

Gender-Responsive Green Finance Roadmap for the Western Balkans Six



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Title:

Gender-Responsive Green Finance Roadmap for the Western Balkans Six Building Blocks for a Resilient and Inclusive Future

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Regional Cooperation Council
Trg Bosne i Hercegovine 1/V, 71000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina
+387 33 561 700
rcc@rcc.int
www.rcc.int

Author:

Dr. Margerita TOPALLI

Editor:

Evisi Kopliku, RCC

Design:

Damir Bilalović

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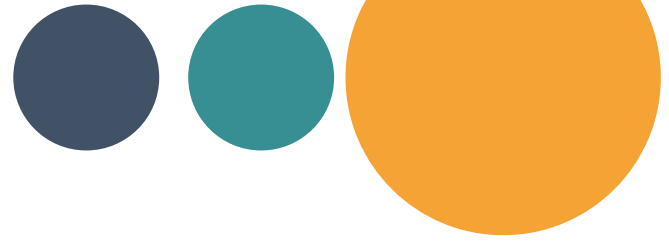
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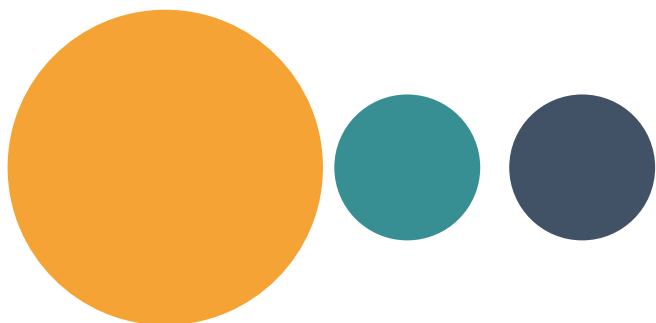
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Abbreviations

CCDR:	Country Climate and Development Report
CRM:	Common Regional Market
CSOs:	Civil Society Organisations
CSRD:	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
CRDDD:	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
EIB:	European Investment Bank
ESG:	Environmental, Social, and Governance
EU:	European Union
GGF:	Gender-responsive Green Finance
IFI:	International Financial Institution
KPI:	Key Performance Indicator
MSME:	Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises
NAP:	National Adaptation Plan
NGFS:	Network of Central Banks and Supervisors for Greening the Financial System
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RCC:	Regional Cooperation Council
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
SME:	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TCFD:	Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures
UNSCR:	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WB6:	Western Balkans Six



Executive Summary



The Western Balkans Six (WB6) are facing socio-economic challenges exacerbated by climate change. These challenges disproportionately affect women, rural communities, marginalised groups, and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which form a critical component of the region's economic structure.

Persistent gender inequalities in access to finance, economic participation, and leadership further constrain opportunities for inclusive growth and climate resilience. Concurrent disruptions in key sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, and energy underscore the urgent need for coordinated and inclusive solutions.

The **Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) Roadmap** offers a comprehensive response by integrating women's empowerment, financial inclusion, and climate resilience into the economic and governance frameworks of the WB6. By fostering **gender-responsive finance**—also referred to as gender-responsive financial ecosystems in this document—the roadmap addresses structural inequities while facilitating just transition to green economy, ensuring no one is left behind.

Gender-responsive finance refers to financial systems explicitly designed to reduce gender disparities by embedding equitable access, tailored financial solutions, and inclusive representation in decision-making processes. By adopting this approach, the GGF Roadmap positions women and MSMEs as pivotal drivers of sustainable development.

Aligned with key international frameworks, including the **European Green Deal**, **Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan**, and **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, the Roadmap outlines three core priorities:

- ▲ **Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment:** Strengthening women's access to financial resources, leadership opportunities, and entrepreneurial ventures in green sectors. Empowering women as agents of change promotes equity, enhances climate adaptation, and drives sustainable economic recovery;
- ▲ **Supporting MSMEs and Building Climate Resilience:** Developing tailored financial products—such as green microloans, climate insurance, and digital financial tools—to support MSMEs, particularly women-led enterprises, in mitigating climate risks and contributing to green growth;
- ▲ **Enhancing Financial Inclusion and Regional Integration:** Addressing gender and geographic disparities in access to finance to ensure underserved population equitably benefit from green finance solutions, aligned with CRM objectives and EU directives.

MSMEs, often regarded as the backbone of the region's economy, face similar barriers. Limited access to financial resources and technological solutions hinder their transition to sustainable and resilient practices. These intersecting vulnerabilities not only pose challenges but also create opportunities to enhance economic and climate resilience through gender-responsive green finance.

At its core, the GGF Roadmap envisions a financial ecosystem that positions women and MSMEs as key agents in fostering sustainable development. By embedding gender-responsive principles into financial policies, systems, and institutional frameworks, the Roadmap ensures equitable access to resources essential for mitigating climate risks, closing gender gaps, and building resilience across the region.

To achieve these objectives, the Roadmap outlines actionable strategies, such as capacity-building programmes to enhance institutional readiness for gender-responsive finance, centralised platforms for gender-disaggregated data collection to inform policy decisions and accountability, and

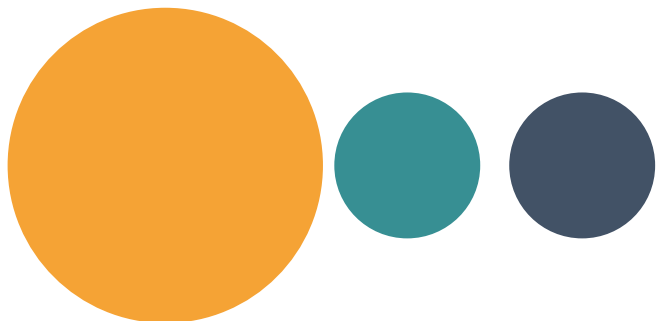
the implementation of green and gender budgeting practices and principle-based green and gender-responsive procurement practices.

These efforts are supported by strengthened regulatory frameworks, innovative financial products, and collaborative partnerships amongst public institutions, financial institutions, and civil society.

By ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities, the GGF Roadmap envisions a region where women, MSMEs, and vulnerable communities lead in achieving a just green transformation. This Roadmap calls upon policymakers, financial institutions, and stakeholders to embrace shared responsibility in advancing gender equality while empowering MSMEs to address climate vulnerabilities. Aligning with regional frameworks such as the CRM and global commitments like SDGs, WB6 can unlock the transformative potential of gender-responsive green finance, paving the way for a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient green economy where all communities thrive.



Introduction



The Western Balkans Six (WB6) stand at a critical juncture where climate vulnerabilities, socio-economic inequalities, and regional integration efforts converge. The increasing frequency and intensity of climate events, such as extreme weather, shifting precipitation patterns, and rising temperatures, pose significant threats to economic stability, especially in rural areas and sectors where women and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are critical stakeholders.

WB6 rank amongst the most climate-vulnerable in Europe, positioned higher on the ND-GAIN Climate Vulnerability Index compared to the EU average (World Bank, CCDR WB6, 2024). Recurrent floods, droughts, and heatwaves jeopardize essential sectors like agriculture, energy, and infrastructure, leading to cascading socio-economic effects. These disruptions exacerbate poverty, deepen inequalities, and destabilise livelihoods. Addressing these systemic challenges demands urgent, coordinated action that integrates gender equity and financial inclusion as central components of climate resilience strategies.

The economic consequences of climate inaction are significant. Projections indicate potential losses of up to 20% of global GDP **by 2050**, as highlighted by a study from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) published in the scientific journal *Nature*. These losses are driven by declining productivity, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted sectors like agriculture and water management. Yet, public investment in climate adaptation remains insufficient, leaving a substantial financing gap. In the WB6, for instance, Serbia is expected to experience a significant GDP reduction of approximately 15% due to flooding, while North Macedonia could face a more moderate reduction of around 3%. These projections highlight the substantial regional disparities in climate vulnerability across the WB6, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted and context-specific adaptation measures (World Bank, CCDR WB6, 2024). The **World Bank** estimates that emerging economies, including those in the WB6, require **\$1.2 - \$1.7 trillion annually** in additional climate finance by 2030 to meet the Paris Agreement goals. The shortfall disproportionately affects vulnerable population, especially women and rural communities.

Women in the WB6 are pivotal agents of change, contributing as leaders, entrepreneurs, and proponents of sustainable practices. However, systemic barriers, including inequitable access to finance, property ownership, and decision-making platforms, hinder their full participation in the green economy. The Gender Equality Index for the WB6 averages 58%, significantly lower than the EU-27 average of 68%.¹ Women-led enterprises, typically micro and small businesses, face systemic barriers such as restricted property rights, limited financing opportunities, and socio-cultural constraints. These constraints impede their capacity to scale operations, adopt climate-resilient practices or participate in decision-making processes.

Women are disproportionately represented in agriculture and informal sectors—areas highly susceptible to climate shocks but lacking financial safety nets for recovery (World Bank CCDR for WB6, 2024). Addressing these gender-specific vulnerabilities is not just a social imperative; it is an economic necessity. Studies show that achieving gender parity in labour force participation could boost regional GDP by up to 20%², with 5% of this attributable to closing the entrepreneurship gap (World Bank Gender Report, 2023). Women entrepreneurs, particularly those leading MSMEs, hold significant potential to drive sustainable growth, yet they remain underrepresented in critical sectors like renewable energy, technology, and climate-resilient agriculture.

The financial sector in WB6 faces dual risks: physical risks, such as infrastructure damage from climate events, and transition risks associated with the shift to a low-carbon economy. These

1 EU Gender Equality Index: EIGE's calculations, data from 2020. Western Balkans 6 calculations: data mostly pertains to: Albania (2018), Montenegro (2017), North Macedonia (2019) and Serbia (2018).

2 [Regional Cooperation Council | Women's Economic Empowerment: Areas for joint actions in the Western Balkans](#)

challenges, however, offer opportunities for financial institutions to innovate with gender-sensitive solutions, including micro-insurance, green credit lines, and climate-resilient loans tailored to women-led MSMEs. Such initiatives not only address vulnerabilities but also facilitate market expansion.

Despite these opportunities, WB6 lack comprehensive policies that integrate gender considerations into climate strategies. While economy-specific plans align with EU frameworks like the European Green Deal, they often fail to address the unique needs of women and marginalised groups. The absence of gender-disaggregated data further hampers evidence-based policymaking. Central banks and financial regulators play a pivotal role in bridging these gaps by embedding gender-responsive principles into financial systems, promoting public-private partnerships, and mandating data collection to inform equitable climate finance policies.

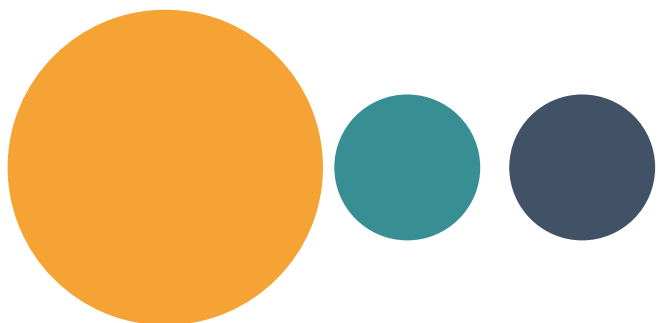
The GGF Roadmap provides a strategic framework for enhancing resilience and sustainability across the WB6. By prioritising women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, the Roadmap seeks to unlock the region's economic potential while ensuring an inclusive transition to a low-carbon economy. Investments in women-led businesses, particularly in climate-sensitive sectors, serve as catalysts for socio-economic transformation, increasing adaptive capacity and reducing community vulnerability.

Timely intervention is imperative to mitigate compounding socio-economic and climate risks. Delayed action will amplify the economic and social costs of climate impacts. Through targeted interventions, this Roadmap envisions a future where women, MSMEs, and marginalised communities lead in building a just and resilient green economy.

The following sections will present systemic barriers to and opportunities for gender-responsive green finance, and present actionable pathways to achieve sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience. By fostering equitable access to resources and opportunities, this Roadmap aims to create a region where no one is left behind in the green and just transformation.



Methodology



Development of GGF Roadmap for the WB6 was guided by a rigorous and participatory methodology. This process aimed to ensure that the Roadmap is deeply rooted in the socio-economic realities of the region while aligning with regional frameworks such as the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan 2021–2024, the forthcoming CRM Action Plan 2025–2028 (CRM2.0), Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, European Green Deal, and the overall Berlin Process. The methodological approach combined desk research, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based analysis to deliver actionable and regionally relevant recommendations.

Phase 1: Desk Research

The first phase involved extensive desk research to review existing data and literature on gender and green finance. Key sources included reports from international organisations such as the World Bank, OECD, IFC, and RCC, as well as regional policy documents and academic studies. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying structural barriers to financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs, mapping the socio-economic impacts of climate change, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing financial instruments in addressing gender and climate issues. This phase also incorporated findings from gender-disaggregated data sets, including the Global Findex and Gender Equality Index, ensuring that the Roadmap is informed by robust evidence and addresses specific disparities.

Phase 2: Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement was a critical component of the methodology, adding a participatory dimension to the Roadmap's development. A pivotal event in this process was a regional workshop held on 27 November 2024 in Petrovac, Montenegro. Organised by the RCC, with the participation of the Working Group on Industrial Development (WGID) and Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship (RNWE), this workshop brought together representatives of WB6 public institutions, private sector, civil society organisations, and international bodies such as the European Commission. Discussions during the workshop centred on identifying practical solutions for advancing gender-responsive green finance, enhancing financial literacy, and scaling best practices for MSMEs, particularly women-led enterprises. Participants validated the Roadmap's strategic pillars and provided crucial insights into the challenges and opportunities for aligning gender-responsive financial systems with CRM2.0 and EU sustainability goals.

