Assessment, a bylaw stemming from the Law on Nature Protection. MEP also requested that the development of this act start upon the completion of activities on the new Decree on Ecological Network. Therefore, the establishment of the Working Group for the Decree on Appropriate Assessment has been postponed by MEP for 2024.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
1.3 # of trained staff of the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia and Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province using the tailor made capacity building programme	15	Ongoing
1.4 # of trained protected areas managers using the tailor made capacity building programme	25	Ongoing
1.5 # of trained staff of the water management authorities and agencies: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management-Republic Directorate for Water, Public Water Enterprises" Srbijavode" and "Vode Vojvodine" using tailor made capacity building programme	20	Ongoing

UNEP as per UN2UN agreement is responsible for the implementation of the above listed activities. Due to the administrative bottlenecks in setting up the project in UNEP Project Management System (as described above), the activities that were foreseen to start in Q2 were postponed to Q4-2023/Q1-2024.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
1.6 # of trainings included in learning modules of NAPA	1	Ongoing

In 2023, the UNDP Project Team held two online meetings with the staff from the National Public Administration Academy (NAPA) regarding the integration of a training on Nature based Solutions in the learning module for Environmental Protection of the for the year 2024. MEP approved the on the proposed change to the module content. The material for this training shall be completed and provided in the first part of 2024.

Output 2- Capacities on sustainable and participative management of protected areas and the water-related ecosystems are increased, as well as the capacities on NbS and gender-sensitive, climate adaptation planning

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.1 Assessment Report of protected area's role in achieving climate change adaptation and mitigation goals	1	Ongoing

UNEP as per UN2UN agreement is responsible for the implementation of the above listed activities. UNEP initiated a desk study of available data and information, to inform the development of the assessment on protected area's role in achieving climate change adaptation and mitigation goals. UNEP reviewed relevant literature and held consultations both internally at UNEP Europe Office and with the experts of the Carpathian Convention Network of Protected Areas. They developed a Terms of References for a local consultant to support the delivery of Activity 2.1.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.3 # of trained staff of competent authorities on Copernicus Services and Sectoral Information System (SIS)	0*	Completed

** originally planned for 2024, 2025 and 2026 (target 20/year)*



Photo: Copernicus Services and Sectoral Information System (SIS) training held at the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia Belgrade on 6th November 2023 - UNDP

The UNDP project team has engaged experts and organized a training on Copernicus Services and Sectoral Information System (SIS) held on November 6th of 2023 at the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia for a total of 122 participants. The training covered the following topics: Introduction to COPENICUS, available data and access methods, SIS within COPENICUS, data relevant for management of protected areas, examples of use of available data within COPENICUS and SIS for nature protection. The training was organized in hybrid format, with 50 participants attending live, whilst 89 followed online. The participants at this training were from the two Institutes for Nature Conservation, protected area managers, RGZ, local self-government units and other relevant scientific institutions.

The justification for conducting and completing this activity ahead of the initially planned timeframe defined by the project was the need to provide as much capacity building to the relevant stakeholders as possible in the early stages of the project, especially for the

purpose of improving their knowledge on relevant topics prior to the Challenge call. Through the completion of this training in 2023, we have reached the overall target of 60 total participants, set for 2024, 2025 and 2026 with 20 participants per year.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.4 # of trained persons on the use of Climate Atlas of Serbia and Disaster Risk Registry in 10 municipalities with focus on impacts of climate change on nature conservation and water management by promoting the multi-functional purpose of freshwater ecosystems	0*	Completed

* originally planned for 2024 and 2026 (target 30/year)



