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EU SUPPORT TO **CONFIDENCE BUILDING IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**



2025 Annual Progress Report

1 January -
31 December
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[1] As per Addendum No II to Contribution Agreement No IPAIII/2022/437-134 signed on December 23, 2025

* For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice to position on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For UNDP, all references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of the Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

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Ambassador **Luigi Soreca**,
Head of the EU Delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

“It is our duty to preserve truth, honour the victims, and pursue justice. Bosnia and Herzegovina has made important progress in prosecuting genocide and war crimes, yet challenges remain. The EU therefore calls for stronger regional commitment to ending impunity, greater willingness to ensure prosecutions and the use of the existing cooperation protocols. Judicial results alone, however, cannot heal society. As denial and revisionism grow, the protection of truth remains a moral imperative.”



“I always strive to ensure that the victim feels safe and prepared for all further proceedings. These conferences and round tables are always useful, and I believe they should continue, because the cases we deal with always require a very professional and victim-oriented approach.”

Burhan Maxhuni, Coordinator of prosecutorial VWS Service, Pristina

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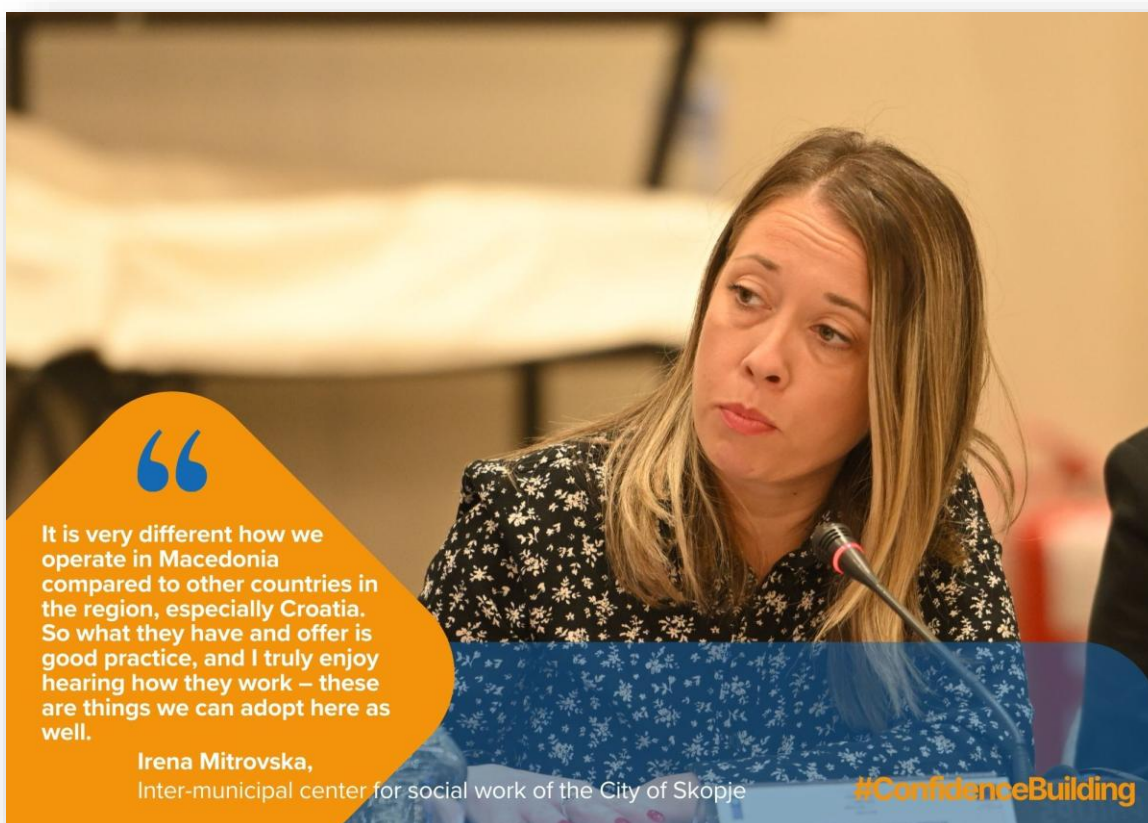


“

This play has the potential to affirm free thought and artistic expression in the region, especially in the face of the challenges encountered by those who speak outside dominant narratives. Even today, more than a year after the premiere, I am still thrilled, in love, and fulfilled when I think about this play.

Anja Pletikosa, dramaturge of the theatre play "Death in Dubrovnik", Podgorica

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“

It is very different how we operate in Macedonia compared to other countries in the region, especially Croatia. So what they have and offer is good practice, and I truly enjoy hearing how they work – these are things we can adopt here as well.

Irena Mitrovska,
Inter-municipal center for social work of the City of Skopje

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“

Since I became involved in the project and the performance 'My Land', I have started to place greater importance on that period of history we learned about and to understand how important it really is. I had no idea how much I needed this.

Minja Rakićević, youth mentor in project "My Land", Belgrade

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Acronyms

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CSO	civil society organization
EU	European Union
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
CRSV	conflict-related sexual violence
ICMP	International Commission on Missing Persons
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
LVG	Low-value grant(s)
ICTY	UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IRMCT/Mechanism	UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals
IRH	UNDP's Istanbul Regional Hub for Europe and Central Asia
RBEC	Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures (in Beneficiaries' institutions)
SSPO	Supreme State Prosecutor's Office of Montenegro
TJ	transitional justice
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

I. Executive Summary

The project “EU Support to Confidence Building in the Western Balkans” is implemented in the region of Western Balkans - Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia (hereinafter also referred to as “Beneficiaries” or “participating jurisdictions”). It helps step up institutions’ efforts for resolving the remaining backlogs of unresolved war crimes and missing persons cases, as a consequence of the conflicts in the region in the 1990s, through strengthening the capacities of local judiciaries, law enforcement, and other relevant institutions, as well as their mutual regional collaboration. The project also improves the frameworks and capacities of local actors to provide and safeguard rights and services to victims of war crimes. Finally, by working with and expanding, especially among the youth, the networks of civil society actors, activists, artists, academics, young professionals, and new opinion leaders, it seeks to promote and enhance public support for accountability for war crimes, fact-based dialogue about the recent past, especially towards a shared understanding of the war crimes, and strengthen confidence and social cohesion with and among the societies across the region.

Summary of the key progress in 2025:

Outcome 1

Output 1

- Enhanced capacity of justice and law enforcement professionals working on war crimes cases and the search for missing persons
 - With 512 practitioners trained since the project’s initiation (281 in the reporting period), the project has already exceeded its capacity development target, strengthening the region’s institutional readiness to address war crimes and missing persons cases. The practitioners - judges, prosecutors, legal associates, police investigators, forensic experts, staff of missing persons institutions, and attorneys-at-law — received specialized and tailor-made professional training and participated in other forms of knowledge transfer.
 - Targeted stress management and burnout prevention training for justice professionals was piloted in BiH to strengthen institutional resilience and reduce attrition risks.
 - The region’s first e-learning curriculum on war crimes trials, complete with certification requirements, was developed and embedded as a sustainable resource within the Judicial Academy in Serbia and made available to individual users across the region.
- Strategic frameworks further strengthened across the region
 - The War Crimes Investigation Strategy 2024–2027 in Montenegro advanced through new case openings, review of older cases, adoption of bylaws, targeted training, and stronger international cooperation mechanisms; the accompanying 2024–25 Action Plan was fully implemented.
 - The Transitional Justice Strategy in Kosovo is being operationalised, including the establishment and functioning of the Presidential Commission on Transitional Justice, as well as the strengthening of the Institute for Documentation of Crimes in Kosovo (expansion of trained staff and adoption or preparation of internal policies to enhance efficiency).
- Institutional and operational frameworks for the search for missing persons continue to improve
 - The Missing Persons Institute of BiH adopted new Standard Operating Procedures.
 - Montenegro established a sustainable framework aligned with international standards: Guidelines for the Search for Missing Persons were adopted, and a training curriculum on the search for missing persons and enforced disappearances was piloted and institutionalized.
 - Cross-sector cooperation between war crimes investigation bodies (prosecution offices, police), institutions for the search for missing persons, and other relevant institutions improved further, resulting in better communication, strengthened exhumation processes, and improved evidence collection.

Output 2

- Regional judicial cooperation in war crimes cases continues and remains active, facilitated by the established practice of regionally inclusive annual high-level meetings of prosecution offices convened by UNDP. Regular meetings of the regional Missing Persons Group also continue (as a separate process led and facilitated by the ICMP).
- Transfers of cases and evidence, mutual requests for cross-border legal assistance, agreed bilateral protocols, and other forms of cross-border/regional cooperation in war crimes proceedings (regional cooperation actions) contribute to war crimes case backlog reduction (especially in BiH).
- Prosecution offices reaffirmed their commitment to continue and accelerate case and evidence transfers, particularly between BiH and other jurisdictions; to exchange necessary information to facilitate these transfers; to jointly address remaining obstacles and challenges; and to ensure and facilitate victims' compensation claims, especially in cases of conflict-related sexual violence.
- The legal framework for regional judicial cooperation continues to expand and improve, with the chief prosecutors of Montenegro and Croatia amending their cooperation agreement.

Output 3

- Mechanisms and capacities for gender informed victim and witness support are improving and gradually aligning with EU standards
 - Across the region, 284 victim support professionals from institutions were trained by UNDP since the start of the project (169 in the reporting period), while 539 aid providers from the civil or private sector (89 in the reporting period) were trained by the project's CSO grantees, thus exceeding the training target in this area. The trainings strengthened their skills in trauma and gender-informed communication and work with victims and survivors, including conflict-related sexual violence crime survivors, as well as their knowledge of EU standards and best practices.
 - Cross-border cooperation between judicial victim support units and between victim support CSOs has been strengthened, contributing to enhanced professional capacities, more harmonized practices, and the ability to fill gaps in support provision when formal cross-border agreements are absent.
- Enhanced institutional communication with victims (in BiH), and increased public advocacy and awareness raising efforts, promoting victims' rights and access to justice and services and contributing to stronger social cohesion.
- Further expansion of the CSO support network for victims across the region, exceeding the individual support targets: CSO grantees directly provided psychosocial, medical, legal, and other forms of assistance to more than 2,540 individual victims, including conflict-related sexual violence crimes' survivors, since the start of the project (over 540 individuals in the reporting period).

Outcome 2

Output 4

- Fifty-one civil society initiatives, of which twenty-four in the reporting period, were selected and supported to promote transitional justice mechanisms, conflict resolution, and community trust building—particularly through youth engagement and socially engaged art—and to cultivate new activists, advocates, and professionals advancing dialogue and social cohesion at local, national, and regional levels.
- Continued support was provided to professionals and opinion leaders, especially historians, enabling them to engage in fact-based teaching and public dialogue about the past and to use archives and materials from the ICTY/Mechanism and domestic courts.
- Educational materials and methodological tools were developed to introduce and promote transitional justice in pre-university education in Kosovo; transitional justice was introduced as a university-level course at two universities in BiH.
- Over 2.9 million people, and at least 4.8 million since the beginning of the project, were reached through information materials and campaigns prepared or promoted by grantees, and 2.975 individuals (at least 4,975 since the start of the project), particularly youth, were trained or engaged

by CSO grantees on topics including transitional justice, peace and confidence-building, reconciliation, and public advocacy.

Of the overall budget of 8,5 million EUR for the six-year implementation 2023-2028 (as extended by the project revision and Addendum no 2 to the Contribution Agreement IPAIII/2022/437-134 between UNDP and EU of 23 December 2025)², the cost incurred in 2025 was 2,114,959.19 EUR, making the total of 5,780,226.24 EUR utilised since the beginning of the project.

The project is implemented in complex and sensitive social and political environments across the Western Balkans, characterized by conflicting narratives and differing interpretations of the recent past, all of which pose ongoing risks and challenges to its implementation. Additional factors include trust deficits among institutional actors from different Beneficiaries, the complex dynamics of relations and dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, relatively frequent elections, continued political protests in Serbia, and other context-specific issues.

Despite these challenges, significant progress has been achieved in many areas. This has been made possible through context-sensitive and adaptive planning and implementation, as well as effective approaches to building and maintaining communication with and among direct beneficiaries. Ensuring their inclusive participation, identifying and expanding areas of common interest, focusing on the technical aspects of regional cooperation, strengthening mechanisms for knowledge and experience sharing, maintaining status neutrality, and reinforcing local ownership have all proved essential in overcoming obstacles and sustaining results.

II. Introduction / Background

The project is addressing societal challenges in the five Beneficiaries from the Western Balkans that arise from the consequences of the conflicts in the region during the 1990s, and the project seeks to help the institutions and the societies overcome them, especially in the area of post-conflict or transitional justice (TJ)², and to strengthen social cohesion and build confidence between and within the societies.

While there has been a significant social and economic advancement of the Western Balkans region over the last decade, as well as a general improvement in co-operation across the border and boundaries, with periodic backsliding in political and institutional cooperation, the region continues to deal with unresolved issues and legacies of the conflicts in the 1990s. Transitional justice and reconciliation remain uncompleted, with politics and inter-ethnic tensions continuing to impact domestic and regional relations. Many war crimes cases remain unprocessed or blocked, which requires, i.e., strengthened regional judicial co-operation. Together with almost 10,000 persons still counted as missing as a result of the conflicts, this all creates an impunity gap, leaving victims and societies with grievances, anxiety, and division. Many victims need access to justice without re-traumatisation and to social services and reparations. The public, especially young people, is largely unfamiliar with objective findings about war crimes committed in the 1990s, and the perception of the recent past and justice is marked with increasing voices of denial and revisionism and the antagonistic ethnic-based narratives and perceptions. These all create an environment of polarisation and division, not conducive to reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.

Against this background, the project provides **expertise and support** to better equip judicial and law enforcement authorities of the participating jurisdictions in **handling war crimes cases** at the domestic level, including through multi-disciplinary and cross-sectorial approaches in knowledge sharing and

² The UN defines transitional justice as „the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses in order to ensure accountability, secure justice, and achieve reconciliation”, with criminal justice, truth telling, reparations, and institutional reforms as the main pillars of transitional justice. *Report of the Secretary-General, The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies* (S/2004/616*), UN Security Council, August 23, 2004, and *Guidance Note of the Secretary-General*, (2010), United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice

improvement of legal and policy frameworks (**Output 1**). It also aims to improve the conditions for **regional (cross-boundary/cross-jurisdictional) cooperation** in handling war crimes cases through bilateral and multilateral high- and technical-level peer-to-peer meetings and policy dialogues (**Output 2**). The project furthermore provides **expertise and support** to enhance victim-centred and gender-sensitive approaches in the handling of domestic war crimes cases, to increase the delivery of **support services to victims of war crimes** and their access to justice, and to strengthen the capacity of other relevant actors, especially civil society organisations (CSOs), that work with victims, at domestic level and across the region, including through the rolling out of a sub-granting scheme (**Output 3**). These three outputs will contribute to enhancing the **efficient and effective domestic handling of war crimes** (**Outcome 1**). In parallel, the project provides expertise and support **to equip grassroots actors and young opinion leaders to better raise public awareness** of past crimes and promote **dialogues and exchanges** among a wide range of stakeholders such as youth, historians, artists, academics, students, journalists, local community actors, and others. (**Output 4**). This is primarily to be achieved by setting up a sub-granting scheme supporting grassroots initiatives, with strong consideration for promoting intra-regional partnerships. This output will contribute to an **increased and shared understanding of the crimes** committed during the 1990s conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (**Outcome 2**). Overall, all the interventions aim at increasing both accountability for war crimes in the region and the public support for it, and at enhancing dialogue within societies and between ethnic groups about crimes committed during the 1990s, all with the vision of achieving sustainable peace in the region and leaving more resilient societies with stronger social cohesion.

The project is implemented by the UNDP's Istanbul Regional Hub for Europe and Central Asia (UNDP IRH) together with UNDP offices in the five Beneficiaries in the Direct Implementation Modality (DIM). The project team of 16 UNDP staff is based in Belgrade, Podgorica, Sarajevo, Pristina, and Skopje, at the respective UNDP offices, including the IRH's immediate regional team of three, also based in Belgrade. The IRH is responsible for overall financial and programmatic management, guidance, quality assurance, and reporting.