Phase 3: Evidence-Based Analysis

To ensure that recommendations are actionable and context-specific, the Roadmap integrated lessons learned from successful case studies and best practices from both within and beyond the WB6. These examples showcased innovative approaches to overcoming barriers, such as introducing green microloans tailored to women entrepreneurs, implementing capacity-building programmes to address financial literacy gaps, and establishing mechanisms for scaling access to green finance for MSMEs. The findings were contextualised to reflect the unique economic and social conditions of WB6.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework guiding the development of the Roadmap focused on three interconnected dimensions:

- 1. Climate Resilience:** Assessing the exposure of women entrepreneurs and MSMEs to climate risks, examining how financial tools such as green credit lines and climate insurance could enhance their resilience;
- 2. Financial Inclusion:** Exploring systemic barriers to financial inclusion—including limited access to credit and high collateral requirements—and proposing solutions aligned with EU frameworks such as the Green Deal;
- 3. Gender-Responsive Policies:** Applying a gender lens to policy evaluation, identifying gaps in promoting women's economic empowerment, and recommending regulatory reforms to create an enabling environment for gender-responsive green finance.

Validation of Recommendations

The Roadmap's recommendations were further validated through alignment with regional and global objectives. By addressing CRM2.0 goals and fostering access to EU funding mechanisms—such as the Just Transition Fund—the Roadmap positions the WB6 to advance gender equity and sustainability in parallel. The analysis also emphasized the need to harmonise policies across the region to facilitate regional collaboration and investment, ensuring that women entrepreneurs and MSMEs can benefit equitably from green finance initiatives.

This comprehensive methodology ensures that the GGF Roadmap is both evidence-based and inclusive, reflecting stakeholder needs alongside broader goals of regional integration and sustainability. By combining participatory approaches with rigorous analysis, this Roadmap provides a structured pathway for advancing financial inclusion, empowering women entrepreneurs, and fostering climate resilience in the Western Balkans Six.



Gender Lens into Green Finance

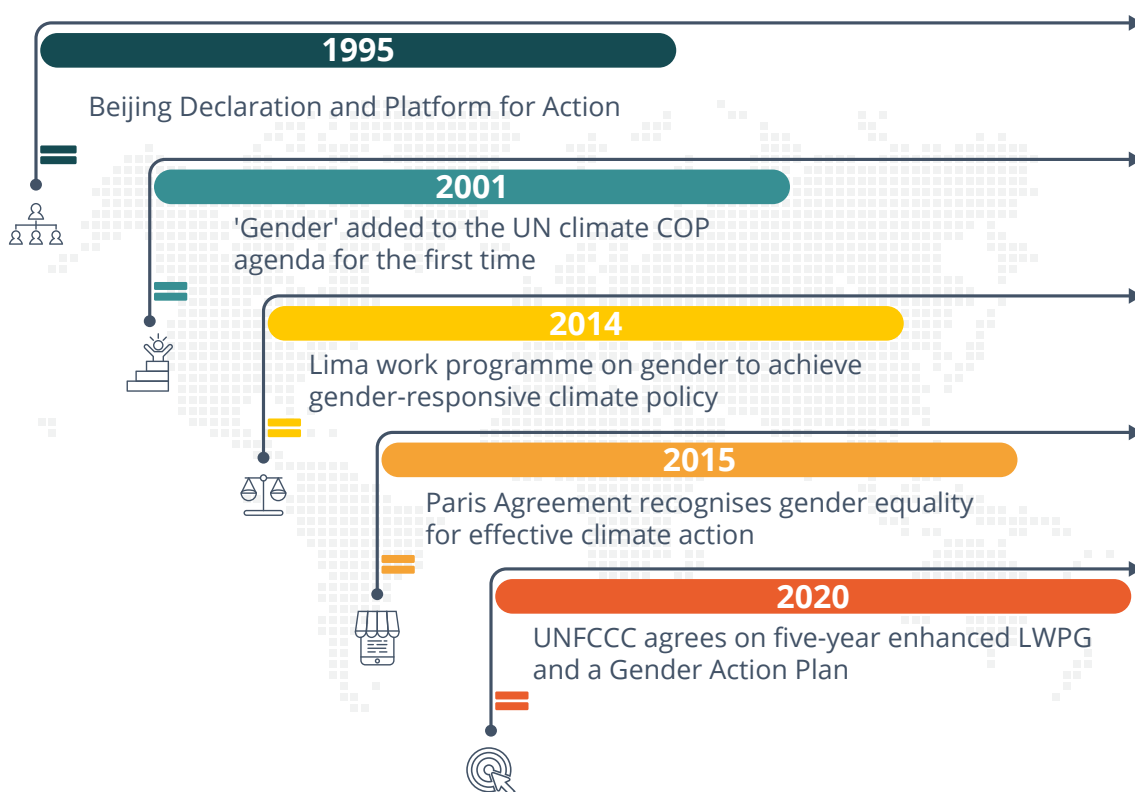


Challenges and Opportunities: A Global Context Perspective

Addressing climate change through a gender lens is essential for achieving equitable and sustainable outcomes. Women's dual roles—as leaders and disproportionately affected individuals—highlight the importance of integrating gender-responsive strategies into climate action. However, systemic barriers and structural inequalities continue to impede women's participation and leadership in climate governance, reducing the inclusivity and effectiveness of global responses.

Although global frameworks have made progress towards gender-responsive climate strategies, this progress has been uneven and slow. Milestones such as the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**, inclusion of gender in the **UN climate agenda (2001)**, and adoption of the **Gender Action Plan (2020)** represent important steps. Yet, critical gaps persist in the implementation of these frameworks, particularly in financing, institutional capacity, and cross-sectoral collaboration. Many economy-level and international strategies still fail to address systemic inequalities, perpetuating the exclusion of women from decision-making processes and adaptation efforts.

Figure 1: Progress in international climate negotiations



Moreover, framing women solely as victims of climate change overlooks their vital contributions as agents of change. While social and economic inequalities exacerbate women's vulnerability to climate impacts, they also possess unique insights and capabilities that can drive transformative solutions. Failing to recognise this duality perpetuates narrow narratives, limiting support mechanisms and undermining women's roles in shaping the green transition.

To bridge these gaps, gender-responsive climate strategies must focus on systemic inclusion rather than token representation. This requires mainstreaming gender equality into all levels of climate governance, ensuring equitable access to resources, and fostering financial mechanisms tailored to women's needs. Such an approach not only enhances the inclusivity of climate action but also unlocks its full potential for resilience and sustainability.

Consequences of Inaction: A Global Perspective

The failure to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into climate action perpetuates existing inequalities, leaving women disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This oversight not only undermines their well-being but also weakens global efforts to achieve sustainability and economic growth. The consequences of ignoring the gender lens ripple across health, livelihoods, and economic stability, underscoring the urgent need for immediate and inclusive action.

Health and Well-Being at Risk: Climate change exacerbates vulnerabilities in health and well-being, with women bearing the brunt of its impacts. For instance, women are 14 times more likely than men to die in climate-related natural disasters (UNDP)³. Furthermore, extreme weather events increase the prevalence of gender-based violence, as evidenced by a surge in domestic violence following natural disasters such as cyclones (UN Women). This compounding effect of climate change on women's physical safety and mental health not only jeopardizes their individual well-being but also destabilises the communities they support.

Climate-related disruptions—such as desertification and water scarcity—amplify their struggles, placing further strain on their physical and emotional resilience. Women's health outcomes, particularly in rural areas, deteriorate when basic resources such as food and water become scarce, forcing them to travel longer distances or make do with limited supplies. These challenges are compounded by inadequate healthcare systems, which often fail to address the unique needs of women during climate crises.

Economic Exclusion and Missed Opportunities: One of the most glaring inequities lies in women's exclusion from the rapidly growing green economy. Despite their potential to drive innovation and resilience, women remain significantly underrepresented in climate-critical sectors such as renewable energy and green technologies. Women-led businesses receive just 7% of global venture capital, limiting their ability to scale innovations or lead in climate-resilient industries (IFC Gender-Responsive Climate Governance 2023).

This economic exclusion comes at a significant cost. Globally, integrating women into the green economy could yield transformative benefits. A 1% increase in female managers, for example, has been shown to reduce CO₂ emissions by 0.5% (ECB). Additionally, closing gender gaps in climate finance could boost global GDP by nearly 2% while reducing carbon emissions by 1.5 gigatons annually (IFC Climate Report 2024). However, the persistent gender gap prevents women from accessing new job opportunities, participating in reskilling programmes or securing funding for green tech ventures. Without intervention, the untapped potential of women in the green economy will continue to hinder economic progress and sustainability.

Barriers to Access to Finance: Women face systemic barriers to financial inclusion, particularly in climate finance. Globally, women-owned micro, small, and medium enterprises experience a credit gap of \$1.4 trillion to \$1.7 trillion, leaving them unable to adopt climate-smart technologies or build resilience to climate shocks (IFC Gender-Responsive Climate Governance 2023). For many women, limited property ownership and lack of collateral make it nearly impossible to access traditional financial products, while the gender disparity in digital and mobile banking tools further widens the gap.

Moreover, women in rural and underserved areas face compounded challenges, including limited mobility and restricted access to digital financial platforms. This exclusion not only limits their abil-

3 <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/PB3-AP-Gender-and-disaster-risk-reduction.pdf>

ity to implement climate solutions but also denies them the economic opportunities necessary for self-sufficiency and innovation in a changing climate.

Underrepresentation in Climate Governance: Despite their critical contributions to household and community resilience, women's voices remain underrepresented in climate governance and policymaking. Their unique insights into sustainable resource management—gained from their roles as caregivers and community leaders—are often overlooked in the design of climate policies. This underrepresentation in leadership positions limits the diversity of perspectives that are vital for crafting inclusive and effective strategies. Without their voices at the table, policies risk reinforcing existing inequities and failing to address the needs of half the population.

Globally, women hold a fraction of decision-making roles in both public and private sectors. This lack of representation not only perpetuates inequality but also weakens the effectiveness of climate policies. Diverse governance structures are more likely to prioritise equitable resource allocation and innovative solutions, but achieving this diversity requires dismantling systemic barriers that have long excluded women from leadership.

For instance, banks with greater gender diversity on their boards are 60% more likely to cut energy use and lend less to polluting industries (ECB; EP Analytics). Conversely, policies crafted without the inclusion of women often overlook critical gender-specific vulnerabilities and fail to equitably distribute resources. Without women's voices in leadership, climate policies risk reinforcing existing inequities and undermining long-term sustainability goals.

Green Innovation Overlooking Gender: The exclusion of women from green innovation and technology development further amplifies these challenges. Only 7% of energy start-up founders are women, highlighting the systemic barriers they face in entering and succeeding in this critical sector (IFC, IEA). The lack of gender-responsive approaches in green innovation stifles the creativity and diverse problem-solving needed to accelerate climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Without targeted interventions, women's underrepresentation in green industries will persist, limiting the potential for transformational change.

Unlocking Transformative Potential: Women's roles as caregivers, resource managers, and community leaders position them as critical agents of change in addressing climate challenges. Their unique insights into sustainable resource management and adaptive practices can drive resilience at both household and community levels. For example, women in leadership roles are more likely to prioritise investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency, ensuring that climate strategies align with long-term sustainability goals (ECB; IFC Gender Report 2023).

However, systemic barriers—such as limited access to finance, underrepresentation in leadership, and socio-cultural constraints—continue to undermine their ability to fully participate in and benefit from the green economy. Addressing these disparities requires a comprehensive approach that reflects the unique challenges women face globally. Recognising women's contributions and ensuring they have the tools, resources, and opportunities to succeed is not just a matter of equity—it is an economic and environmental imperative. By integrating a gender lens into climate action, we can unlock transformative potential, fostering sustainable development that benefits everyone.

The costs of inaction are clear: perpetuating gender disparities in climate action will escalate both economic and social risks, while inclusive policies offer a pathway to resilience and prosperity. Incorporating a gender lens into climate finance, green innovation, and governance is not merely an equity issue; it is an essential strategy for achieving sustainability. By empowering women and dismantling systemic barriers, the global community can accelerate progress towards a low-carbon future that benefits everyone. The time to act is now, and empowering women as equal partners in this transition is crucial for building a more resilient and inclusive world.



Barriers and Opportunities in the WB6



Financial Exclusion and Gender Disparities

Gender disparities in climate action are a global challenge, but they manifest uniquely across different regions. In Least Developed Countries (LDCs), women's challenges often revolve around securing basic resources like food and water, compounded by limited access to education and healthcare. In contrast, the WB6 face systemic and deeply entrenched barriers rooted in socio-cultural norms, financial exclusion, and underrepresentation in decision-making. These structural inequalities undermine women's ability to adapt to climate shocks and participate fully in the transition to a green economy. Addressing these disparities is not merely a social imperative but also an economic and environmental necessity for unlocking the region's growth potential.

Systemic Barriers to Women's Participation: In the WB6, gender inequalities intersect with socio-economic vulnerabilities to disproportionately expose women to the impacts of climate change. These challenges are most acute in rural areas, where traditional norms restrict women's access to essential resources like land, credit, and technology. Women are often underrepresented in formal financial systems due to systemic barriers, including cultural biases and outdated legal frameworks that limit their financial independence.

Women in the WB6 are also significantly less likely than men to own property, which is a critical asset for accessing formal credit. This lack of collateral impedes their ability to secure loans for climate adaptation or business investments. Data shows that women account for only a minority of formal land ownership registrations across the region, further exacerbating their financial exclusion. Additionally, socio-cultural norms continue to limit women's decision-making power and economic agency, leaving them disproportionately vulnerable to climate risks.

