Gender Assessment

FP321: Moldova Green Shield: Enhancing Resilience through Ecosystem-based Adaptation

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GENDER ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

Moldova Green Shield: Enhancing Resilience through Ecosystem-based Adaptation

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Abbreviations **3**
1. Introduction, Scope, and Methodology **4**
1.1 Objectives 4
1.2 Methodology 4
2. Gender Context at the National Level **5**
2.1 Landscape and Demographic Overview 5
2.2 Key Gender Indicators 5
2.3 Life Expectancy and Health 6
2.4 Education and Skills 6
2.5 Poverty and Employment 6
2.6 Political Participation 6
3. Legal and Policy Frameworks on Gender **7**
4. Gender Context in the Project Area **7**
4.1 Project Area Profile 7
4.2 Gender and Forestry 8
4.3 Gender and Climate Change Vulnerability 8
4.4 Gender and Community Resilience Planning 9
4.5 Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEA/SH) 9
5. Differential Vulnerabilities and Adaptive Capacities **10**
5.1 Vulnerabilities 10
5.1.1. Social inclusion and Intersectionality 10
5.1.2. Vulnerable Population Groups 11
5.2 Adaptive Capacities 11
5.3 Access to Productive Resources 12
6. Barriers to Information and Services **13**
7. Stakeholder Engagement and Consultations **13**
7.1 Stakeholders Consulted 13
7.2 Key Findings from Consultations 14
8. Gender Considerations for Project Design **14**
8.1 Gender Mainstreaming Across All Components 14
8.2 Component-Specific Considerations 15
8.3 Knowledge Gaps and Capacity Needs 15
9. Introduction to the Gender Action Plan **17**
9.1 World Bank Approach to Gender 17
10. Gender Action Plan — Cross-Cutting Activities **17**
11. Component 1: Institutional Capacity Development and Data-Driven Planning **20**
12. Component 2: Climate-Resilient Ecological Infrastructure Restoration **22**
13. Component 3: Community Engagement, Climate-Resilient Livelihoods, and Local Stewardship Systems **25**
14. Component 4: Project Management, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge **27**
15. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting **28**
16. Institutional Arrangements and Responsibilities **29**
17. References **30**

Abbreviations

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EbA	Ecosystem-based Adaptation
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
ESF	World Bank Environmental and Social Framework
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
ICAS	Institute for Forest Research and Management
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
LPA	Local Public Administration
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoE	Ministry of Environment
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NCCAP	National Climate Change Adaptation Plan
NOIEP	National Office for Environmental Projects Implementation
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
RFRMC	Southern Regional Forest Reproductive Material Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA/SH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment
SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
SFE	State Forest Enterprise
SPMP	Silvopastoral Management Planning
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
UN Women	United Nations Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WBG	World Bank Group

PART I: GENDER ASSESSMENT

1. Introduction, Scope, and Methodology

The project "Moldova Green Shield: Enhancing Resilience through Ecosystem-based Adaptation" recognises the critical importance of gender-responsive climate adaptation in a national context shaped by rural poverty, demographic ageing, environmental degradation, and persistent gender inequalities. Women and girls in Moldova, especially in semi-arid and remote areas, are disproportionately affected by climate-related stressors due to entrenched socio-economic disparities, limited access to productive resources and services, and underrepresentation in decision-making processes. These vulnerabilities are compounded by high rates of male out-migration, which have left many women as de facto heads of households, bearing increased responsibility for unpaid care work, agricultural production, and community-level resource management.

The project is expected to directly benefit approximately 30,000 people through participation in restoration planning, ecosystem restoration implementation, and climate-informed landscape decision-making processes, and indirectly benefit approximately 155,000 people through improved ecosystem services, reduced climate exposure, and strengthened ecological infrastructure across targeted districts.

This Gender Assessment focuses on gender-differentiated vulnerabilities and opportunities associated with ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) interventions implemented under Components 1–3 of the project, including institutional capacity development, data-driven planning, and climate-informed early warning systems (Component 1); climate-resilient ecological infrastructure restoration (Component 2); and community engagement, climate-resilient livelihoods, and local stewardship systems (Component 3).