III. Progress Review: Key Activities and Results (1 January – 31 December 2025)

Section 1: Analysis of Theory of Change

All assumptions underlying the Theory of Change (ToC) remain valid at the end of the project's third year. There has been sufficient political and institutional will within the judiciary, police, and line ministries to accept the project and engage as partners and beneficiaries in its implementation. No major political obstacles have been identified in this regard. Victim communities, including victims' groups and associations, as well as a broad range of societal stakeholders such as youth groups, CSOs, students, and young professionals (social scientists and researchers, academics, transitional justice and human rights advocates, and media workers) have also shown a willingness to engage and collaborate with UNDP. Their participation in the project's sub-granting scheme and the implementation of their own supported initiatives further demonstrate this commitment. The existing legal and institutional frameworks across the region continue to provide an adequate basis for the implementation of all project components. At the same time, improving these frameworks remains an important project objective, and notable progress toward this goal had been achieved in 2025, as elaborated in this report.

More effective and efficient local prosecution of war crimes, as well as stronger delivery of support to victims and enhanced capacities of local actors and victims, will be achieved by continuing to build the capacities of judicial, law enforcement, and other institutions involved in handling war crimes cases and the search for missing persons. Strengthening regional judicial cooperation and improving the capacities of institutions and grassroots actors to provide victim support are also essential. In addition, broadening networks of grassroots actors and further developing their skills and expertise to raise public awareness of past crimes and to foster cross-societal and inclusive dialogue on the legacies of the 1990s conflicts

will contribute to a shared understanding of the crimes committed during that period. These efforts will further support social cohesion and contribute to a more sustainable peace. The project strategy, including the ToC, remains relevant and continues to provide a viable pathway toward achieving the project's objectives. No changes to the strategy or the ToC are proposed.

Section 2: Overall progress against outcomes

Outcome 1

A total of 281 justice and law enforcement practitioners — including judges, prosecutors, legal associates, police investigators, forensic experts, staff of missing persons institutions, and attorneys-at-law — benefited from **specialized, context-responsive training and knowledge exchange** initiatives in 2025. Cumulatively, 512 professionals have been reached since project inception in 2023, surpassing the end-of-project (2026) target of 500. Training modalities incorporated advanced methodologies and were tailored to address the specific needs of practitioners engaged in war crimes cases and the search for missing persons, including a targeted stress management and burnout prevention training piloted for justice professionals in BiH. The region's inaugural e-learning curriculum on war crimes trials, complete with tests and certification, was developed and integrated as a sustainable resource within the Judicial Academy of Serbia. This curriculum is now accessible to individual practitioners throughout the region, promoting continuous professional development and standardization of knowledge.

Regarding **strategic and institutional frameworks**, Montenegro demonstrated robust implementation of its War Crimes Investigation Strategy 2024–2027, as evidenced by new case openings, systematic review of legacy cases, adoption of supportive bylaws, and enhanced international cooperation. The corresponding 2024–2025 Action Plan was fully executed. Kosovo advanced operationalization of its Transitional Justice Strategy, including the formal establishment and functioning of the Presidential Commission on Transitional Justice and capacity expansion at the Institute for Documentation of Crimes.

Institutional and operational **mechanisms for the search for missing persons** continued to evolve. Notably, the Missing Persons Institute of BiH adopted new Standard Operating Procedures, while Montenegro institutionalized guidelines and training curricula consistent with international standards. Enhanced cross-sectoral cooperation among investigative bodies and missing persons institutions resulted in improved communication and better prospects for coordinated exhumation processes and evidence collection.

Regional cooperation in war crimes cases remained dynamic and on the way to advance from moderate towards a high level of cooperation, especially between BiH and its neighbouring jurisdictions (Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia), facilitated by inclusive annual high-level meetings of prosecution offices convened by UNDP. The volume of regional cooperation actions — including case and evidence transfers, facilitation of access to witnesses and other mutual requests for legal assistance, and bilateral protocols — remained stable as reported by prosecution offices. Commitment to accelerate these exchanges, particularly between BiH and the neighbouring jurisdictions, was reaffirmed. Joint efforts were directed at overcoming persistent obstacles, accelerating and increasing the number of case transfers, ensuring victims' compensation claims (especially in conflict-related sexual violence cases), and more harmonised cross-border procedures. Chief prosecutors of Montenegro and Croatia amended their cooperation agreement, further expanding and improving the regional judicial collaboration legal framework. With at least 85 regional cooperation actions reported since the start of the project, and over 260 individuals—mainly prosecutors—participating in various forms of regional cooperation, the project has exceeded its overall targets of 80 actions and 170 participating individuals.

Enhanced capacities of judicial and investigative authorities, along with positive developments and trends in regional cooperation, create *favourable conditions for achieving the project's desired outcomes: an increased number of prosecutorial decisions to initiate or close investigations and cases, a reduction in case backlogs, and, overall, more efficient and effective handling of war crimes cases.*

Official or reliable data on an actual increase in the number of cases processed, or on the reduction of case backlogs across the region, are not yet available as most of such information, particularly data related to ongoing investigations, is often treated as confidential by the prosecution offices or other judicial institutions, or they publish some of the information mid-year. Moreover, the progression of a

case from the stage of evidence exchange, information sharing, and investigative coordination (which are the main topics of the prosecutors' meetings facilitated by the project) to the trial phase and final adjudication typically takes several years. Therefore, it will only be possible to establish clearer linkages and draw more robust conclusions about the project's contribution to more efficient case processing at the end of the project, when data spanning several years can be analysed.

UNDP-facilitated training for 169 **victim support professionals from institutions** (284 cumulatively since the start of the project) and 89 aid providers from civil/private sectors (539 cumulatively), focusing on trauma- and gender-informed communication, engagement with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, and alignment with EU standards and best practices. **Cross-border cooperation between judicial victim-support** units and between CSOs was strengthened, fostering more harmonised practices and enabling effective service provision, particularly where formal cross-border agreements are not in place. **Institutional communication with victim communities**, especially families of missing persons, in BiH was enhanced, while public advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives promoted victims' rights and access to justice, contributing to greater social cohesion. The CSO support network expanded, directly assisting over 540 individual victims in 2025 (2,540 cumulatively), including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

The number of victim support professionals trained and the number of victims and survivors who directly received assistance both surpassed the project's final targets by the end of 2025. *This demonstrates that the project is on the right track and is contributing to the establishment of more gender-responsive victim and witness support mechanisms, including for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, in line with the intended outcome level goals.*

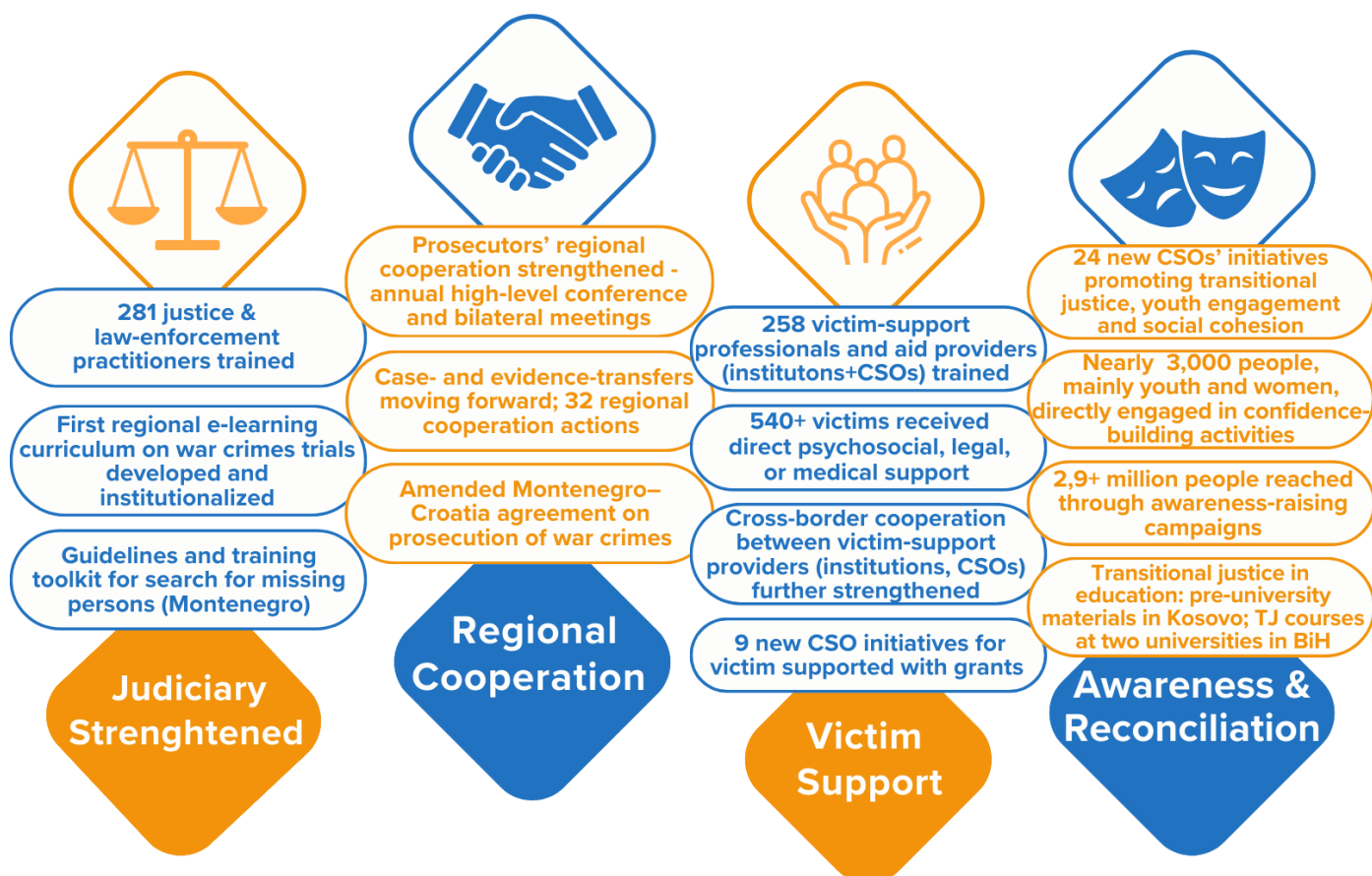
Outcome 2

Twenty-four **new civil society initiatives** were selected in 2025 and supported by grants to advance transitional justice, conflict resolution, and community trust-building, with particular emphasis on youth engagement and socially engaged art. These initiatives cultivate new generations of activists, advocates, and professionals committed to dialogue and social cohesion at all levels. The support provided enables historians and opinion leaders to develop fact-based educational materials, engage in public dialogue, and utilize archives from the ICTY/Mechanism and domestic courts. Methodological tools and curricula were developed to introduce transitional justice in pre-university education in Kosovo, and university-level courses were established at two universities in BiH. Information materials and campaigns developed or promoted by CSO grantees reached a substantial audience of 2.97 million people, while CSO grantees trained or engaged a significant number of individuals (2,975), especially youth, on topics including transitional justice, peacebuilding, reconciliation, and public advocacy.

The number of interventions and initiatives promoting social cohesion and reconciliation between different groups since 2023 has reached 51, thus exceeding the outcome level target of 40. Likewise, the public reach of these initiatives and their engagement of youth and other direct beneficiaries have also surpassed the final -output level targets, thanks to the strong and impactful CSO initiatives supported through -sub-granting (which will be presented in more detail below under Output 4). This demonstrates that the project is on a solid path toward improving good- -neighbourly relations in the region and strengthening reconciliation and social cohesion both between and within communities.

Overall, the achievements outlined in this section demonstrate tangible progress toward the project's objectives: strengthening institutional capacities for war crimes accountability and resolving the fate of the missing; fostering regional cooperation; empowering victims and survivors; promoting transitional justice; and cultivating dialogue and initiatives aimed at reconciliation, sustainable peace, and inclusive, resilient societies across the Western Balkans.

The Project forms part of UNDP's broader engagement in the wider region of Europe and Central Asia, more concretely in relation to one of the outcomes of the UNDP's Regional Programme for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (2022-2025) - *Resilience built to respond to systemic uncertainty and risk (Regional Programme's Outcome 3)*. The Project contributed to the strengthened capacities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding at regional levels and across borders (Regional Programme's Output 3.2) and to risk-informed and gender-responsive recovery solutions implemented at regional levels (Output 3.3).



Section 3: Monitoring of activities

The project team continued to conduct systematic monitoring activities throughout the project's duration to ensure the effective delivery and achievement of planned results, as well as to manage risks. Regular communication with institutional beneficiaries and civil society partners—including grassroots organizations and victims' associations—was integral to maintaining continuous oversight and quality assurance. This approach enabled the timely identification of beneficiaries' needs and ensured that project activities remained relevant and impactful.

Communication and oversight were maintained through various means, including regular meetings, field visits, phone consultations, written correspondence, and other direct interactions. These methods facilitated ongoing engagement with stakeholders and ensured that any issues or needs were promptly addressed.

Activities carried out directly by CSOs under the sub-grants (under Outputs 3 and 4) were closely monitored by the UNDP office-based project teams. Grant Officers played a primary role in this process, conducting periodic field visits, spot checks, participating in selected activities and interventions, systematically reviewing narrative and financial reports, and providing tailored feedback. This monitoring ensured that CSO-led actions stayed aligned with project objectives, complied with visibility and compliance requirements, and contributed measurably to the achievement of expected results. At the start of each sub-granting cycle, grantees received written guidelines for implementation, communication, and visibility. These guidelines were prepared by the project team in accordance with UNDP's rules and regulations, EU guidelines, and tailored to the specifics of the sub-granting scheme. Monitoring and evaluation of grantees' project implementation included coaching and capacity development, especially when working with less experienced grantees or those lacking developed internal organizational structures.

Ongoing monitoring enabled the project team to identify new or emerging beneficiary needs and behavioral trends. Activities were adapted and new interventions designed as required. This responsive

approach, recognized and commended by beneficiary institutions, contributed to the practical impact and overall results of the project.

Risk assessment, monitoring, and management were conducted regularly throughout project implementation. In 2025, risk oversight became even more frequent and rigorous due to certain political developments, notably anti-government protests in Serbia. This heightened risk monitoring and additional scrutiny were applied across all phases of activities, particularly those implemented by grantees. The enhanced approach ensured that the project remained on track toward its objectives, mitigated potential reputational risks for UNDP, the EU, and partner institutions, and safeguarded the project's neutrality and adherence to core organizational values and principles.

Section 4: Progress against each output

NOTE: *Output 5* has been added to the project by Addendum no 2 to the Contribution Agreement, signed on 23 December 2025, and since it is planned to be implemented as of 2026, that output is not included in this report.

Output 1: Judicial authorities in the region are better equipped to handle war crimes

Outcome 1		
Output 1: Judicial authorities in the region are better equipped to handle war crimes		
Output indicators	Targets	Progress against targets
# of judges, prosecutors, police investigators, court staff, attorneys, and professionals from other relevant institutions trained on war crimes case processing	Baseline: 0 2026 target: 500	Reporting period (2025): 281 individuals trained Cumulative total (since the start of the project in 2023): 512

The overall target for Output 1, set for 31 December 2026 — training 500 judges, prosecutors, investigators, court staff, attorneys, and professionals from other relevant institutions on various aspects of war crimes case processing (including resolving missing-persons cases) — has already been achieved. As of December 2025, a total of 512 judicial professionals have been trained since the start of the project. The project will continue to provide training in this field, in line with the assessed needs of beneficiaries. These needs and targets will also be reassessed in preparation for the project proposal and target setting for the planned Phase 2 (2027–2029).

1) Investigation and prosecution of war crimes: capacity development and improving institutional frameworks

a) Strategic frameworks

In 2025, significant progress was made in Kosovo and Montenegro with the adoption of key strategic documents—developed with project support—that set crucial benchmarks and provided guidance for processing war crimes and, in the case of Kosovo, additional mechanisms of post-conflict justice. Building on these advancements, both jurisdictions have taken further steps to update and implement these frameworks to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability.