Economic Exclusion and Missed Opportunities: Closing gender gaps in entrepreneurship and labour force participation has the potential to drive transformative economic outcomes in the WB6. Achieving gender parity could boost GDP by up to 5%, underscoring the substantial economic gains of empowering women as active participants in the green economy (World Bank CCDR 2024). Women-led businesses, in particular, are well-positioned to contribute to sustainable development in critical sectors such as renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture, and green technologies. Despite this potential, women remain underrepresented in these areas, with minimal support and investment (IFC Gender-Responsive Climate Governance 2023).

Financial exclusion is a major barrier for women-led MSMEs, which are critical to regional economic growth, accounting for 99.7% of businesses, employing 73.8% of the workforce, and generating 63.9% of value-added (OECD, 2018). These enterprises face systemic challenges, including limited access to financial products, insufficient skills development—particularly in digital and technological fields—and outdated legislative frameworks that restrict property rights and collateral options. Without tailored financial instruments, women entrepreneurs struggle to secure the resources needed to adopt climate-smart practices, such as renewable energy technologies or adaptive agricultural methods.

A critical obstacle is the financing gap for women-led MSMEs. These enterprises face systemic challenges, including limited access to productive inputs, insufficient skills development, and outdated legislative frameworks. Without targeted financial instruments, women entrepreneurs are unable to secure the resources needed to invest in climate-smart practices or transition to low-carbon operations. Bridging this gap is central to the Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) Roadmap, which advocates for solutions such as green microloans, climate insurance, and gender-responsive credit lines tailored to the specific needs of MSMEs (WE Study 2023).

Programmes like the IFC's \$11 billion gender-lens investment initiative have demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted financial instruments in promoting inclusive growth. Access to these resources would enable women-led businesses to invest in sustainable practices, adopt climate-smart technologies, and strengthen their resilience to climate challenges. By addressing systemic barriers, the WB6 can unlock the transformative potential of women entrepreneurs, driving regional economic growth and advancing the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The Role of Women in Climate Governance: Women's contributions to climate action extend well beyond entrepreneurship. In the WB6, they frequently serve as primary caregivers and resource managers, roles that provide them with unique insights into sustainable resource management and adaptive practices. These perspectives make women indispensable in crafting effective climate resilience strategies. However, their underrepresentation in governance structures significantly limits their ability to influence policymaking and resource allocation.

Currently, women hold fewer than 20% of leadership positions across the public and private sectors in the WB6 (Gender Equality Index WB6 2022). This lack of representation results in policies that are often less inclusive and fail to address the diverse needs of all stakeholders. Evidence indicates that increasing women's participation in financial decision-making and climate governance enhances sustainability outcomes. For instance, women in leadership roles are more likely to prioritise investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Similarly, financial institutions with greater gender diversity in their leadership tend to allocate fewer resources to polluting industries (ECB; IFC Gender Report 2023).

Policymakers and Regulators

Policymakers and regulators in the WB6 are at the forefront of the region's transition to a green and inclusive financial ecosystem. They face the dual challenges of addressing financial exclusion and mitigating climate risks both of which pose significant threats to economic stability and sustainable development. A gender-responsive approach to green finance presents a unique opportunity to address these challenges while fostering resilience, equity, and innovation across WB6.

By aligning with international and regional frameworks such as the **European Green Deal**, **Just Transition Fund**, and **Berlin Process**, WB6 policymakers are well-positioned to integrate green finance with gender equity at the core of their financial systems. The European Green Deal's target of climate neutrality by **2050** underscores the importance of embedding sustainable practices into regulatory frameworks, while the Just Transition Fund offers opportunities to support vulnerable communities disproportionately affected by the green transition. For WB6, alignment with these frameworks not only facilitates access to EU funding mechanisms but also ensures that financial policies are inclusive and gender-sensitive (European Commission 2023).

The **Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF)** Roadmap outlines key principles for integrating just transition practices into WB6 financial systems. These principles include:

- ▲ **Embedding Just Transition Principles:** Incorporating just transition principles into regulatory frameworks to promote inclusivity;
- ▲ **Leveraging Digital Financial Tools:** Expanding access for rural and informal sectors through innovative digital solutions;
- ▲ **Ensuring Women's Participation:** Actively involving women in financial governance and strategic planning.

These principles are essential for creating an ecosystem where financial services address the needs of women, MSMEs, and other marginalised groups, enabling their equitable participation in the green transition. For instance, digital platforms such as mobile banking and app-based credit tools can bridge access gaps for women in rural areas, providing them with the necessary resources for climate adaptation and business innovation (World Bank CCDR 2024; IFC Gender-Responsive Climate Governance 2023).

Innovative financial instruments—such as sustainability-linked loans with gender-specific performance indicators—can incentivise private sector alignment with green and inclusive objectives. These instruments have demonstrated success in advancing gender equality and climate resilience, particularly when paired with policies that mandate gender-disaggregated data collection to track progress and inform decision-making. Central banks and regulators in the WB6 can play a transformative role by promoting these tools, aligning financial institutions with climate and gender objectives, and fostering cross-sector collaboration to scale their impact (World Bank Gender Report 2023).

A just transition also requires proactive measures to address systemic gender disparities in decision-making. Women remain underrepresented in financial governance and policy development across the WB6, which limits their influence in shaping climate and financial strategies. Increasing women's participation in these roles is essential not only for equity but also for enhancing the effectiveness of environmental governance. Studies show that gender-diverse leadership teams are more likely to prioritise sustainable investments, reduce carbon emissions, and adopt climate-resilient technologies (IFC Gender Report 2023; ECB Analysis 2023). Therefore, regulators and policymakers must take deliberate steps to ensure that women are actively included in leadership and decision-making processes within financial institutions and public policy frameworks.

Integrating gender-sensitive policies into climate finance aligns financial systems with broader social and environmental goals, fostering innovation and resilience. By leveraging EU funding mechanisms—such as the Just Transition Fund—and aligning with the goals of the Paris Agreement, the WB6 can develop financial systems that promote both sustainability and inclusivity. These efforts not only address immediate challenges but also position the region as a leader in gender-responsive green finance, driving long-term growth and stability.

By fostering collaboration amongst governments, financial institutions, and civil society, the GGF Roadmap provides a clear pathway for WB6 policymakers to create a financial system that leaves no one behind. Innovation in gender-responsive green finance is not merely a solution to climate challenges; it is a driver of resilience, equity, and prosperity across the Western Balkans Six.

EU funding opportunities

The WB6 benefit from a robust ecosystem of EU funding programmes and mechanisms aimed at fostering sustainable development, financial inclusion, and economic resilience. These initiatives present significant opportunities for integrating gender-sensitive green finance principles, ensuring that women entrepreneurs and MSMEs can access the resources necessary to thrive in the green economy. The programmes outlined below represent key avenues of support within the broader framework of financing opportunities available to the region.

- ▲ The **Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF)** is one of the most comprehensive funding mechanisms for the region. It combines financial and technical assistance from the European Union, international financial institutions (IFIs), and bilateral donors. The WBIF supports infrastructure development across sectors critical for the green tran-

sition, such as clean energy, sustainable transport, and digital transformation. Through private sector blending mechanisms and guarantees, the WBIF enables women-led MS-MEs to access financing for renewable energy projects, circular economy initiatives, and climate-resilient solutions. With **€9 billion** in EU funding mobilising up to **€20 billion** in investments, the WBIF serves as a cornerstone for integrating sustainability and gender equality into regional development efforts (WBIF Private Sector Blending Guide, 2024).

- ▲ The **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)** plays a pivotal role in aligning the WB6 with EU standards as part of the accession process. This funding tool prioritises capacity-building programmes and sustainable development initiatives while embedding gender mainstreaming principles to ensure equitable benefits for women entrepreneurs. By supporting women-led initiatives and green finance projects, IPA III enhances the region's ability to meet EU sustainability goals (European Commission 2023).
- ▲ The **Just Transition Fund**, a cornerstone of the EU Green Deal, provides targeted financial support to communities most affected by the shift to a low-carbon economy. For women entrepreneurs—particularly those in carbon-intensive sectors—the Fund offers critical resources to adopt sustainable practices and transition their businesses towards greener models. By prioritising equity and inclusion, the Fund helps ensure that marginalised groups are not left behind in the green transition (European Commission 2020; UNFCCC 2016).
- ▲ Programmes such as **Horizon Europe** and **LIFE Programme** play pivotal roles in fostering sustainability and innovation. Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship research and innovation programme, prioritises gender equality while providing significant funding for climate resilience and green technologies. Women entrepreneurs in WB6 can access grants for developing innovative solutions in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and climate adaptation. Similarly, the LIFE Programme focuses on environmental and climate action projects, offering tailored grants for women-led enterprises involved in biodiversity conservation, eco-tourism, and resource efficiency (European Commission 2023).
- ▲ The **European Investment Bank (EIB)** plays a critical role in financing green innovation and infrastructure projects across WB6. The EIB collaborates with local banks to enhance access to finance for SMEs, with a strong focus on women-led businesses. Through guarantee schemes and targeted investments, the EIB promotes gender-responsive financing, ensuring that women entrepreneurs have the resources to scale their green enterprises and contribute to regional sustainability goals (EIB Gender Strategy 2022).
- ▲ The **EU4Green Recovery Initiative**, with a budget of **€10 million**, focuses on implementing the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. It provides technical assistance and funding opportunities for projects in circular economy, pollution reduction, and sustainable agriculture. Women-led initiatives are prioritised under this programme, which seeks to bridge the gap between policy and implementation by equipping women entrepreneurs with tools to lead in climate-resilient sectors (EU4Green Guide 2024).
- ▲ The **Western Balkans Fund (WBF)** fosters regional cooperation by supporting people-to-people contacts, civil society engagement, and cultural cooperation. It provides grants for integration projects that can benefit women entrepreneurs. Additionally, the **Reform and Growth Facility** focuses on economic reforms and infrastructure development; this EU initiative mobilises **€6 billion** in funding, half of which is channelled through the WBIF.

- ▲ The **EU Neighbourhood Policy** prioritises social cohesion, political reform, and economic alignment with EU standards while further supporting inclusive economic development through grants and loans.
- ▲ Beyond these programmes, the **EU's sustainable finance mechanisms**—such as the European Green Bond Standard—provide additional opportunities for financing climate-resilient projects. Women-led SMEs in WB6 can leverage these tools to access funding for renewable energy installations, waste management systems, and other low-carbon technologies. Incorporating gender-specific performance indicators into these mechanisms ensures that women actively participate in shaping the green economy (IFC Gender Report 2023).

By embedding gender-sensitive principles into the design, implementation, and monitoring of these initiatives, WB6 can foster an inclusive financial ecosystem. Investments in women-led enterprises and MSMEs are crucial not only for closing gender gaps but also for achieving the region's climate and development goals. Leveraging these EU programmes positions WB6 as a leader in gender-responsive green finance while promoting resilience, equity, and sustainable growth.



Gender-responsive Green Finance: A Framework for Transformation



Gender-responsive Green Finance represents an intersectional framework that brings together financial systems, sustainability objectives, and gender equity to address the dual challenges of climate resilience and socio-economic inclusion. It acknowledges that climate action cannot succeed without addressing systemic inequalities, particularly those that hinder the participation of women and marginalised groups in green economy. By embedding gender-responsive principles into financial systems, GGF aims to unlock the transformative potential of women-led enterprises while advancing environmental objectives and strengthening socio-economic resilience.

This concept (Figure 2) builds progressively from the broader domains of finance, inclusive finance, and green finance. While traditional financial systems focus on economic growth, inclusive finance seeks to extend services to underserved population, such as women and MSMEs. Green finance then layers sustainability onto this foundation, directing investments towards climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. GGF, at the core of this progression, integrates these dimensions to ensure that gender equity becomes central to climate finance. It recognises that women and marginalised groups face unique challenges in accessing financial resources and that overcoming these barriers is essential for achieving transformative outcomes.

In the WB6, the GGF framework is especially relevant. GGF seeks to reframe the role of finance in addressing these challenges—not as a mechanism that perpetuates exclusion but as a tool for inclusion and empowerment. By ensuring that financial systems work for all stakeholders, the WB6 can drive inclusive and sustainable development while aligning with global goals such as the EU Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals.

What makes GGF transformative is its dual focus on empowering women and advancing sustainability. It envisions financial systems that provide women-led enterprises with not just access to credit but also the resources to innovate, grow, and adapt. These interventions are not just beneficial for individual businesses; they ripple outwards, fostering local economic resilience and contributing to global climate mitigation.

Beyond finance, GGF is a call for systemic change. Financial systems must actively prioritise equity and sustainability, embedding gender considerations into every stage of the decision-making process. This includes expanding access to innovative financial instruments like gender-linked credit lines and sustainability-focused loans, ensuring that women entrepreneurs have the tools to compete in green industries. It also requires strengthening the capacity of women-led enterprises to navigate these systems through training, mentorship, and technical support. These efforts not only improve financial literacy but also equip women with the confidence and expertise needed to lead in emerging sectors such as low-carbon manufacturing and circular economy ventures (Marjanović et al., 2022; IFC Gender Report, 2023).

At the same time, GGF recognises the importance of competitiveness in the green transition. The WB6, like many others, are striving to position themselves as leaders in sustainable industries. GGF enhances this competitiveness by unlocking the potential of underrepresented groups, particularly women, whose contributions have historically been overlooked. Businesses that integrate sustainability into their operations—and do so inclusively—are better positioned to thrive in global markets where environmental and social responsibility are becoming non-negotiable standards.