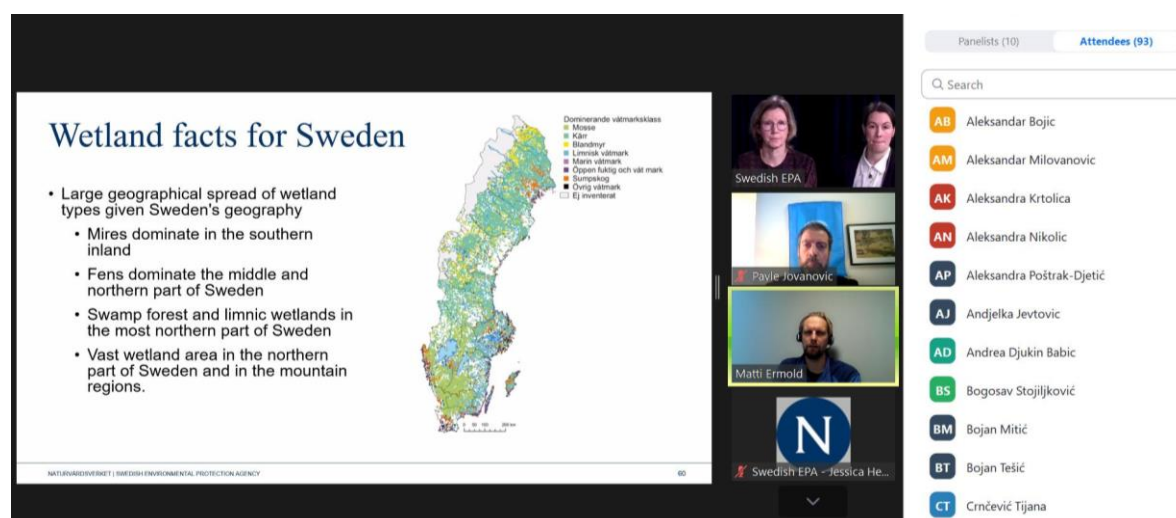
Photos: Use of Climate Atlas of Serbia (left) and Disaster Risk Registry (right) training sessions held at the UN House in Belgrade on 19th and 20th October 2023 respectively - UNDP

The UNDP project team organised a two-day training on Use of Climate Atlas of Serbia and Disaster Risk Registry in hybrid format on 19th and 20th October 2023, with 50 participants attending live at the UN House in Belgrade, whereas 89 participated online. The training covered the following topics: Climate change and introduction for adaptation, Climate data and models, Introduction into the basic functions of the Digital Climate Atlas, Demonstration of practical use of DAC, Identification of disaster risk in Serbia, Disaster risk assessment for ecosystems in Serbia, Disaster Risk Registry, Environmental protection through disaster risk reduction, Services of Republic Geodetic Authority (RGZ), Geospatial Data serving the Green Agenda. More than 30 municipalities were involved, with representatives of local self-government units and protected area managers attending the training. The number of attendees (139) surpassed the total target of 60 participants for this activity, originally planned to be conducted in 2024 and 2026 (with the target of 30 participants per year). The reasoning behind the earlier completion of this activity is the same as for the previous Output indicator (2.3).

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.6 # activities in synergy with other Swedish funded projects, ie Swedish expertise on spatial planning and nature management	10	Ongoing



Photos: Project Kick-off event held in the UN House in Belgrade (7th March 2023) - UNDP



Screenshot: Online training on Nature based Solutions held by experts from the Swedish Environment Protection Agency (13th December 2023) - UNDP

The UNDP Project team held a joint meeting on 2 February with the representatives of INCS, PINC, RGZ and the resident representative of the Swedish Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authority (Lantmäteriet) working on the ePlan4eSpace project (implemented by RGZ). We have discussed the main goals of this project and the ePlan4eSpace at the meeting, as well as the potential for synergies during their implementation. We have also tackled the facilitation of the implementation of obligations stemming from the INSPIRE Directive as a possible option for synergy, given the activities of this project focusing on the upgrade of information system of INCS and PINC.