In **Montenegro**, the country's first *War Crimes Investigation Strategy 2024-2027* with the accompanying *2024-25 Action Plan*, developed with the project's support and adopted by the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office (SSPO) in June 2024, remains the key benchmark document that sets up strategic and operational goals and action points for creating more enabling institutional and operational environment for the domestic handling of war crimes cases. It also contributes to advancing the country's

EU accession. Based on the Strategy and the Action Plan, the SSPO and other institutions initiated a number of implementation steps and actions, including opening new and reviewing and reopening some earlier cases, drafting bylaws, training, and signing international co-operation agreements. In December 2025, at the request of the SSPO, a project's expert prepared a structured evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the Strategy and Action Plan implementations. The evaluation examined the impact of the institutions' activities under the Action Plan to date, identified remaining challenges, and enabled evidence-based adjustments and future interventions, particularly those aimed at strengthening institutional capacities for investigating war crimes and addressing the fate of missing persons. The findings will guide the preparation of the next strategic cycle and the Action Plan 2026–2027, and ensure continuity, lessons learned, and a more targeted approach.

In **Kosovo**, the Government approved the Transitional Justice Strategy in June 2024, prepared with the support of the project. The project has continued to support the implementation of this strategy and associated policies, as well as the actions of relevant authorities. Notably, support was provided for the establishment and functioning of the Presidential Commission on Transitional Justice, including international expertise to help develop a comprehensive legal framework to address conflict-related crimes and promote justice and reconciliation. This support encompassed research and analysis of operational models, alignment of the Commission's mandate with international best practices adapted to Kosovo's context, close collaboration with the Office of the President and its Working Group, and the creation of a strong foundation for the Commission to address past crimes, foster reconciliation, and strengthen institutional responses to transitional justice challenges. Further support for the Strategy's implementation included efforts to enhance the operations of the Institute for Documentation of Crimes Committed in the Past in Kosovo, which is the primary local non-judicial body for establishing facts about crimes and suffering during the Kosovo conflict. This has remained a priority for project interventions in Kosovo into 2025 (and follows the human resources expertise the project provided to the Institute in 2024 - resulting in the recruitment and deployment of over 40 employees, training of a number of staff and development several internal policies). A multi-sectoral working group (WG), led by the Office of the Prime Minister, completed an analysis of the Institute's work and the implementation of the founding law, producing an Ex-post Evaluation Report. The WG recommended amending the law to better regulate staff status and management and to define the Institute's mandate and operational scope more precisely. Additionally, another multi-sectoral WG drafted a regulation outlining procedures for the use of the Institute's archives and the security of personal and sensitive data.

b) Training and capacity development

Pilot workshops and skill-development in BiH

Beyond enhancing legal knowledge, investigative skills, cross-sectoral cooperation, and analytical capacity in war crimes cases and the search for missing persons, the project piloted targeted workshop-style skill building in Bosnia and Herzegovina for staff from the Missing Persons Institute (MPI), the BiH Prosecution Office, and SIPA. These workshops focused on stress management, burnout prevention, and staff empowerment, addressing the persistent challenges of health problems, stress, and burnout among personnel involved in war crimes investigations, searches for mass graves, and identification of remains. The first workshop was held in May for 40 participants (18 women and 22 men) from these institutions, followed by a second in October for 47 professionals (18 women and 29 men). Led by experienced occupational and other psychologists, the sessions helped participants recognize and manage work-related burnout, develop stress coping techniques, and foster emotional healing. This approach aims to enhance institutional performance, resilience, teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills, ultimately reducing staff attrition and benefitting victims' communities.

Peer learning and policy recommendations for BiH prosecutors

Through peer-to-peer facilitated discussions, case studies, and joint analytical sessions, prosecutors from state, entity, and district/cantonal offices across BiH (11 women and 14 men) expanded their knowledge and discussed practical challenges in their work, such as different modes of criminal responsibility, cross-border cooperation, evidence exchange, and case transfers among regional countries. The group adopted a set of conclusions and policy recommendations to address these challenges, which were submitted to the BiH High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, the supreme regulatory body for the judiciary in BiH. This event, held in October, was integrated into the national annual gathering of BiH prosecutors for thematic discussions.

Specialized training in Kosovo

Tailor-made training for prosecutors, judges, and police investigators in Kosovo on specific aspects of handling war crimes and other conflict-related cases continued in 2025. In April, 19 justice professionals were trained in evidence analysis and the interplay between domestic and international law. In October, [another 14 professionals received training](#) on trials in absentia, command and direct individual responsibility, the rights of victims and witnesses, and international legal cooperation.



1: Training for prosecutors, judges, and police investigators in Kosovo, April 2025

Knowledge sharing for North Macedonia

For the first time, a dedicated knowledge-sharing experience was organized for judicial practitioners from North Macedonia. In September, eight representatives from the (State) Public Prosecutor's Office and the (Special) Public Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime and Corruption participated in working and study visits to the International Criminal Court, International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, and Eurojust in The Hague. These visits not only enhanced their understanding of international cooperation mechanisms for addressing serious crimes and transitional justice but also allowed the practitioners to build operational links and networks. This will strengthen North Macedonia's ability to provide legal assistance to other jurisdictions in war crimes cases and improve its capacity to combat organized crime and corruption through effective use of international legal cooperation.



2: Prosecutors from North Macedonia visited International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, and Eurojust in The Hague, September 2025

Institutionalizing training in Serbia (and the region)

In Serbia, a significant step was taken toward sustainable and institutionalized training on international criminal and humanitarian law with the development of an e-learning module (curriculum) for the Serbian Judicial Academy (JA). This first e-learning curriculum in the region on war crimes trials related topic, comprises written presentations and more than nine hours of video lectures, authored and delivered in Serbian by one of the world's leading academics in this field, Professor Marko Milanovic of Reading University, UK, and tailored to local terminology and context. The material is organized into nine modules, followed by a test that is required to obtain the official JA certificate. The e-learning program became available in October; by early 2026, nine professionals had completed the course and received certificates, while 44 others started participating in the course or taking the test. The module is embedded in the JA's existing e-learning platform, ensuring sustainability and regular maintenance. The Judicial Academy has committed to offering free individual access to judicial and legal practitioners across the region who understand Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, or Montenegrin. Future translations into other languages of the region are under consideration. This e-learning module is intended as a long-term, sustainable resource for legal professionals interested in international humanitarian and criminal law—fields essential for prosecuting war crimes.

Capacity development for private attorneys in Serbia

Training private attorneys-at-law is essential for enhancing the quality of legal representation for both defendants and victims in war crimes proceedings, contributing to higher standards in criminal justice. In Serbia, capacity development efforts included a training session in February for 26 attorneys-at-law (13 women and 13 men) who serve as defense counsel or victims' representatives in local war crimes trials. Participants were introduced to the jurisprudence and standards of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), particularly those relevant to prosecuting atrocity crimes and ensuring fair trial rights. They also gained insight into the admissibility of applications before the ECtHR, which will help them more effectively represent war crimes survivors or their families seeking redress before the ECtHR, the court of last resort in Europe.

2) Addressing the missing persons' issues: capacity development and institutional setting

Substantial progress was achieved in improving the institutional setting for resolving cases of people who went missing during the conflicts in the 1990s. Close to 11,000 persons in the Western Balkans are still counted as missing as a result of the conflicts.³ Resolving their fate, including finding their remains, together with upholding the rights of the missing persons' families (to truth, justice, and reparations), remains among the most sensitive parts of the legacies of the armed conflicts in the region, with enduring wide and deep societal and political impacts.

Institutional capacity development in BiH

With the project's support, the BiH Missing Persons Institute (MPI) — the country's lead institution mandated to address missing persons cases—has, for the first time since its establishment in 2005, developed a written set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). The SOP, adopted by the MPI's Collegium of Directors and initiated in 2024, consolidates and defines many internal procedures based on MPI's best practices and experiences. It aligns with both national and international standards, and formalizes cooperation with national law enforcement agencies and prosecution offices in areas such as information analysis, case documentation, exhumation, and identification of remains. The SOP is expected to streamline the Institute's work, enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, and may serve as a model for similar SOPs across the region.

Training and cross-sectoral coordination in BiH

In June, 27 investigators (20 males and 7 females) from the Prosecutor's Office of BiH, MPI, and the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) participated in a seminar aimed at improving institutional coordination in the search for missing persons and war crimes investigation. The seminar focused on proper exhumation procedures and analytical skills for locating mass graves and analyzing evidence.

³ The exact number of missing persons varies depending on the source. At the beginning of 2026, the ICMP's [Database of active missing person cases from conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia](#) contained a total of 11,209 records of missing persons, while according to [an ICRC representative's statement](#) from January 2026, the overall number is nearly 10,000.

Along with two additional workshops held in 2024 involving operatives from ICMP, ICRC, and the Mechanism, these activities significantly enhanced intersectoral cooperation and the overall efficiency of both the search for the missing and war crimes investigations. These capacity development interventions are expected to result in concrete progress in discovering new mass or clandestine graves in BiH. The project intends to facilitate a review of the MPI's and other institutions' experiences with the SOP and evaluate the progress in coordination.



3: Roundtable: Achievements and Priorities in the Process of Searching for Missing Persons, Jahorina, BiH, June 2025

Staff wellbeing and burnout prevention

Recognizing health problems, stress, and burnout among staff working on missing persons cases and war crimes investigations, the project piloted a workshop in May for staff from MPI, BiH Prosecution Office, and SIPA. Led by experienced psychologists, the workshop focused on stress management, burnout prevention, and staff empowerment. Participants learned to recognize and overcome burnout and developed stress coping and emotional healing techniques. Planned follow-up sessions aim to further support staff wellbeing, improve institutional performance, and reduce attrition, which is critical given the difficulty of replacing experienced professionals.

Cross-sectoral cooperation in Kosovo

Intersectoral cooperation between war crimes documentation, and investigation and the search for and identification of missing persons, also improved in Kosovo. A workshop, in April, which gathered representatives of the Institute of Forensic Medicine, the Kosovo Commission of Missing Persons, the Special Prosecution Office, the Kosovo police, and several other relevant institutions, including the Ministry of Justice, was a practical step for improving their cooperation and coordination. It resulted in the adoption of critical recommendations on standardising inter-institutional communication, coordination of excavation and exhumation of mass and individual graves, and improvement of evidence collection for war crimes cases through identification of missing persons and their remains.

Institutional framework development in Montenegro

Significant progress in improving the institutional framework was achieved with the development and adoption of the [Guidelines for the Search for Missing Persons](#) in Montenegro. This document, drafted by a project expert, provides for the first time in the country a set of SOPs to facilitate steps in the process of searching for the people who went missing during the conflict in the 1990s, which can also be applied to other situations of missing persons, including enforced disappearances. The Guidelines, setting out the key principles, mechanisms, and procedures for the search, record-keeping, exhumation, and identification of missing persons, and the provision of essential information to families and the public, streamline local processes with international standards and best practices and build cross-sectoral coordination among relevant national authorities. The Guidelines were adopted by the Government's Missing Persons Commission on 29 July. The adopted document was [presented by the Montenegro Government delegation](#) at the 29th session of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, in Geneva, on 22 September 2025, and welcomed by the Committee.

In addition, a training toolkit, incorporating the Guidelines, with a curriculum was developed for the country's judicial, law enforcement and other relevant officials and civil servants covering the international and national normative and institutional framework for the search for missing persons, mechanisms for implementing the Enforced Disappearances Convention, and best international and regional practices. The toolkit was piloted in a workshop in September, bringing together 13 female and 9 male professionals from the country's courts, prosecution offices, police, and the defence and humanitarian sector. Following the workshop, the toolkit was included in the official curriculum of the national Centre for Training of Judges and Prosecutors, thereby ensuring its sustainable and regular use in preparation and refreshment of the officials and professionals responsible for the missing persons and enforced disappearance files.

The Guidelines and training toolkit form two essential pillars—alongside the national Missing Persons Commission—of Montenegro's long-term institutional and policy framework for addressing missing persons and enforced disappearances in accordance with international standards, while also supporting the EU's fundamental rights accession criteria.

Support for excavations in Serbia

The project provided urgent support to excavations in Serbia aimed at locating a suspected mass grave. Following a time-sensitive request from the Serbian Government and the EU Delegation to Serbia (and the Project Board and EU's approval of budget revision), excavation equipment and machinery were provided to the Serbian Government's Missing Persons Commission to complete excavations at a location in southwest Serbia (village of Kožlje, near Novi Pazar). The site, an active landfill, was believed to contain the remains of Kosovo Albanians killed and concealed during the 1999 Kosovo conflict. Excavations began in December but were halted by winter conditions; they are expected to resume in spring 2026 with Serbian Government funding. Although no remains were found, the intervention was a significant contribution to project goals. Fully investigating suspected sites is vital for advancing transitional justice and building trust between the Serbian and Kosovo commissions and the communities they represent.

Regional cooperation

At the regional level, UNDP expanded support by co-facilitating a meeting of the regional ICMP-facilitated Missing Persons Group (MPG), which includes representatives from the region's missing persons institutions. During its session in Sarajevo on June 4, the MPG agreed to enhance transparency and accountability in searches and to adopt more adaptive strategies, with plans to formalize these principles into a working document. Further details are provided under Output 2 – Regional Cooperation.

Output 2: Improved conditions for regional cooperation in war crimes proceedings

Outcome 1

Output 2: Improved conditions for regional cooperation in war crimes proceedings

Output indicators	Targets	Progress against targets
2.1 # of documented regional cooperation actions in handling war crimes	Baseline:	Reporting period (2025):
2.2 # judges, prosecutors, attorneys, other relevant	2.1: 0	2.1: at least 32 regional cooperation actions ⁴
	2.2: 0	2.2: 75 individuals participated in regional cooperation ⁵
	2.3: Low/Medium	

⁴ The number includes transfers of cases, transfers of evidence, mutual requests for cross-border legal assistance, agreed bilateral protocols, and other instances of cross-border/regional cooperation in war crimes proceedings among the five participating jurisdictions, chiefly among BiH, Serbia, Montenegro; cooperation of the participating jurisdictions (Action's Beneficiaries) with Croatia for cases processed by their justice authorities also count. The data is based on the monitoring by the project team and information received in the communication with the partner local judicial institutions and the Mechanism; full and official data on mutual requests and other forms of regional co-operation are not available yet or cannot be available if related to the investigation phase.

⁵ The number includes prosecutors, police investigators, judges and other officials, including designated institutions for search for missing persons, participating in the regional multilateral meetings and conferences, organized under the project, including peer-to-peer meetings under Output 1 (Activity 1.5), and in bilateral operational meetings (based on information obtained from the prosecution offices and other institutions or evidenced by the project team's participation in such bilateral meetings)

justice and law enforcement officials participating in regional peer-to-peer meetings related to cross-border co-operation in war crimes handling supported by the action 2.3 level of regional cooperation between prosecution offices improves	2026 target: 2.1: 80 regional cooperation actions 2.2: 170 individuals participating in regional cooperation 2.3: Medium/High	2.3: Medium towards High Cumulative total (since the start of the project in 2023): 2.1: at least 85 regional cooperation actions 2.2: 260 individuals participated in regional cooperation 2.3: Medium towards High
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The December 2026 targets for Output 2 have been reached and slightly exceeded in two aspects – the number of judges, prosecutors, attorneys, other relevant justice and law enforcement officials who participated in regional cooperation actions and activities (target – 170, participated – 260), and the number of regional cooperation actions, which included case- and evidence-transfers and other various instances of cross-border/cross-boundary legal assistance and co-operation (target – 80, reached – at least 85). Both speak of widening and increased frequency of regional cooperation, involving more practitioners and mutual case assistance.

Keeping the same trend in terms of participation and cooperation actions, in 2026, the qualitative level of regional cooperation will be moving from medium towards a high level of assessed cooperation as the target. The situation and the achieved level in 2026 will inform further planning and target setting.