GGF also calls for harmonisation of policies across the WB6. Regional alignment is essential for scaling initiatives and facilitating regional collaboration. This includes standardising data collection to ensure gender-disaggregated insights inform policymaking and designing incentives for private sector engagement in inclusive green finance. By creating an enabling environment for both public and private stakeholders, the WB6 can foster a financial ecosystem that supports innovation, equity, and sustainability.

In essence, GGF is not just about filling gaps in existing systems; it is about reimagining those systems entirely. It challenges outdated assumptions about who benefits from financial systems and reframes access to finance as a right, not a privilege. By putting women and sustainability at the centre of its framework, GGF offers the WB6 a pathway to not only address the challenges of climate change but also to lead in building a more equitable and prosperous future.

This approach sets the stage for a roadmap that moves beyond conceptual understanding and into actionable strategies. By embedding gender equity into every stage of climate finance, the WB6 can ensure that its transition to a low-carbon economy is not just inclusive but transformative—creating a future where no one is left behind.

Figure 2: Gender-responsive Green Finance Concept





Strategic Pillars and Key Objectives



The GGF Roadmap for the WB6 is anchored in a set of strategic pillars designed to establish a financial system that is resilient, inclusive, and aligned with the region's sustainability and gender equality objectives. These pillars address critical barriers to financial inclusion, promote climate resilience, and empower women entrepreneurs and MSMEs to actively participate in the region's green economic transformation. Together, they form a comprehensive framework for achieving the Roadmap's overarching goals.

1. Resilience: Strengthening Adaptability to Climate and Economic Challenges

A key pillar of the GGF Roadmap is fostering resilience within financial systems, communities, and businesses to withstand climate and economic shocks. The roadmap prioritises the creation of financial tools and mechanisms such as climate insurance, green credit lines, and adaptive microfinance products to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events and economic volatility. For women-led MSMEs, these tools provide the security and resources necessary to adapt operations, invest in climate-resilient technologies, and protect livelihoods in the face of environmental challenges.

This pillar also emphasizes the importance of gender-responsive approaches to resilience, ensuring that financial solutions are tailored to the unique needs of women entrepreneurs. By integrating these solutions into broader regional and international frameworks—such as the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and EU Green Deal—the Roadmap aligns resilience-building efforts with long-term sustainability goals.

2. Policy and Regulatory Reforms: Creating an Enabling Environment for Inclusive Finance

Effective policy and regulatory frameworks are fundamental to the success of GGF Roadmap. This pillar focuses on harmonising the financial regulations of WB6 with EU standards to create a cohesive and supportive environment for gender-responsive green finance. Specific actions include incentivising financial institutions to develop gender-sensitive financial products, implementing gender-disaggregated data collection and reporting requirements, and incorporating gender equity targets into sustainability-linked financial instruments.

Additionally, the Roadmap advocates for integrating just transition principles into regional financial policies. These principles aim to ensure that the transition to a low-carbon economy is equitable and inclusive, addressing the needs of women entrepreneurs and other underrepresented groups. By embedding gender equity into financial regulations, WB6 can foster a more inclusive and transparent financial ecosystem while meeting their commitments under CRM2.0 and Berlin Process.

3. Building Institutional Capacity for Gender-responsive Finance: Enhancing Skills and Systems for Implementation

Strengthening institutional capacities is essential for the effective implementation of gender-responsive green finance initiatives. This pillar addresses the need for training and capacity-building programmes for financial professionals, policymakers, and regulators to enhance their understanding of gender-sensitive finance and climate resilience.

Capacity-building efforts include workshops, technical assistance programmes, and regional knowledge-sharing platforms that equip institutions with the tools necessary to design, implement, and monitor gender-responsive financial products. Additionally, the Roadmap emphasizes fostering partnerships between the public and private sectors to support the

scaling of innovative financial solutions. These collaborations not only enhance institutional capabilities but also ensure the sustainability and scalability of gender-responsive green finance initiatives.

4. Stakeholder Engagement: Building Consensus and Promoting Collaboration

The success of GGF Roadmap depends on active participation of diverse stakeholders, including governments, private sector, civil society organisations, and international partners. This pillar emphasizes the importance of fostering stakeholder engagement to promote transparency, collaboration, and consensus-building.

Key actions include establishing multi-stakeholder platforms to discuss challenges and opportunities; incorporating the voices of women entrepreneurs into policy discussions; and leveraging regional networks such as the Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship (RNWE) to advocate for inclusive finance. By creating space for dialogue and partnership, the Roadmap ensures that the perspectives of women and marginalised groups are central to decision-making processes.

5. A Unified Vision for Gender-responsive Green Finance

Together, these strategic pillars provide a comprehensive and actionable framework for advancing gender-responsive green finance in the WB6. By addressing resilience, regulatory reforms, institutional capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration, the Roadmap positions the region to achieve a financial system that is equitable, sustainable, and aligned with global standards. The pillars not only address current challenges but also lay the foundation for a future where women entrepreneurs and MSMEs are empowered to drive economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Resilience: Financial Inclusion and Access to Green Finance

Resilience forms the cornerstone of the GGF Roadmap for the WB6. By addressing systemic barriers to access to finance and enabling equitable participation in the green economy, the Roadmap aims to empower women entrepreneurs, MSMEs, and other underserved groups to adapt to climate risks while driving sustainable development. This pillar focuses on building robust financial systems that foster resilience, mitigate climate vulnerabilities, and advance inclusive economic growth.

In the WB6, significant disparities in access to finance persist, with women and marginalised groups often excluded from formal financial systems. These inequities are especially pronounced in rural and underserved areas, where limited infrastructure, restrictive social norms, and inadequate financial literacy compound barriers to accessing financial services. Women face unique challenges in obtaining credit, collateral, and other financial resources critical for participating in the green economy. Studies indicate that access to finance amongst women in the region can lag behind that of men by as much as **76 percentage points**, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to close these gaps (CRM, 2021).

Central to the Roadmap is development of **financial products** that are both inclusive and sustainable, designed to address the specific needs of women entrepreneurs and MSMEs. **Gender-responsive green bonds** and **sustainability-linked loans** provide opportunities for women-led businesses to invest in climate-smart technologies and sustainable operations. Microloans tailored to women entrepreneurs in rural or high-risk areas create pathways for small-scale green projects, such as renewable energy installations and organic farming practices. Additionally, micro-insur-

ance schemes offer critical protection for women-led MSMEs against climate-related disruptions, such as droughts or floods, ensuring business continuity and stability in the face of environmental challenges. The establishment of sustainable investment funds further supports women-led businesses by providing the capital necessary to innovate and expand in green sectors, aligning their efforts with broader sustainability goals and promoting greater gender equity within the financial system while contributing to environmental goals (Guide for Gender Mainstreaming, 2022).

Alternative financing models play a vital role in addressing persistent funding gaps for women-led green MSMEs. **Venture capital funds** targeted at early-stage businesses provide essential resources for innovation and growth, while **crowdfunding platforms** enable women entrepreneurs to access diverse funding pools for their sustainable initiatives. Co-investment partnerships that combine public and private resources create scalable opportunities to channel investments into green projects, fostering job creation and economic resilience. These innovative financing mechanisms not only address structural inequities but also promote women's participation in sectors critical to the green transition.

Digital financial services emerge as a transformative solution to overcome traditional barriers to financial inclusion. Mobile banking platforms and app-based financial tools enable women in rural areas to access loans, insurance products, and advisory services directly, bypassing physical infrastructure challenges. These digital solutions also promote financial literacy by offering tailored educational resources that empower women entrepreneurs to manage their finances effectively and navigate the complexities of green finance. Partnerships with mobile network operators and investments in digital infrastructure ensure that these services reach underserved communities, closing gaps in access and creating opportunities for broader participation in the green economy. Gender-sensitive digital tools—such as mobile applications for tracking climate risks or managing green projects—further enhance the capacity of women entrepreneurs to integrate sustainability into their businesses.

Transparency and accountability are fundamental to the Roadmap's vision for gender-responsive green finance. Financial institutions are encouraged to adopt robust reporting practices that track the social and environmental impacts of their investments. Gender-specific reporting ensures that the outcomes of green finance initiatives are measurable, allowing stakeholders to evaluate progress and address any gaps. The integration of **Digital Product Passports (DPPs)**—which provide verifiable data on sustainability metrics such as carbon footprints and resource use—aligns financial practices with global standards while fostering trust and consumer confidence. Mandating the inclusion of gender-disaggregated data in financial disclosures enables policymakers to identify disparities, develop targeted interventions, and promote equity within financial systems. These efforts support the Roadmap's alignment with the goals of CRM 2.0, European Green Deal, and SDGs, ensuring that inclusive finance drives both sustainability and social equity in the region.

Resilience extends beyond financial inclusion to encompass climate risk mitigation and sustainable growth. The Roadmap emphasizes investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy projects, and sustainable agricultural practices—creating pathways for communities to adapt to environmental challenges while fostering economic development. By prioritising women-led MSMEs in these initiatives, the Roadmap facilitates their access to resources necessary for adopting adaptive practices such as drought-resistant crops and energy-efficient systems. These investments not only reduce the exposure of vulnerable groups to climate risks but also promote balanced economic growth and job creation in green sectors. Furthermore, transitioning to a low-carbon economy delivers co-benefits such as improved air quality, resource conservation, and

biodiversity protection—all of which disproportionately enhance the quality of life for women in rural and underserved areas.

Through its focus on financial inclusion, innovative financing models, digital solutions, and transparent reporting practices, the GGF Roadmap establishes a comprehensive framework for building resilience in the WB6. By empowering women entrepreneurs and MSMEs, the Roadmap ensures that they are not only beneficiaries of green finance but also active contributors to the region's sustainable economic transformation. This approach positions the WB6 as leaders in gender-responsive green finance while advancing equity, resilience, and sustainability across the region.

Policy and Regulatory Reforms

A robust policy and regulatory framework is fundamental for fostering an inclusive and sustainable financial system across the WB6. The GGF Roadmap emphasizes integrating gender-responsive principles into regional and economy-level policies to create an enabling environment for equitable access to green finance. These reforms align the WB6 with international standards, particularly the **EU Green Deal** and regional objectives under the CRM Action Plan, while helping to meet accession requirements and driving progress towards gender equality and climate resilience.

Establishing a **legal and policy framework for gender-sensitive green finance** enables the WB6 to effectively address the unique needs of women entrepreneurs and marginalised groups in key sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy, and water management. This approach ensures that women are not only beneficiaries but also active participants in the green economy, thereby advancing gender equity while aligning with the SDGs, including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and their NDCs⁴ and NBSAPs⁵.

Expanding access to tailored financial products, such as green bonds, climate insurance, and sustainable investment funds, is critical for promoting gender-responsive financial ecosystems. This includes providing tax incentives for businesses and financial institutions that prioritise investments in women-led green projects, particularly in high-impact sectors like renewable energy and agriculture. Such measures not only expand women's participation in green economic sectors but also catalyse innovation and resilience-building across WB6.

Gender-sensitive climate risk assessments must also become a cornerstone of financial institutions' investment decisions, ensuring that projects account for the vulnerabilities and adaptation needs of women and marginalised communities. By embedding these assessments into investment criteria, financial institutions can foster equitable resilience to climate change, addressing its disproportionate impacts on underrepresented groups.

Although none of the WB6 currently possess a comprehensive green taxonomy, adopting principles from the EU taxonomy on sustainable finance represents a significant opportunity. These principles provide clear definitions and standards for green finance while addressing regional priorities such as inclusive financial practices and gender-responsive approaches. By embedding these principles into economy-level and regional policies, WB6 can create transparent pathways for sustainable investments and ensure that women and marginalised groups benefit equitably from the transition to green economy.

4 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are climate action plans, which aim to help meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

5 National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) is a strategic policy document, which aims at providing direction on the management and protection of biodiversity.

Green and gender-responsive public procurement (GPP) standards further empower women entrepreneurs by prioritising the procurement of environmentally sustainable products and services from women-led businesses. These standards encourage women-led MSMEs to engage in sectors such as renewable energy, eco-tourism, and sustainable agriculture, fostering gender equity while driving economic transformation. When coupled with mandated climate risk assessments, GPP policies ensure that financial institutions address the vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups, promoting equitable participation in the green economy.

Finally, green and gender budgeting practices represent a transformative step in integrating climate and gender considerations into public financial management systems. Gender-sensitive approaches, such as green budget tagging and programme-based budgeting, align fiscal policies with climate adaptation and gender equity goals while enhancing accountability and transparency. These practices, emphasized in CRM 2.0 and aligned with the European Green Deal, allow governments to track and evaluate expenditures using gender-disaggregated data, ensuring meaningful outcomes that support inclusive and sustainable development.

By embedding these policy and regulatory reforms, WB6 can build an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable financial system that drives economic growth, enhances resilience, and ensures that women and marginalised communities play an active role in the green transition.

Building Institutional Capacity for Gender-responsive Finance

Institutional capacity building is a critical component of the GGF Roadmap, equipping policymakers, financial institutions, and stakeholders in the WB6 with the tools, skills, and systems needed to foster inclusive and sustainable financial systems. By advancing financial literacy, strengthening institutional expertise, and leveraging digital innovation, the WB6 can effectively address gender disparities, promote climate resilience, and meet global and regional sustainability objectives.

Integrating Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) principles into economy-specific financial education programmes is pivotal for equipping individuals and businesses with the tools to navigate climate risks and leverage gender-sensitive financial products. Tailored financial literacy initiatives empower women entrepreneurs and marginalised groups to make informed decisions, access essential financial tools, and seize opportunities within the green economy. These programmes should prioritise topics such as sustainable finance, gender-responsive budgeting, and climate risk management to foster an understanding of how financial mechanisms can support both resilience and gender equity.

