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United Nations Development Programme in Serbia

INCEPTION REPORT

Green cities transformation – smart, sustainable and low-carbon urban solutions in triangular metropolitan area

April 2026

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1.0	**Project Identification Form**
Project title	**Green cities transformation – smart, sustainable and low-carbon urban solutions in triangular metropolitan area**
Project location	Belgrade, Serbia
Project duration	15 December 2025 – 15 December 2030
Project PIMS+ ID **Project GEF ID**	9584
Quantum Award ID **Quantum Project ID**	1377278 SRB_GEF_ASL_01000473 01000473
Value (total budget)	Total Budget administrated by UNDP USD 7,165,603 Grand-Total Project Financing USD 139,385,235
Funding	Global Environmental Facility (GEF)
Implementation Modality	Assist to National Implementation Modality (NIM)
Main partners and beneficiaries	Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia
Responsible parties	
Expected Outcome(s)/ Indicator(s):	Outcome 1: Integrated and participatory cross-sectoral green city planning methods, mechanisms and practices effectively applied for the development of the triangular metropolitan area Outcome 2: New innovative and sustainable green city investments implemented with reported results Outcome 3: Comprehensive analysis, reporting and sharing of the project results and lessons learnt nationally and internationally
Expected Output(s)/Indicator(s) :	● Sustainable digital data management systems in place and key sectoral data (land use, mobility, biodiversity, buildings, energy, emissions, waste) systematically collected and used for integrated, cross-sectoral and participatory green urban development plan(s) in the triangular metropolitan area. ● Serbian Sustainable Cities Platform (SSCP) developed and tested. ● Developed and launched challenge call for pilot investments into sustainable and smart city communal infrastructure and services in three cities. ● Developed and launched challenge call for pilot investments into maintenance of natural capital, improvement of ecosystem services and nature-based solutions. ● At least 15 projects identified and implemented, out of which at least 5 women led entrepreneurship. ● Public outreach and capacity building conducted, and knowledge management materials produced
Status of the project at the time of reporting	Inception phase

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1.1 Introduction

Development Challenge

Despite ongoing rural-to-urban migration, the total urban population in Serbia has decreased to 1990 levels, apart from Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Novi Pazar. Lack of qualified workforce as well as global energy, security and economic crisis affected also the development pathways of Serbian urban agglomerations. Serbian cities and local self-governments (LSGs) continue to face several interconnected development challenges that affect their attractiveness for sustainable economic activity, employment, and overall productivity. These include insufficient access to services and infrastructure; environmental pressures such as air pollution and waste management; urban planning and governance systems affecting urban sprawl and increasing risks associated with disasters and climate change, including extreme heat events, droughts, and floods.

While Serbia has made significant progress at national level by adopting new laws, regulations, programmes, and targets to advance sustainable green city development, the local self-governments are lagging behind in translating. these advances into integrated local-level actions. Key reasons for this gap are lack of local administrative capacities and complex multilayer planning system, including both policy and available budget. This complexity, combined with LSGs' capacity constraints and lack of financing, prevent effective local actions and implementation of policy priorities.

The most significant urban and industrial area in Serbia is the triangular metropolitan area formed by the cities of Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin, collectively representing a population of 2.16 million people — approximately 32% of Serbia's total population. Zrenjanin is the largest municipality in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, with an area of 1,326 km². The triangular metropolitan area encompasses some of Serbia's most prominent natural reserves, including the wetlands of Carska Bara and Okanj Bara (designated as Ramsar sites), the national park Fruška Gora situated between Belgrade and Novi Sad, and 45 protected natural assets within the Belgrade region.

All three cities face comparable urban sustainability challenges: elevated air pollution, uncomplete waste and wastewater management systems, high levels of urbanization, insufficient green areas, growing traffic congestion and increasing vulnerability to heat waves and extreme precipitation. In response, all three cities have committed to reducing pollution and greening their infrastructure through voluntary participation in the Covenant of Mayors and the Green Cities initiative. However, these plans are constrained by the high costs of meeting the EU acquis requirements already transposed into Serbian legislation, continued urban expansion and years of deferred infrastructure maintenance.

The financial constrains as well as lack of integrated, inclusive, and cross-sectoral approaches to green city development slow down fundamental green transformation of the three cities. Only by effectively removing these barriers the three cities will achieve comprehensive urban transformation and integrated city planning required to address the climate and sustainability challenges. This, for example, refers to a coordinated approach to the existing and planned investments, such as investments of the Ministry of Environmental Protection into waste management and green infrastructure (worth USD 39 million), investment of the Provincial Secretariat for Urban Planning into infrastructure in the City of Zrenjanin (worth USD 1 million) and investments into national environmental infrastructure which will also support local level actions (worth USD 5 billion).

Serbia is still preparing financial mechanisms that will also support innovative, integrative solutions that simultaneously address communal service improvement, infrastructure development, and the preservation of natural capital and ecosystem restoration, including in in the triangular metropolitan area. While participatory approaches involving citizens, women, and marginalized groups are procedurally set, the local administration lacks full capacities to ensure comprehensive stakeholder engagement in urban planning and investment decision-making.

This project has been designed precisely to address the above structural gaps by introducing integrated metropolitan planning instruments, innovative investment mechanisms, and cross-sector governance tools that can convert national climate policy commitments into measurable urban transformation outcomes in Serbia's most important metropolitan growth corridor.

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2.0 Background of the project

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Serbia supports the Government of Serbia in complying with international conventions and European Union regulations on climate change, adaptation and mitigation, emission reduction, and the promotion of low-emission and climate-resilient development. Within its Environment and Climate Change Portfolio, UNDP Serbia assists the Government in enhancing national capacities for climate change policy development, UNFCCC reporting, and the mobilization of climate finance.

UNDP Serbia, acting as GEF Implementing Agency, is supporting the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia in implementing the project “Green Cities Transformation – Smart, Sustainable and Low-Carbon Urban Solutions in Triangular Metropolitan Area”, financed under the GEF8 Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme (SCIP). This is Serbia's first project under any GEF Integrated Programme, and represents a milestone in Serbia's engagement with the Global Environment Facility.

The project builds directly on the results and lessons learned from two predecessor GEF supported projects in Serbia, the “Climate Smart Urban Development” (CSUD) project and the Circular Economy (CE) project “Reducing Community Carbon Footprint by a Circular Economy Approach in the Republic of Serbia” (2021–2025). Both projects successfully developed and tested the innovation challenge call approach, performance-based grant mechanisms, and multi-stakeholder engagement models that have now been embedded as core methodological instruments in the design of this project. Through these projects, with UNDP assistance, the Government of Serbia managed to mobilize over USD 25 million in private sector green investments contributing to decarbonization, circular economy transition, and environmental depollution.

The GEF8 SCIP, of which this project is a child project, is a global initiative led by the World Bank as lead agency, bringing together countries from across the world in a coordinated effort to address the environmental and social challenges caused by rapid urbanization. Through the SCIP framework, Serbia's project is connected to a global network of cities and countries implementing comparable urban transformation interventions, enabling knowledge exchange, joint learning, and sharing of good practices across the participating country portfolio.

The project was formally launched at the Inception Workshop held on 2 April 2026 at the Palace of Serbia in Belgrade. The workshop brought together representatives of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the three participating cities (Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin), UNDP Serbia, Xueman Wang of the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC) at the World Bank, and national institutional stakeholders, including representative of the Ministry of public administration and local self-governments. The workshop formally initiated the project implementation phase and established the foundation for the preparation of this Inception Report.

3.0 Review of the project design

This project is aligned with the GEF8 (SCIP) and is structured under three interrelated components and corresponding outcomes and outputs. The project development objective and immediate objective, as defined in the approved Project Document, remain unchanged following the Inception Workshop. No modifications to the project design, results framework, outcomes, outputs, or indicators were proposed or agreed at the Inception Workshop. All elements of the Project Document are confirmed as relevant, well-designed, and appropriate for implementation as planned.

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Project Development Objective: To transform Serbia's triangular metropolitan area, comprising the cities of Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin, into a model of smart, sustainable, low-carbon urban development by integrating green planning, cross-sector governance, and innovative investment solutions that reduce emissions and improve urban resilience.