1) Annual Regional Prosecutors' Conference

The key activity in the area of regional cooperation was the annual [Regional Prosecutors' Conference on Cooperation in Prosecution of War Crimes](#). It was organized in Brijuni, Croatia, from 2 to 4 September, convened and facilitated by UNDP, and officially hosted by the State Attorney's Office of the Republic of Croatia.⁶ The conference continues the established practice of annual high-level meetings of chief prosecutors and/or chief war crimes prosecutors from the project Beneficiary jurisdictions, Croatia, and [the Mechanism](#), with emphasis on strong national and regional ownership.

The participants⁷ came from the highest national prosecution offices: BiH - all the four levels of jurisdiction in BiH represented, with the chief prosecutors respectively leading the delegations; Kosovo - Chief Special Prosecutor; Montenegro - Supreme State and Chief Special Prosecutors; North Macedonia - Chief State Prosecutor; Croatia (not as the direct beneficiary of the project, but as a participant of the regional cooperation process) - with the delegation led by the Chief State Attorney and the Minister of Justice; the Chief Prosecutor of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT/Mechanism). The Serbian War Crimes Prosecutor's Office delegation was not able to participate in the conference, citing as the reason the circumstance that the post of its Chief War Crimes Prosecutor was still vacant and expressing their commitment to the process and participation in regional meetings in the future.

Besides the plenary meetings, at the margins of the conference, all the national delegations had bilateral meetings with each other and with the IRMCT - over 12 of such meetings, the largest number so far. They were addressing concrete cases and practical issues of cooperation, not only in war crimes cases, but in criminal justice in general.

The participants assessed the cross-border cooperation in war crimes cases, especially between BiH and Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia, as still burdened with challenges but with an upwards trend of mutual cooperation in case- and evidence-transfers, thanks also to the periodical regional cooperation meetings. The cooperation between some of the participating jurisdictions (Serbia-Croatia, Kosovo-Serbia) was assessed as decreasing or non-existent.

⁶ While Croatia is not a project's Beneficiary, the hosting state and locations were selected to be in Croatia, with the EU's approval, to keep the rotational hosting by the jurisdictions participating in the regional cooperation process.

⁷ The number of participants from the national prosecution offices and the Mechanism was 37.



4: Annual Regional Prosecutors' Conference on Cooperation in Prosecution of War Crimes, Brijuni, Croatia, September 2025

Following two days of detailed discussions and subsequent consultations after the conference, the participants agreed on the joint conclusions and recommendations proposed by UNDP as the convenor. While the Serbian delegation did not participate, in their communication with the project staff, they expressed their agreement with the conclusions and recommendations. The agreed steps forward will contribute to reducing the remaining case backlogs and improve victims' access to justice, compensation and the right to truth, and they include the participating prosecution offices' commitments to:

- continue working on the transfer of cases, especially between BiH and other jurisdictions, both during the investigation phase and after indictments are filed, and to continue developing concrete plans for such transfers;
- jointly address remaining obstacles and challenges in prosecuting transferred cases;
- mutually seek and exchange necessary information to ensure that the transferred evidence is admissible and valid in the receiving jurisdiction;
- ensure, within their mandates, that requests for cross-border legal aid and assistance are addressed within a reasonable timeframe;
- prioritise the transfer of evidence and cases to the country where the accused resides or is located, as a way to resolve cases involving unavailable individuals;
- ensure that victims' compensation claims, especially in cases of sexual violence crimes, are resolved already in criminal proceedings, without referring victims to civil litigation, thus facilitating their access to reparations and preventing their retraumatisation.

(A regional experience-sharing conference on judicial victim and witness support services, in Skopje, North Macedonia, in November, was also a major contributor to furthering regional cooperation in war crimes proceedings. It is reported below, under Output 3. Some other activities reported under Outputs 1 and 3 aimed at training and other types of knowledge and experience sharing that included participants and/or trainers from different jurisdictions in the region also had an effect of furthering regional cooperation and addressing concrete matters of bilateral or multilateral cross-border judicial and police cooperation.)

2) Bilateral cooperation

As one of the follow-up steps agreed in the Brijuni conference, the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office of Montenegro and the State Prosecutor's Office of Croatia signed, in Zagreb in November, an [Annex revising the earlier \(2006\) bilateral Agreement](#) on Cooperation in the Prosecution of Perpetrators of War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Genocide. The amended agreement introduces the principle of reciprocity in the Agreement's application, strengthening mutual trust and legal cooperation between Montenegro and Croatia and improving the efficiency of prosecution for conflict-related crimes concerning the two states. This agreement, together with the agreements on cooperation in victim and witness support the Montenegrin SSPO signed in 2024 with BiH and Serbian prosecution offices (as reported in the previous annual report), completes the legal framework of bilateral treaties and protocols that Montenegro has in place for international legal assistance and cooperation with the neighbouring countries in prosecuting conflict-related crimes and applying survivor/victim-centred approach.

In addition to advancing cooperation between the jurisdictions in the region, analytical collaboration and joint strategic planning between the Prosecutor's Office of BiH and the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) of the Mechanism have been improved through a facilitated visit of the PO BiH's prosecutors and investigators to the OTP. The visit had a knowledge-sharing and skill-development effect on the PO BiH's, especially with regard to building cases against higher-ranking military leadership. It also had potential for increasing evidence and case transfers between the Mechanism and BiH, so as between the PO BiH and other prosecution offices from the region, since such transfers were discussed too (whether actual agreements were reached on case transfers remains a judicial confidential matter).

Besides the aforementioned concrete actions, facilitation of cross-border communication and cooperation between the prosecution offices, courts, police, and other justice institutions across the region has been a part of the project team's continuous engagement. The prosecution offices also continued to have bilateral communication and periodical meetings concerning concrete cases following their discussions and agreements reached at Brijuni and previous annual conferences (Podgorica, 2024 and Sarajevo, 2023).

3) Regional cooperation in the search for missing persons

The project also contributed to sustaining regional cooperation between institutions searching for missing persons. For the first time, UNDP joined ICMP in supporting and facilitating the regional Missing Persons Group (MPG), which was established after the 2018 London Summit of the Berlin Process. The MPG's eleventh session, co-hosted by the BiH MPI and ICMP in Sarajevo on June 4, brought together representatives from missing persons institutions in BiH, Croatia (as a regular member), Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia.⁸ This support enabled continued periodic meetings of the MPG, which serves as the only regional mechanism for cooperation on missing persons. Key discussions centered on evaluating progress under the MPG's Framework Plan, identifying areas for improvement, and aligning principles for coordinated action and reporting. The meeting concluded with agreements to enhance transparency and accountability in the search for missing persons, including regular evaluations and adaptive strategies, plans to formalize agreed principles in a working document, and a call for sustained support from international partners and governments.

Output 3: Increased delivery of gender-sensitive support services to victims and witnesses of war crimes and stronger capacity of relevant actors

Outcome 1

Output 3: Increased delivery of gender-sensitive support services to victims and witnesses of war crimes and stronger capacity of relevant actors

Output indicators	Targets	Progress against targets
3.1.# of sub-grants of the action successfully implemented by civil society partners	<u>Baseline</u> 3.1: 0	<u>Reporting period (2025):</u> 3.1: implementation of 9 new grants ⁹

⁸ The number of participants from the national designated institutions for missing persons was 23.

⁹ The number of CSO projects selected and awarded with LVGs, under Activity 3.7, in the 2nd sub-granting cycle (July 2025).

3.2. # of individuals especially women victims of conflict related sexual and gender-based violence) benefitting from sub-grants and activities to improve access to justice and services 3.3 # of victim and witness support officers trained on techniques of interacting with sensitive victims and cross-border co-operation	3.2: 0 3.3: 0 <u>2026 target:</u> 3.1: 40 sub-grants 3.2: 400 individuals benefiting 3.3: 200 victim and witness support officers trained	3.2: at least 542 individual victims reached out and benefited from the grants¹⁰ 3.3: 169 victim support officers trained; 89 support providers (healthcare and psychosocial support professionals, CSO activists, volunteers) trained by grantees <u>Cumulative total (since 2023):</u> 3.1: 23 sub-grants implemented (1st and 2nd cycle)¹¹ 3.2: at least 2542 individual victims reached out and benefited from the grants 3.3: 284 victim support officers trained; 539 support providers (healthcare and psychosocial support professionals, CSO activists, volunteers) trained by the grantees
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With 23 CSO initiatives supported through the grants awarded in total in the first and second sub-granting cycle under this output, the result will remain below 40 that was set as one of the 2026 Output 3 targets, since no new grantees will be selected in 2026. The number of supported initiatives depended on the volume and quality of applications received. However, although the number of grants will fall short of the final target, the number of individual victims, including women survivors of CRSV, who benefited from CSO-led initiatives has exceeded the project target by a wide margin. At least **2,542 individuals** have benefited to date, compared to the target of 400. This number will further increase as several LVG-supported initiatives continue to be implemented in 2026. This demonstrates that, despite being fewer in number, the supported initiatives were more productive and impactful than expected. Several CSOs provided highly professional psychological, legal, capacity development, and other services to victims, contributing significantly to the overall impact.

The total number of victim support judicial and police officers, as well as other victim support professionals trained either by grantees or through project-organised training (**823**), has also exceeded the end-of-project target of 200. This was driven by increased demand among professionals for such training and by the effectiveness of CSO initiatives that included training components within their LVG projects.

In 2026, CSO grantees will continue implementing their remaining LVG projects, further increasing the results. The project, meanwhile, will focus only on training activities considered urgent or of high priority, while continuing efforts to strengthen the broader institutional framework. The design and planning of Phase 2 (2027–2029), including target setting in the victim support area, will take into account these findings — particularly the demonstrated potential of CSO projects to deliver strong results.

1) Stakeholders' capacity development and legislative framework

Regarding the improvement of the **legislative framework** concerning the status and rights of the victims, a major expected development and advancement would be the adoption of the *Law on the Rights of the Families of Missing Persons in Serbia*. The Law should grant rights to the families of the missing registered in Serbia, filling the legislative gap in Serbia as the last remaining jurisdiction in the region where these rights were not regulated. It would be a major step for victim reparations in the country. The process of completion and adoption of the law, however, was stalled after the Government's resignation in March 2025. The draft law, prepared with project support in 2024 and adopted by a Working Group in February 2025, awaits further action by a newly established Working Group under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which resumed the drafting process in early 2026. Throughout 2025, UNDP maintained advocacy efforts to advance the law's finalization and adoption, supported missing persons' families associations in Serbia in their advocacy, and offered technical assistance to the responsible

¹⁰ Based on the reports from the CSO grantees available in January 2026; includes figures from the LVG projects implemented, completed, or started in 2025.

¹¹ Includes grants completed or started by the end of 2025.

ministry for the law's implementation. The Ministry has indicated that the new Working Group will refine the previous draft and expedite the law's progression, including opening a formal public debate.

Training for victim and witness support services

In May, a group of professionals from [victim and witness support judicial services in BiH and Serbia](#), comprising 23 women and 4 men, participated in specialized training focused on strategies and techniques for managing the personal impact of working in high-emotional and high-stress environments. The curriculum included gender-informed and gender-sensitive stress-coping strategies, prevention of burnout, peer-to-peer (mutual) support, psychological counseling, and professional supervision. This innovative approach—introduced in response to both the identified needs of professionals and the project's own needs assessment—built upon similar training delivered in 2024. The goal is to enhance the resilience of victim support professionals in judicial services, reduce staff turnover in frequently understaffed institutions, and ultimately improve the quality and responsiveness of support provided to war crimes victims and survivors. The joint, cross-border training model, which brings together professionals from BiH and Serbia, has proven valuable not only for capacity development but also for [fostering peer-to-peer dialogue and communication](#). This model strengthens regional cooperation in victim support and contributes to more effective war crimes proceedings.



5: Training for victim and witness support services' professionals on stress-coping mechanisms, Vrdnik, Serbia, June 2025

Further knowledge and skill development efforts included a two-day [training](#) held in **Kosovo** in September. This session focused on a gender-sensitive, victim-centered approach to supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Through expert-led sessions, real-life case studies, and practical exercises, 14 women and 12 men from the Agency for Free Legal Aid and the Institute for Documentation of Crimes Committed in Kosovo acquired essential skills for navigating secondary trauma and providing empathetic support to survivors. These efforts enable both institutions to fulfill their mandates in line with contemporary international standards, emphasizing survivor-centered research and documentation practices.

In September, the project's grantee, the civil society organization Human Rights Action, conducted training in **Montenegro** for 9 local judicial practitioners, prosecutors, and social workers (all women). The training emphasized survivor-centered and gender-informed interviewing skills designed to prevent re-traumatization while collecting critical information for support and legal proceedings.



6: Training on gender-sensitive, victim-centered approach to supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo, September 2025

Enhancing witness protection mechanisms

Protecting witnesses is critical for the successful investigation and prosecution of war crimes and other conflict-related atrocities, ensuring the establishment of facts and upholding the rights of all parties involved. The project supported the Witness Protection Unit (WPU) of the **Serbian police** by enhancing the knowledge and skills of its operatives and facilitating international cooperation and knowledge exchange. In October, a select group of WPU representatives (two women and three men) undertook a working visit to the Italian Central Protection Department (CPD) of the Polizia di Stato, a leading authority in witness protection. This exchange provided insights into the legal and organizational frameworks of successful witness protection programs, including procedures for witness identity changes, exit strategies, technical support, and operational protocols. The visit established operational cooperation between the Serbian WPU and its Italian counterpart. Additionally, the WPU engaged with other national and regional counterparts, focusing on the integration of smart digital tools for witness protection.

Dialogue with victim communities

Facilitated dialogues, organized in partnership with the Missing Persons Institute, continued to bring together associations of missing persons' families from **BiH** and representatives of judicial, police, and other institutions. Two town hall meetings, held in July and November, gathered 73 family members—often local association representatives—from central and north-western BiH. These events provided updates on case progress, search efforts, and general war crimes processing while offering families an opportunity to voice their needs and concerns. Such meetings enhance coordination and communication between families and institutions and among institutions themselves, contributing to stronger social cohesion in local communities. Key takeaways included recommendations for state authorities to intensify efforts to encourage individuals with information about undiscovered mass graves to come forward and for family associations to amplify their own public advocacy activities.

2) Regional cooperation and peer-to-peer learning

Regional experience-sharing conference on judicial victim and witness support services was organized from 4 to 6 November 2025 in Skopje, North Macedonia. It gathered 46 participants (35 women and 11 men) representing victim and witness support services from the project participating jurisdictions, as well as Croatia and Ukraine, reflecting the growing reach and relevance of the regional cooperation framework. The diverse professional composition, including judicial practitioners,

psychologists, policy experts, and representatives of international and civil society organizations, including the Brussels-based think-tank Victim Support Europe, enabled meaningful peer-to-peer exchange and discussions grounded in practical experience.

The participants took stock of regional experiences and practices, identified common challenges, and shared updates on institutional developments, legal and policy reforms, and progress in aligning national practices with the EU (especially the EU Victims Rights Directive) and other international standards. Comparative perspectives help place regional developments within broader European and international trends. The discussions and exchanges also addressed in detail tailored trauma-informed individualised approaches for specific categories of victims (including male victims and witnesses who are not direct victims). Coordination with victims' associations, NGOs, and mental health professionals was identified as critical to ensuring comprehensive and sustainable support.

Needs, priorities, and ways forward for strengthening victim and witness support services over the next few years were discussed and identified, and key priorities include further organizational development while counting on limited state resources, legislative and policy frameworks, adoption of clearer operational standards, specialised training (both for enhancing professionals' skills and enabling their coping with stress and professional burnout), technical resources, and data management. Strong emphasis was placed on regional and international cooperation as a means of addressing shared challenges and harmonising standards.



7: Regional experience-sharing conference on judicial victim and witness support services, Skopje, North Macedonia, November 2025

Overall, the conference further strengthened regional cooperation and added to the enhancement of professional capacities. The model of annual regional practitioners' conferences, following the two previous ones (Skopje 2023 and Ohrid 2024), continued to promote the systematic exchange of good practices among judicial victim and witness support services within the region and beyond while also enabling the professionals' networking and informal exchanges which often proves invaluable for cross-border cooperation especially when bilateral state protocols are still either missing between some of the jurisdiction or are not fully adequate.