The UNDP project team organized the kick-off event for the project “EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Protecting and investing in biodiversity and water for enhanced climate resilience” on 7 March 2023 in the UN House in Belgrade, with more than 50 participants in

attendance. This event was attended by representatives of government agencies and organizations implementing other Swedish funded projects, such as the RGZ (implementing ePlan4eSpace project) and International Union for the Conservation of Nature- IUCN (implementing the Swedish funded ADAPT project).

Synergy with other Swedish funded projects was also achieved through the regular involvement of the representatives of the RGZ and IUCN in capacity building activities, namely RGZ in three trainings and IUCN in one training. A notable activity in this regard was the online training on Nature based Solutions organized on 13 December 2023 in cooperation with the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket) for a total of 124 participants. The online training covered the following topics: International agreements relevant for NbS; Background knowledge on NbS; Swedish EPA NbS guidelines; Climate adaptation and climate risks; Socio-ecological landscape; Possible solutions for wetlands; NbS examples; Selection, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of NbS; and Challenges and prerequisites for NbS in Serbia.

Also worth noting are two online consultations organized by the UNDP Project Team for the national consultant (on 16 October) and the international consultant (on 29 November) with representatives of RGZ for the purpose of the Needs Assessment Report for the Upgrade of the information systems of INCS and PINC and other relevant issues that can be addressed through this project.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.7 Upgraded application for field research developed for Natura 2000 mapping purposes	0	Ongoing

A national consultant has prepared a Needs Assessment report in 2023 for the upgrade of the application for field research developed for Natura 2000 mapping purposes (TERENSKA). The national consultant, a biology expert with extensive experience in the functionality of the TERENSKA application, consulted both INCS and PINC for this task, in close cooperation with an international IT expert who has extensive experience in the digital systems in use for nature protection in a EU member state, namely Croatia. This needs assessment by the national expert preceded the development of the Terms of Reference by the international expert for a company contract that UNDP shall select through a competitive process for carrying out the update of TERENSKA.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.8 Upgraded information systems and biodiversity databases in the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia and the Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province	0	Ongoing

The UNDP project team has engaged an international expert primarily for the tasks of developing a Needs Assessment for the upgrade of information systems of two Institutes for Nature Conservation, as well as the Terms of Reference for the company that will be engaged for this purpose. These tasks will be completed in early 2024. Furthermore, with input from the national expert mentioned above (2.7), in 2023 the international expert produced a detailed specification of the required hardware and software in close cooperation with the staff of INCS and PINC. The UNDP project team has procured the first batch of equipment, defined as a priority in terms of requirements, and delivered it to INCS (NAS device) and PINC (a server with operating system) in 2023.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.9 National wetland inventory completed according to the Ramsar Framework for Wetland Inventory	0	Ongoing

The UNDP project team has developed a Terms of Reference for a national consultant for the task of preparing a National Wetland Inventory Development Plan for Serbia, as a guidance document for collecting critical and up-to-date information on the location, extent, and condition of wetland ecosystems across the country. This guidance document for NWI development shall be in line with document A New Toolkit for National Wetlands Inventories (2020) Gland, Switzerland: Convention on Wetlands Secretariat (RAMSAR).

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
2.11 # of users of mobile application for citizens science	0	Ongoing

The UNDP project team has conducted consultations with nature protection and IT professionals in 2023 and drafted the Terms of Reference for a consultant that is to define the requirements, tasks and deliverables for a company that shall initiate the development and promotion of the citizen science app for wetlands in 2024.

EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Take Action

Output 3 - NbS implemented in pilot site

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
3.1 # of preselected pilot sites with high potential for climate adaptation through implementation of NbS	0	Ongoing

For the purpose of identifying pilot sites for potential implementation of NbS, we have engaged a national consultant (biologist with extensive fieldwork experience) in 2023 with the task of assessing at least ten protected areas with wetlands in Serbia, with a mandatory