Project Immediate Objective:

To establish the enabling institutional, planning, and investment framework needed to accelerate green urban transformation in the Belgrade, Novi Sad, Zrenjanin metropolitan area, including integrated planning tools, strengthened capacities, and implementation-ready pilot investments for low-carbon and resilient city development.

This project consists of the following components:

Component 1: Enabling Framework for Municipal Sustainable and Green Strategic Development and Urban Planning

This component establishes the strategic, institutional, and technical foundation required for long-term green urban transformation in Serbia's most important metropolitan growth corridor. It will develop coordinated planning instruments that address the current fragmentation across sectors including land use, transport, energy, waste, water, and climate resilience. It introduces a common metropolitan vision for sustainable urban development that aligns national climate priorities with local implementation realities and strengthens institutional coordination mechanisms and digital tools that improve planning quality, transparency, and data-driven decision-making.

The following outputs will be delivered under Component 1:

- Output 1.1: A roadmap developed with recommendations for streamlining integrated inclusive green urban development into different local sectoral plans and incorporating national policy targets for smart, climate-resilient green city development, including gender aspects.
- Output 1.2: Enhanced capacity of the participating LSGs to transform national regulations, programmes and targets into integrated and inclusive local-level action for green city development, including operationalized systems for digital data collection and management, strengthened human capacities for data management and participatory planning, and streamlined institutional and sectoral coordination.
- Output 1.3: Socio-economic impact and livelihood analysis and a Livelihood Action Plan, with specific focus on vulnerable groups and their gender-specific dimensions potentially affected by suggested policy measures, plans, and investments.
- Output 1.4: An integrated and inclusive green cross-sectoral development plan for the triangular metropolitan area designed.
- Output 1.5: Serbian Sustainable Cities Platform (SSCP) launched to support inter-institutional collaboration, development of local green plans, and financing of innovative green urban and nature-based solutions.
- Output 1.6: Awareness raised and institutional capacities of key national and local stakeholders enhanced to enable knowledge transfer to other medium-sized cities in Serbia and the region.

Component 2: Innovative Green City Investments and Pilot Implementation

This component translates planning into practical implementation by generating and supporting concrete green investments that demonstrate scalable low-carbon urban solutions. It bridges the gap between strategic planning and real-world application by testing innovative models in selected sectors with strong mitigation and replication potential. Through pilot investments, the project demonstrates how integrated green urban solutions can reduce emissions, improve resource efficiency, and generate co-benefits such as improved air quality, enhanced resilience, and increased livability. A core mechanism under this component is the Innovation Challenge Call, an approach already developed

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and tested under the predecessor CSUD and Circular Communities projects, which will be applied to source innovative, community-based investment ideas and business models through performance-based grants and competitive selection.

The design of the Innovation Challenge Calls under this component will not follow a standardized, uniform approach applied identically across all three cities. Instead, the design of each call will be grounded in and directly informed by the outcomes of the bilateral and multi-stakeholders' meetings with Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin conducted during the early implementation phase, and by the comprehensive analysis of existing planning documents and government-approved strategic frameworks carried out under Component 1. This approach ensures that each Challenge Call is genuinely responsive to locally identified needs, institutionally anchored in each city's planning and investment context, and aligned with the political and technical priorities that each municipality has validated through direct engagement with the project team. This preparatory phase is essential to ensure that calls attract high-quality, implementation-ready proposals aligned with the most pressing and strategically significant green and sustainable urban investment needs in each participating city.

Given the scale of the three participating cities, the diversity of sectors requiring investment, and the range of actors, such as public, private, and civil society, who have the potential to propose and implement innovative green solutions, the Challenge Calls under Outputs 2.1 and 2.2 will be published on an annual cycle throughout the project implementation period, with each annual call carrying different sectoral targets, geographic scopes, and eligible applicant categories determined on the basis of the priorities validated through bilateral city meetings and updated planning assessments. This annual rolling approach is deliberately designed to maximize the breadth and strategic focus of the investment portfolio over the project period, allowing the project team to respond adaptively to emerging city needs, absorb lessons from previous call cycles, and progressively refine targeting based on what has worked and what gaps remain.

Following the bilateral meetings with each city, a joint decision on priorities will be made regarding the sequencing and focus of upcoming calls, ensuring that the order in which calls are published reflects each city's readiness, the maturity of available co-financing, and the most urgent investment priorities identified through the planning and assessment processes under Component 1.

The Challenge Call for innovative green communal infrastructure solutions under Output 2.1 will be designed in a flexible and modular format that can take several different forms depending on the priorities and institutional context identified through design process. Possible call typologies include:

- A sector-specific call targeting all three cities simultaneously, for example, a call focused exclusively on waste management innovations, energy efficiency solutions in public buildings, or sustainable urban mobility, inviting proposals from public and private actors across all three cities and enabling cross-city comparison of approaches to a shared challenge.
- A call restricted to public utility companies, targeting communal enterprises responsible for specific urban services such as water supply, district heating, waste collection, or public transport, who are invited to propose operational innovations, technology upgrades, or business model changes that improve the efficiency, environmental performance, and circularity of their services.
- A call for private sector companies targeting a specific problem defined by one or more public utility companies, structured as a Partnership for Innovation procurement model, in which the public utility company identifies a specific technical or operational challenge it cannot resolve through standard procurement, and invites private companies to propose and develop innovative solutions in a collaborative development process. This approach creates a direct demand-driven mechanism for green innovation that links private sector creativity with the operational realities and procurement needs of public communal enterprises.
- A call for women entrepreneurs and women-led enterprises in green communal infrastructure and services, specifically designed to advance gender equality objectives by lowering barriers to participation for women-led businesses and ensuring that the project's investment portfolio includes representation of women-led entrepreneurship.

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The Challenge Call for nature-based solutions and natural capital under Output 2.2 will similarly be structured in a flexible and modular format, capable of being subdivided into thematically focused sub-calls that target specific ecological contexts, intervention types, or applicant groups, in response to the priorities identified through design phase and the baseline ecosystem assessment. Possible sub-call structures include:

- A sub-call for urban green infrastructure, targeting innovative solutions for the design, installation, and management of green roofs, living walls, urban tree planting, pocket parks, green corridors, permeable surfaces, and other green infrastructure elements within the built-up areas of the three cities, contributing to urban heat island reduction, biodiversity enhancement, stormwater management, and improved public space quality.
- A sub-call for nature-based solutions in urban and peri-urban areas, targeting interventions at the urban and peri-urban interface, including wetland restoration, riverbank and floodplain management, urban forest establishment, ecological corridor creation, and sustainable management of urban and peri-urban agricultural and green landscapes that provide ecosystem services to the metropolitan area.
- A sub-call for protected areas and biodiversity conservation, targeting innovative management, restoration, and sustainable use solutions for the protected natural areas within and adjacent to the triangular metropolitan area, including the Ramsar-designated wetlands of Carska Bara and Okanj Bara, the national park Fruška Gora, and the 45 protected natural assets in the Belgrade region, with a focus on mobilizing private and corporate investment in ecosystem restoration and conservation alongside public funding.
- A sub-call specifically targeting women entrepreneurs and women-led organizations, designed to promote and support women's participation in nature-based solutions and ecosystem management, recognizing the specific role that women play as stewards of natural resources and green spaces at the community level, and ensuring that the Challenge Call portfolio reflects gender equality commitments embedded in the project design.

The evaluation criteria for both the urban infrastructure and nature-based solutions calls will be designed to ensure synergy and cross-sectoral co-benefits between the two call streams, assigning higher weights to proposals that demonstrate integrated impacts across both communal infrastructure and natural capital dimensions, for example, nature-based approaches to energy efficiency, circular use of green waste biomass, or wetland restoration contributing to both carbon sequestration and flood protection for urban infrastructure. This integrated evaluation approach directly reinforces the project's commitment to cross-sectoral urban planning and holistic green city development.