The Gender Assessment and accompanying Gender Action Plan (GAP) are aligned with the principles of the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), in particular ESS1 and ESS10, as well as Moldova's policy framework on gender equality and climate adaptation, including the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (NCCAP) 2030. The GAP complements the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) by operationalising gender-responsive participation, inclusive restoration planning processes, and equitable access to ecosystem-based adaptation benefits across all project components.

1.1 Objectives

The Gender Assessment is guided by the following key objectives:

- To assess gender-differentiated impacts of climate change on access to water resources, land use systems, food security, and adaptive capacity across age and gender groups in climate-vulnerable regions of southern Moldova.
- To identify legal, institutional, and socio-economic barriers affecting women's participation in restoration planning, natural resource governance, and EbA implementation.
- To formulate practical recommendations for integrating gender considerations across all project phases from restoration prioritisation and implementation to institutional coordination, community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation systems.

1.2 Methodology

This assessment employs a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative indicators and qualitative analysis, including:

- Desk review and literature review of national and international gender data, policy frameworks, and relevant project studies.
- Stakeholder consultations: a national workshop in Chisinau and three local-level consultations, including sessions in Cimislia and Basarabeasca (October 2025), covering government counterparts, NGOs, community representatives, and women from targeted communities.
- Field observations and policy mapping across key sectors including water management, agriculture, forestry, and rural livelihoods.

- Analysis of sex-disaggregated data to identify gender-specific vulnerabilities, adaptive capacities, and institutional and socio-cultural barriers.

2. Gender Context at the National Level

2.1 Landscape and Demographic Overview

Moldova is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe (33,846 km²) with a temperate continental climate marked by hot summers, cold winters, and increasingly irregular precipitation. Droughts are rising in frequency and intensity, particularly in the southern and southeastern regions, which correspond to the project's primary target area.

As of 2024, Moldova's population stood at approximately 2.6 million, reflecting a steady decline due to one of the highest emigration rates in Europe. More than one million Moldovan citizens are estimated to be living and working abroad. Labour migration has significantly altered household structures: many women, elderly persons, and children remain behind in rural areas. Rural areas are home to about 57% of the total population, predominantly engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and small-scale trade.

The rural demographic is aging rapidly. Women constitute the majority of those remaining in villages, taking on multiple roles as caregivers, food producers, and informal community leaders. Elderly women form a growing segment of Moldova's rural poor, often surviving on small pensions and subsistence agriculture. Household sizes in rural Moldova tend to be smaller due to the migration of working-age adults; many households are headed by women who manage both domestic responsibilities and agricultural work.

2.2 Key Gender Indicators

Indicator	Data
Maternal mortality ratio (2022)	~19 per 100,000 live births (improved from 38 in 2010)
Infant mortality rate (2022)	9.8 per 1,000 live births
Life expectancy at birth (2023)	73.3 years overall; 69.3 men / 77.2 women
Adult literacy rate	~99.7% (near-equal between women and men)
Women in higher education	Women constitute over 60% of HE students
Women in STEM faculties	Only ~27% of engineering/technology students are female
Gender wage gap	~13–15% (women earn less across all industries)
Women's labour force participation	43.2–50.3% (vs. 48.8–59.8% for men)
Informal employment (women)	~30–60% of employed rural women in informal roles
Female-headed households	>25% of all households in Moldova
Parliamentary seats held by women (2023)	27%
Women in local governance	~22% of positions
Poverty rate – rural women	15.6% vs. 4.8% urban women (EEAS, 2023)
Access to formal credit – rural women	15% vs. 25% for rural men
Internet use – rural women	~40% vs. ~55% for rural men

2.3 Life Expectancy and Health

Despite women's longer life expectancy, elderly rural women face poverty, social isolation, and limited access to geriatric care. Many live alone due to widowhood or the migration of younger family members. Climate change further complicates these dynamics: older adults, particularly elderly women, are highly vulnerable to heat-related illnesses, vector-borne diseases, and disruptions to food and water supplies.

Maternal health indicators continue to reflect underlying inequities. Nearly 25% of pregnant women in rural Moldova receive fewer than the recommended four antenatal visits. Roma women experience higher maternal and infant mortality rates due to compounded discrimination, lower literacy, and limited access to culturally appropriate services.