Targeted education for women entrepreneurs is particularly vital in addressing barriers like limited access to credit, lack of collateral, and insufficient knowledge of financial systems. By offering specialised training that highlights green finance opportunities in sectors like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism, women-led businesses can better position themselves to thrive. Moreover, these programmes help individuals and enterprises recognise the long-term benefits of sustainable investments, such as transitioning to renewable energy or adopting climate-resilient agricultural practices, thereby advancing both environmental and economic goals. Incorporating gender-responsive topics into economy's financial education curricula ensures that women-led enterprises and marginalised groups acquire the skills necessary to make informed, sustainable financial decisions.

Institutional capacity-building is equally critical to the successful integration of GGF into regional financial strategies. Training programmes, developed in collaboration with international organisations and NGOs, are essential for equipping financial professionals with the expertise needed to

adopt gender-sensitive climate risk assessments, design inclusive financial products, and assess vulnerabilities specific to women and marginalised groups. For instance, financial institutions can benefit from training in developing sustainability-linked loans, green bonds, and micro-insurance schemes tailored to women-led MSMEs. Similarly, incorporating gender-disaggregated data systems enables institutions to track the impact of their products, ensuring transparency, accountability, and alignment with gender equity goals.

These efforts should also extend to enhancing access to digital and mobile financial solutions in rural and underserved areas, bridging inclusion gaps and empowering women to engage in sustainable financial practices. Expanding digital literacy alongside financial education allows marginalised groups to utilise mobile banking platforms, green microloans, and climate insurance effectively, fostering broader participation in green finance.

Collaborations with international frameworks, such as the Berlin Process, European Green Deal, and Sustainable Development Goals, ensure that institutional capacity-building initiatives align with global standards while addressing regional challenges. Partnerships with NGOs and international organisations bring critical expertise, enabling institutions in the WB6 to design and implement effective financial education and capacity-building programmes.

By enhancing financial literacy, strengthening institutional capacity, and expanding access to inclusive financial products, the GGF Roadmap creates a robust foundation for an inclusive and sustainable financial ecosystem in the Western Balkans Six. These efforts empower women entrepreneurs and marginalised groups to actively participate in and benefit from green finance, while equipping financial institutions to address climate risks and advance gender equity. This comprehensive approach not only strengthens the resilience of financial systems but also ensures that the WB6 can support an equitable and transformative green transition.

Fintech as a Driver of Financial Inclusion

Enhancing Skills and Technology Integration: Financial technology (fintech) is emerging as a transformative tool for expanding access to green finance, particularly for women and marginalised groups in the WB6. By leveraging digital platforms, fintech addresses traditional barriers to financial inclusion, such as limited banking infrastructure, socio-cultural norms, and restricted mobility, which disproportionately affect women in rural and underserved areas. The integration of fintech solutions offers a pathway to empower women entrepreneurs, enabling their active participation in the green economy and fostering resilience against climate risks.

The rapid adoption of digital payments, mobile banking, and online lending platforms in the WB6 has already begun to bridge the gaps in access to finance for individuals and MSMEs in remote areas. Digital tools such as e-wallets, mobile apps, and credit platforms simplify access to financial services, including credit, savings, and insurance products. These innovations are particularly transformative for women, who often face systemic barriers in traditional banking systems, such as lack of property ownership or financial collateral. Access to digital finance not only enhances women's financial independence but also promotes economic empowerment by enabling better control over their financial resources and decision-making.

Fintech also supports women entrepreneurs in adopting sustainable practices and contributing to climate resilience. Mobile credit platforms, for example, provide the capital needed to invest in renewable energy technologies or implement climate-smart agricultural practices. Similarly, fintech-enabled insurance products help mitigate climate risks by offering affordable coverage for MSMEs vulnerable to extreme weather events. These solutions align individual economic activities

with broader green economy goals, demonstrating fintech's potential to drive both environmental and social sustainability.

Despite its promise, the full potential of fintech in the WB6 remains untapped due to several challenges. Limited digital literacy—particularly amongst women in rural areas—hinders the adoption of digital financial tools. Many individuals lack the skills necessary to navigate fintech platforms or fully understand their benefits. Additionally, inadequate digital infrastructure, such as unreliable internet connectivity and limited smartphone penetration, exacerbates access gaps, especially in underserved regions. Regulatory uncertainties further complicate fintech's growth; fragmented frameworks across WB6 limit innovation and restrict interoperability of digital financial services.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, multi-faceted approach, as outlined in the Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) Roadmap. First, targeted digital literacy programmes are essential to equip women and marginalised groups with the knowledge and confidence to utilise fintech effectively. These programmes must be tailored to the specific needs of rural communities and implemented through partnerships amongst financial institutions, governments, and civil society organisations. Second, investments in digital infrastructure are critical to ensuring reliable internet connectivity and access to affordable devices. Strengthening infrastructure in underserved areas is crucial for bridging the digital divide and enabling equitable access to fintech solutions. Finally, supportive regulatory policies are needed to foster innovation while maintaining security, accountability, and inclusivity. Harmonising fintech regulations across the WB6 can create a more integrated and efficient digital financial ecosystem, encouraging regional cooperation and scalability.

Fintech represents a powerful lever for advancing gender-responsive green finance in the WB6. By addressing existing barriers and harnessing the potential of digital finance, women entrepreneurs can access the resources they need to invest in sustainable practices, build resilience to climate risks, and drive innovation within the green economy. This integration of fintech with gender-sensitive principles not only enhances financial inclusion but also positions the WB6 as a leader in fostering an inclusive and sustainable financial landscape.

Stakeholder Engagement: Building Consensus and Collaboration

The success of GGF Roadmap relies on robust and meaningful stakeholder engagement. Active participation of governments, private sector stakeholders, civil society organisations (CSOs), women's advocacy groups, and international development partners is essential to ensure that the design, implementation, and scaling of inclusive financial solutions are both comprehensive and effective. This engagement fosters transparency, promotes collaboration, and builds consensus around GGF principles, aligning with regional initiatives like the **Berlin Process, Green Agenda for the Western Balkans**, and **European Green Deal**.

Multi-Stakeholder Platforms for Dialogue: Establishing multi-stakeholder platforms is critical for creating inclusive spaces where diverse stakeholders can discuss challenges, share solutions, and coordinate actions. These platforms bring together policymakers, financial institutions, NGOs, and women entrepreneurs to co-design gender-sensitive green finance policies and tools. They enable stakeholders to align strategies, pool resources, and ensure that interventions address local and regional needs.

The involvement of regional networks such as the **Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship (RNWE)**, **Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum (WB6CIF)**, and representatives of women-led organisations ensures that gender perspectives are integrated into financial

policymaking. These platforms encourage dialogue on key issues including access to credit, digital financial tools, and climate risk management, ensuring that solutions are tailored to the needs of women and marginalised communities.

Incorporating Women Entrepreneurs' Voices: Women entrepreneurs—particularly those in climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy, and eco-tourism—provide invaluable insights into the obstacles and opportunities in the green economy. Engaging their voices in policy discussions ensures that the unique challenges they face are addressed and that financial products are designed to meet their specific needs.

Workshops, such as the validation event held under the RCC framework, demonstrate the importance of directly consulting women-led MSMEs. By sharing their experiences, women entrepreneurs inform policies that target barriers such as limited access to credit, collateral requirements, and insufficient gender-sensitive training programmes. This participatory approach ensures that GGF initiatives empower women to lead in green sectors while fostering innovation and resilience.

Civil Society and Advocacy Groups: Civil society organisations (CSOs) and advocacy groups are integral to ensuring that green finance strategies are inclusive and reflect the perspectives of underserved population. These groups amplify the voices of women and marginalised communities while advocating for policies that address structural barriers to financial inclusion.

Through awareness campaigns and community outreach initiatives, advocacy groups educate women entrepreneurs about available financial tools—such as green microloans and sustainability-linked bonds. This enhances visibility and utilisation of green financial products, ensuring that GGF initiatives reach those who need them most.

Leveraging Regional and International Networks: The GGF Roadmap emphasizes the importance of regional and international networks for scaling gender-responsive financial instruments aligned with EU Taxonomy criteria, such as green bonds or sustainability-linked loans. Partnerships with organisations like the RCC, CIF, and international donors enable the WB6 to access technical support, funding, and capacity-building resources.

Fostering Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborative efforts amongst governments, financial institutions, NGOs, and international partners are essential for advancing GGF initiatives. Public-private partnerships encourage innovation in green finance while NGOs play a critical role in ensuring that these financial products meet the needs of underserved population.

CSOs and women's advocacy groups are essential for crafting policies that address unique challenges faced by women and marginalised groups. Their involvement enhances inclusivity and relevance of GGF initiatives.

Sharing Best Practices and Knowledge: Knowledge sharing is a foundational element of stakeholder engagement, serving to disseminate successful strategies and enhance the effectiveness of gender-responsive green finance initiatives across the Western Balkans Six. Through regional cooperation supported by frameworks such as the Berlin Process and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, stakeholders can replicate proven models tailored to address specific challenges in the WB6.

Regional Collaboration for Scalable Solutions: Regional partnerships involving governments, financial institutions, and civil society create a platform for exchanging best practices that drive adoption and scaling of GGF principles. Programmes such as the EU's **Horizon Europe** and **EIT Climate-KIC** offer valuable insights into policy development and financial product innovation while serving as benchmarks for aligning local strategies with international standards. For instance, re-

gional collaboration facilitated by RNWE has enabled women entrepreneurs to connect, share experiences, and advocate for inclusive financial policies, ensuring their perspectives shape the green economic transition.

Leveraging International Expertise: International development organisations play a critical role in enriching knowledge-sharing efforts by providing technical expertise, capacity-building support, and access to funding mechanisms. These partnerships are crucial for integrating global best practices into regional contexts. Workshops, collaborative platforms, and capacity-building initiatives help financial institutions and policymakers adopt innovative approaches to GGF implementation. By aligning with international frameworks such as the EU Green Deal and Paris Agreement, WB6 can ensure their policies meet global standards while addressing regional needs.

Awareness Campaigns: Awareness campaigns are essential for reinforcing the importance of gender-responsive finance amongst policymakers, businesses, and the public. These campaigns highlight inclusive finance's role in achieving environmental sustainability while fostering economic resilience, and promoting greater understanding of GGF principles. Such efforts build consensus amongst stakeholders while encouraging active participation of all parties involved.

Creating a Resilient and Inclusive Ecosystem. By fostering knowledge-sharing practices and integrating lessons learned from successful initiatives, the WB6 can develop a robust inclusive financial ecosystem. This approach ensures that women and marginalised groups have equitable access to green financial services, empowering them to actively participate in the green economy. The GGF Roadmap emphasizes strengthened institutional capacity building, strategic partnerships, and policy reforms to eliminate barriers to financial inclusion, setting a benchmark for equitable sustainable finance in the region.

Through collaborative efforts amongst regional networks and integration of global best practices, the WB6 are positioned to lead in gender-responsive sustainable development. The Roadmap's focus on inclusivity, resilience, and innovation ensures a financial framework that meets dual objective: advancing gender equality while addressing climate challenges, thus reinforcing the region's commitment to green inclusive future.

Promoting Consensus and Transparency: Stakeholder engagement fosters transparency and accountability, creating an environment of shared ownership of the Roadmap's objectives. Inclusive decision-making processes build trust amongst stakeholders, ensuring that policies are responsive and impactful.

Transparency is reinforced through monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. By involving stakeholders in tracking the impact of GGF initiatives, the Roadmap promotes continuous improvement and ensures alignment with SDGs and EU accession requirements.

Stakeholder engagement serves as both a foundation and a driving force behind the GGF Roadmap. By fostering collaboration, amplifying diverse voices, and leveraging regional and international networks, the Roadmap creates an inclusive and sustainable financial ecosystem. Through knowledge-sharing platforms, active participation, and transparent practices, stakeholders ensure that green finance initiatives empower women entrepreneurs and marginalised groups, positioning the WB6 as a leader in gender-responsive sustainable development.

Inclusive decision-making processes are essential for building trust amongst stakeholders. When diverse voices are heard and considered in policy formulation, it enhances the legitimacy of the decisions made. This collaborative approach ensures that the policies developed are not only effective but also reflective of the needs and priorities of all community members, particularly those who are often marginalised.

To maintain transparency, it is crucial to establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks. These mechanisms allow stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of GGF initiatives over time. By actively involving stakeholders in these processes, the Roadmap ensures that feedback is incorporated into the ongoing efforts, facilitating continuous improvement. This iterative approach helps align initiatives with both SDG targets and EU accession requirements.

A Unified Vision for Gender-responsive Green Finance

The Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) Roadmap for the WB6 presents a transformative vision for addressing climate risks, advancing gender equity, and fostering sustainable economic growth. At its core, the roadmap emphasizes resilience building by integrating gender-sensitive approaches into climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. By channelling investments into climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy projects, and sustainable agricultural practices, the roadmap aligns with global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, EU Green Deal, and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. These efforts not only mitigate environmental risks but also catalyse long-term, inclusive economic development.

Central to the Roadmap is the empowerment of women and marginalised groups through innovative financial tools such as microloans, sustainability-linked loans, and climate insurance. These gender-responsive financial products provide critical resources for adopting adaptive measures, including improved irrigation systems, climate-resilient crops, and renewable energy solutions. By addressing gender disparities in access to finance, GGF ensures the equitable distribution of resources, empowering women-led MSMEs to play a central role in the green transition. This inclusive approach enhances climate risk management, fostering a more resilient and equitable economy.