The following outputs will be delivered under Component 2:

- Output 2.1: Specific Challenge Call organized to source and support the implementation of innovative, digital, and other types of solutions that provide low-carbon, energy-efficient, and circular economy-based communal infrastructure and services in the three cities.
- Output 2.2: Specific Challenge Call organized to source and support solutions that maintain natural capital and ecosystem services and promote nature-based solutions in the peri-urban triangular metropolitan area.
- Output 2.3: Selected ideas transformed into marketable businesses and products through the provision of technical support and advisory services on financial structuring and de-risking.
- Output 2.4: Pilot investments supported into sustainable and smart city communal infrastructure and services in the three cities through performance-based payments and innovation awards.
- Output 2.5: Pilot investments supported into maintenance of natural capital, improvement of ecosystem services, and nature-based solutions through performance-based payments.
- Output 2.6: A Smart City Information System launched to support management of smart and green urban infrastructure.
- Output 2.7: Monitored and reported results of supported investment projects, including good practice showcasing women's empowerment.
- Output 2.8: Gender-sensitive public outreach conducted to disseminate results and promote replication and scaling up.

Component 3: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

This component ensures that project implementation is continuously monitored, results are measured against agreed indicators, and lessons learned are systematically captured and disseminated. It provides the accountability and

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adaptive management framework necessary to maintain implementation quality and ensure that successful interventions generate broader systemic impact beyond the project period. The component also establishes mechanisms for replication and scaling of proven solutions to other municipalities in Serbia and the region.

The following outputs will be delivered under Component 3:

- Output 3.1: Lessons learned and conditions for further replication of integrated innovative solutions across sectors and on gender distilled and disseminated.
- Output 3.2: Sustainable City Partnership Initiative established and promoted, including organization of international, regional, and national events to promote integrated city planning approaches.

Output 3.3: Capacity built and learning enabled through gender-sensitive exchange of information with the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities, joint training, and site visits.

Monitoring and Evaluation activities will be executed in line with the M&E plan described under Chapter VI – Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan.

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3.1	**Policy and programme context including linkage to other ongoing projects**
Policy and programme context	The project is firmly grounded in Serbia's national climate, environmental, and sustainable development policy framework and directly contributes to the implementation of the country's commitments under international climate agreements, national climate legislation, and strategic green transition priorities. As a Party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, Serbia is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and strengthening climate resilience across all sectors of development. In its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), submitted in 2022, Serbia committed to measurable GHG emission reductions by 2030, creating an urgent need for implementation mechanisms at sectoral and territorial levels - particularly in urban areas, where emissions, infrastructure pressures, and resource consumption are concentrated. Urban areas represent the most critical intervention space for Serbia's low-carbon transition. Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin are among the country's most economically significant and environmentally impactful urban centers, generating high levels of transport emissions, energy demand, land-use pressure, and municipal waste. Despite this, urban planning in Serbia remains fragmented across sectors such as transport, energy, land use, water, waste, and climate adaptation. This project addresses that structural gap by introducing an integrated metropolitan planning and investment framework that connects these systems into a unified green urban transformation model. The project is aligned with the following key national policy and strategic documents: - Law on Climate Change of the Republic of Serbia, which establishes the legal basis for climate governance, mitigation and adaptation planning, and national MRV obligations; - Low Carbon Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2023-2030, with projections until 2050, which defines Serbia's long-term decarbonization pathways; - Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), which sets national priorities for energy transition and climate neutrality; - Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2023-2030, adopted in 2023, which defines Serbia's adaptation priorities and resilience framework; - Circular Economy Development Programme 2026–2030 with Action Plan, adopted in 2026, which establishes the framework for the transition from linear to circular economic models across key sectors; - Serbian Urban Development Strategy until 2030 defines strategic objectives for sustainable urban development; - National Cleaner Production Strategy and Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods; - Law on Environmental Protection, Law on Waste Management, and the Waste Management Programme for the period 2022–2031; - Spatial Plan of Serbia, Law on Planning and Construction, and Law on Communal Activities. The project also contributes directly to Serbia's EU accession obligations, particularly under Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change), by strengthening integrated urban governance models consistent with EU sustainable city standards. It is explicitly aligned with the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the GEF8 Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme global framework. A key policy rationale behind this project is that Serbia has already established a relatively advanced strategic climate policy framework at national level, but implementation at city level remains underdeveloped. Existing policy documents identify priorities, targets, and measures, yet local governments often lack integrated tools, institutional coordination mechanisms, investment pipelines, and financing models necessary for implementation. This project is designed precisely to bridge that gap, converting

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	national climate policy commitments into operational urban planning instruments and investment-ready solutions. In that sense, the project serves as a strategic implementation platform that translates Serbia's climate ambitions into measurable urban transformation outcomes in the country's most important metropolitan growth corridor. The project contributes to the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land).
Linkage to other ongoing projects	This project shall be implemented in strong coordination with following ongoing and recently completed projec to ensure transparency, complementarity and the avoidance of duplication.: **Complementary Projects:** **Project:** "Advancing Medium and Long-Term Adaptation Planning in the Republic of Serbia" – Phase II (2025 – 2027) The second phase of Serbia's National Adaptation Plan (NAP) shifts from planning to implementation, building on Phase I's groundwork of vulnerability assessments and policy development. Phase II focuses on executing the 2024–2026 NAP Action Plan and developing the next one (2027–2029), while introducing key systems and tools for long-term adaptation. This includes establishing a national monitoring and evaluation framework, a legal bylaw for adaptation reporting, and methodologies for tracking climate-induced losses and damages. Unlike the first phase, this proposal integrates climate adaptation into public budgeting through climate-sensitive planning and green expenditure tracking, and it introduces new mechanisms to engage the private sector, including incentives and co-financing schemes. It also supports the preparation of investment-ready adaptation concept notes and develops sector-specific tools for agriculture, biodiversity, and disaster risk management. In all its planned activities, the project also applies a strong gender lens by ensuring inclusive stakeholder engagement, targets for women's participation and decision-making and using gender-sensitive data in all its stages. Overall, the project strengthens institutional coordination, expands financing capacity, and creates the foundation for sustained, system-wide adaptation action in Serbia. The outputs of this project, particularly the upgrading of the Digital Climate Atlas and the institutional capacity assessments, provide directly applicable evidence and tools that this Green Cities project will build upon, particularly in the context of integrated cross-sectoral urban planning and digital data management under Components 1 and 3. **Project:** "Reducing Community Carbon Footprint by a Circular Economy Approach in 2021-2025" (2022 – 2027)) This GEF funded project implemented by the Ministry of Environmental Protection with UNDP support, aimed to reduce community carbon footprint through a circular economy approach, with a direct GHG emission reduction target of 95 $ktCO_2eq$, an indirect target of 1,638 $ktCO_2eq$, at least five circular economy pilot and demonstration projects with a total investment value of over USD 14.15 million. Until now the project has over achieved these targets. The Circular Communities project served as the direct predecessor and proof-of-concept for the innovation challenge call approach, performance-based payment mechanisms, and participatory private sector engagement models that are now embedded as core methodological instruments in this GEF8 project. Lessons learned from the Circular Communities project have directly informed the design of the Challenge Call mechanisms under Component 2. **Project:** "EU for Green Agenda in Serbia" (2022 – 2026, Phase III 2026 – 2029) This EU funded Project contributes to the efficient, inclusive, and sustainable implementation of the Green Agenda in Serbia and supports alignment with the European *acquis* and with the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The project consists of five pillars, including decarbonization, clean energy, sustainable transportation, circular economy, biodiversity, air quality and rural development. The GEF8 project will coordinate closely with this initiative to avoid duplication of efforts in the areas of energy

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	efficiency, sustainable transport, and industrial decarbonization, circular economy and biodiversity, while building on its results in the three participating cities.