The conference received very positive feedback from participants, expressed through post-event evaluations: conference sessions were assessed as highly useful and relevant, with average scores between 4.80 and 4.92 (with 5 being maximum), and participants reported a substantial improvement in

knowledge and skills (average 4.03) and a high likelihood of applying the acquired knowledge in practice (average 4.46). Most respondents believed the conference could significantly contribute to improving their institutions (average 4.61), particularly in strengthening victim-centred approaches and inter-institutional cooperation. The most valued aspect of the conference was experience sharing, followed by practical examples, peer learning, and networking. Participants expressed a strong interest in continuing and expanding the conference series.

The event was complemented by [testimonial video](#) capturing participants' reflections and supporting wider visibility and knowledge sharing.

In 2025, the project also addressed the critical need for cross-border collaboration among **specialized civil society organizations (CSOs) in the region**. [A regional conference convened in Pristina](#) from June 9 to 11, bringing together over 70 participants—primarily CSO representatives, alongside institutional victim support service staff. The conference, titled “Sharing Experiences of Civil Society Driven Victim Support Services,” enabled the exchange of best practices for supporting various victim categories, particularly survivors of sexual violence crimes. Participants explored ways to enhance cross-border cooperation, improve victims' access to justice and support services, and strengthen relationships between CSOs and institutions. The group also visited “Moment,” Kosovo's and the region's first museum dedicated to victims of conflict-related sexual violence, and learned about survivor-centered memorialization practices. Many CSOs reached agreements for bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including experience sharing, exchange visits, piloting service models, and partnering in support of victims in reparations cases or criminal proceedings. There was a strong call to make such regional gatherings and experience-sharing events a regular, at least annual, occurrence.



8: Regional Conference: Sharing Experiences of Civil Society Driven Victim Support Services, Pristina, Kosovo, June 2024

3) Grants for CSOs to assist victims

a) Overview of the second cycle of low-value grants (LVGs)

The public call for the 2nd cycle of low-value grants (LVG) applications to strengthen support to victims and survivors of war crimes was published in January-March by UNDP offices in [BiH](#), [Kosovo](#), [Montenegro](#), and [Serbia](#). (North Macedonia does not participate in the sub-granting for victim and witness support, as envisaged by the Project Document). A total of 58 eligible applications were received. Of that, 9 applications were selected by the participating UNDP offices' grant selection committees and endorsed by the Regional Grant Selection Committee and the Project Board (with an EU representative participating): in BiH – 4 applications, in Kosovo-3, and in Montenegro - 2. The total value of the selected applications and the signed grant agreements is 407,789 EUR. In Serbia, no CSO project concerning victim support was selected as the local grant selection committee considered that no application was of such quality to receive the LVG funding.

The selection process was completed in July 2025; the LVG agreements with the selected applicants were signed, and the implementation commenced in August-September. Five remaining CSO projects selected through the 1st cycle public call (in 2023) were completed in 2025.

The selected CSO projects include and address issues and topics such as healing and public sensitisation through creative inter-societal and inter-generational dialogue and art production, overcoming post-traumatic consequences in women with war trauma, preventing secondary victimisation through support and building trust in institutions, memorialization and remembrance. Three projects support specifically CRSV survivors and children born out of wartime rape. Priority in the selection process was given to innovative approaches that are assessed as impactful and have the potential for long-term and replicable outcomes.

The project team, including the grant officers, has been engaged in regular monitoring of the grant implementation, including, i.a., coordination among the grantees when needed, field visits, providing guidance on financial and operational management and reporting, communication and visibility.

Some of the exemplary grantees' projects, activities, and distinctive accomplishments are presented below, both from those completed in 2025 and from those selected in the 2nd cycle, whose implementation commenced in the second half of the year.

b) Notable results and activities in 2025

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Human Rights Center (HRC) from Mostar, following its 2024 analysis of the legal framework for access to justice and free legal aid in BiH and the subsequently proposed two-year action Plan, delivered four specialised training sessions enhancing the competence of 70 legal aid providers in the country (53 women and 17 men). The HRC also directly provided free legal aid, including legal counselling, representation, and support to survivors in exercising their rights to over 260 civilian victims of war as direct beneficiaries. This CSO also mapped, for the first time, the associations in BiH gathering civilian war victims based on the territorial jurisdiction of free legal aid providers.

Kosovo

Medica Gjakova delivered training sessions for CSOs, including victims and survivors associations, developing their capacity to write and manage projects, apply for grants and mobilise resources in other ways, and engage in advocacy campaigns for human rights and gender sensitive policies. The CSO applied an innovative approach in the community healing in the Western Balkans, by organising a workshop in the city of Gjakova/Đakovica in December for young people from the local community with an interest in transitional justice and human rights about recognising and coping, at the individual and community levels, with conflict-related trauma transmitted across generations.

Medica Gjakova also regularly provided tailored legal assistance, psychological counselling and other types of individual and group psychosocial support to CRSV survivors in Kosovo (e.g. in the period August-December 2025, 9 women and 2 men CRSV survivors received psychological support and 21 women and 5 men were assisted by their legal aid service).



9: Medica Gjakova: Training for youth on resilience and transgenerational trauma, December 2025

The Kosovo Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCTV), i.e., brought together CRSV survivors, representatives of central and local institutions, legal professionals, CSOs, international organizations, and the media in workshops to identify pathways to improve access to justice and services for CRSV survivors (publishing, alongside, a Case Study and a Book of Survivor, amplifying their project's impact). KRCTV also trained 10 Free Legal Aid Agency officials, enhancing their trauma-informed practices in providing support for CRSV survivors, and provided legal and psychosocial support to a number of women survivors of CRSV.

The CSO *Integra* produced a groundbreaking [play "Eyes of the Wolf"](#), exploring, for the first time, a deeply silenced reality of children born out of conflict-related sexual violence. The play brings attention to the stories of these children, born into trauma, marked by stigma, and left out of the collective narrative about the conflict and the past. The play premiered on October 8th, followed by five replays in October and November, which will continue in various cities in Kosovo.



10: Premiere of the theatre play *Eyes of the Wolf*, by CSO *Integra*, October 2025

Montenegro

Another play, *Hotel Morinj*, about a war crime case well known in communities in Montenegro and the neighbouring Croatia, was also produced by the grantee in Montenegro – *Juventas*, and premiered in December in the National Theatre in Podgorica. *Juventas* also produced an educational TV programme related to the same war crime, presenting historical facts and analyzing social and political context. *Juventas* also organized a three-day educational camp for 16 young people from different communities and through workshops, lectures, and documentary screenings, examined diverse narratives, societal impacts, and gender roles during the conflicts while building skills for active engagement in reconciliation processes at both local and national levels.

Human Rights Action prepared a policy paper on memorialization of war crimes in Montenegro, and organized a [panel discussion, *Policy of Remembrance: Memorialization of War Crimes as a Foundation for a Shared Future*](#), in October 2025. For the first time since the conflicts in the 1990s, the Minister of Culture participated as a panellist on such a topic, opening up a perspective that the Government could take some groundbreaking steps towards official memorialization initiatives concerning the victims of the crimes from 1990s from the non-majority ethnic group. The HRA also produced an [expert opinion](#) on certain legal dilemmas in war crimes proceedings and conducted a public opinion survey on the attitudes of voters and political parties towards war crimes and transitional justice (the results and analysis expected to be shared in 2026).

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), in a project on mapping victims' memories and promoting victim-centered approach to memorialising the past, organized a one-day empowerment workshop for 10 families of war crimes victims in Bijelo Polje, in November, developing their skills for public advocacy to strengthen their socio-economic position, improve engagement with institutions, and promote memorialization initiatives. Within the same project, YIHR brought Montenegrin activists to learn from Croatia's practices in documenting war crimes and implementing reparations, and organized a training for journalists and young researchers on the use of the ICTY and IRMCT archives in promoting victim-centred narratives and discourse about the past.

Serbia

International Aid Network (IAN) from Belgrade, provided support, including psychological, medical, and accompaniment to and from trials, to six witnesses in war crimes trials in Sarajevo. Medical assistance was provided to 24 beneficiaries and psychological assistance to 142 beneficiaries, including group and individual psychological support sessions held in Bratunac and Višegrad. The grantee also conducted capacity-development and self-help training for 49 survivors, improving, i.a., their capacities for fundraising, managing and administering projects. The IAN produced a guidebook, to be printed and distributed in 2026, to familiarize future witnesses with war crimes proceedings in Serbia and BiH, explain victims' and witnesses' rights and obligations and offer practical advice on how to prepare psychologically for testifying.

Output 4: Grassroots actors better equipped to raise public awareness and foster mutual understanding through fact-based dialogue about crimes committed during the conflicts in the 1990s on the territory of the former Yugoslavia

Outcome 2

Output 4: Grassroots actors better equipped to raise public awareness and foster mutual understanding through fact-based dialogue about crimes committed during the conflicts in the 1990s on the territory of the former Yugoslavia

Output indicators	Targets	Progress against targets
4.1. # of initiatives related to the 1990s conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, led by civil	Baseline: 4.1: 0	Reporting period (2025): 4.1: 24 new CSO initiatives supported by grants ¹²

¹² CSO projects selected and supported in the 2nd cycle (July 2025, and the Kochani call in N.Macedonia (Activity 4.3).

society organisations and supported by the action 4.2. # of people participating in reconciliation events related to the 1990s conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia 4.3 # of people reached through information materials/ campaigns prepared or promoted by the action and disseminated through social and mainstream media 4.4. # of civil society and media representatives participating in public awareness raising events supported by the action.	4.2: 0 4.3: 0 4.4: 0 <u>2026 target:</u> 4.1: 30 initiatives 4.2: 300 people participating in reconciliation events 4.3: 120,000 people reached 4.4: 130 media and civil society representatives reached	4.2: at least 2,975 individuals, mainly students and young professionals, participated in the grant-supported events (public awareness raising and skill/knowledge development workshops, etc.) 4.3: at least 2,97 million people reached through the grant-supported actions 4.4: app. 566 media and civil society representatives participated in the grant-supported actions <u>Cumulative total (since 2023)</u> 4.1: 51 CSO initiatives supported by grants ¹³ 4.2: at least 4,975 individuals, mainly students and young professionals, participated in the grant-supported events (public awareness raising and skill/knowledge development workshops, etc.) 4.3: at least 4,8 million people reached through the grant-supported actions 4.4: at least. 1,160 media and civil society representatives participated in the grant-supported actions, 23 journalists trained by UNDP
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All end targets for Output 4 have been reached and exceeded — some by a significant margin. This includes both the number of people reached through social and traditional media by project-supported CSO initiatives and the number of individuals who directly participated in confidence building, educational, awareness-raising, and dialogue activities, many of which engaged youth. These strong results stem from the higher-than-planned number of CSO projects selected for support, driven by the substantial interest from civil society and the quality and impact of the proposed initiatives. The results will be even higher by the end of 2026, as several activities under these initiatives are still ongoing.

In the areas of public awareness-raising, interethnic dialogue, education, and youth engagement, there is no upper limit to the number of people who should be reached or involved. In fact, higher participation enhances the overall impact on reconciliation and social cohesion. These achievements will also inform planning for Phase 2, including setting more ambitious targets. This is particularly relevant given the potential for deeper and more active partnerships with CSOs, which, similar to the victim support interventions under Output 3, have demonstrated strong capacity for mobilisation, innovation, and delivery of impactful results.

The project continued to implement a dual strategy aimed at raising public awareness and fostering cross- and inter-community dialogues as central to advancing reconciliation, building confidence, and promoting social cohesion. The first track involves UNDP's direct engagement with stakeholders and actors throughout society, organizing or supporting activities that strategically advocate for transitional justice and confidence-building mechanisms and/or drive systemic changes in public discourse about the past and reconciliation, particularly within the realms of education and research, at both local and regional levels. The second track focuses on empowering local CSOs by providing support through sub-granting, which will be further detailed below.

1) Advocacy, awareness raising, and education: capacity development and direct support

¹³ LVG projects from the 1st and 2nd cycle that were implemented, completed or started by January 2026.

A major step in institutionalising and making transitional justice education sustainable and a part of public education and schooling has been taken in Kosovo. As of October, the project started providing expertise to the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation to develop and pilot educational materials and methodological tools, and to adapt some of the existing ones, for promoting transitional justice in pre-university education; this will include, i.a, a set of guidelines and materials for school teachers. The educational materials and tools are expected to be completed by the end of 2026 and piloted and applied in elementary and high schools in Kosovo.

Commemorating Srebrenica and Promoting Transitional Justice

The project significantly contributed to commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, and to national, regional, and global dialogues surrounding the event. Beyond honoring the victims, this commemoration served as a platform—[supported by the Srebrenica genocide survivors' community](#)—to foster a culture of remembrance and promote transitional justice and peacebuilding, particularly among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the wider region.



11: Exhibition Mother's Scarf by PCRC, in Sarajevo City Hall, during the week of Commemoration of the 30 years since genocide in Srebrenica, Sarajevo, BiH, July 2025

During the central week of commemoration, beginning July 6, 2025, the project supported and participated in several events in Sarajevo. In partnership with the Association 'Pravnik' and the Mechanism, [two lectures were held](#) at the Sarajevo Mechanism's Information Center. Distinguished speakers included Judge Graciela Gatti Santana, President of the Mechanism, and Serge Brammertz, Chief Prosecutor of the Mechanism. This rare opportunity enabled 30 young legal professionals from diverse communities in BiH to engage with the Mechanism's leadership, reflect on its legacy, learn about its institutional development, and understand the challenges it faces. The sessions also aimed to inspire young legal professionals, especially women, to contribute to transitional justice and combat impunity within their communities and institutions, and to encourage careers in both domestic and international transitional justice. Additionally, the project supported the Post Conflict Research Center (PCRC) in organizing the Srebrenica Youth School, which brought together 40 young participants from 20 countries—half from the Western Balkans. Participants engaged in discussions with peers and experts, including project staff, covering topics such as transitional justice, dealing with the past, memorialization, peacebuilding, and genocide prevention. The Youth School included a visit to the Srebrenica Memorial and participation in the central commemoration. Many attendees will continue their involvement in transitional justice through PCRC internships.



12: Serge Brammertz, Chief Prosecutor of the IRMCT, held a lecture at a training co-organized with the Association Pravnik, Sarajevo, BiH, July 2025

In November, the project assisted the Association of Victims of War Crimes and Genocide and the Movement of the Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa in organizing an [international conference focused on addressing Srebrenica genocide denial](#) and promoting truth and reconciliation. The conference attracted nearly 150 participants, including youth, civil society representatives, victims' associations, judiciary, government institutions, and international organizations. The event featured thematic panels on the ICTY legacy, genocide denial, victim testimonies, memorialization, and transitional justice education. High-level speakers included members of the BiH Presidency, principals from the International Residual Mechanism, the Head of the EU Delegation, as well as ambassadors and mission heads from the UN, OSCE, UK. Informal gatherings with youth promoted intergenerational dialogue. By providing space for victims, institutions, and youth to engage, the conference enhanced trust, promoted truth and justice, and advanced confidence-building in a divided post-conflict society. The conference concluded with recommendations to BiH institutions and several UN Member States, calling for prioritization of war crimes and genocide prosecutions, continued support for the Mechanism's operation under UN authority, preservation of the ICTY legacy, strengthened mechanisms to counter denial, and implementation of UN-mandated education on war crimes, particularly the Srebrenica genocide.



13: Munira Subašić, President of the Movement of the Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa, opening the International conference focused on Srebrenica genocide denial, Sarajevo, BiH, November 2025

Regional Forums and Engagement with Historians

The project, together with other donors, supported the XVII annual Forum for Transitional Justice in the post-Yugoslav space, held in Zagreb, Croatia, from December 13-14. Organized by the RECOM Coalition of CSOs, this forum is the largest gathering of transitional justice practitioners, victim community representatives, CSOs, activists, and institutional stakeholders in the Western Balkans. Participants discussed lessons learned and future directions, including the transformational potential of transitional justice, memorialization practices—including the legacies of the ICTY/Mechanism and domestic trials—intergenerational dialogue, overcoming ethnic divides among young people, and the influence of youth political protests on inter-ethnic relations and social cohesion in multiethnic societies.