2.4 Education and Skills

Despite near-universal literacy and women's over-representation in higher education, gender segregation in academic disciplines persists. Women remain underrepresented in STEM fields (only ~27% of engineering students), which limits their access to higher-paying sectors and to the green and digital economy. The gender pay gap (13–15%) is partly attributable to occupational segregation and discriminatory practices. Labour market data also show that women with advanced education face underemployment or career disruptions from caregiving obligations in environments with inadequate childcare services.

2.5 Poverty and Employment

The national poverty rate is approximately 23%, with rural poverty reaching 28%. Women-headed households, constituting over 25% of all households, are especially susceptible to economic disruptions. Rural women dedicate almost twice the number of hours daily to unpaid care work compared to men, which limits their ability to pursue paid employment, vocational training, or participation in public decision-making and climate adaptation programs.

Approximately 60% of employed rural women participate in informal or unregistered work, lacking employment contracts, health insurance, or pension payments. They are disproportionately exposed to climate-related economic insecurity due to their concentration in informal and low-paid sectors, dependence on subsistence agriculture, and limited access to productive resources. Many women rely on remittances from family members working abroad, creating additional economic vulnerability in periods of climate or economic instability. Women's unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities further reduce opportunities for paid employment, vocational training, and participation in climate adaptation activities, reinforcing the feminization of poverty in rural areas.

2.6 Political Participation

Women held 27% of parliamentary seats as of 2023, with modest improvement following introduction of gender quota law in 2016. At local government level, women hold approximately 22% of positions and are underrepresented in executive roles and in ministries overseeing infrastructure and finance. In the project area specifically, among 23 City Halls, five are led by women — who are noted as effective, inclusive decision-makers.

3. Legal and Policy Frameworks on Gender

Moldova has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework for gender equality, underpinned by international commitments and progressively aligned with EU directives. Key frameworks relevant to the project include:

Framework / Instrument	Year	Key Relevance
Law on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (No. 5-XVI)	2006 (amended)	Primary gender equality legislation; mandates sex-disaggregated data and equal treatment
National Strategy on Gender Equality	2022–2027	Strategic roadmap for gender mainstreaming across sectors
National Strategy on Gender Equality (predecessor)	2017–2021 (extended to 2027)	Land reform promotion; gender-sensitive agricultural policies
National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (NCCAP 2030)	2024	Gender-sensitive adaptation; inclusive consultations; capacity-building for planning agencies
Law on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence (No. 45-XVI)	2007	GBV prevention and response; restraining orders; local multidisciplinary teams
Istanbul Convention (ratified by Moldova)	2021	Comprehensive framework for preventing violence against women
National Programme for Preventing Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence	2023–2027	Improved enforcement, support services, and institutional coordination
Law on Forests and Forestry	Current	Resource management and land-use frameworks affecting women's access
CEDAW	Acceded	International standard for non-discrimination and women's rights
SDG 5 – Gender Equality	2030 Agenda	Targets for women's economic participation, decision-making, and GBV elimination

The NCCAP 2030 explicitly recognises gendered dimensions of climate vulnerability and mandates inclusive, participatory planning. While the NCCAP lays a solid policy basis, implementation challenges persist, including insufficient institutional capacity, limited localized gender analysis tools, and cultural norms impeding women's participation in formal decision-making.

4. Gender Context in the Project Area

4.1 Project Area Profile

The project area encompasses southern Moldova, including districts such as Leova, Basarabeasca, Gagauzia, Cimislia, and the Lower Prut and Lower Dniester regions. These areas are characterised by:

- Low forest coverage (approximately 13% compared to the European average of 30%).
- High agricultural dependence: 67% of land used for agriculture, of which 30% is eroded or heavily eroded.
- Women constitute 51% of rural residents and face heightened vulnerabilities due to limited resource access, traditional gender roles, and underrepresentation in decision-making.

- Rural women's poverty rate stands at 15.6% compared to 4.8% for urban women; female-headed households face a 26.6% poverty rate.
- Semi-arid conditions with increasing drought frequency, water scarcity, and climate-related agricultural stress disproportionately affecting women.