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3.2	**Project Purpose/Objectives**
Objectives to be achieved	The overall objective of the project is to support the transformation of the Belgrade, Novi Sad and Zrenjanin triangular metropolitan areas into a model of smart, sustainable, and low-carbon urban development through integrated planning, cross-sector governance, and innovative green investments. The project is designed to create systemic change in the way urban development is planned, financed, and implemented in Serbia by introducing coordinated metropolitan-scale approaches that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve resource efficiency, and strengthen urban resilience. More specifically, the project seeks to establish an enabling institutional and planning framework that allows national and local authorities to move from fragmented sector-based urban management toward integrated green urban governance. This includes strengthening cooperation among ministries, local self-governments, public utilities, private sector actors, and development partners to jointly design and implement sustainable urban solutions. A core objective of the project is to develop integrated urban planning tools for the three participating cities that connect climate mitigation, adaptation, mobility, land use, energy, waste, water, and infrastructure planning into a unified metropolitan framework, creating a replicable model for climate-responsive urban planning that can be scaled to other cities in Serbia. The project also aims to generate a pipeline of green investments ready for implementation by identifying, designing, and supporting innovative pilot projects in priority sectors such as low-carbon mobility, energy-efficient infrastructure, circular resource systems, nature-based solutions, and smart city technologies. Another important objective is to strengthen institutional capacities at both national and local levels for integrated green city planning, project preparation, and implementation, improving technical knowledge, planning methodologies, data systems, and digital tools necessary for evidence-based urban decision-making. In addition, the project seeks to establish financing and partnership mechanisms that can attract public and private investment into sustainable urban development, thereby increasing Serbia's capacity to scale green city interventions beyond the project lifetime. Finally, the project aims to create long-term impact through knowledge management, replication, and dissemination of lessons learned by documenting successful approaches and creating mechanisms for knowledge transfer that support broader policy uptake and replication in Serbia and the region. By connecting Serbia's project to the global GEF Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme network, the project will facilitate access to international knowledge, good practices, and peer learning from comparable urban transformation experiences in other countries.
3.3	**Outcomes and Activities**
Outcome 1	**Integrated and Participatory Cross-Sectoral Green City Planning Methods, Mechanisms and Practices Effectively Applied for the Development of the Triangular Metropolitan Area**
	This outcome focuses on creating the strategic, institutional, and technical foundation required for long-term green urban transformation in Serbia's most important metropolitan growth corridor. The project will support the development of coordinated planning instruments that overcome the current

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	fragmentation between sectors such as land use, transport, energy, waste, water, and climate resilience. Through this outcome, the project will establish a common metropolitan vision for sustainable urban development that aligns national climate priorities with local implementation realities. The outcome will also strengthen coordination between national ministries, local governments, public institutions, and other stakeholders through participatory planning processes, ensuring that green urban transformation is based on inclusive governance and shared ownership. Special emphasis will be placed on strengthening institutional capacities and introducing modern digital tools that improve planning quality, transparency, and data-driven decision-making.
Expected outputs	The activities and outputs contributing to Outcome 1 of the project will contribute to establishing the strategic, institutional and technical foundation for green urban transformation across triangular metropolitan area, It will deliver six interconnected outputs: • Green Urban Transformation Roadmap that will provide concrete guidance for integrating inclusive, climate-resilient, and gender-responsive green development principles into the sectoral plans of all three cities, drawing on a national policy gap analysis, city-level baseline assessments, and broad stakeholder consultations. • Enhanced Local Government Capacity that will strengthen the technical and institutional capabilities of participating local self-governments to operationalize digital data management systems across key urban sectors, improve participatory planning practices, and prepare bankable green city projects through tailored, city-specific capacity building programmes. • Socio-Economic and Livelihood Analysis and Action Plans that delivers comprehensive socio-economic assessments and city-specific Livelihood Action Plans focused on protecting vulnerable groups, including women and marginalized communities, from adverse impacts of green transition policies, while identifying economic opportunities linked to circular economy and sustainable development. • Integrated Green Cross-Sectoral Metropolitan Development Plan containing proposals and drafting amendments for urban development plans and key sectoral policy documents across the three cities, covering waste management, energy, water supply and wastewater treatment, transport, construction, and green infrastructure, all aligned with national targets and EU accession requirements. • Serbian Sustainable Cities Platform (SSCP) will establish a digital knowledge management and investment platform supporting inter-institutional collaboration, development of local green plans, and mobilization of financing for innovative green urban and nature-based solutions — designed for long-term sustainability through integration with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities. • Awareness Raising and Institutional Capacity for Knowledge Transfer to enhance the understanding and capabilities of national and local stakeholders through workshops, forums, and training programmes, enabling the replication and transfer of the integrated green city development approach to other medium-sized cities across Serbia and the wider region.
Outcome 2	**New Innovative and Sustainable Green City Investments Implemented with Reported Results**
	This outcome translates planning into practical implementation by generating and supporting concrete green investments that demonstrate scalable low-carbon urban solutions. It is designed to bridge the gap between strategic planning and real-world application by testing innovative models in selected sectors that have strong mitigation and replication potential. The Innovation Challenge Call mechanism, building on the approach tested in the previous projects, will be applied to source

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	innovative community-based business initiatives and investment ideas through performance-based grants and competitive selection Through pilot investments, the project will demonstrate how integrated green urban solutions can reduce emissions, improve resource efficiency, and generate co-benefits such as improved air quality, resilience, and livability. These pilots will also serve as proof-of-concept models for future scaling through public budgets, donor finance, and private-sector participation. A major focus of this outcome is mobilizing innovative financing and partnership models capable of attracting additional investment into sustainable urban infrastructure and climate-smart city development.
Expected outputs	Outcome 2 translates planning into practical implementation by sourcing, supporting and monitoring concrete green investments in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Zrenjanin through a proven innovation challenge approach. It delivers interconnected outputs: Finalize design and implementation plan of the Challenge calls, • Challenge Call for Green Communal Infrastructure Innovations organized as a competitive open call to source and co-finance innovative, low-carbon, energy-efficient, and circular economy-based solutions for communal infrastructure and services in the three cities, with specific outreach to women entrepreneurs to advance gender equality in green urban innovation. • Challenge Call for Nature-Based Solutions and Natural Capital organized a parallel competitive call targeting innovative solutions that preserve natural capital, enhance ecosystem services, and promote nature-based solutions in the peri-urban areas of the triangular metropolitan region, with evaluation criteria designed to ensure complementarity and cross-sectoral co-benefits with Output 2.1. • Selection of the projects/project ideas that will receive technical support, • Acceleration and Technical Support for Selected Ideas provided as tailored mentorship, technical advisory services, feasibility study development, financial structuring support, and de-risking assistance to selected applicants, transforming promising ideas into market-ready businesses and investment-ready projects before any co-financing is committed. • Pilot Investments in Smart City Communal Infrastructure will be implemented through performance-based co-financing and innovation awards to the most advanced solutions that have successfully completed the acceleration process, supporting concrete pilot investments in sustainable and smart communal infrastructure and services across the three cities. • Pilot Investments in Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services will be implemented through performance-based co-financing and innovation awards for pilot investments in natural capital maintenance, ecosystem service improvement, and nature-based solutions — running in parallel with Output 2.4 and applying the same rigorous co-financing criteria and monitoring framework. • Smart City Information System will be developed as a specific digital information system that integrates data from key urban infrastructure sectors, including district heating, water supply, waste management, transport, and air quality monitoring, providing city management teams with real-time, actionable insights for green infrastructure decision-making. All activities supported by the Challenge Calls will be closely monitored throughout their implementation and the information gathered and lessons learnt will be analyzed, documented and disseminated. The project team will establishe a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework tracking the results of all supported pilot investments, including gender-disaggregated indicators, supplemented by field visits, The innovations and solutions will be showcased at events, city fairs, media campaigns, webinars, and digital outreach to disseminate results, promote replication of