Historians remain a key target group for the project, recognized for their influence as educators, authors, and public commentators who can shape both current public opinion and future narratives through fact-based research and commentary. Alongside supporting history professors and researchers via sub-granting, the project directly engages historians in activities aimed at long-term capacity development. Notably, support was provided for the [Fourth Belgrade History Education Symposium](#), held October 30-31 in Belgrade. The symposium brought together 68 historians, teachers, diplomats, and civil society representatives from across the region and Europe to discuss how history education can foster understanding, dialogue, and a shared future. Through panels and workshops, participants explored topics such as what students learn about war, peace, and post-conflict realities, the role of civil society in informal youth education, and approaches to researching and teaching contested histories and heritage.

Empowering CSOs and Artistic Advocacy

To strengthen the advocacy role and capacity of local CSOs and activists, UNDP organized a briefing and [policy dialogue](#) on accountability, confidence-building, and reconciliation in the Western Balkans, in Brussels on April 7-8. It brought together CSO representatives from BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, and desk officers and other representatives of the European Commission and other EU institutions who cover enlargement, rule of law, and other related issues.



14: Policy dialogue: Transitional Justice and Reconciliation in the WB, Brussels, Belgium, April 2025

One of the key insights from the project's earlier phase and first sub-granting cycle is that art and artistic works serve as powerful mediums for advancing reconciliation, social cohesion, and survivor-based narratives about the past, while raising public awareness and promoting accountability for past crimes. Building on this, the project continued to support the performance and targeted touring of plays produced under previous grants, aiming to leverage their impact and create strong empathetic reactions necessary for public awareness and reconciliation. Support was provided for the performance of the theater play "MY LAND: What Young People Think About Patriotism," produced by the Serbian grantee E8, in Skopje, North Macedonia in June, and the documentary theater play "Death in Dubrovnik," an award-winning production by the 2024/2025 Montenegrin grantee, in Belgrade in November as part of the Reflektor Theater Festival.



15: Theatre play "My land" by Center E8, Belgrade, Serbia, 2024

2) Grants for CSOs for awareness-raising and dialogue

a) Overview of the second cycle of low-value grants (LVGs)

The UNDP offices in [BiH](#), [Kosovo](#), [Montenegro](#), [North Macedonia](#), and [Serbia](#) initiated a public call for applications for the second cycle of low-value grants (LVG) aimed at promoting public awareness and fostering dialogue about the past and reconciliation. The application period extended from January to March. Under this call, a remarkable 214 eligible applications were received - a significant increase compared to the first cycle in 2023, which had 67 applications. This surge reflects the growing interest and demand among civil society organizations (CSOs) for engagement in transitional justice, reconciliation, and dialogue, but also the fact that, in the meantime, more CSOs learned of the project and the UNDP-EU partnership.

Following a thorough selection process led by the UNDP grant selection committees in each country and endorsed by the Regional Grant Selection Committee and the Project Board (with EU representation), 24 CSO projects were chosen, totaling 768,770 EUR in funding. The distribution of selected projects was as follows: 5 for BiH, 3 for Kosovo, 2 for Montenegro, and 7 for Serbia¹⁴ (noting that no LVGs were awarded in Serbia for the victim support call). In North Macedonia, 2 projects were initially selected, and in July, the Project Board and the EU approved a portion of LVG funds for a new [public call targeting CSOs in the municipality of Kochani](#). This specific call aimed to support community healing, trust-building, and youth empowerment following the tragic nightclub fire in March 2025 and its impact on local social cohesion. The selection process for Kochani concluded in January 2026, awarding 5 local projects a total of 46,075 EUR, thus bringing North Macedonia's grant total for this output to 7 projects.

The selected CSO projects span a diverse range of activities, including artistic activism, cultural engagement, educational programs for youth and future leaders on transitional justice, youth engagement, promoting women's roles in peace- and confidence-building, cross-ethnic dialogue, community initiatives for trust-building, history teaching and research, and combating misinformation.

¹⁴ Besides this number, one LVG project in Serbia, by the Belgrade Open School, received through the same public call and selected by the same procedure, received the financing from the UK's supplementary contribution.

Projects from the Kochani call focus on community healing, commemoration initiatives, and psychosocial support for affected families.

LVG agreements with selected applicants were signed in July 2025 and, for Kochani, in January 2026. Implementation began in August-September for most projects and in January 2026 for those in Kochani.

In addition to the new grants launched in September-October 2025, 13 grants from the first 2023 LVG cycle were implemented or completed during 2025

The project team, including grant officers, conducted regular monitoring of grant implementation. Activities included coordination among grantees, field visits, guidance on financial and operational management, reporting, communication, and visibility.

b) Notable results and activities in 2025

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Human Rights Center in Mostar conducted a survey across 8 public universities in BiH and 3 in the region to assess the inclusion of transitional justice (TJ) in their curricula. Of 206 faculties and programs, TJ was mentioned in just 6 courses, with none dedicated specifically to the subject. The survey provides a foundation for advocacy to integrate TJ more fully into academic programs. Progress was made when two public universities in Mostar committed to introducing TJ in their curricula, with the University 'Džemal Bijedić' officially adopting a TJ course syllabus for several faculties. The accreditation of a TJ course at the University of Mostar is expected in early 2026. This represents a significant step toward behavioral change in higher education, offering essential learning opportunities for young people to address conflict legacies and strengthen social cohesion.

CSO grantee Lara from Bijeljina organized Women's Peace Camps for 100 young women from diverse communities, promoting gender-inclusive narratives in peacebuilding. Lara also developed a curriculum—"Women's Approach to Peacebuilding", and implemented local activities that fostered reconciliation and diversity, including bazaars and cultural exhibitions, engaging over 200 participants, with women as key actors, and theatre plays on ecology as a peacebuilding tool.

The Balkans Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) BiH developed and launched an [online database of missing children](#) (available in the local languages and English), offering a centralized resource for families, researchers, and the public. BIRN also produced seven investigative articles and videos exploring individual cases and featuring, i.a., testimonials from family members of the missing children, analyzing the institutional responses and systemic challenges, advocating for resolution of missing children cases. Their reports have been widely disseminated by the media and CSOs throughout the region.¹⁵



16: Exhibition following the premiere of theatre play *Rode*, Tuzla, BiH, February 2026

¹⁵ Since January 2025, BIRN has published its [4th](#) story, with a [video](#) (and an example of [a BiH media following up](#) on the story is also available), followed by the [5th](#), [6th](#), and [7th](#) story.

Kosovo

In the multiethnic community of Mitrovica North, 52 activists, volunteers and community leaders (39 women and 23 men) from Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities participated in two [Community Dialogue Forums](#) organized by *Alternative Dispute Resolution Center (ADRC)*. They explored reimagining public spaces as platforms for social cohesion, trust, and inclusive engagement, explored how culture and sports can serve as practical bridges between communities, and discussed local needs and opportunities for joint initiatives. The ADRC also organized [Youth as Peer Mediators Camp](#) in Rugove/Rugova community, where 15 youth leaders (10 women and 5 men) of different ethnic backgrounds learned about mediation, conflict resolution, and dialogue facilitation, and to apply these skills in real community settings through inclusive mini projects.

DOKUFEST and Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo held three [workshops for 49 high school teachers](#) (34 women and 15 men) from 16 Kosovo municipalities exploring innovative approaches for teaching and integrating transitional justice into the school curricula, including the use of digital resources that will soon be accessible through the Teachers' Digital Library. Through these CSOs initiative, [DokuTalks](#), participants from across the Western Balkans had a dialogue, i.e. how film can serve as a powerful tool for addressing the past and shaping collective memory.

In Pristina, 18 future young activists and leaders (11 women and 7 men) were educated through [Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding seminar](#), organized by the Pristina Institute for Political Studies.



17: Community Dialogue Forums organized by Alternative Dispute Resolution Center (ADRC), Pristina, Kosovo, 2025

Montenegro

Center for Civic Education (CCE) organized three transitional justice schools for youth (in [April](#), [October](#) and [November](#)), combining theoretical and interactive sessions with field visits to the sites of crimes and remembrance. The CCE presented a [public opinion research](#) showing divided perceptions and weak institutional response in the country regarding the conflicts in the region. They also organized the hosting of a [theatre play from Kosovo](#) in the Montenegrin National Theatre.

The historiographical academic article [The Attack on Dubrovnik: Through the Pens of Three Historians](#), authored by history researchers from Croatia (Tvrтко Jakovina), Serbia (Dragan Popović), and Montenegro (Miloš Vukanović) was published by the Human Rights Action (HRA), which also organized a panel discussion on the anniversary of the Siege of Dubrovnik (5 December), and promoted a book containing witness testimonies.

The HRA continued to engage audiences through [the play Death in Dubrovnik](#), premiered in Podgorica in June 2024. This HRA's production received [multiple awards](#), including Best Play and Best Dramaturgy at the 35th Marulić Days theatre festival in Split, Croatia, and three jury awards at the FIAT Festival in Podgorica for Best Young Actor, Best Female Role, and Best Male Role. In September, the play *Death in Dubrovnik* was performed in Skopje as part of the European theatre showcase Under 600, marking its first performance in North Macedonia, with full attendance and very positive feedback.



18: Theatre play *Death in Dubrovnik* by Prazan Prostor, Podgorica, Montenegro, 2024

Serbia

[The theatre play](#) 'MY LAND: What Young People Think About Patriotism', produced by Center E8 and its partners with a group of students as actors, which premiered in 2024 in Belgrade, went on its regional tour in 2025, visiting Sarajevo, Mostar, and Banja Luka in BiH, Zagreb, and Pristina, reaching over 1300 people in the audience. A documentary about the play's development was also produced. Under a new grant, E8 developed a follow up project to continue working with the 15 young people gathered within the first project who will change their role from actors to youth leaders and educators with the task of recruiting five new peer groups, each with 10 participants; with mentoring, expert and production support, they will work on the creation and realization of small-format creative productions related to the promotion of peace and transitional justice. In November, in Belgrade, E8 also organized Reflektor Theatre Festival of socially engaged theatre, featuring authors and plays from theatres and cities across the region focused on post-conflict societies and peace.



19: Theatre play *My Land* by Center E8, Belgrade, Serbia, 2024

A groundbreaking initiative of developing cooperation between historians from Serbia and Kosovo through the publication and promotion of academic articles was a part of the *Civic Initiative's* grant, which also organized a TJ school for young social scientists in Serbia, including study visits to Srebrenica and Kosovo, and published a collection of works of young researchers "Sources and Actors - new studies of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s" (available in [Serbian](#) and [English](#)). In addition, in cooperation with teachers from three high schools, [teaching materials](#) - specific lesson plans on dealing with the past, reconciliation, and TJ, as well as on broader topics of nonviolence and civic activism, were developed and are made available to all who teach the Civic Education course in elementary and high schools in Serbia.

Europolis promoted a new victim-centred approach to memorialising the wartime suffering of the populations during the 1990s through narratives and art workshops and produced 22 video stories (available [here](#) and [here](#)) and two publications dedicated to memorialising the destinies of two ethnic communities during the 1990s - Serbs in Croatia and Croats in Serbia.



20: Exhibition *Memories in Pictures* by Europolis, Belgrade, Serbia, February 2025

Belgrade International Law Circle developed and published three packages of tools and materials for working on the topic of sexual violence in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, for three target groups: [CSOs](#), [university lecturers and researchers](#), and [students and activists](#).

Six seminars/workshops, approved by the Ministry of Education, were organized by *Euroclio* for 122 primary and secondary school teachers of history, civic education, sociology and humanities on how to teach about the conflicts from the 1990s in accordance with the judicially established facts. In addition, 37 [history teachers were trained on teaching sensitive topics](#).

Other CSO grantees' activities and accomplishments during the reporting period in Serbia included [digital and creative TJ activism](#), focusing on the role of women (by '*Jelena Šantić*' Foundation), research on violence culture and glorification of war criminals (*Crocodile*), regional peacebuilding school for 17 young participants from Serbia, Croatia and BiH and Women's Politics of Peace" seminar (*Youth Center CK13*), a permanent exhibition "Labyrinth of the 1990s" in Belgrade, with over 2200 visitors since September (*Culture Front*), and detecting and countering mis/disinformation about war crimes, including [fact-checking of public statements](#) (*Humanitarian Law Center*).

Section 5: Cross-Cutting Integration

Human and Social Context:

- **Leave No One Behind**

The project adopts a victim-centered approach, addressing the needs of war crimes victims and survivors while enhancing their rights and well-being, particularly through Output 3. Victims and survivors are recognized as right-holders and as a vulnerable group within each post-conflict society in the Western Balkans. While they share many common challenges and problems, each community also faces unique issues within their own jurisdictions. Some activities, such as advocating for and drafting a missing persons law in Serbia, specifically target the rights of certain groups of survivors — namely, families of individuals who disappeared during the conflicts. These efforts seek to improve the status of this category, which has so far been excluded from reparations legislation in Serbia, despite their ongoing struggles with the consequences of the conflict in daily life.

Potential to improve the rights and status of the individual survivors, or their families and communities, has been one of the criteria for selection of grant recipients under Output 3.

Victims and survivors are also seen as potential agents of change in the region. Activities under Output 4, focused on raising public awareness, empower these communities to become actively involved in advocacy, activism, and the pursuit of their own rights as well as the rights of others.

- **Human Rights**

Upholding and promoting human rights are cornerstone principles of this project. All activities are grounded in a human-rights-based approach, ensuring alignment with international human rights standards. The project seeks to deliver outcomes that uphold and improve the human rights of beneficiaries, with a particular focus on vulnerable or previously deprived groups. These include victims of war crimes, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) crimes, missing persons, including victims of enforced disappearance, and their families.

Project activities and the development interventions through this project were designed and implemented to safeguard the human rights of beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Careful consideration was given to ensure that no actions negatively impact the rights guaranteed to these groups. Central to the project's interventions are the right to truth, access to justice, and equality before the law.

The interventions are designed to support efficient and effective domestic handling of war crimes with a victim-centered, human rights-based approach. These efforts directly address and embody fundamental human rights, such as the right to a fair trial, legal remedy, compensation or reparation for unlawful harm, equal access to justice, non-discrimination, and the right to truth. By working through institutional structures and mechanisms — including prosecutors' offices, courts, and the civil sector — the project strengthens institutional and non-state capacities for accountability and protection of human rights. This contributes to the consolidation of the rule of law and the establishment of human rights-based legal orders and societies across the region.

Actions aimed at improving regional legal frameworks are key to advancing the human rights-based approach. For instance, the War Crimes Strategy in Montenegro and the Transitional Justice Strategy in Kosovo are designed to embody and promote international human rights standards. They focus on victims of international crimes and gross human rights violations, the right to truth, access to justice, various forms of reparations, and equality before the law. The draft law on missing persons in Serbia includes a set of victims' rights, which are also reflected in victim support protocols between the prosecution offices of Montenegro, Serbia, and BiH.

Sub-grants for victim and witness support facilitate the implementation of CSO-led projects that enhance the rights and interests of war crimes survivors and their families. These projects ensure access to justice and reparations, uphold the right to truth, provide protection from secondary victimization and traumatization, and safeguard other human rights. Additionally, they improve the visibility of individual victims and victim groups, empowering them to advocate for and seek their rights.

- **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

Gender equality and the empowerment of women have been central themes throughout the project's design and implementation. By integrating a gender perspective from the outset, the project has ensured that activities are responsive to the needs and experiences of women, particularly those affected by conflict, and that gender equality is promoted and women are empowered within the context of transitional justice and victim support.