4.2 Gender and Forestry

Forestry in the project area is heavily gender-segregated. Men predominantly engage in timber harvesting and formal forest management, while women are primarily involved in collecting non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as berries, mushrooms, and medicinal plants. This division limits women's economic opportunities and decision-making power in the forestry sector.

Women in Moldova's agricultural sector face structural inequalities affecting their adaptive capacity and resilience to climate change. Women manage only approximately 19% of agricultural land and typically operate smaller plots than men (0.86 ha compared to 1.21 ha), limiting their access to agricultural income and investment opportunities. Women also have lower access to vocational and technical agricultural education, reducing their ability to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices, modern irrigation systems, and sustainable land management approaches. Women's reliance on NTFPs, while ecologically sustainable, typically yields lower incomes than timber-related activities, reinforcing economic disparities. These inequalities increase women's vulnerability to droughts, floods, soil degradation, and other climate-related risks affecting agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. Strengthening women's access to land, training, climate information, and restoration-related livelihood opportunities is therefore essential for effective ecosystem-based adaptation and long-term landscape resilience.

Recent initiatives demonstrate potential for change. The UNDP project "Sustainable and Resilient Communities through Women Empowerment" (Phase 1, 2020–2024) supported women-led agroforestry businesses in Leova and related semi-arid districts, planting 59,263 trees across 17 hectares of degraded land and enabling sustainable land management on 216 hectares, with gender-mainstreamed local climate adaptation plans developed in 12 localities.

Consultations in the project area confirmed that Moldsilva employs numerous women foresters, noted as skilled workers often performing better at planting and monitoring than men. Women are also dominant in social work, education, and City Council roles, demonstrating existing capacity for leadership in ecosystem management.

4.3 Gender and Climate Change Vulnerability

Climate change significantly impacts women in the project area due to their roles in household and agricultural resource management. Key vulnerabilities include:

- Water scarcity: Women are typically responsible for water collection; in 2018. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation infrastructure remains uneven across rural areas of Moldova, disproportionately affecting women responsible for household water management and caregiving responsibilities (UNDP Moldova; National Bureau of Statistics, 2024).
- Agricultural impacts: Droughts and floods reduce agricultural productivity on which women heavily rely. Women's limited access to land (20% ownership), credit (15% access rate vs. 25% for men), and technology hinders adoption of climate-smart practices.
- Time poverty: Women spend nearly twice as long as men on unpaid care work, excluding them from climate adaptation planning and training processes. A 2020 UNDP study found 90% of Moldovans hold at least one bias against women.
- Digital divide: Only 40% of rural women regularly use the internet (vs. 55% men), restricting access to climate information, market data, and extension services.
- Minority women: Gagauz, Roma, and other minority women face compounded language and discrimination barriers.

Social norms and gender stereotypes continue to shape women's participation in economic activities, community decision-making, and climate adaptation processes in Moldova, particularly in rural areas. Traditional expectations often assign women primary responsibility for unpaid domestic work, caregiving, food preparation, water collection,

and household management, while men are more frequently perceived as primary decision-makers and income earners.

These gender roles significantly affect women's ability to participate in restoration activities, vocational training, local governance processes, and ecosystem-based adaptation planning. Women frequently experience "time poverty" due to unpaid care responsibilities, reducing opportunities for participation in consultations, seasonal employment, and capacity-building activities.

Gender stereotypes also influence educational and employment pathways. Women remain underrepresented in technical and STEM-related fields relevant to climate adaptation and natural resource management, while social norms continue to discourage women's leadership in environmental governance and land management. A 2020 UNDP study found that approximately 90% of Moldovans hold at least one bias against women, highlighting the persistence of restrictive gender norms that may limit women's participation in climate resilience initiatives.

These structural inequalities must be considered throughout project implementation to ensure that ecosystem restoration and adaptation activities are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and capacities of women and vulnerable groups.

4.4 Gender and Community Resilience Planning

Women's participation in community resilience planning is limited by underrepresentation in local governance (22% of positions) and time constraints from domestic responsibilities. This exclusion means that women's knowledge of local ecosystems and social dynamics is often overlooked, reducing the effectiveness of resilience strategies.