The GGF Roadmap also highlights the transformative potential of women-led businesses and MSMEs in driving sustainable economic growth. By increasing investments in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism, the Roadmap not only creates jobs but also fosters innovation in high-growth sectors where women are often underrepresented. These investments align the WB6 with Sustainable Development Goals and global standards, reducing dependency on traditional, environmentally harmful industries and building a future-proof economic framework. Women entrepreneurs gain opportunities to lead initiatives that promote sustainability, enhancing region's economic productivity while ensuring gender equity.

The transition to a low-carbon economy generates significant co-benefits for social and environmental health. Investments in clean energy and sustainable practices reduce reliance on fossil fuels, improve air and water quality, conserve biodiversity, and mitigate public health risks associated with pollution and resource scarcity. For women and marginalised communities—particularly in rural areas—these improvements have a profound impact on livelihoods, household budgets, and overall quality of life. Clean energy projects, for instance, lower energy costs and provide financial relief to households managed predominantly by women, reinforcing the link between environmental and socio-economic well-being.

To sustain these efforts, the integration of GGF principles into economy-level and regional financial policies is crucial. Aligning financial systems with international standards such as the EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities ensures region's competitiveness while addressing gender and climate challenges. By embedding frameworks that mandate gender-disaggregated data collection and prioritise gender-sensitive investments, the Roadmap establishes a foundation for accountability, inclusivity, and long-term resilience.

The strategic pillars of the Roadmap—resilience-building, regulatory reforms, institutional capacity enhancement, and stakeholder collaboration—offer a cohesive framework for advancing gender-responsive green finance. These pillars address immediate socio-economic and environmental challenges while creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs and MSMEs to lead sustainable economic transformation.

By adopting this unified vision, the WB6 can position themselves as regional leaders in inclusive and sustainable finance. The Roadmap aligns with key regional and international initiatives, including the Berlin Process, CRM 2.0, and EU accession requirements, ensuring that WB6 not only meet global sustainability benchmarks but also serve as a model for equitable green development. This vision secures a more resilient, inclusive, and competitive financial ecosystem—one that inspires replication and drives transformative change across other regions.



Implementation Framework: Turning Vision into Action

The successful execution of **Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF)** Roadmap in the **Western Balkans Six** hinges on a robust and well-structured Implementation Framework. This framework is designed to integrate GGF principles into the region's financial systems in a manner that is structured, sustainable, and adaptable. By embedding gender equality and environmental sustainability into policies and practices, the framework empowers the region to foster resilience, equity, and inclusive economic growth.

Central to this framework is the emphasis on data-driven monitoring and accountability, ensuring that GGF initiatives deliver measurable results. The use of gender-sensitive indicators tracks the effectiveness of policies and financial products in addressing both climate resilience and gender equality. By systematically collecting and analysing disaggregated data, stakeholders can identify gaps, evaluate socio-economic and environmental impacts, and adjust strategies based on evidence.

The **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework** underpins this approach, incorporating tools for regular reviews, stakeholder feedback, and reporting mechanisms aligned with international standards such as the EU Green Deal, Sustainable Development Goals, and Berlin Process. These processes ensure that accountability remains a guiding principle, fostering trust and alignment with global sustainability goals as the region transitions to a resilient and inclusive financial ecosystem.

Staged Implementation

The gradual rollout of GGF Roadmap in the WB6 is structured into four interconnected stages, ensuring a phased, scalable, and sustainable integration of GGF principles into the region's financial systems. Each stage builds on the previous, creating a progressive pathway that aligns with both regional priorities and global sustainability goals, as illustrated in the implementation framework (Figure 2). These stages are strengthened by three continuous themes—**Capacity Building, Partnerships, and Global and Sustainability Alignment**—which serve as the driving forces throughout the process. Together, these components create a cohesive structure for achieving long-term, transformative change in the WB6.

Stage 1: Laying the Foundation

The successful rollout of GGF in the Western Balkans Six begins with a foundational phase dedicated to establishing the knowledge, regulatory frameworks, and tailored financial solutions that integrate environmental sustainability and gender equality into the region's financial systems. This stage focuses on addressing structural barriers and equipping stakeholders with the tools to implement GGF principles effectively, setting the groundwork for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

A key priority in this phase is expanding financial literacy to build awareness of climate risks and the specific barriers women face in accessing financial services. Underserved areas, where knowledge gaps are most pronounced, are a central focus. Targeted education programmes will emphasize the importance of gender-responsive financial products and their potential to foster economic resilience and climate adaptation. By educating policymakers, financial institutions, and women entrepreneurs, these efforts aim to create a shared understanding of GGF's economic and social value.

Establishing regulatory support is another crucial element of this stage. Regulatory frameworks will introduce gender-responsive policies and integrate environmental and gender considerations into financial risk management systems. This process includes embedding

gender-specific criteria into lending practices and risk frameworks to ensure financial institutions align their operations with inclusive and sustainable goals. Furthermore, regulatory measures will emphasize transparency, requiring financial institutions to report on the social and environmental impacts of their activities.

Developing inclusive financial products forms the practical backbone of this stage. The introduction of tailored solutions such as green loans, sustainability-linked credit, and micro-insurance schemes will address the unique financial needs of women entrepreneurs and marginalised groups. These products are especially relevant for climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture, renewable energy, and eco-tourism, where women often play critical roles but face significant obstacles to accessing resources. These financial tools will promote resilience and expand opportunities for women-led businesses, fostering both economic empowerment and climate adaptation.

Capacity-building efforts will underpin all activities in Stage 1, driven by collaboration with international organisations, NGOs, and regional networks. Partnerships will provide technical expertise and facilitate knowledge-sharing platforms, such as workshops and training programmes, to strengthen institutional capacities for implementing GGF principles. Leveraging insights from international frameworks like the EU Green Deal and Berlin Process, these initiatives will ensure that regional stakeholders are equipped to address both local challenges and global standards.

By the end of this stage, the WB6 will have a stronger institutional foundation for GGF implementation. Enhanced financial literacy, regulatory support, and availability of inclusive financial products will empower women entrepreneurs and other marginalised groups to access the resources they need to thrive in the green economy. These achievements will position the region to advance climate resilience and gender equality while building a more inclusive and sustainable financial system.

Stage 2: Creating Enabling Conditions

Building on the foundation established in the first stage, Stage 2 focuses on creating the structural and operational conditions necessary to foster Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) across the WB6. This phase prioritises regulatory development, capacity enhancement, and establishment of collaborative mechanisms to ensure that the Roadmap's objectives are actionable and impactful.

A robust and inclusive regulatory framework forms the backbone of this stage. The focus is on assessing existing policies across the WB6 to identify gaps and ensure alignment with EU standards, international agreements like the Green Agenda for the WB6, and Sustainable Development Goals. Efforts will include drafting unified frameworks that integrate gender-responsive incentives, such as tax breaks, subsidies, and regulatory mandates for gender-sensitive disclosures and climate risk assessments.

This stage also envisions promoting regional alignment by working with the RCC and key stakeholders to draft and finalise a regulatory framework that can be adopted across economies. The objective is to position the WB6 as a model for inclusive and sustainable finance while enabling economies to meet EU accession requirements and access international funding mechanisms. Monitoring and evaluation processes will ensure that these frameworks are implemented effectively and continuously improved.

Strengthening the skills and knowledge of financial professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders is key to scaling GGF initiatives. This stage includes organising targeted professional training programmes, workshops, and partnerships. These programmes will focus on equipping financial institutions with the expertise to design and implement gender-sensitive financial products and climate risk management strategies.

Regional forums organised by the RCC will provide a platform for sharing experiences and aligning efforts, ensuring that stakeholders across the WB6 are actively engaged in advancing GGF. By emphasizing the role of women-led initiatives and regional collaboration, these efforts will help create a vibrant, inclusive financial ecosystem.

Stage 2 is instrumental in building the regulatory, institutional, and collaborative framework needed to advance GGF. By aligning regional efforts with international standards and equipping stakeholders with the knowledge and tools to drive progress, this stage sets the foundation for sustained, transformative impact in the Western Balkans Six.

Stage 3: Mainstreaming GGF in Financial Systems

The third phase of implementing the Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) Roadmap emphasizes embedding GGF principles into the core operations of financial systems in the WB6. This stage transforms gender-responsive green finance from a targeted initiative into a standard practice across the sector, ensuring long-term sustainability, inclusivity, and effectiveness.

A critical aspect of this stage is **institutionalising GGF practices** through formalised guidelines. These guidelines must integrate gender equity into green finance frameworks and policies, with a specific focus on making climate-related financial disclosures gender-sensitive. By mandating transparency in reporting on the social and gender dimensions of green investments, financial institutions will align more closely with international standards while addressing local gender equity challenges.

Expanding access to green financial products is another key focus. This involves leveraging mobile banking and digital solutions to overcome barriers faced by unbanked population, particularly women in remote and underserved areas. Digital tools such as mobile apps and online platforms can deliver tailored products like green loans and micro-insurance directly to women, breaking down structural barriers to inclusion. Accessibility and affordability must remain central to these efforts, ensuring that all demographics benefit equitably from green finance initiatives.

To ensure accountability and measure progress, the Roadmap emphasizes establishment of a **robust monitoring and evaluation system**. This system will track critical indicators, such as the percentage of women accessing green financial services, while also evaluating the socio-economic and environmental impacts of GGF initiatives. Regular reviews and feedback mechanisms will help policymakers and stakeholders make informed adjustments, ensuring the framework's ongoing effectiveness and alignment with regional and global objectives.

Harmonisation of GGF policies across the region is also critical at this stage. By fostering regional collaboration platforms, the WB6 can standardise practices and reporting mechanisms, streamline resource sharing, and promote regional synergies. These efforts enhance the efficiency and scalability of GGF solutions while ensuring alignment with the EU Green Deal, CRM 2.0, and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

Through these coordinated actions, Stage 3 positions the WB6 as a leader in gender-responsive green finance, creating a resilient and equitable financial system that serves as a benchmark for inclusive economic development and environmental sustainability.

Stage 4: Scaling GGF for Long-Term Sustainability

The fourth and final stage of the Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) Roadmap focuses on embedding sustainability into the core of the financial systems across the WB6. This stage emphasizes both scaling up innovative practices and ensuring durability of outcomes achieved in earlier phases. The overarching goal is to create a resilient, inclusive financial ecosystem that not only meets current challenges but also adapts to emerging environmental and social (E&S) dynamics.

One of the key priorities at this stage is **encouraging continuous financial innovation**. This involves development of new green finance products tailored to the unique needs of women and underserved groups. For example, climate bonds and eco-friendly mortgages specifically designed for women entrepreneurs can diversify the portfolio of green financial instruments, expanding opportunities in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and other sectors critical to the green economy. Continuous innovation ensures that financial systems remain responsive to evolving climate risks and social challenges.

Another focus area is **empowering women as leaders in the green economy**. Beyond ensuring access to finance, this stage prioritises mentorship, market linkages, and targeted support for women-led green startups. By positioning women as drivers of green growth, this phase not only advances gender equality but also taps into their potential as key agents of sustainable economic transformation. Programmes that enhance women's leadership roles in sustainable industries are central to fostering a more inclusive economy.

Scaling efforts also include **strengthening regional and global alignment**. Active participation in international climate finance networks, such as those promoted by the EU Green Deal and Paris Agreement, is crucial for harmonising the region's strategies with global goals. By adhering to global sustainability commitments, the WB6 can enhance their recognition as leaders in gender-responsive green finance. Partnerships with international networks provide access to funding, technical expertise, and collaborative opportunities that amplify the region's impact.

Finally, this stage focuses on **ensuring long-term sustainability** by integrating GGF principles into the core financial practices of the region. Building on the achievements of earlier stages, this involves institutionalising gender and environmental considerations within all financial processes. A sustained focus on these principles not only secures socio-economic benefits but also bolsters the region's resilience against climate-related shocks. Through strategic policy alignment, innovation, and institutional collaboration, the Roadmap sets the foundation for a durable, inclusive, and green financial ecosystem.

By scaling GGF initiatives and strengthening ties with global frameworks, this stage solidifies the region's position as a pioneer in gender-responsive sustainability, ensuring that the principles of resilience, equity, and sustainability endure for generations.

Continuous Vertical Themes

The continuous themes of Capacity Building, Partnerships, and Global and Sustainability Alignment are integral to the GGF Implementation Framework. These themes serve as the foundation for the Roadmap, ensuring its adaptability, resilience, and effectiveness throughout the implementation process. By embedding these principles into every stage of the Roadmap, the region can foster a cohesive and inclusive financial ecosystem that addresses both climate and gender challenges.

Capacity Building

Capacity building remains an essential and ongoing effort to equip stakeholders with the knowledge and skills required to implement GGF principles effectively. Training financial professionals to incorporate gender-sensitive climate risk assessments and design tailored financial products for women and marginalised groups is a critical component of this process. Access to technical expertise and updated knowledge resources fosters institutional readiness to address evolving challenges, ensuring that financial systems are aligned with GGF goals.

Regional cooperation is a vital aspect of capacity building, leveraging regional knowledge-sharing platforms to disseminate best practices and foster collaboration. Joint training sessions and workshops with international organisations enhance institutional capabilities, while partnerships with NGOs and global entities provide valuable technical expertise. These initiatives collectively strengthen the ability of financial systems to address the region's socio-economic and environmental challenges, paving the way for a unified and resilient approach to sustainability.

Partnerships

Partnerships are at the heart of GGF Roadmap, fostering innovation and resource sharing across the public and private sectors. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) play a pivotal role in aligning the efforts of governments, financial institutions, NGOs, and international development organisations to advance gender-responsive green finance. These collaborations mobilise resources and expertise to develop innovative financial solutions, such as green bonds and micro-insurance products tailored for women-led enterprises.