Women and men were equally represented in the activities such as conferences, workshops, training, organized by the project team: 395 (50,77%) male and 383 (49,23%) female participants. Based on the gender disaggregated data received from the grantees, women make over two third of direct beneficiaries of the CSOs initiatives for providing direct support to victims and survivors and capacity development to victim support professionals (70,4% women and 29,6% men) and over a half of the direct beneficiaries or participants in the CSO-implemented initiatives (under Output 4) for reconciliation, dialogue and strengthening of social cohesion (54,6% female, 45,4% male).

A gender analysis of transitional justice mechanisms was conducted in the project's inception phase. This analysis informed both the overall implementation and the planning of specific activities, ensuring a gender-sensitive and -informed approach across the project. Key recommendations from this analysis contributed to guiding the inclusion of gender perspectives in capacity development initiatives, particularly with beneficiary institutions. Special emphasis was placed on cases of CRSV and the strengthening of gender-informed services and reparations for the survivors.

Capacity development activities, especially those related to the processing of CRSV cases and supporting victims, adopted a holistic approach. Training initiatives incorporated gender-sensitive practices and promoted greater awareness among justice professionals and other stakeholders. Efforts were made to address the stigma faced by CRSV victims and their families, inform survivors of their rights, and foster gender sensitivity within public awareness campaigns.

Partnerships with grantees and other CSOs were grounded in the promotion of a gender transformative agenda. These collaborations ensured that gender equality and women's empowerment remained among foundational elements in many of their activities, particularly in supporting CSO projects that targeted the needs of women survivors of war, with a focus on both psychosocial and economic empowerment.

An additional needs assessment conducted during the inception phase focused on institutional capacities in victim support. The findings informed project activities under Output 3, with a particular focus on gender-responsive justice for women victims and survivors of armed conflict. Efforts were directed at improving legal and institutional frameworks, policies, and practices to better serve women affected by conflict.

Several activities were designed specifically to empower women, especially those who are victims of war. Notably, CSO projects in BiH and Kosovo delivered a range of psychosocial support services and promoted the economic empowerment of women survivors of CRSV. Special attention was given to women victims and witnesses, particularly those who had suffered sexual violence, through initiatives to enhance regional cooperation among victim and witness support services and their training programmes.

A gender-responsive approach and the empowerment of women victims of war were embedded as conditions for sub-granting in the area of victim support. Across the first and second sub-granting cycles, a total of 19 grants were awarded to initiatives meeting these criteria. These grants supported projects that provided support and services to individual survivors, empowered them economically and with the development of advocacy and other skills, raised awareness, delivered transitional justice workshops for youth, and focused on CRSV crimes, highlighting the rights of women as survivors and victims.

Young women have remained well represented among students and young professionals targeted by educational and awareness-raising activities implemented by the Project Team and the grantees. These initiatives aim to cultivate a new generation of opinion leaders, transitional justice activists, and advocates for reconciliation, further embedding the values of gender equality and women's empowerment within society.

IV. Partnerships and Sustainability

Partnerships

The project team and UNDP have continued to engage in coordination and experience sharing meetings with other organisations involved in transitional justice and promotion of the rule of law and human rights, including the OSCE missions to BiH and to Serbia, ICMP, ICRC, as well as embassies, bilateral and multilateral donors, and regional and international think-tanks.

Special and frequent communication and coordination were maintained with the **Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) of the IRMCT** and with **the IRMCT's Information Programme for Affected Communities**, particularly regarding the implementation of activities funded from the same EU source. The OTP was a key partner in preparing and facilitating the regional prosecutors' conference in Brijuni,

as well as in organizing working visits of prosecutors from the region to the IRMCT (as described in more detail in the activities section above). Regular cooperation and communication also included a youth workshop with the two Principals of the Mechanism during the Srebrenica Genocide commemoration week (mentioned earlier in this report under Output 4); joint coordination and brainstorming meetings, especially related to aligning Output 4 activities with their programme; mutual use of staff as lecturers; and continuous information exchange to ensure a coordinated approach between UNDP and the IRMCT in relation to CSO grantees whose projects address the legacy of the ICTY/IRMCT and make use of their resources (database, expertise, etc.).

The project has a history of cooperation with the **ICMP**, particularly in organizing training and coordination meetings on the issue of missing persons in BiH. In the reporting period, UNDP and ICMP jointly supported a regional meeting of designated national institutions for missing persons (the ICMP-facilitated Missing Persons Group), which took place in June in Sarajevo. Based on the project Addendum signed in December, ICMP is planned to become UNDP's partner to implement new Output 5, added through the project revision, in the next three years; the discussions are still ongoing between UNDP, ICMP, and the EU on how to operationalize such a partnership arrangement.

Close and regular coordination has been maintained with the **EU**, both as the donor and as a key development partner. Periodic progress briefings were held with the European Commission's DG ENEST focal points, alongside direct communication between the Regional Project Manager and the focal points. These interactions ensured that the EU was consistently informed about project implementation, including any challenges encountered. In addition, periodic meetings took place between UNDP offices, project team members, and EU Delegations in each of the five Beneficiary jurisdictions, facilitating information sharing about project plans, implementation, and complementarity with other EU-supported interventions and policies related to transitional justice and associated fields. A policy dialogue was also organized in Brussels, bringing together ten CSOs from the region and representatives of the EU (as reported under Output 4). Furthermore, the Regional Project Manager contributed as a panellist at an international conference in Kyiv, organized by the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine, to discuss the application of transitional justice mechanisms in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Some of the activities implemented in the reporting period were partly co-financed by the **United Kingdom's** regional supplementary contribution to UNDP - "Strengthening transitional processes in the Western Balkans" in the amount of 200,000 GBP for the period 1 April 2025-31 March 2026. Such complementary funding, as well as some other ad-hoc partnerships when **donors of partner CSOs** also co-financed certain events (such as larger regional conferences gathering diverse groups of participants, e.g., those marking the Srebrenica anniversary, or the regional REKOM forum), created opportunities for the Project to use its resources for a broader range of activities.

Internal coordination activities were conducted across **various UNDP offices**, units, and projects at both the regional and international levels. These efforts aimed to facilitate the exchange of best practices and enhance synergies, including periodic briefings for other UN agencies and entities.

At the **national level, the Boards of Partners** have served as a crucial mechanism for maintaining partnerships and coordination, ensuring that the project's strategic direction and implementation remain aligned with the needs and policies of key beneficiaries. The Boards are comprised of representatives from major stakeholders in each of the five Beneficiaries. Meetings of the Boards were organized once or twice annually in each respective Beneficiary, with the respective EU delegations always invited to participate.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a core principle underlying the project's approach to strengthening accountability, transitional justice, and the protection of human rights. By working through institutional mechanisms, such as prosecutors' offices and court systems, and alongside civil society actors, the project seeks to establish lasting institutional capacities and resilient systems. This dual focus not only enhances state institutions but also empowers non-state actors, contributing to ongoing efforts to address the legacy of past conflicts, bolster social cohesion, and support the rule of law.

A significant advancement toward sustainable training was achieved through the development of an e-learning module embedded within the Serbian Judicial Academy's platform. This curriculum, the first of its kind in the region for war crimes trials, includes written materials and over nine hours of video lectures. The content is tailored to regional terminology and context, culminating in a certification test. Legal

professionals throughout the region with proficiency in Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, or Montenegrin have free access to this resource, ensuring its longevity and broad impact in the fields of international humanitarian and criminal law.

UNDP-facilitated regional meetings of prosecutors have transitioned toward greater national ownership, with prosecution offices increasingly taking responsibility for the platform. This shift reduces reliance on external facilitation and fosters a sustainable, institutionalized structure for cross-border cooperation in war crimes cases. As legal and practical barriers are addressed through this platform, mutual cooperation in criminal matters becomes more resilient and self-sustaining, reinforcing the sustainability of regional collaboration.

The sub-granting programs for victim support and public awareness were designed with sustainability in mind. The grant selection process prioritized long-term capacity building impacts, particularly for grassroots organizations and victims' associations. The programs have strengthened small CSOs through training, mentoring, and operational improvements, enabling these organizations to become more resilient and autonomous in planning, fundraising, and advocacy. This capacity building supports the ongoing engagement and effectiveness of local organizations in their communities.

Efforts to raise public awareness and promote fact-based dialogue focus on empowering groups with the potential for wider influence, such as journalists, youth activists, victims' community leaders, and students. The selection of many grant-supported initiatives in this area intentionally sought a catalytic effect, to inspire future civil society interventions and promote sustainability through art, advocacy, and community engagement that promote accountability and foster confidence building and stronger social cohesion within the region.

V. Update on challenges, risks, and mitigation measures

Challenges

The project operates in complex and sensitive social and political environments across the region, marked by conflicting narratives and interpretations of the recent past, which pose ongoing challenges in its implementation. This includes trust deficits among the institutional actors from different Beneficiaries.

The challenges are overcome by context-sensitive and adaptive planning and implementation, building and maintaining communication with the beneficiaries, strengthening local ownership, and identifying and expanding commonalities among them as a pretext for regional collaboration and experience and knowledge sharing.

Focusing efforts at the technical level and encouraging cross-boundary collaboration among the institutions to address concrete challenges helps incrementally overcome the trust deficit. Identifying and discussing shared concerns among Beneficiaries, as well as highlighting points from each jurisdiction's experiences that may benefit others, have also been valuable. Facilitating ongoing mutual communication and cooperation beyond formal meetings, and organizing regional events in a status-neutral manner, create an inclusive atmosphere respectful of institutional identity and ownership. Additionally, regional and bilateral activities provide opportunities for informal communication and bonding, helping to build bridges, expand common ground, and lay the foundation for ongoing institutional collaboration.

Scheduling and timing of activities and events, especially those involving a larger number of different stakeholders and institutions, have been a continuous operational challenge due, i.e., to the changing professional schedules of the practitioners, courts and case schedules, and often urgent matters that many of our direct beneficiaries had to attend to. That may result in the postponement of activities or inadequate participant attendance. To address this, the project team relies on timely long- to mid-term planning, particularly for regional events, anticipates likely free dates, initially plans for a larger number of participants at events such as trainings or workshops, and maintains flexibility to reschedule activities, including shifting them from one year to the next, as effective mitigation measures.

Risks

Besides the explanation of risks and mitigation measures in the section below, the updated risk log is provided in Appendix 2 to this report.

Risk 1: Political contexts in the Western Balkans

The primary risks impacting the project are closely tied to the broader political context in the Western Balkans, as well as the complex bilateral and multilateral institutional and societal relationships that remain strained due to, i.e., unresolved legacies from the conflicts of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia. In 2025, political rhetoric — particularly verbal exchanges between officials from different states and jurisdictions — has become increasingly antagonistic. This heightened tension threatens to widen the gaps between communities and societies, challenging efforts to overcome historical divisions.

Such political developments have the potential to stall regional judicial cooperation, disrupt regional cooperation events, and hinder other activities. There is also a risk that institutions from all five countries and territories where the project operates may not be represented in key initiatives, or that political actors and the broader public may react negatively toward actions aimed at promoting accountability, reconciliation, and regional cooperation. These circumstances can delay or halt the development of crucial legislation and policies needed for progress. Nonetheless, the core objective of the project is to actively engage with and address these unresolved legacies, focusing especially on the conflicting narratives about the past, gaps in accountability, the transmission of collective trauma, and the lack of social cohesion and mutual confidence within and between communities across the region. As such, the project is designed to integrate conflict- and context-sensitivity into its regular planning and operational processes, with ongoing monitoring and management of associated risks embedded in the work of the project team and management structure.

An ongoing sensitivity and risk for the project involves the **Kosovo – Serbia relations**, as well as developments in the Belgrade – Pristina Brussels talks. The project continues to operate effectively in this environment, managing risk while ensuring that its activities and events remain inclusive — specifically, by securing the participation of institutional representatives from both Kosovo and Serbia. *Risk management and mitigation strategies* include careful selection of event locations and hosting partners, sensitive communication with relevant authorities, strengthening individual professional relationships with institutions, frequent communication with participants during preparation phases, meticulous agenda and invitation letter development, and the use of status-neutral settings for conferences so that all parties can participate comfortably. The status of the risk in 2025: *stable*.

The political landscape in the region is also shaped by **regular or unexpected elections and government reshuffles**. Since the project covers five different countries or jurisdictions, such changes are a constant possibility in at least one of them. For example, new ministerial appointments in Serbia in April 2025 led to the line ministry responsible for the Law on Missing Persons halting progress on a previously completed draft and reopening the drafting process, causing delays in the important, high-impact activity. *The mitigation* includes anticipation of such political moves and changes, adapting the plans and sequence of activities accordingly, and refocusing priorities in a given year. The status of the risk in 2025: *stable*.

Potentially higher-risk situations, such as organizing **regional or other events around sensitive anniversaries**, are assessed in advance and, if necessary, temporarily avoided in certain geographical areas. *To mitigate this risk*, the project team anticipates possible implications of such events, employs adaptive planning and implementation, which may include rescheduling events and activities, changing venues, and thoughtfully selecting topics and speakers in consideration of the specific local and regional context and timing. The status of the risk in 2025: *stable*.

Political protests in Serbia, ongoing since November 2024, added another layer of risk, requiring increased sensitivity, particularly when working with local civil society organizations (CSOs), including those partnering as grantees. In this environment, the project's sensitive topics and engagement with CSOs, some of which openly support the protests, can be perceived as particularly delicate, introducing reputational risks for the project. The government may also respond adversely to activities involving certain CSO partners and grantees. In response, the project team implements risk management and mitigation measures more frequently than usual, guided by the principle of maintaining UNDP's neutrality and impartiality while upholding organizational values. *Mitigation measures* include close monitoring and guidance for the grantees (including communication guidance), adaptive management of communication and visibility, clear instructions to grantees to separate their political or activist activities from project-

related transitional justice work, coordination with UNDP Country Office teams and management and joint risk assessments and mitigation. The status of the risk in 2025: *increasing*.

Because of the increased antagonistic rhetoric and dynamic political developments in one of the Beneficiaries, the status of the risk in 2025 for “Political contexts in the Western Balkans” is: *increasing*.

The risks have been regularly monitored, addressed and mitigated, so that the overall project delivery and fulfilment of the goals are not jeopardised.

Risk 2: Lack of sufficient interest, willingness, or capacity of local actors to participate in the project

The potential for insufficient interest or capacity among local partners is a low-likelihood but high-impact risk. It has not materialized to date, and no mitigation measures have been necessary. Across all five jurisdictions, both national and local beneficiaries and partners remain committed to cooperation with UNDP and the EU and have consistently welcomed project activities. This ongoing commitment extends to both public institutions and civil society organizations. All proposals or requests for collaboration from the project team were met with positive responses

The project team’s main approach to *prevention or mitigation* of this risk is the careful and inclusive planning of activities, informed by a deep understanding of regional, national, and micro contexts and based on thorough assessments of local stakeholders’ and beneficiaries’ needs. The prevention and mitigation measures include regular and close communication with beneficiaries and partners, promoting and supporting local (co)ownership, updating needs assessments, and adaptive planning. The status of the risk in 2025: *decreasing*.

Looking ahead, the team will continue to cultivate and sustain partnerships with relevant institutions and stakeholders, raise awareness about the project, build trust, and promote local ownership of project results. These efforts have already proven key to securing local buy-in and ensuring smooth project implementation.

VI. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Strengthening trust among authorities

Overcoming the trust deficit between judicial, prosecutorial, and governmental authorities across the region, particularly among some Beneficiaries, has proven to be an incremental learning process. Several approaches have shown effectiveness in fostering participation and addressing contentious issues. These include focusing communication efforts at the technical level and encouraging cross-boundary collaboration to address concrete challenges. Identifying and discussing shared concerns among Beneficiaries, as well as highlighting points from each jurisdiction’s experiences that may benefit others, have also been valuable. Facilitating ongoing mutual communication and cooperation beyond formal meetings, and organizing regional events in a status-neutral manner — avoiding references to specific countries, territories, institutions, or symbols — create an inclusive atmosphere respectful of institutional identity and ownership. Additionally, regional and bilateral activities provide opportunities for informal communication and bonding, helping to build bridges, expand common ground, and lay the foundation for ongoing institutional collaboration.