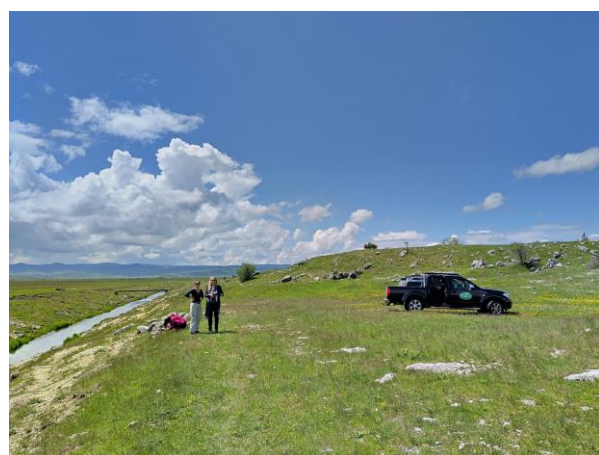
field visit to five of them for direct consultations with the protected area managers. This task will be completed in early 2024.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
3.2 Call for proposals for Nature based Solution challenge launched	0	Ongoing

The UNDP project teams has tasked a national expert with developing the Challenge Call for innovative projects implementing Nature based Solutions in protected wetlands, based on the existing framework of the previously conducted Challenge Calls of the EU for the Green Agenda for Pillar 4 – Biodiversity and Ecosystems. The main target group for the Call are protected area managers, as without their direct involvement, no active measures can take place.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned precondition, the UNDP team, in cooperation with MEP, used the opportunity to inform all the protected area managers of the upcoming Challenge Call and the opportunity for cofinancing active measures for wetland protection, at two events (Seminars for protected area managers in Sokobanja on 11 April and in Subotica on 16 November). We focused presentations at these events on introducing the concept of the future Challenge Call, NbS and potential project ideas in order to motivate protected area managers to plan their own innovative projects with which they could apply for co-financed through this call. Furthermore, for the purpose of timely informing the most relevant stakeholders, the UNDP in cooperation with MEP, also formally informed all the managers of protected areas with wetland ecosystems in Serbia through an official email circulated by MEP on the need to include active measures for wetland conservation and/or restoration in the annual management programmes for 2024, as well as to plan their own funds for this purpose, prior to the submission of the programmes for approval to MEP.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
3.3 # of identified pilot sites for potential implementation of NbS	0	Ongoing



Photos: Field visit of the Special Nature Reserve "Peštersko Polje" by the representatives of MEP, INCS, UNDP and Swedish Embassy in Belgrade – Pavle Jovanović/UNDP

The UNDP project team organized a field visit to a RAMSAR site, the Special Nature Reserve „Peštersko polje“ on 2 June with representatives of MEP and INCS, UNDP and the Swedish Embassy, with the goal of on-site assessment of potentials for the future implementation of NbS. During the field visit, we conducted detailed consultation with the protected area manager and ranger staff on challenges, priorities and future plans for the management of this protected area.

Output indicator	Target for 2023	Status
5.1 # of implemented campaigns and stakeholder dialogues	0	Ongoing

A national consultant has produced a Communications plan for the project that has been approved by the UNDP Communications Team, whilst the Terms of Reference for the company that will be tasked with development and implementation of a public awareness campaigns on NbS and organization of at least two stakeholder dialogues on nature-water-climate has been drafted.

During 2023 stakeholder dialogue on the topic of wetland conservation occurred mainly through events organized by UNDP and MEP, such as the panel discussion during the project kick-off event on March 7th in Belgrade, during the online training on NbS on December 13th, as well as during the two seminars for protected areas managers, held on 11th April in Sokobanja and 16th November in Subotica. During these events, the main stakeholders were prompted to think about and discuss about potential active measures for wetland conservation through the application of NbS. The goal of these activities with stakeholders in 2023 was to stimulate the potential applicants for the future Challenge call to plan the development of innovative project ideas for implementing NbS in protected wetlands.

RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Output 1- Regulatory and strategic planning framework underpinning nature-water-climate nexus approach improved

The risk “Lack of engagement in decision-making process” by the beneficiary (MEP) identified as a potential threat factor for activities 1.1 and 1.2, according to the experience in implementation in 2023 can be estimated as low. Even though MEP has yet to formally initiate the process of drafting the New Law on Nature Protection, the conducted *ex-post* analysis for the existing Law on Nature Protection can be considered as an adequate mitigation measure that precedes the drafting the new Law on Nature Protection.

A potential risk identified in 2023 that is relevant for policy development is the lack of and unavailability of national experts with the qualification necessary for the development of nature protection legislation. This risk can be considered as moderate, whereas it can be mitigated efficiently through the engagement of international experts, namely those from EU member states (preferably Croatia due to similarities of legal systems and language). This measure is applicable for both activity 1.1 and 1.2.

Output 2- Capacities on sustainable and participative management of protected areas and the water-related ecosystems are increased, as well as the capacities on NbS and gender-sensitive, climate adaptation planning

The risk initially defined in the ProDoc for activities 2.7 and 2.8 did not materialize. A potential risk for the upgrade of the information systems of INCS and PINC may lie in the source code used for programming of the information systems, as the INCS nor PINC have the legal ownership of this crucial element. This challenge may be overcome if an exception is made to the procurement rules as the ownership of the code is a precondition for making any changes to the existing information systems of INCS and PINC.

The predefined risk of poor data availability for the activity 2.9 is high as no national wetland inventory exists, nor has any systematic nation-wide attempt been made for its establishment in the past. Therefore, the data required for the development of the NWI is not readily available to conduct a comprehensive inventory. Furthermore, irrespective of the extent and detail of the NWI, the task of collecting, analysing and crosschecking data for this purpose requires more funds than is envisaged by the current project budget. The mitigation measure would be to amend the Project Document output indicator to preparing a Guideline for the development of the National wetland inventory, rather than to attempt to complete a NWI according to the Ramsar Framework for Wetland Inventory under the given conditions.

The UNDP Project Team was in constant communication with national partners to ensure that implementation of activities is on track. The long-standing partnership with national partners and confirmation of commitment to the project goals guaranteed that no major hindrances to project implementation occurred.

LESSONS LEARNED

Output 1- Regulatory and strategic planning framework underpinning nature-water-climate nexus approach improved

The establishment of a Working Group and the engagement of consultants/experts needs to be synchronized, as it has shown to be most effective when the consultants/experts and members of the Working Group have sufficient time to exchange positions and experience during the development of the act. However, eventual engagement of consultants/experts prior to the formal establishment of the Working Group is also beneficial, as the Working Group has already developed material, guidelines and recommendations available when commencing work. Engagement of consultants/experts after the Working Group has already begun work is to be avoided, as it can lead to backtracking and corrections to the material developed by the Working Group.

The UNDP project team, in direct cooperation with national counterparts and beneficiaries, identified the need and opportunity for greater application of the NbS approach in strengthening the resilience to disasters due to changing climate conditions in Serbia. There is a general conclusion that larger scale investments are needed in the climate change adaptation measures to prevent damage and losses and to sustain viability of key sectors of the economy such as agricultural production, water management, energy, transport, urban development and construction etc. Such needs and priority measures are also identified in the recently adopted National Climate Change Adaptation Programme with the Action Plan for Serbia.

Output 2 - Capacities on sustainable and participative management of protected areas and the water-related ecosystems are increased, as well as the capacities on NbS and gender-sensitive, climate adaptation planning

Upon consulting nature conservation professionals for potential engagement as national experts for the development of a NWI in line with document A New Toolkit for National Wetlands Inventories (2020) Gland, Switzerland: Convention on Wetlands Secretariat (RAMSAR), UNDP project team concluded that budget and timeframe requirements exceed those available under this project. Furthermore, MEP has not yet defined the scope and the extent to which the NWI should be developed, as this greatly affects the process, in terms of required time and funds.