The Roadmap also underscores the importance of mobilising investments to support women entrepreneurs in green sectors, thereby enhancing their economic participation and driving innovation in sustainable finance. The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) plays a central role in convening stakeholders and advocating for regionally aligned strategies to maximise the potential of these partnerships. By aligning PPPs with global sustainability objectives, the region can establish a scalable and impactful framework for promoting gender equity and climate resilience.

Awareness campaigns targeting diverse stakeholders further amplify the reach and impact of GGF initiatives. Policymakers are informed about the economic and social benefits of gender-responsive green finance, while financial institutions and private sector are incentivised to invest in innovative and inclusive solutions. Leveraging platforms such as social media, forums, and webinars, these campaigns highlight success stories from the region and the EU, demonstrating the transformative potential of GGF principles.

Global and Sustainability Alignment

To secure its position as a leader in gender-responsive green finance, the WB6 must align the GGF Roadmap with global sustainability frameworks. Key alignments include the Paris Agreement, European Green Deal, and SDGs. This harmonisation not only enhances the efficacy of local policies but also ensures compatibility with the EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities, a key enabler for channelling investments into impactful and sustainable ventures.

This alignment unlocks access to international funding mechanisms and global partnerships, equipping the region with the financial and technical resources needed to address climate challenges while promoting gender equality. Active engagement in international climate finance networks allows the WB6 to adopt innovative solutions, exchange best practices, and position itself as a leader in inclusive green finance.

Regional platforms such as the Berlin Process play a critical role in aligning regulatory frameworks and fostering knowledge sharing amongst stakeholders. Collaborations with international financial institutions, including the World Bank and European Investment Bank, further amplify the region's capacity by providing technical expertise, funding opportunities, and strategic guidance. These partnerships ensure that the WB6 meet global standards and leverage international resources for large-scale, transformative impacts.

By weaving these continuous themes into the fabric of the Roadmap, the WB6 can ensure sustainable implementation of gender-responsive green finance. Together, capacity building, partnerships, and global alignment create a robust framework for addressing systemic challenges, fostering innovation, and driving transformative economic and environmental outcomes.

Monitoring and Evaluation as a Dynamic Feedback Mechanism

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are central to the effective implementation of Gender-responsive Green Finance Roadmap, ensuring that its objectives are met while maintaining alignment with regional priorities and international sustainability commitments, including the SDGs and EU Green Deal. Through a robust framework that emphasizes transparency, accountability, and adaptability, the M&E system provides the tools to assess progress, refine strategies, and foster trust amongst stakeholders.

A Continuous Feedback Loop

The M&E framework functions as a dynamic feedback loop, enabling real-time assessment of the Roadmap's impact and guiding its evolution to meet emerging challenges and opportunities. By focusing on evidence-based decision-making, the framework integrates lessons from both regional initiatives and global frameworks, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness over time.

This process prioritises outcome-based evaluations, moving beyond traditional output metrics such as the number of participants trained. Instead, it emphasizes measurable outcomes such as enhanced financial literacy, expanded access to gender-specific financial products, increased participation of women in climate-sensitive sectors, and overall improvements in socio-economic conditions. Stakeholder collaboration underpins this feedback loop, facilitating coordinated efforts across governments, private sector, and civil society to exchange insights, identify gaps, and scale impactful practices.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs serve as the cornerstone of M&E system, offering clear, measurable benchmarks to evaluate the Roadmap's progress. These indicators ensure that the Roadmap is effectively driving gender-responsive green finance and financial inclusion. Examples of key KPIs include:

- ▶ **Funding of women-led green projects:** Measuring the number and proportion of women-led initiatives receiving financial support;
- ▶ **Volume of gender-specific green financial products:** Tracking the availability and uptake of products such as green microloans, sustainability-linked loans, and micro-insurance for women entrepreneurs;
- ▶ **Inclusivity in access:** Monitoring the percentage of women and marginalised groups accessing green financial services, highlighting progress in bridging financial gaps;
- ▶ **Improvements in financial literacy:** Evaluating increases in awareness and understanding of climate risks and sustainable finance options, particularly amongst women and underserved population;
- ▶ **Integration of gender-sensitive climate risk assessments:** Measuring the extent to which financial institutions adopt gender-responsive practices in assessing and mitigating climate-related risks.

These KPIs not only quantify progress but also provide actionable insights for refining and enhancing GGF initiatives, ensuring they address critical gaps and maximise their socio-economic and environmental impact.

Gender-Sensitive Reporting Framework

To complement the KPI system, the Roadmap incorporates a gender-sensitive reporting framework designed to enhance transparency and accountability. This framework requires financial institutions to provide detailed, gender-disaggregated data on the impact of their green finance initiatives, ensuring that the benefits of these efforts are equitably distributed.

Core elements of the reporting framework include:

- ▶ **Gendered impact disclosures:** Financial institutions are required to report on the gender-specific outcomes of their green financial products, such as the percentage of funding directed to women-led projects and socio-economic impacts on vulnerable groups;
- ▶ **Climate risk management reporting:** Institutions must provide detailed disclosures on strategies addressing the specific vulnerabilities of women and marginalised communities to climate risks. This ensures that climate adaptation and mitigation efforts are inclusive;
- ▶ **Case studies and success stories:** The framework encourages publication of real-world examples illustrating the transformative effects of GGF initiatives. These narratives demonstrate how inclusive finance supports women-led enterprises and promotes climate resilience (Guide for Gender Mainstreaming, 2022);

- ▶ **Global Compliance and EU Reporting Standards:** The framework aligns with international and regional regulations, such as the **Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)**, and incorporates EU-specific requirements, including:
 - ▷ **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD):** Mandating detailed reporting on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) impacts, including gender equity considerations within sustainability disclosures,
 - ▷ **EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities:** Providing a clear structure for categorising sustainable finance initiatives to ensure transparency and alignment with EU climate and gender goals,
 - ▷ **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD):** Addressing EU directives related to supply chain sustainability and social accountability, ensuring that financial institutions support projects meeting these standards.

This alignment not only facilitates compliance with evolving regulatory landscapes but also positions the WB6 to access international funding mechanisms and partnerships tied to adherence to such standards.

By integrating these comprehensive reporting practices, the GGF Roadmap ensures that stakeholders can transparently evaluate its progress while reinforcing accountability and alignment with regional and global sustainability objectives. This framework empowers policymakers, financial institutions, and civil society to monitor the equitable distribution of resources and the environmental and socio-economic impacts of green finance.

Enhancing Collaboration through Monitoring

The M&E framework fosters collaboration by promoting data-sharing, resource-pooling, and innovation across sectors. Regular reporting, regional forums, and workshops create opportunities for stakeholders to exchange best practices and refine their approaches. Additionally, digital tools such as data dashboards streamline the collection and analysis of monitoring data, enabling more timely and accurate evaluations.

Active participation of stakeholders, including policymakers, financial institutions, and international development organisations, ensures a holistic approach to monitoring and evaluation. Collaborative efforts enhance the scalability and adaptability of GGF initiatives, reinforcing alignment with both regional strategies and global sustainability goals.

By prioritising outcomes over outputs, the M&E framework ensures that the GGF Roadmap remains responsive to the region's evolving needs. Regular evaluations provide actionable recommendations for improving financial systems, empowering women entrepreneurs, and driving sustainable economic growth. The dynamic nature of this framework allows for continual adaptation, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness in addressing new challenges.

In sum, the M&E framework forms the backbone of the GGF Roadmap, integrating KPIs, gender-sensitive reporting, and robust stakeholder collaboration to track progress and guide the WB6 towards a gender-responsive green financial future. This systematic, results-driven approach strengthens trust, enhances alignment with global commitments, and positions the region as a leader in sustainable and inclusive finance. Through transparency, adaptability, and a commitment to equity, the Roadmap ensures lasting impact for women, marginalised groups, and the environment.

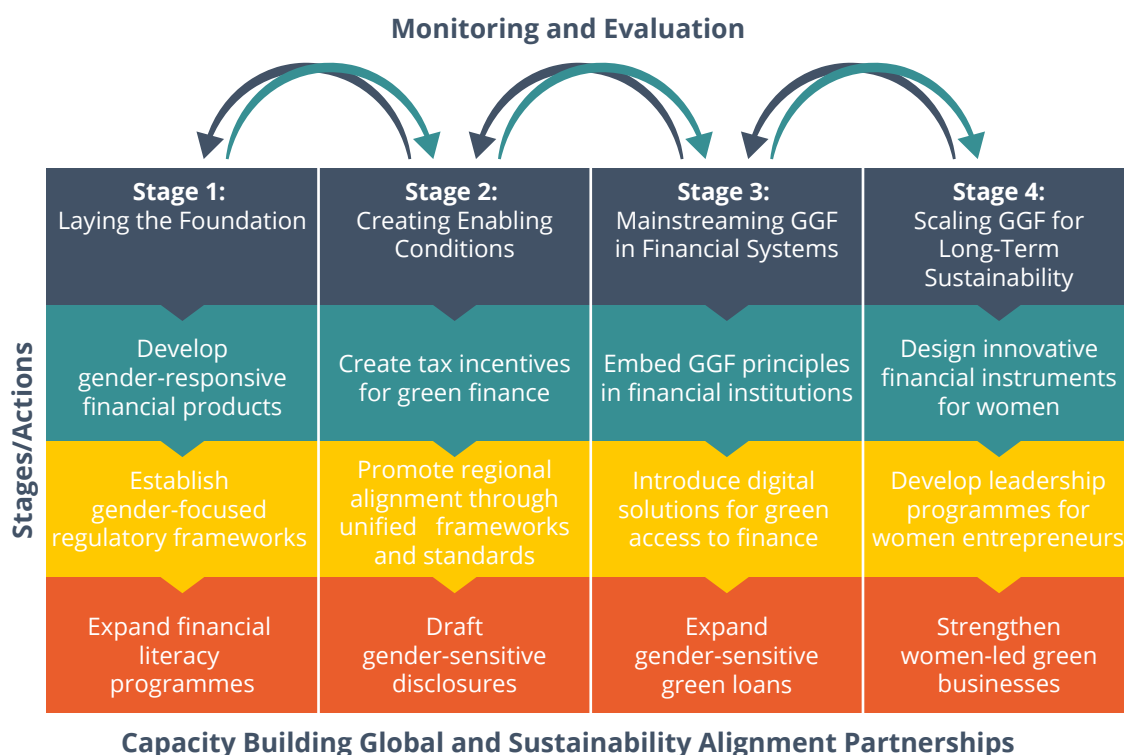
Conceptual Representation of the GGF Roadmap

The Gender-responsive Green Finance Roadmap for the Western Balkans Six presented in Figure 3 provides a clear, phased framework for advancing gender-responsive sustainable finance. Its structured approach ensures progressive adoption of GGF principles, addressing climate challenges while promoting gender equity and socio-economic inclusion.

The Roadmap provides a comprehensive framework for the WB6 to embed gender-responsive principles into their financial systems. By tackling systemic barriers, introducing inclusive financial products, and leveraging international collaboration, the GGF framework creates a pathway for sustainable and equitable growth.

By embracing the Roadmap, the Western Balkans Six can lead the way in gender-responsive sustainable finance, promoting innovation, inclusivity, and resilience. This positions the region as a model for equitable green finance and a key contributor to global sustainability goals.

Figure 3: Gender-responsive Green Finance Roadmap for the Western Balkans Six





SWOT Analysis of the GGF



The introduction of Gender-responsive Green Finance (GGF) in the Western Balkans Six offers a transformative opportunity to foster inclusive economic growth while addressing persistent gender inequalities and the pressing challenges of climate adaptation. This analysis evaluates the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with GGF in the region, highlighting the factors that will shape its successful implementation.

The WB6 are increasingly recognising the importance of gender perspectives in climate finance. Initiatives such as the Climate Gender Equity Fund and Women-Led Coal Transitions reflect growing awareness of the need to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into climate resilience strategies. International support further strengthens these efforts, with programmes such as the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) Women in Business programme providing critical funding and technical assistance. The region also benefits from established policy foundations, such as frameworks for gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), which provide a pathway to align gender equality with sustainability objectives. At the grassroots level, women's organisations and civil society stakeholders are playing a pivotal role in advocating for inclusive policies, fostering community engagement that amplifies the case for gender-responsive green finance.

Despite these strengths, systemic challenges persist. Many financial institutions in WB6 lack the expertise and capacity to design and implement gender-sensitive green finance models, which undermines the scalability and effectiveness of such initiatives. The absence of comprehensive, sex-disaggregated data further complicates progress monitoring and accountability, while entrenched cultural norms and structural barriers continue to restrict women's access to financial resources and decision-making platforms. These limitations are particularly pronounced in rural areas, where traditional gender roles often limit women's economic agency. Additionally, the lack of coordination amongst key stakeholders—including governments, private sector stakeholders, and civil society—results in fragmented efforts that dilute the impact of gender-responsive policies.

Opportunities for advancing GGF in the WB6 are significant, particularly in light of the region's EU accession process. Aligning regional economies' policies with EU directives on gender equality and sustainable development provides a compelling incentive for reform. The emergence of innovative financing mechanisms, such as sustainability-linked loans with gender-specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), presents further opportunities to mobilise resources for women-led enterprises and climate resilience projects. Capacity-building programmes tailored to enhancing financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills amongst women in green sectors also hold transformative potential, particularly as digital platforms and technologies become more accessible. Additionally, the global focus on climate adaptation funding offers the WB6 a chance to position themselves as leaders in integrating gender considerations into climate finance strategies, ensuring that women entrepreneurs are at the forefront of the green transition.