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	successful solutions among other Serbian municipalities through the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities network, and inspire scaling up of the most impactful green city investments.
Outcome 3	**Comprehensive Analysis, Reporting and Sharing of Project Results and Lessons Learnt Nationally and Internationally**
	This outcome ensures that project implementation is continuously monitored, results are measured against agreed indicators, and lessons learned are systematically captured and disseminated. It provides the accountability and adaptive management framework necessary to maintain implementation quality and ensure that successful interventions generate broader systemic impact. Beyond compliance monitoring, this outcome is critical for turning pilot achievements into national learning assets. The project will generate knowledge products, case studies, methodological tools, and exchange platforms that support replication across Serbia and beyond. It will also strengthen national capacities for evidence-based urban policy development by embedding monitoring and learning into institutional practice. This outcome contributes directly to the sustainability of project impacts by ensuring that knowledge generated through the project remains accessible and usable after project completion.
Expected outputs	Outouts and activities under Outcome 3 will ensure that the knowledge, evidence, and lessons generated through project implementation are systematically captured, presented and disseminated to national and international audiences, creating the conditions for replication, scaling, and long-term sustainability of green city solutions beyond the three pilot cities and beyond the project period. It delivers three interconnected outputs: Developing Knowledge Management Products, including lessons learned reports, replication toolkits, technical and financial guidelines, infographics, dashboards, and short video documentaries to promote replicating potential of successful green infrastructure and nature-based solutions investments in other Serbian cities and municipalities. Gender equality dimensions will be explicitly captured, including good practices from women-led entrepreneurship supported under Component 2, developed in cooperation with the Government Coordination Body for Gender Equality. All knowledge materials will be publicly accessible through the Serbian Sustainable Cities Platform and a dedicated e-training platform, available to any city, institution, enterprise, or individual seeking to learn from Serbia's green urban transformation experience. • Establishing Sustainable City Partnership Initiative as a formal association of cities and municipalities committed to sustainable, resilient, and green urban development. The Initiative will be designed for long-term sustainability, with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities or NALED envisaged as its permanent secretariat, ensuring continuity well beyond the project period. • Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building through the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities that will connects Serbia's project to the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC), the GEF's global knowledge network, enabling participating cities to access the latest international knowledge, technological developments, and best practices from comparable urban transformation programmes worldwide. Joint activities with the GPSC cover geospatial monitoring, integrated urban planning tools, and public-private partnership models for nature-based solutions. • Complementary capacity building activities, including site visits to successful green city projects, gender-sensitive training programmes for urban professionals, workshops for policymakers and planners, An end of the project “lessons learnt” report and recommendations for future work.

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Workplan for the next period

The work plan presented in this section was discussed and endorsed at the Inception Workshop held on 2 April 2026 in Belgrade. No changes were proposed to the workplan structure or content during the Inception Workshop. The workplan reflects the full implementation schedule for the five-year project period (2026–2030) as presented in the Project Document, and is confirmed as appropriate and achievable by all parties. All proposed outputs and indicators have been thoroughly reviewed and are considered highly relevant; no changes have been envisaged in this regard.

Outcomes	Outputs	2026				2027				2028				2029				2030			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Outcome 1	Output 1.1. A roadmap developed with recommendations for streamlining integrated inclusive green urban development into different local sectoral plans and incorporating national policy targets for smart climate resilient green city development, including also gender aspects.																				
	Output 1.2 Enhanced capacity of the participating LSGs to transform national regulations, programs and targets into integrated and inclusive local level action for green city development including, but not limited to: i) operationalized systems for digital data collection and management (land use, mobility, biodiversity, buildings, energy (EMIS), emissions, waste), ii) strengthened human capacities and resources for data management, participatory planning and project preparation; iii) streamlined institutional and sectoral co-ordination and co-operation.																				
	Output 1.3 Socio-economic impact and livelihood analysis and a Livelihood Action Plan with specific focus on vulnerable groups potentially affected by suggested policy measures, plans and investments designed.																				

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Outcomes	Outputs	2026				2027				2028				2029				2030			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	Output 1.4 An integrated and inclusive green cross-sectoral development plan for the triangular metropolitan designed.																				
	Output 1.5 Serbian Sustainable Cities Platform launched to support inter-institutional collaboration, development of local green plans and financing of innovative green urban and nature-based solutions.																				
	Output 1.6. Awareness raised and institutional capacities of the key national and local stakeholders enhanced to enable transfer of knowledge to other medium sized cities in Serbia and region																				
Outcome 2	Output 2.1. Specific Challenge Call organized to source and support the implementation of innovative, digital and other types of solutions that provide low-carbon, energy-efficient and circular economy based communal infrastructure and services in three cities																				
	Output 2.2. Specific Challenge Call organized to source and support solutions that maintain natural capital and ecosystem services and promote nature-based solutions in peri-urban triangular metropolitan area																				
	Output 2.3. Selected ideas transformed into marketable businesses and products through the provision of technical support and advisory services on financial structuring and de-risking																				
	Output 2.4. Pilot investments supported into sustainable and smart city communal																				

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Outcomes	Outputs	2026				2027				2028				2029				2030			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	infrastructure and services in three cities supported through performance-based payments and innovation awards																				
	Output 2.5. Pilot investments supported into maintenance of natural capital, improvement of ecosystem services and nature-based solutions through performance-based payments																				
	Output 2.6. A Smart City Information System launched to support management of smart/green city infrastructure																				
	Output 2.7. Monitored and reported results of the supported investment projects, including good practice showcasing women empowerment																				
	Output 2.8. Gender-sensitive public outreach conducted to disseminate results and promote replication and scaling up, including possible city fairs and other opportunities for presenting and pitching the winning ideas to other cities																				
Outcome 3	Output 3.1. Lessons learned and conditions for further replication of integrated innovative solutions across the sectors and on gender distilled and disseminated.																				
	Output 3.2. Sustainable City Partnership Initiative (association of cities and municipalities with green and sustainable vision) established and promoted, including organization of international, regional and national events to promote integrated city planning approaches.																				

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Outcomes	Outputs	2026				2027				2028				2029				2030			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	Output 3.3 Capacity is built and learning enabled through the gender-sensitive exchange of information with the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities established, joint training and site visits																				

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3.5 Resources and budget

The Total Budget and Work Plan (TBWP) presented in this section was discussed and endorsed during the Inception Workshop. No changes to the budget structure or allocations were proposed or agreed at the Inception Workshop. The budget remains as defined in the approved Project Document. The budget for the year 2025 was not disbursed due to the delayed formal project start and has been fully carried over into the 2026 budget allocation, ensuring that the full GEF grant amount remains available for project implementation.

Annual budget – indicative allocation by year

Component	2026 (USD)	2027 (USD)	2028 (USD)	2029 (USD)	2030 (USD)	Total
Component 1	89,000	308,375	237,385	211,125	152,875	998,760
Component 2	70,401	781,898	2,091,742	2,032,742	556,744	5,533,530
Component 3	35,405	52,502	58,802	60,802	59,302	266,813
Monitoring and Evaluation	13,700	20,200	40,200	23,200	23,200	116,000
Project Management	23,700	27,200	27,200	27,200	27,200	132,500
Total GEF	**232,209**	**1,190,175**	**2,455,329**	**2,336,069**	**851,821**	**7,065,603**
Total UNDP	**20,000**	**20,000**	**20,000**	**20,000**	**20,000**	**100,000**

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3.6 Assumptions and risks

The successful implementation of the project is based on several important assumptions. First, it is assumed that strong political commitment at both national and local levels will be maintained throughout the project period, particularly from the Ministry of Environmental Protection, participating line ministries, and the cities of Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin. Continued institutional engagement is essential for ensuring cross-sector coordination and timely implementation of integrated urban planning and investment activities.

A second key assumption is that participating in municipalities and relevant public institutions will maintain sufficient technical and administrative capacity to actively engage in project activities, adopt new planning tools, and integrate project results into their regular planning and investment processes. The project also assumes that stakeholders across sectors - including public utilities, academia, civil society, and private sector actors, will remain willing to cooperate in participatory planning and pilot implementation processes.

Another important assumption is that Serbia's broader policy framework for climate change, sustainable urban development, and EU Green Agenda alignment will remain stable and supportive, enabling the project to build on existing strategic commitments without major regulatory disruptions. The project also assumes continued engagement and support from the World Bank as lead agency of the GEF-8 Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme, and access to the global knowledge network that the programme provides.

At the same time, several risks may affect project implementation:

- Institutional coordination risk: The project requires cooperation across multiple ministries, municipalities, and sectors, weak inter-institutional coordination could delay decision-making and reduce implementation efficiency. This risk will be mitigated through formal governance mechanisms, regular Project Board meetings, and clearly defined stakeholder responsibilities.
- Capacity risk: Some participating institutions may lack sufficient technical expertise or staffing to absorb and implement complex integrated planning tools. This will be mitigated through targeted capacity-building, technical assistance, and ongoing expert support provided throughout implementation, and trening embedded in activity design.
- Implementation delay risk: Delays in procurement, contracting, approvals, or administrative procedures may affect timelines, especially for pilot investments. To reduce this risk, detailed annual work planning and early procurement preparation will be prioritized, and challenge calls will be designed and launched well in advnace of planned disbursement periods
- Financial and co-financing risk: Delays or shortfalls in co-financing commitments from responsible ministry or participating local self-governments may affect implementation of pilot investments or proposed investments. This risk will be addressed by early partner engagement and phased investment planning and continuous co-financing tracking by PM. A significant share of financing for the planned pilot projects is also expected from the private sector.
- Strategic risk related to political support for suggested measures from the responsible ministry or participating local self-governments: Changes in political leadership or institutional priorities at national or local level could affect commitment to project objectives. This risk is partially mitigated by embedding the project within formal national policy frameworks and legally adopted strategic documents. The Project Board will ensure sustained and continuous institutional commitment.