PARTNERSHIPS

Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP)

The UNDP Project Team has direct and constant communication with the State Secretary of the Ministry for Environmental Protection responsible for the Sector for Nature Protection for all issues relevant for the project implementation. MEP's Sector for Nature Protection have been delegated as contacts for operational level communication, namely for policy development issues, but also for other operational issues (data exchange, joint participation at events, etc.). The cooperation in 2023 has been successful.

Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia (INCS) and Provincial Institute for Nature Conservation (PINC)

In 2023, both INCS and PINC have formally delegated contact persons for the purpose of the implementation of the project, for its entire duration. The communication at both operational and higher formal level being satisfactory, with the provision of requested by INCS and PINC being timely and with sufficient detail.

Republic Geodetic Authority (RGZ)

RGZ has also delegated contact persons for the purpose of the implementation of this project, and the aforementioned contacts have readily answered to all requests for data and provided insight to certain topics relevant for the project.

Managers of Protected areas

Although in the category of stakeholders, the managers of protected areas have been identified as a priority target group by the UNDP Project Team and have been regularly contacted for this project a number of issues, from capacity building to consultations, with a high level of responsiveness, especially from a number of protected areas with wetlands that are potential pilot areas for the upcoming Challenge call.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

In 2023 the project contributed to the achievement of SDG 5: Gender Equality through all activities, but those that could be quantified and demonstrated most efficiently in this report are those of the capacity building training activities and engaged consultants.

- **Digital Climate Atlas and Disaster Risk Registry Training:** 100 female and 49 male participants;
- **Copernicus and Sectoral Information System Training:** 80 female and 42 male participants; and
- **Nature based Solutions:** 81 female and 43 male participants.

The engagement of national and international consultants in 2023, presented by gender:

Female (5): Jasminka Radović, Biljana Panjković, Petra Štrbenac, Anki Weibull, Djurdjica Simin

Male (6): Momir Paunović, Nikola Banjac, Đorđe Trikoš, Ivan Medenica, Aleksandar Glišić, Vladimir Đurđević

PROJECT VISIBILITY

The UNDP project team, together with partners and the donor, informed a wide audience about the start of the project at the kick-off event that took place on 7 March 2023. Media picked up this information and broadcasted it: state television (Radio Televizija Srbije - RTS) covered the event and aired a two-minute segment on the project and kick-off event in the evening news. The same topic had a follow up [article](#) online. A number of internet portals also published articles based on the [UNDP press release](#) for the event.

Another activity that contributed to the project visibility was the field visit to SRP Peštersko Polje in June. The [article](#) published on the internet portal of the Delegation of the European Union in Serbia gave insight to this activity and the project.

The UNDP project team also presented the project to participants of several informative events organized by UNDP for the purpose of the Challenge Call for proposals as a regular activity of the EU for Green Agenda in Serbia. The project goals and activities were demonstrated to protected area managers during two events organized by MEP for the protected area managers, namely in Sokobanja and in Subotica (as mentioned above).

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2024 the project will focus on:

The development of the New Law on Nature Protection and the Decree on Appropriate Assessment;

Capacity building through tailor-made programmes for competent INCS and PINC, protected area managers, water management authorities and persons from the women's rights organizations ;

The update of TERENSKA application and portal via a company contract;

Initiating the update of the information systems of the two Institutes for Nature Conservation through a company contract;

Initiating the development of a citizen science application for wetland conservation;

Procurement of additional IT equipment for INCS and PINC;

Preselection of pilot sites for potential NbS implementation;

Implementation of the Launching Challenge call for proposals for Nature-based solutions;

Initiation of the assessment of sites with high protentional for implementation of NbS in the future;

Initiating the development of a national nature/biodiversity/ecosystems financing plan;

Implementation of a pubic awareness raining campaign and stakeholder dialogue – company contract.