However, significant threats must be addressed to ensure the success of GGF initiatives. Economic instability in the WB6 could divert resources and attention away from gender-sensitive and green finance priorities. Political resistance, driven by cultural conservatism or competing interests, may further hinder the adoption of inclusive policies. Climate change itself poses a substantial threat, as the region's most vulnerable population, including women and women-led MSMEs, are disproportionately affected by extreme weather events and environmental degradation. Finally, global competition for climate finance could limit the availability of resources specifically earmarked for gender-responsive initiatives in the WB6, intensifying the need for strategic positioning and advocacy.

This SWOT analysis (Table 1) underscores the dual imperative of addressing systemic weaknesses and mitigating external threats while leveraging the region’s strengths and opportunities. The growing recognition of gender’s central role in climate finance, coupled with international support and innovative financial models, provides a strong foundation for progress. By addressing institutional and cultural barriers, improving data availability, and fostering stakeholder coordination, the WB6 can unlock the full potential of GGF as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable development. Through a strategic and collaborative approach, the region has the potential to become a leader in advancing gender-responsive green finance, aligning economic resilience with environmental sustainability and social equity.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis: Gender-responsive Green Finance Roadmap

Strengths	Weaknesses
Growing Awareness: Recognition of the importance of gender perspectives in climate finance	Limited Capacity: Financial institutions lack expertise in gender-sensitive financing models
International Support: Access to programmes like WBIF and EBRD’s Women in Business	Data Gaps: Lack of sex-disaggregated data hampers progress measurement
Policy Frameworks: Gender-responsive budgeting frameworks to build upon	Cultural Barriers: Traditional roles and stereotypes limit women’s participation
Community Engagement: Women’s groups advocating for inclusive policies	Fragmented Efforts: Uncoordinated stakeholder approaches reduce effectiveness
Opportunities	Threats
EU Accession Process: Aligning policies with EU standards promotes gender and sustainability goals	Economic Instability: Limited funding for green and gender-focused initiatives
Innovative Financing Models: Gender-KPI-linked loans for women-led green projects	Political Resistance: Gender-focused policies may face opposition from stakeholders
Capacity Building Initiatives: Training programmes to empower women entrepreneurs in green sectors	Climate Change Impacts: Disproportionate effects on women exacerbate existing inequalities
Climate Adaptation Funding: Opportunities to integrate gender in global funding strategies	Global Competition for Funding: Limited resources for WB6 gender-responsive initiatives



Policy Recommendations



To address the dual challenges of climate change and social inequities, the **Gender-responsive Green Finance Roadmap** provides a forward-looking strategy tailored to the specific needs of the WB6. This framework integrates gender equity into financial systems to support sustainable economic growth while addressing environmental risks. Targeted policy interventions are essential to meet the financial, regulatory, and institutional needs of a green, inclusive economy.

This policy paper serves as a strategic guide for embedding GGF into the WB6, aligning with international frameworks such as the EU Green Deal, Paris Agreement, and SDGs. It outlines actionable recommendations to establish resilient financial systems that empower women and marginalised groups while addressing urgent climate risks.

Key insights from the regional workshop held on 27 November 2024 informed these recommendations, ensuring that they reflect stakeholder priorities and practical implementation strategies. These policy recommendations are structured to guide policymakers, financial institutions, civil society, and regional stakeholders in integrating gender-responsive green finance principles into economic systems and public policies.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Regulators

Policymakers must create an enabling environment for GGF by **integrating financial literacy**, regulatory reforms, and inclusive practices into economy-level and regional strategies. Improving financial literacy is critical to fostering equitable participation in green finance. Financial education programmes should cover topics such as climate risk management, sustainable finance tools, and gender-responsive instruments like microloans, climate insurance, and green bonds. Special attention should be given to women entrepreneurs in rural and underserved areas to ensure they have the knowledge needed to access green finance products and thrive in sectors like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism. Digital financial literacy must also be prioritised, addressing the needs of unbanked population and enabling greater access to emerging financial tools.

Regulatory reforms aligned with EU standards are crucial to embedding sustainability and equity into financial systems. **Green and gender budgeting** must become a cornerstone of fiscal policy, with public expenditures directed towards gender-responsive and climate-resilient sectors. For instance, green budgeting principles can prioritise funding for women-led projects that have significant social and environmental impacts. These efforts should be supported by gender-sensitive budget audits, ensuring transparency and accountability in public spending decisions.

A principle-based green and gender-responsive procurement framework should drive inclusive growth by embedding sustainability and gender equity into public procurement processes. This includes setting specific targets for awarding contracts to women-led green enterprises, evaluating bidders based on sustainability and inclusivity performance, and providing technical support to women entrepreneurs to meet green procurement standards.

Harmonisation with EU directives, such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), is essential to enhance regional integration and credibility. Standardised reporting practices should include gender-specific disclosures on climate-related risks, enabling financial institutions to align their strategies with inclusive and sustainable development goals.

Recommendations for Financial Institutions

Financial institutions are at the forefront of advancing gender-responsive green finance by designing **innovative and inclusive financial products** to address the unique needs of women and marginalised groups while fostering climate resilience. Institutions must prioritise development of tools like green microloans tailored to the needs of women-led MSMEs in climate-sensitive sectors, including agriculture, renewable energy, and sustainable tourism. Additionally, sustainability-linked loans with gender-specific performance metrics can incentivise private sector alignment with green objectives while promoting gender equity.

Building institutional capacity is critical to ensuring that financial systems in the Western Balkans Six (WB6) are equipped to address gender-responsive climate challenges. Financial professionals need specialised training to conduct gender-sensitive climate risk assessments and design innovative financial products that cater to women-led enterprises and marginalised groups. Regional cooperation, facilitated by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), can play a vital role in harmonising best practices and fostering knowledge-sharing across WB6. Coordinated capacity-building initiatives and leveraging international expertise from global institutions like the World Bank and IFC can strengthen the ability of financial professionals and policymakers to design and implement inclusive financial strategies.

The use of innovative technologies like **Digital Product Passports (DPPs)** can simplify access to green finance by consolidating critical information on sustainability and gender inclusivity. These tools enhance transparency and compliance with sustainability standards, making it easier for women-led businesses to secure funding for green initiatives. Expanding digital financial platforms, such as mobile banking and app-based credit solutions, is critical for ensuring equitable access to finance, particularly in underserved and rural areas.

Financial institutions should also adopt **gender-disaggregated data systems** to track progress and inform product development. By analysing data on financial inclusion and the impact of green finance initiatives, institutions can identify gaps and refine their strategies to better address the needs of women-led enterprises and marginalised communities.

To further drive innovation, governments and financial institutions should collaborate **on blended finance mechanisms** and **provide tax incentives** for products that support women-led green initiatives. These efforts can stimulate the growth of climate-resilient enterprises and expand access to finance for underserved groups.

Recommendations for Civil Society and MSMEs

Civil society organisations (CSOs) and MSMEs are critical stakeholders in implementing GGF strategies effectively. Advocacy for greater representation of women in decision-making roles, particularly within climate and financial governance, is essential. CSOs should support programmes that mentor and prepare women for leadership positions in sustainability-focused sectors, ensuring their perspectives are included in policymaking processes.

Capacity-building initiatives must be tailored to address the needs of women-led MSMEs, providing training on climate-smart practices, renewable energy integration, and green technology adoption. These training programmes can help overcome structural barriers such as limited access to collateral and financial services, enabling MSMEs to lead in sustainable sectors.

Civil society also plays a vital role in **raising public awareness** about the benefits of gender-responsive green finance. Campaigns that showcase successful women-led green projects can

inspire further engagement and adoption of inclusive financial solutions. Regional forums and workshops provide platforms for dialogue amongst stakeholders, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

Additional Cross-Cutting Recommendations

Raising awareness is a key component of the GGF Roadmap. Public campaigns should emphasize the transformative potential of green finance and highlight success stories of women-led enterprises to build momentum for broader adoption of gender-responsive principles and educating stakeholders about available financial tools. Events such as regional workshops can engage diverse audiences, from policymakers and financial institutions to grassroots organisations, in discussions about the importance of gender-responsive financial solutions, encouraging dialogue and collaboration across sectors.

A **robust monitoring and evaluation framework** is essential to track progress and ensure accountability. Key performance indicators should measure metrics such as the number of women-led green projects funded, improvements in financial literacy, and the availability of gender-specific financial products. Aligning the M&E framework with international standards like the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures can enhance transparency and ensure the region meets global benchmarks. Additionally, governments and financial institutions should regularly evaluate the socio-economic and environmental impacts of their initiatives, using these insights to refine strategies and drive continuous improvement. This feedback loop will enable continuous improvement of GGF strategies.

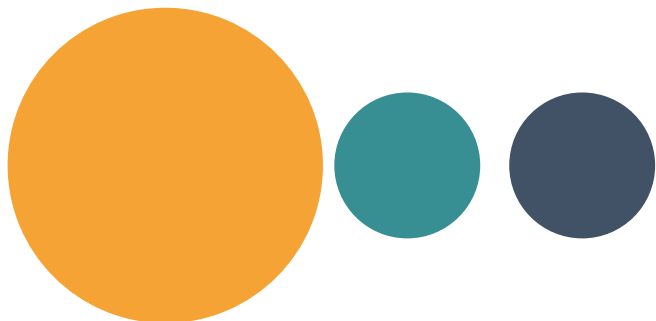
Regional **partnerships** are crucial for scaling GGF initiatives across the WB6. Platforms like the Berlin Process provide opportunities to harmonise regulatory frameworks, share best practices, and foster collaboration amongst governments, financial institutions, and CSOs. Governments, financial institutions, and international organisations should collaborate to pool resources, develop **innovative financial solutions**, and ensure that GGF reaches underserved population. These partnerships can ensure that GGF strategies reach underserved population and create a resilient, inclusive financial ecosystem.

By implementing these recommendations, the WB6 can embed GGF into their financial systems, driving sustainable growth and advancing gender equity. This Roadmap not only addresses urgent climate challenges but also sets the foundation for an inclusive green economy where women and marginalised communities actively shape and benefit from a sustainable future.

Through strategic actions—ranging from regulatory reform and financial literacy to capacity building and partnerships—the WB6 can position itself as a leader in gender-responsive sustainable finance. This comprehensive approach contributes to broader regional goals, aligning with the EU Green Deal and Common Regional Market while ensuring that economic growth and environmental sustainability go hand in hand for the benefit of all.



Conclusion



The Gender-responsive Green Finance Roadmap presents a transformative opportunity for the Western Balkans Six to address the interconnected and pressing challenges of climate resilience, gender inequality, and financial inclusion. By embedding gender-responsive finance into financial systems and policies, the Roadmap provides a structured framework for fostering a resilient and inclusive green economy, aligned with EU directives and global sustainability goals, leaving no one behind.

At its core, the Roadmap envisions a financial ecosystem that empowers women and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises as central agents of sustainable development. Women, often disproportionately affected by climate risks, are positioned to lead in green sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and sustainable tourism. Tailored financial instruments, including green microloans, climate insurance, and digital credit tools, are critical for addressing structural inequities and enabling marginalised groups to adapt to climate challenges while driving green growth.

Central to the success of the Roadmap is the recognition that the green industry in the WB6 is still in its early stages. A step-by-step approach tailored to the region's unique needs is vital. This includes building institutional capacity to integrate gender-responsive principles into financial operations and policies. Capacity-building initiatives must extend to financial institutions, policymakers, and women-led MSMEs, offering technical training on adopting green technologies and navigating green financial instruments. Partnerships with international organisations can play a pivotal role in resource sharing and expertise exchange to support this process.

The Roadmap emphasizes the importance of embedding sustainability and gender considerations into public financial management systems through green and gender-responsive budgeting and procurement frameworks. Strengthened regulatory frameworks, aligned with EU directives such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) provide the necessary foundation for harmonising economy-level policies with regional and international commitments.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of the Roadmap's implementation. Effective partnerships amongst public institutions, private sector, and civil society are essential for driving the green and digital transition. Public-private cooperation, complemented by regular regional and joint working group meetings, fosters the exchange of best practices, joint project development, and harmonised policy implementation. Long-term support for private sector, particularly for youth and women entrepreneurs, is critical for reducing reliance on donor-funded initiatives and ensuring the sustainability of green projects.

Awareness-raising campaigns and regional platforms, such as RCC's RNWE Platform, play an important role in promoting best practices and highlighting women-led initiatives. Annual flagship events, such as the Western Balkans Six Women Entrepreneurs of the Year, and collaborative efforts can further elevate the visibility of successful gender-responsive green finance practices in the region, inspiring broader participation and engagement.

The Roadmap integrates robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. Gender-sensitive key performance indicators (KPIs) provide stakeholders with actionable insights into progress in financial inclusion, climate resilience, and women's economic empowerment. These mechanisms are vital for aligning interventions with global standards and adapting to shifting priorities.

By addressing systemic inequities and advancing inclusive financial solutions, the GGF Roadmap lays a foundation for a resilient and equitable green transition. Its phased implementation approach—beginning with awareness raising and institutional strengthening and advancing towards

policy integration and tailored financial instruments—ensures a structured and scalable pathway for achieving its objectives.

Ultimately, the Roadmap positions the WB6 as pioneers in harmonising financial inclusion and climate resilience. By fostering long-term collaboration, aligning with CRM 2.0 objectives, and leveraging regional synergies, the WB6 can become leaders in gender-responsive sustainable finance. This vision charts a course for a future where economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and social equity are deeply interconnected, empowering all members of society—particularly women, MSMEs, and marginalised groups—to thrive in a resilient, low-carbon economy.

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Regional Cooperation Council

Trg BiH 1/V, Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Fax: +387 33 561 701
Phone +387 33 561 700

mail: rcc@rcc.int
website: www.rcc.int



@rccint



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