Adaptive capacity development

The capacity development needs of Beneficiary institutions, particularly in terms of training, evolve over time and are often influenced by the specific challenges faced in particular cases or files. Changes in institutional leadership and priorities can further impact these needs. Consequently, project plans and training designs, initially based on the Project Document and inception phase needs assessments, must be adapted quickly to remain relevant. This flexibility ensures the project continues to address the real needs of beneficiaries and maintains their full cooperation.

Leveraging regional or local momentum for systemic change

The regional nature of the project enables a strategic shift in focus and resources toward institutions and partners where positive political and institutional momentum exists. For example, Montenegro's progress in EU accession and the government's commitment to closing negotiation clusters and chapters have accelerated justice reforms in this country, including improvements to policy, legal, and institutional frameworks for war-crimes prosecution, the search for missing persons, and victim support.

Demand for education and dialogue

There is a pronounced demand, particularly among younger generations, for more information, educational content, and opportunities related to transitional justice and confidence-building mechanisms, as well as fact-based analysis of the recent past. This demand extends to inter-community dialogue across ethnic lines and has influenced the selection of CSO projects for sub-granting. Future planning will consider additional ways to engage beyond the sub-granting scheme, especially with CSOs and stakeholders focused on young professionals, students, and academics, in the planned Phase II of the project.

Innovative approaches to dialogue and confidence-building

The project has embraced a more adaptive approach when partnering with civil society actors who offer novel methods for promoting dialogue and confidence- and peace-building. Artistic expression, in particular, has been recognized as a means to address sensitive issues in ways perceived as less confrontational and more emotional, and less political and more personal. Strengthening cohesion around common community challenges through art forms has also proven effective.

Joint (regional) training sessions

Joint training sessions involving participants from two or more jurisdictions in the region can multiply the benefits of such activities. These sessions not only enhance knowledge, skills, and capacities but also foster cross-border and regional cooperation. For example, joint training for BiH and Serbian victim support professionals, and working visits by BiH PO's prosecutors to the Mechanism, have improved skills, facilitated practical case and evidence transfers, and strengthened regional collaboration. Organizing joint training sessions is considered whenever feasible and appropriate, depending on the topic and participant profiles.

Multilateral regional meetings: value and efficiency

Multilateral regional meetings, especially those involving high-level institutional representatives, are resource-intensive due to participant numbers and logistics. However, they provide unique opportunities for stakeholders from diverse Beneficiary jurisdictions to engage, discuss cooperation, address contentious issues, and reach agreements - both formal and informal. These meetings can substitute for multiple bilateral or trilateral meetings, offering financial savings and programmatic benefits. High-level or technical regional meetings are organized when feasible and when they add value, with smaller meetings remaining an option as needed.

Addressing beneficiaries' professional burnout

Professional burnout among those involved in war-crimes investigations and trials, the search for missing persons, and victim support is a significant challenge, contributing to staff attrition and undermining institutional capacity to fulfill mandates. Targeted interventions, particularly peer-to-peer support and knowledge-sharing, are increasingly recognized by beneficiary institutions as essential and highly valued.

Lessons from grant implementation

There is a strong demand among CSOs for support from international organizations because most governments in the region are less interested in inclusive, multi-perspective approaches to dealing with the past based on judicially established facts. Despite decreasing donor support in recent years, the demand—especially from young generations—for educational content and opportunities focused on transitional justice, confidence-building mechanisms, and inter-community dialogue across ethnic lines remains high.

Grantees have introduced innovative approaches that combine art and culture with peace-building and reconciliation, demonstrating strong potential for broad societal impact. Many shared challenges across the region and within societies—such as environmental preservation, local community issues, the roles of women and youth, and mutual interests in art—can serve as new points for building mutual confidence. Expanding and supporting the use of social media platforms across the region is also recommended.

Cross-border CSO projects have proven successful and show great potential for multiplying effects across several countries and communities, beyond the lead grantee's jurisdiction. Data collected through grantee activities provides valuable insights into interethnic relations in various communities, offering a foundation for future interventions.

VII. Financial Summary

A detailed financial report for 2025 is provided in Appendix 3, enclosed as a separate document.

The costs incurred in 2025 amounted to EUR 2,114,959.19, bringing the total expenditure since the beginning of the project to EUR 5,780,226.24.

Several implemented activities were financed from multiple outputs and corresponding budget lines, which is accurately reflected in the enclosed annual financial report. As noted in the previous report, many implemented and planned activities serve multiple purposes and therefore draw financial resources from more than one activity budget line, and often from more than one output as well. For example, regional meetings of prosecutors, other judicial practitioners, or victim support officers generate multiple programmatic benefits and fully justify drawing costs from several budget lines, such as budget line 1.5 ("Regional peer-to-peer knowledge and experience sharing..."), 1.3 ("Knowledge transfer..."), as well as 2.1 and 2.2, which cover various types of regional meetings for cross-boundary operational cooperation. If the event relates to victim support, costs may also be allocated to Activity Lines 3.2 to 3.4.

Some of the activities implemented in the reporting period were partly co-financed by the UK's regional supplementary contribution to UNDP ("Strengthening transitional processes in the Western Balkans" in the amount of 200,000 GBP for the period 1 April 2025-31 March 2026). There were also activities, such as larger regional conferences that gathered diverse groups of participants (e.g., those marking the Srebrenica anniversary, the regional REKOM forum), that were co-financed by other development partners (donors of the CSOs organising the events). Such complementary funding or ad-hoc partnerships created opportunities for the Project to use its resources for a broader range of activities.

The total value of disbursements committed to grants selected in the second sub-granting cycle is 1,176,558 EUR, exceeding the original budget of 1 million EUR set at the beginning of the project for this cycle. This increase, justified by the quality and assessed impact of the project and high civil society demand for sub-granting, was approved by the EU and the Project Board in July. As the increase did not exceed the 20% flexibility margin per budget heading that the Project Board vested in the Regional Project Manager, a formal budget revision was not required. Approximately 50% of the LVGs' value will be disbursed to grantees in 2026 and will be reflected in the annual financial report for that year.

The spending in 2025 was higher than in the first two years, as the dynamics and number of activities were higher, since this was the peak project year, and instalments for the grants were disbursed throughout the year, both for the new grants and those from the previous cycle carried out in 2025. External economic factor (the rise in accommodation and travel prices) also contributed to the higher spending rate.

Two budget revisions were made in 2025, both of which were well documented, justified, and approved by the EU and the Project Board.

The first revision, in November, involved reallocating 41,200 EUR from two activities—Activity 4.1 "Regional public opinion survey" and Activity 4.2 "Developing communication strategies with counterparts." These activities were dependent on various circumstances and the needs of beneficiaries, making their implementation unlikely. The funds were reassigned to a newly created activity and budget line, 1.2.b: "Provision of expert and technical support to line ministries and other institutions for improving technical capacities for war crimes investigations and the search for missing persons." This reallocation was approved in response to an urgent and unforeseen request from the Serbian Government and the EU Delegation to Serbia for support in excavating a potential mass grave in southwest Serbia. The Project Board approved the decision during a virtual meeting held via email exchange from November 17 to 19.

The relocated funds were used for the rental of excavation equipment and were fully expended by the end of December.

The second, more substantial budget and project revision - including amendments to the Project Document and an extension of the project timeline, was agreed upon with the EU and approved by the Project Board on 2 December 2025, and an addendum to the Contribution Agreement was signed with the EU. This revision established a new Output 5 (“Strengthening regional cooperation in the missing persons processes, including through the regional Missing Persons Group and the coordination of the families, supporting the stakeholders' active dialogue and engagement in the process locally, regionally and internationally, and informing the public”, for which the EU asked UNDP to engage the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) as the implementor). With the revision, 1.1 million EUR was allocated for activities under Output 5 t. With the same revision, 0.4 million EUR was allocated for Project activities across the other outputs and budget lines. The project was extended until 2028, with an understanding that activities in 2027-28 would focus exclusively on Output 5. As a result, the overall Project budget increased to 8.5 million EUR. Addendum no 2 to the Contribution Agreement IPAlII/2022/437-134 between UNDP and the EU was signed on 23 December 2025, incorporating these revisions and the additional funding of 1.5 million EUR was received on January 26, 2026, becoming immediately operational. Preparations for signing a responsible party agreement with the ICMP for implementing Output 5 — including completion of UNDP’s mandatory HACT (Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers) assessment as a precondition for the agreement — are underway and being discussed among UNDP, ICMP, and the EU at the time of this report’s submission.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Progress Review: detailed matrix of outputs and results

Appendix 2: Updated Risk Log

Appendix 3: Financial report for 2025

Appendix 4: Annual Work Plan (AWP) for 2026

Appendix 5: Budget for 2026

I. Appendices

Appendix 1: Progress Review: detailed matrix of outputs and results

Output 1	Indicators	Baseline	End target (31 Dec 2026)	Progress / Milestone
Judicial authorities in the region are better equipped to handle war crimes Budget (for the project): 739,919.06 EUR Expenditure to date: 579,824.83 EUR	# of judges, prosecutors, police investigators, court staff, attorneys, and professionals from other relevant institutions trained on war crimes case processing	0	500	In 2025: 281 Cumulative (since the project started in 2023): 512
Output 2	Indicators	Baseline	End target (31 Dec 2026)	Progress / Milestone
Improved conditions for regional cooperation in war crimes proceedings Budget: 462,267.10 EUR Expenditure to date: 358,603.59 EUR	# of documented regional cooperation actions in handling war crimes	0	80 regional cooperation actions	2025: at least 32 regional cooperation actions ¹⁶ Cumulative (since 2023): at least 85 actions
	# judges, prosecutors, attorneys, other relevant justice and law enforcement officials participating in regional peer-to-peer meetings related to cross-border co-operation in war crimes handling supported by the action	0	170 individuals participated in regional cooperation	2025: 75 individuals ¹⁷ Cumulative (since 2023): 260 individuals

¹⁶ The number includes transfers of cases, transfers of evidence, mutual requests for cross-border legal assistance, agreed bilateral protocols, and other instances of cross-border/regional cooperation in war crimes proceedings among the five participating jurisdictions, chiefly among BiH, Serbia, Montenegro; cooperation of the participating jurisdictions (Action's Beneficiaries) with Croatia for cases processed by their justice authorities also count. The data is based on the monitoring by the project team and information received in the communication with the partner local judicial institutions and the Mechanism; full and official data on mutual requests and other forms of regional co-operation are not available yet or cannot be available if related to the investigation phase.

¹⁷ The number includes prosecutors, police investigators, judges and other officials, including designated institutions for search for missing persons, participating in the regional multilateral meetings and conferences, organized under the project, including peer-to-peer meetings under Output 1 (Activity 1.5), and in bilateral operational meetings (based on information obtained from the prosecution offices and other institutions or evidenced by the project team's participation in such bilateral meetings

	level of regional cooperation between prosecution offices improves	Low/Medium	Medium/High	2025: Medium towards High Cumulative: Medium towards High
Output 3	Indicators	Baseline	End target (31 Dec 2026)	Progress / Milestone
Increased delivery of gender-responsive support services to victims and witnesses of war crimes and stronger capacity of relevant actors Budget: 2,049,239.30 EUR Expenditure to date: 1,621,014.17 EUR	# of sub-grants of the action successfully implemented by civil society partners	0	40 sub-grants	2025: 9 new grants implemented ¹⁸ Cumulative (since 2023): 23 grants implemented (1 st and 2 nd cycle) ¹⁹
	# of individuals especially women victims of conflict related sexual and gender-based violence) benefitting from sub-grants and activities to improve access to justice and services	0	400 individuals benefiting	2025: at least 542 individual victims reached out and benefited from the sub-grants ²⁰ Cumulative: at least 2542 individual victims reached out and benefited from the sub-grants
	# of victim and witness support officers trained on techniques of interacting with sensitive victims and cross-border co-operation	0	200 victim and witness support officers trained	2025: 169 victim support officers trained; 89 support providers (healthcare and psychosocial support professionals, CSO activists, volunteers) trained by the grantees Cumulative: 284 victim support officers trained; 539 support providers (healthcare and psychosocial support professionals, CSO activists, volunteers) trained
Output 4	Indicators	Baseline	End target (31 Dec 2026)	Progress / target
Grassroots actors better equipped to raise public awareness and foster mutual understanding	# of initiatives related to the 1990s conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, led by civil society organisations and	0	30 initiatives	2025: 24 new CSO initiatives supported by grants ²¹ Cumulative (since 2023): 51 CSO initiatives

¹⁸ The number of CSO projects selected and awarded with LVGs, under Activity 3.7, in the 2nd sub-granting cycle (July 2025).

¹⁹ Includes grants completed or started by the end of 2025.

²⁰ Based on the reports from the CSO grantees available in January 2026,; includes figures from the LVG projects implemented, completed, or started in 2025.

²¹ CSO projects selected and supported by LVGs in the 2nd cycle (July 2025, and the Kochani call in N.Macedonia (Activity 4.3).

through fact-based dialogues about crimes committed during the 1990s conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia Budget: 2,733,340.94 EUR Expenditure to date: 2,205,050.99 EUR	supported by the action			supported by grants ²²
	# of people participating in reconciliation events related to the 1990s conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia	0	300 people participating in reconciliation events	2025: at least 2,975 individuals, mainly students and young professionals, participated in the grant-supported events (public awareness raising and skill/knowledge development workshops, etc.) Cumulative: at least 4,975 individuals, mainly students and young professionals, participated
	# of people reached through information materials/ campaigns prepared or promoted by the action and disseminated through social and mainstream media	0	120,000 people reached	2025: at least 2,97 million people reached through the grant-supported actions Cumulative: at least 4,8 million people reached
	# of civil society and media representatives participating in public awareness raising events supported by the action	0	130 media and civil society representatives reached	2025: app. at least 566 media and civil society representatives participated in the grant-supported actions; 10 journalists trained by UNDP Cumulative: app. at least 1,160 media and civil society representatives participated; 23 journalists trained by UNDP

22 LVG projects from the 1st and 2nd cycle that were implemented, completed or started by January 2026.

Appendix 2: Updated Risk Log

#	Description	Date Identified	Type	Impact & Probability	Counter-measures / Mngt response	Owner	Last Update	Status
1	Political contexts across the W. Balkans, esp. Kosovo-Serbia relations, developments related to the recent past causing enhanced sensitivities; divisive ethnocentric narratives; frequent elections; political developments, including antigovernmental protests (Serbia)	continuous risk	Political Operational	Not all the Beneficiaries are participating; regional judicial cooperation negatively affected; cancelled or delayed activities; legislative and policy frameworks not adopted; adverse public environment in parts of the region; reputational damage for UNDP and the donor. In Serbia, the political developments, including antigovernmental protests, might lead to the government's adverse reactions to activities implemented by or involving CSOs and grantees (some of whom are also vocal about supporting the protests) or to the project or UNDP's role; reputational damage vis-a-vis government as well as civil society Probability on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high) P = 4 (Serbia); P=3 (rest of the region) Impact on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high) I = 4	Constant risk and context monitoring and assessment; context- sensitive planning and implementation of activities (incl. agenda drafting and selection of participants, location, and timing); reassessments and adaptive implementation; frequent communication with partners and beneficiaries promoting inclusivity; continuous communication with institutions; status neutrality; demonstrating neutrality; accelerated work with national partners before or after elections Re: the risk in Serbia: more frequent risk monitoring, management, and mitigation; monitoring and guiding LVG implementation (incl. giving adaptive communication guidance, managing UNDP's and donor's visibility, insisting on impartiality and integrity of LVG project activities, and separating them from political issues	Regional Project Manager with the Project Team	end of the reporting period	increasing

2	Lack of sufficient interest, willingness, or capacity of local actors to participate in the project	continuous risk	Operational Organizational	Canceled or delayed activities; insufficient reach/attendance; low absorption capacity of direct beneficiaries; results not sustainable Probability on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high) P = 2 Impact on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high) I = 4	Regular and close communication with beneficiaries and partners; promoting and supporting local (co)ownership; updating needs assessments; adaptive planning	Regional Project Manager with the Project Team	end of the reporting period	reducing
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