Progress Report narrative approved by:

DocuSigned by:

Miroslav Tadić

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Miroslav Tadić, Programme Analyst
United Nations Development Programme

ANNEX A - FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2023

OUTPUTS	ACTIVITIES	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET for 2023	TOTAL EXPENDITURES JANUARY - DECEMBER 2023	TOTAL PROJECT BALANCE 2023
Output 1. Regulatory and strategic planning framework underpinning nature-water-climate nexus approach improved	A 1.1. Development of legislation following nature-water-climate synergy (contributing to implementation of Pillar 4 of the Green Agenda in Serbia "Protecting and investing in biodiversity and ecosystems")	UNDP	\$ 21,000.00	\$ 23,011.15	\$ - 2,011.15
	A.1.2. Strengthening capacities of representatives of competent institutions to mainstream nature-water-climate synergy into implementation of policies (in Serbia "Protecting and investing in biodiversity and ecosystems")	UNDP	\$10,000.00	\$ 18,332.76	\$ - 8.332.76
		UNEP	\$ 22,000.00	\$ -	\$ 22,000.00
TOTAL FOR OUTPUT 1			\$ 53,000.00	\$ 41,343.91	\$ 11,656.09

Output 2. Capacities on sustainable and participative management of protected areas and the water-related ecosystems are increased, as well as the capacities on Nature based Solutions (NbS) and gender-sensitive, climate adaptation planning	A 2.1. Assessments of protected area's role in achieving climate change adaptation and mitigation goals	UNEP	\$ 5,000.00	\$ -	\$ 5,000.00
	A 2.2. Strengthening the capacities of stakeholders for improved management of protected areas (contributing to implementation of Pillar 4 of the Green Agenda in Serbia "Protecting and investing in biodiversity and ecosystems")	UNDP	\$ 19,000.00	\$ 26,291.31	\$ - 7,291.31
		UNEP	\$ 5,400.00	\$ -	\$ 5,400.00
	A 2.3. Improving data, monitoring and reporting on nature, biodiversity and ecosystems	UNDP	\$ 43,000.00	\$ 6,353.10	\$ 36,646.90
	A 2.4. Preparation of National wetland inventory and Wetland Restoration Action Plan	UNDP	\$ 3,000.00	\$ -	\$ 3,000.00
		UNEP	\$ 3,000.00	\$ -	\$ 3,000.00
TOTAL FOR OUTPUT 2			\$ 78,400.00	\$ 32,644.41	\$45,755.59
Output 3. Nature based Solutions (NbS) implemented in pilot site	A 3.1. Identification of pilot sites with high potential for climate adaptation through implementation of NbS (through stakeholder dialogue and by applying appropriate methodology)	UNEP	\$ 17,500.00	\$ -	\$17,500.00

	A 3.2. Implementation of the Challenge call for proposals for Nature based Solution	UNDP	\$ 13,000.00	\$ 4,379.21	\$ 8,620.79
TOTAL FOR OUTPUT 3			\$ 30,500.00	\$ 4,379.21	\$ 26,120.79
Output 5. Awareness about the importance of the NbS improved	A 5.1. Development of project communication plan	UNDP	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,558.15	\$ - 558.15
	A 5.2. Implementation of project communication plan focusing on public campaigns and dialogues on nature-water-climate synergy from a vulnerable groups perspective	UNDP	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 7,815.47	\$ 12,184.53
TOTAL FOR OUTPUT 5			\$ 30,000.00	\$ 18,373.62	\$ 11,626.38
Output 6. Project management	A 6.1. Project management	UNDP	\$ 12,843.53	\$ 12,843.53	\$ -
TOTAL PROJECT OUTPUTS			\$ 204,743.53	\$ 109,584.68	\$ 95,158.85
GMS	General Management Services	UNDP	\$ 12,147.48	\$8,766.77	\$ 3,380.71
	General Management Services	UNEP	\$ 4,232.00	\$ -	\$ 4,232.00

Financial Report approved by:

DocuSigned by:

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