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- Environmental and social risks: Unforeseen external shocks and extreme weather conditions may increase implementation costs or slow infrastructure delivery. Flexible budgeting and adaptive management mechanisms will be used to respond to such changes. Climate risks and extreme weather conditions will be taken into account in the calculations, in defining the technical specifications for the equipment and in ensuring the proper installation and guarantees from the suppliers. The proposed solutions may generate waste that is harmful to the environment, if not properly managed and disposed. The project will mitigate this risk by having as an obligatory component for all challenges that the proposed solutions need to include an environmental impact assessment.

All identified risks will be continuously monitored through UNDP Quantum risk management procedures and regularly reviewed by the Project Board and project management team. Risk mitigation measures will be updated throughout implementation to ensure timely response and safeguard achievement of project objectives. The Country Office oversight team will provide regular updates on risk status.

3.7	**Management and coordination arrangements**
Institutional arrangement	UNDP is the GEF Agency for this project. The proposed project is consistent with the UNDP's mandate on promoting environmental protection, while recognizing the need to sustainably manage resources through capacity building and encouraging broader multi-sectoral participation of stakeholders. Given UNDP's recognized role in capacity development, the Government of Serbia has requested UNDP's assistance in the design and implementation of this project. The project will be implemented following UNDP's national implementation modality (NIM with UNDP support), according to the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement between UNDP and the Government of Serbia, and the Country Programme. All procurement and financial transactions will be governed by applicable UNDP regulations under NIM. The Implementing Partner for this project is the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MoEP). The Implementing Partner is responsible and accountable for project planning, coordination, management, monitoring and evaluation of project interventions, reporting, oversight the management of project risks, procurement of goods and services, financial management, approving and signing the multiyear workplan, signing the financial report of the funding authorization and certificate of expenditure. The Ministry of Environmental Protection has appointed the National Project Director (NPD) among officials from the Ministry of Environmental Protection at a level that provides enough authority and insight to represent the counterpart's ownership and authority over the project, to assume responsibility for achieving project objectives and ensure accountability to the head of the Implementing Partner and UNDP for the use of project resources and achieving outputs. The Project Board may introduce other Responsible Parties during the project implementation to assist in the implementation of certain project outputs, as well as the recipient of Low-Value PBPs Agreements. UNDP is accountable to the GEF for the implementation of this project. This includes overseeing project execution undertaken by the Implementing Partner to ensure that the project is being carried out in accordance with UNDP and GEF policies and procedures and the standards and provisions outlined in the Delegation of Authority (DOA) letter for this project**.** UNDP is responsible for the Project Assurance function in the project governance structure and presents to the Project Board and attends Project Board meetings as a non-voting member. The Ministry of Environmental Protection has established Project Management Unit comprised of Project Manager and Project Assistant, in order to support the project in achieving its listed outputs and outcomes. The support unit shall secure, manage and facilitate the implementation of the

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	activities, making sure that they are implemented in accordance with applicable Government rules and procedures and support the project implementation otherwise. The three cities will be included as key beneficiaries and proactive project partners. The representatives of the cities will be included in the Project Board. The cities will be included in the design and implementation of all three components, enabling the project to be aligned with their priorities and supporting their sustainable green urban development. Additionally, the project may establish complementary advisory, co-ordination and working group (or groups) including a larger representation of the key public sector entities, CSOs and private sector representatives working on related topics and projects.
Project Management	Project Management Unit (PMU) has been established by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, including Project Manager and Project assistant. The Project Manager is responsible for overall project coordination and implementation, consolidation of work plans and project documentation, preparation of quarterly progress reports, reporting to the project supervisory bodies, coordinating work of the PIU and Innovation Challenge Support Unit and supervising the work of the project experts and project staff. The PIU will also closely coordinate project activities with relevant Government institutions and hold regular consultations with other project stakeholders and partners. The MoEP, serving as the project's IP, has requested UNDP implementation/execution support for certain project sub-components and tasks. Project execution support performed by Innovation Challenge Support Unit will be undertaken by personnel on non-staff contracts specifically hired for the implementation of specific outputs under Outcome 2 of this project and forming the so-called Innovation Challenge Support Unit, which is fully project-based. It will not involve any actions from the category of "programme or operational oversight". It will be limited to preparing TORs, specifications, requests, and arranging for a proper process for all project management activities such as "managing" the Innovation Challenge Calls, acceleration support, issuing and monitoring of Innovation Awards and Low-Value Performance-based payment Agreements as well as preparing documentation for procurement and recruitment processes, as needed. The firewall will be ensured by the fact that the Innovation Challenge Support Unit will report to the Project Manager, engaged by the Implementing Partner, and to the Project Board, while administrative aspects of the contracts of the Unit's project personnel will be managed by the UNDP CO officer who is not, in any way, involved in programme nor operational oversight of the project. The Project Board (PB, also called Project Steering Committee) is the most senior, dedicated oversight body for a project. Two main roles of the project board are high – level oversight of the execution of the project by the Implementing Partner and approval of strategic project execution decisions of the Implementing Partner with a view to assess and manage risks, monitor and ensure the overall achievement of projected results and impacts and ensure long term sustainability of project execution decisions of the Implementing Partner. In order to ensure UNDP's ultimate accountability, Project Board decisions should be made in accordance with standards that ensure management for development results, best value for money, fairness, integrity, transparency and effective international competition. Besides the MoEP, represented by the National Project Director, the Board is expected to include representatives from three cities and UNDP. New members of the Board or participants at the Board meetings during the project implementation can be invited at the decision of the Board, by ensuring, however, that the Board will remain sufficiently lean to facilitate its effective operation. Project assurance is the responsibility of each project board member; however, UNDP has a distinct assurance role for all UNDP projects in carrying out objective and independent project oversight and monitoring functions. UNDP performs quality assurance and supports the Project Board (and Project Management Unit) by carrying out objective and independent project oversight

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	and monitoring functions, including compliance with the risk management and social and environmental standards of UNDP.

4.0	**Teams of Experts** Local Technical Specialist will provide specialized advisory support to the MoEP for responding to various relevant initiative within the country and to provide critical advice on their relevance and complementarity with the sustainable cities project and conduct in-depth technical reviews of project outputs developed by consultants and service providers. Technical Specialist will also provide technical support for designing of Innovation Challenge Calls, mobilization of potential applicants, contracting of independent evaluators, provide technical support to established mentorship, provide technical support for completion of Due Diligence, assess opportunities for new partnerships and opportunities, provide input on outreach and communication materials. The project will also engage on as needed basis following consultancies to support implementation of specific project activities, including, but not limited to: - Legal/policy consultant, - Gender Consultant - Innovation Challenge Call Design and Acceleration Expert - Green Finance and Investment Expert - Communication Specialist - Expert for data collection management, and urban planning Legal consultant will provide specialized legal and regulatory advisory support ensuring that proposed amendments to urban development plans, sectoral planning documents, and local regulatory acts under Output 1.4 are technically sound, legally feasible, and fully compliant with Serbian legislation, EU accession obligations under Chapter 27, and applicable international environmental standards. He/she will review and draft proposed legislative and regulatory changes across key sectoral areas. Gender equality consultant will ensure that gender equality and social inclusion considerations are systematically integrated into project design, implementation, monitoring, and knowledge management from inception through to project closure. Under Component 1, the consultant ensures that the baseline assessment, roadmap, socio-economic and livelihood analysis, Livelihood Action Plans, and the integrated metropolitan development plan all incorporate gender-responsive analyses, gender-specific recommendations, and targeted measures for women and marginalized groups, in coordination with the Socio-Economic and Livelihood Expert. Under Component 2, he/she will provide gender advisory support to the Challenge Call design and evaluation processes, including development of gender-sensitive eligibility and evaluation criteria, gender balance requirements for selection committees, and dedicated outreach strategies to attract and support women entrepreneurs and innovators through the application, acceleration, and co-financing phases. Under Component 3, he/she will lead the development of gender-specific knowledge products and guidelines.

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	Innovation Challenge Call Design and Acceleration Expert will be responsible for designing and managing both Innovation Challenge Calls under Outputs 2.1 and 2.2, including developing the evaluation criteria, operational manuals, and selection processes for sourcing innovative green communal infrastructure solutions and nature-based solutions. The Consultant will provide input for establishing the project-based Accelerator. Green Finance and Investment Expert will provide technical advisory services on financial de-risking instruments, including green bonds, ESCO models, green guarantee schemes, blended finance, and public-private partnerships, and advise cities and private sector applicants on accessing IFI financing from EBRD, EIB, and the Western Balkans Investment Framework. Communication Specialist will be responsible for designing and implementing the project's overall communications, visibility, and public outreach strategy in accordance with GEF visibility requirements, UNDP branding guidelines, and the communication commitments defined in the Project Document. He/she will develop and manage a comprehensive communications plan that covers all three project components and the full five-year implementation period, ensuring consistent, targeted, and high-quality communication of project activities, results, and lessons learned to diverse audiences including national and local government, civil society, the private sector, media, international partners, and the general public. Specialist will provide inputs for infographics, dashboards, video material and social media posts. Expert for data collection management, and urban planning will bring global expertise in digital urban data management systems, integrated metropolitan planning methodologies, and smart city frameworks to support the project team and municipal partners across all three participating cities. He/she will provide high-level technical advisory services and knowledge transfer on international best practices in urban data collection, interoperability standards, and the integration of multiple sectoral data streams into unified urban planning and decision-support platforms, directly informing the design of the digital data management systems and the Smart City Information System. He/she will advise on the design and operationalization of the Maps of Hope spatial analysis framework.

5.0	**Gender Action Plan and Gender Mainstreaming** Gender equality considerations are integrated into project design and implementation in full compliance with UNDP and GEF requirements. The project has been assigned a GEF Gender Marker rating of GEN-2, indicating that gender equality is a significant objective that is systematically mainstreamed across all three project components and reflected in the results framework. The project recognizes that sustainable urban development, climate planning, and green investments may affect women and men differently, and therefore aims to ensure inclusive and equitable participation throughout all project activities. The Gender Action Plan (GAP) for this project has been developed as part of the Project Document (Annex 10) and is confirmed as valid and applicable without modification following the Inception Workshop. GAP identifies specific gender equality targets, activities, and responsibilities across all project outputs. Key gender mainstreaming commitments include:

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	• Ensuring that at least 5 of the minimum 15 pilot innovation projects supported under Component 2 are led by women entrepreneurs, as a specific project target included in the results framework. • Applying gender-sensitive evaluation criteria in all Challenge Call mechanisms under Outputs 2.1 and 2.2, including gender balance requirements within project selection committees and provision of gender expertise to the projects. • Ensuring gender balance among stakeholders and beneficiaries of the innovation challenges and in all capacity building and training activities, with collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated beneficiary data. • Actively engaging women's organizations and women NGOs in co-creation activities, participatory planning processes, and public outreach under all three components. • Integrating gender-responsive analyses into the baseline assessment, roadmap development, socio-economic and livelihood assessment, and integrated metropolitan development plan under Component 1. • Incorporating gender-specific dimensions into knowledge management activities and public communication materials under Component 3. • Ensuring that all contractors and responsible parties are required to maintain non-discriminatory participation of men and women during implementation of their respective tasks. Gender considerations will be continuously monitored through project reporting, stakeholder engagement processes, and UNDP's safeguard and compliance mechanisms. Sex-disaggregated data will be collected and reported for all beneficiary and participation indicators throughout the project lifecycle. The project's monitoring and evaluation framework includes gender-specific indicators that will be tracked in all Project Implementation Reports submitted to the GEF. Women's participation in the Inception Workshop on 2 April 2026 was actively encouraged, and the project team will ensure that all Project Working Group to be established by the Ministry of Environmental Protection includes adequate representation of women from relevant institutions and civil society organizations.

6.0	**Summary and Recommendations**

The Ministry of Environmental Protection organized the Inception Workshop of the project 'Green Cities Transformation – Smart, Sustainable and Low-Carbon Urban Solutions in Triangular Metropolitan Area' on 2 April 2026 at the Palace of Serbia in Belgrade. The workshop was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the cities of Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin, UNDP Serbia, Xueman Wang of the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC) at the World Bank as lead agency of the GEF-8 Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme, representatives of relevant national institutions, and other project partners.

The Inception Workshop resulted in the following key outcomes:

- All key stakeholders were fully familiarized with the detailed project strategy, results framework, components, outputs, activities, and indicators, and confirmed their understanding of and commitment to the project's objectives.

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- Roles and responsibilities of the project team were discussed and confirmed, including reporting lines, stakeholder engagement strategies, and governance arrangements.
- Participants were provided with a comprehensive understanding of their roles, functions, and responsibilities within the project's decision-making structures, including the Project Board, National Project Director, and Project Management Unit.
- The results framework, monitoring plan, GEF core indicators, baselines, and targets were reviewed and confirmed as appropriate. No changes to outputs, outcomes, or indicators were proposed or agreed.
- Reporting, monitoring, and evaluation roles and responsibilities were discussed; the M&E budget was confirmed; and arrangements for the annual audit were agreed.
- Financial reporting procedures and budget monitoring requirements were reviewed and agreed with all partners.
- The project was formally launched in a participatory and constructive manner, with broad stakeholder representation.
- The World Bank representative presented the GEF-8 Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme global framework, connecting the Serbian project to the international network of participating cities and countries and highlighting opportunities for knowledge exchange and joint learning.

From the Inception Workshop discussions, the following most important conclusions were reached:

- The project was launched in a wide participatory and constructive manner. This approach will be maintained throughout implementation through networking and cross-sectoral collaboration.
- Participants confirmed that intersectoral collaboration is of central importance for the development and implementation of this project. The project will contribute to the continuous involvement of various stakeholders to ensure intersectoral cooperation in the long run, particularly in the field of sustainable urban development and climate change.
- Project staff, consultants, and relevant institutions and stakeholders will utilize different digital tools throughout project implementation.
- The Ministry of Environmental Protection will extend already established formal project working group comprising stakeholders and representatives of relevant institutions in the period following the Inception Workshop.
- The proposed outputs, indicators, and workplan have been thoroughly reviewed by all participants and are considered highly relevant and achievable. No changes were envisaged in this regard.
- The Ministry of Environmental Protection will organize the first Project Board meeting within a month of the Inception Workshop to formally confirm all planned project activities and discuss potential challenges.
- The Ministry of Environmental Protection and cities will take an active role in Global Platform for Sustainable Cities.

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Pictures: Inception Workshop

Key next steps and recommendations

Based on the Inception Workshop outcomes, the following next steps and recommendations are identified for the immediate post-inception implementation period:

- The Ministry of Environmental Protection will undertake all necessary actions to ensure smooth implementation of planned project activities.
- The Project Board members are formally nominated, and the first Project Board meeting will be convened within a month of the Inception Workshop.
- The Project Team will submit this Inception Report to the Project Board for formal endorsement.
- Procurement procedures for key expert positions identified will be initiated by the PMU in Q2 2026, prioritizing activities under Outputs 1.1, 1.2, and 1.5.
- The design of the first Challenge Call under Output 2.1 will be initiated in Q3 2026, following completion of the national policy gap analysis and baseline assessment under Outputs 1.1 and 1.2.
- Exchange of information, promotion of intersectoral cooperation, sharing of experience and knowledge across participating ministries and cities will be actively pursued during implementation.
- Strengthening of inter-project partnerships and synergies with related national and international initiatives, including the global GEF SCIP network, will be a priority throughout the implementation period.
- The Ministry of Environmental Protection will organize bilateral meetings with each city until end of Q2 2026 and broad stakeholders' consultation meeting.

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	Annexes
1	**Inception Workshop Agenda**

Agenda

2nd April, 2026, room 470, Palace of Serbia (SIV1) Mihajla Pupina 2, Belgrade

Inception Workshop — Green Cities Transformation – Smart, Sustainable and Low-Carbon Urban Solutions in Triangular Metropolitan Area	
2 April 2026 | Palace of Serbia (SIV1), Room 470, Mihajla Pupina 2, Belgrade	
08:00 – 08:30	Registration of participants
08:30 – 08:40	Welcome and introductory remarks by the National Project Director — Miloš Stojanović, Ministry of Environmental Protection
08:40 – 08:45	Opening address by the GEF Implementing Agency — Yakup Beris, Resident Representative, UNDP Serbia
08:45 – 08:55	Presentation: GEF-8 Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme — Global Framework and Programme Objectives — Xueman Wang, Programme Manager, Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC), World Bank
08:55 – 09:30	Presentation: Project Goals, Indicators, Components, and Activities — Ministry of Environmental Protection / UNDP Serbia
09:30 – 09:40	Presentation: First-Year Workplan — Ministry of Environmental Protection / UNDP Serbia
09:40 – 10:05	GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Requirements; Guidelines on Financial Management in Accordance with Donor Requirements — Miroslav Tadić / Ana Seke, UNDP Serbia
10:05 – 10:20	Questions, Answers, and Open Discussion — Risks, Opportunities, and Stakeholder Expectations
10:20 – 11:30	Closing Remarks — Summary of Agreements and Next Steps — Ministry of Environmental Protection

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2	**Workshop participants list**
3	**Presentations used during the workshop (attached as separate file)**

Република Србија
МИНИСТАРСТВО ЗАШТИТЕ
ЖИВОТНЕ СРЕДИНЕ

Уводна радионица / Inception Workshop

„Зелена трансформација градова – паметна, одржива и ниско-угљенична урбана решења" /
„Green cities transformation – smart, sustainable and low-carbon urban solutions in triangular metropolitan area"
02. април 2026. године, Палата Србија / 02 April 2026, Palace of Serbia

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4	**Minutes from the Inception Workshop Meeting**
	Introductory Addresses
Speaker	Summary of presentation
Marija Zotović - MoEP	Ms Zotovic welcomed the participants on behalf of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and provided the floor to the following speakers
Miloš Stojanović - National Project Director - MoEP	Ms Stojanovic welcomed participants and expressed personal satisfaction with the broad understanding among stakeholders of the importance and relevance of this project. He emphasized the Ministry's commitment to ensuring its successful implementation.
Yakup Beris, Resident Representative, UNDP Serbia	Mr Beris welcomed participants and emphasized UNDP's role as GEF Implementing Agency for this project. He highlighted the strategic importance of the project for advancing Serbia's low-carbon and sustainable urban development agenda and underlined that this is Serbia's first project under any GEF Integrated Programme, a significant milestone reflecting Serbia's ambition and institutional capacity. He stressed the need for strong institutional cooperation and effective cross-sector collaboration, reaffirming UNDP's full support for quality delivery and achievement of project results.
Xueman Wang, Program Manager of the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC) at the World Bank	Ms Xueman presented the GEF-8 Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme (SCIP) global framework, highlighting how cities can achieve low-carbon and resilient development through coordinated planning, data-driven decision-making, and cross-sector integration. She introduced the GPSC framework and tools, emphasizing opportunities for knowledge sharing, capacity building, and access to the best global practices that can support Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin in implementing sustainable urban solutions. She connected Serbia's project to the global network of SCIP-participating countries and cities.
	Project objectives and activities
Olja Stanić, MoEP	Ms Stanic presented the project, covering the overall purpose of the GEF-8 project, its strategic importance for Serbia and the three pilot cities, the theory of change, key objectives, indicators, project components, outputs, and structure of Component 1.
Ana Seke and Miroslav Tadić - UNDP	Ms Seke presented Components 2 and 3, implementation logic of the project in more operational terms, including how the project components will be delivered, the role of innovation challenge calls, technical support and acceleration of pilot projects, monitoring and reporting of results, knowledge management, and the broader framework for scaling up successful solutions. She also covered the financing structure and implementation support arrangements from the UNDP side. Mr. Tadic presented UNDP-GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Milestones, with a focus on Management arrangement, oversight and role of IP and UNDP, key roles in M&E, reporting requirements including reporting timeline, project results framework, adaptive management, risk management, budget revision and project extension process,

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	Discussion and Conclusion Following the presentations delivered by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, UNDP Serbia, and the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities representative, the floor was opened for discussion. Representatives of the Ministry of Environmental Protection emphasized that a thorough and rigorous analysis of existing planning and policy documents in each of the three participating cities must be conducted as a foundational first step before any new planning instruments or recommendations are developed. The Ministry stressed that the quality and relevance of the Green Urban Transformation Roadmap and the integrated metropolitan development plan will depend directly on a comprehensive understanding of what planning frameworks, sectoral strategies, and policy commitments already exist at the local level — and where the gaps, overlaps, and inconsistencies lie. This assessment should not be a desk-based exercise but should actively engage municipal technical staff, sectoral departments, and public utility companies to ensure that the analysis reflects operational realities Ms. Mehandzic underlined that the Green Urban Transformation Roadmap must not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Each of the three participating cities, Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin, has a distinct profile in terms of size, institutional capacity, existing green infrastructure, economic base, and environmental challenges, and the roadmap must reflect and respond to these differences. The Ministry therefore stressed the necessity of developing a city-specific roadmap for each participating city that defines its own set of priorities, milestones, and sequencing of green transformation actions, tailored to local conditions and aligned with each city's development plans and political commitments. While a common metropolitan framework and shared methodology should underpin all three roadmaps, priority measures, and implementation timelines should be differentiated to reflect what is feasible, relevant, and impactful in each specific urban context. Ms. Mehandzic also stressed importance of bilateral meetings that will allow the project team and municipal representatives to engage in technical and political dialogue about what each city most urgently needs from the project, which sectoral plans are most in need of revision, what capacity gaps require priority attention, and how the project's instruments, including the Challenge Calls, digital data systems, and Smart City Information System, should be designed to deliver maximum value in each specific context. Representatives of the cities of Novi Sad and Zrenjanin expressed sincere gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the design stage and initiation meetings of the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities, facilitated through the project's connection to the GEF-8 Sustainable Cities Integrated Programme. City representatives noted that their engagement in these early-stage global processes had been invaluable in helping them understand the full scope of possibilities available to them under the SCIP framework, including access to international knowledge networks, peer learning with cities in other participating countries, joint capacity building activities, and tools and methodologies developed and tested across the global programme portfolio. The cities confirmed their commitment to actively and consistently participating in Global Platform activities throughout the project's five-year implementation period and requested that the project team facilitate their continued engagement with the GPSC network, including activities planned for 2026.

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	UNDP project team expressed gratitude for ongoing cooperation and will ensure that city representatives are included in all relevant Global Platform activities and that the knowledge and tools available through the GPSC are made accessible and actionable for the municipal teams in Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin throughout implementation. All participants confirmed that the proposed project design, outputs, indicators, workplan, and budget are appropriate, realistic, and require no modification at this stage.
	Key Words and Next Steps
	• Project Board members will remain as per the Project Document. • The Project Team will prepare and present the Inception Report to the Project Board for formal endorsement at the first Project Board meeting. • The Ministry of Environmental Protection will extend a formal project working group to include representatives of relevant national institutions, civil society, and the private sector. • Information exchange, promotion of intersectoral cooperation, and sharing of experience and knowledge across ministries, cities, and partners will be actively pursued throughout implementation. • Inter-project partnerships and synergies with related national and international initiatives will be actively strengthened throughout the implementation period. • The Ministry will coordinate with each of three cities to schedule dedicated bilateral meetings to be held in Q2 2026, with the objective of defining and validating city specific priorities, sectoral plan amendments and capacity building programme. • Procurement of key expert positions will be initiated in Q2 2026 in accordance with the approved procurement plan. • The design of the first Challenge Call mechanism will be initiated in Q3 2026, following completion of the national policy gap analysis and baseline assessment. • The Ministry of Environmental Protection and cities will take an active role in Global Platform for sustainable cities.