Consultations in Cimislia and Basarabeasca (October 2025) confirmed that women appreciate early involvement in planning: "And of course, we are encouraged by the fact that you invited and listened to women's opinions at the stage of planning, not only implementation." However, a major challenge is the low participation of women in seasonal labour due to competing household and childcare responsibilities, with women preferring longer-term stable employment contracts.

Women's participation is further constrained by unpaid domestic responsibilities, childcare obligations, mobility limitations, and limited availability of flexible employment opportunities. These barriers disproportionately affect rural women, elderly women, and women-headed households, reducing their ability to engage consistently in restoration activities, training programmes, and community consultations. Gender-responsive participation approaches, including flexible scheduling and accessible consultation formats, are therefore essential to ensure meaningful inclusion.

Consultations conducted in Cahul, Causeni, Leova, Comrat, Cimislia, and Cantemir districts identified several operational barriers that may affect women's participation in ecosystem restoration activities. These include limited availability of childcare, lack of transportation to remote restoration sites, seasonal agricultural workloads, insufficient access to technical equipment and protective gear adapted to women workers, and limited flexibility of short-term seasonal employment arrangements. Participants also highlighted institutional capacity constraints within LPAs and local environmental institutions, including shortages of technical staff and limited local financing for community-based adaptation initiatives. These barriers should be considered during implementation to ensure equitable participation and sustainable engagement of women and vulnerable groups in project activities.

4.5 Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEA/SH)

GBV remains a significant human rights issue in Moldova. Key data points:

- In 2018, 9.1% of women aged 15–49 reported physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former partner in the previous 12 months.
- A 2011 NBS survey found 63% of women had experienced psychological, physical, or sexual violence from a husband or partner at least once.
- Rural, elderly, and separated/divorced women face the highest rates of multiple types of violence.
- Moldova is identified as one of the primary source countries for sex trafficking and forced labour across Europe.

Climate change exacerbates GBV risks as droughts force rural women to work harder and travel farther to secure resources, increasing exposure to violence. The project must integrate robust SEA/SH prevention and response measures as part of its gender-responsive approach.

The project will establish confidential, survivor-centred SEA/SH reporting and referral procedures aligned with World Bank Good Practice Note requirements. Referral pathways will include available medical, psychosocial, legal, and protection services operating at national and local levels. SEA/SH-related complaints will be managed separately from the standard GRM, with strict confidentiality and informed consent principles applied throughout all reporting and response processes.

Given that some activity sites may be located in isolated or remote areas, SEAH awareness training and GRM access points will be adapted to ensure mitigation effectiveness in such contexts, including through mobile outreach, community-level focal points, and communication channels accessible to women in remote locations.

5. Differential Vulnerabilities and Adaptive Capacities

5.1 Vulnerabilities

Women's higher participation in the informal economy, particularly in unpaid family labour and subsistence farming, contributes to distinct vulnerabilities:

- Lack of social protection: Informal workers lack health insurance, pensions, maternity benefits, or unemployment support, increasing vulnerability to economic and climate shocks.
- Low earnings and exploitation risk: Roles such as unpaid family labour or subsistence farming yield minimal returns. Women in informal trade face harassment and unstable income.
- Time poverty: Women balance informal work with domestic and caregiving responsibilities, limiting transition to formal employment or skill development.
- Limited asset access: Women own only 20% of agricultural land; only 15% access formal credit vs. 25% of men. Without collateral or financial literacy, investment in climate-resilient practices is severely constrained.

5.1.1. Social inclusion and Intersectionality

Vulnerable groups experience multiple forms of exclusion. Roma women, women with disabilities, and rural women face intersecting discrimination that limits their access to education, employment, and services (UN Women, 2025). For instance, Moldova's rural women are four times more prone to absolute poverty and are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts due to their reliance on agriculture and limited access to alternative income sources (UNDP, 2024). Persistent gender norms and stereotypes further exacerbate these challenges, as women are often expected to prioritise domestic responsibilities, reducing their ability to engage in economic or community activities (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2024). Initiatives like the UNDP's "Sustainable and Resilient Communities through Women Empowerment" (Phase 1) have addressed these issues by empowering women in 30 rural communities to practice sustainable agriculture and forestry, demonstrating the potential for targeted interventions to enhance social inclusion (UNDP, 2024).

Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding how multiple social identities intersect to create unique vulnerabilities to climate change. In Moldova, factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, and rural location combine to exacerbate risks for certain groups. As mentioned above, rural Roma women face discrimination based on their gender and ethnicity, which limits their access to land, financial resources, and decision-making opportunities. Climate change impacts, such as water scarcity, droughts, and extreme weather events, disproportionately affect these groups due to their limited adaptive capacity (UNDP, 2024). Women's time poverty, spending nearly twice as long as men on unpaid domestic tasks (UNFPA, 2024), further restricts their ability to participate in income-generating activities or community planning for climate adaptation.

Table. Key vulnerabilities and intersectional factors in Moldova

Social Group	Key Vulnerabilities	Intersectional Factors
Rural Women	Higher poverty rates (15.6%), time poverty, limited access to land and resources	Gender, location (rural), socio-economic status
Roma Women	Multiple forms of discrimination, lower employment rates, and limited access to education	Gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status
Women with Disabilities	Social exclusion, limited access to services, and higher poverty rates	Gender, disability, socio-economic status
Female-Headed Households	Higher poverty rate (26.6%), increased domestic responsibilities	Gender, household status, and socio-economic status
Elderly Women	Higher poverty rates, limited access to healthcare, and resources	Gender, age, socio-economic status

Climate change impacts are not experienced equally across the population. In Moldova, gender intersects with poverty, age, ethnicity, disability, household status, and rural location to create differentiated vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities. Rural women, Roma women, elderly women, women with disabilities, and female-headed households often face overlapping forms of exclusion that reduce access to land, employment, climate information, financial resources, and participation in decision-making processes.

These intersecting vulnerabilities increase exposure to climate-related risks such as droughts, declining agricultural productivity, water scarcity, and economic instability. Women from marginalized groups frequently experience additional barriers related to discrimination, mobility constraints, lower educational attainment, and reduced access to institutional support services.

Understanding these overlapping vulnerabilities is essential for ensuring that ecosystem-based adaptation interventions are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of vulnerable population groups.

5.1.2. Vulnerable Population Groups

Certain population groups face heightened vulnerability to climate change impacts and may experience barriers to participation in ecosystem restoration and adaptation activities.

Rural women are particularly vulnerable due to high poverty rates, dependence on climate-sensitive agricultural livelihoods, limited access to productive resources, and significant unpaid care responsibilities. Women-headed households face increased economic insecurity and reduced adaptive capacity.

Women in agriculture face structural inequalities in access to land ownership, vocational education, agricultural technology, and climate finance, limiting their ability to adopt climate-resilient agricultural practices.

Roma women experience intersecting gender and ethnic discrimination affecting access to education, healthcare, employment, and institutional services. These inequalities increase vulnerability to climate-related economic and environmental shocks.

Women with disabilities face mobility barriers, social exclusion, and reduced access to climate information, public services, and livelihood opportunities, particularly in rural areas.

Elderly women, especially those living alone in rural communities, face increased vulnerability due to poverty, social isolation, limited mobility, and dependence on climate-sensitive household resources and subsistence agriculture.

These differentiated vulnerabilities should be considered throughout project implementation to ensure inclusive participation and equitable access to project benefits.

5.2 Adaptive Capacities

Despite these challenges, women in Moldova demonstrate important adaptive capacities:

- Entrepreneurship and market engagement: Many women engage in micro-enterprises, leveraging local networks to generate income, including selling surplus agricultural produce.
- Community networks: Informal family or community-based cooperatives provide resources and knowledge-sharing opportunities for coping with economic uncertainties.
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK): Women hold significant TEK related to biodiversity, water sources, medicinal plants, and seasonal patterns, which is directly relevant to EbA planning.
- Leadership demonstrated: Consultations confirmed women foresters are skilled restoration workers; women-led City Halls are noted as effective, inclusive decision-makers.

Consultations and stakeholder mapping also identified important opportunities for strengthening women's leadership in ecosystem restoration and local climate governance. Women are already actively involved in local public administration, education, social services, tourism, environmental awareness activities, and community-based initiatives in several target districts. Women-led local administrations and women specialists within forestry and environmental institutions were frequently identified by stakeholders as effective facilitators of participatory planning and community mobilisation processes. These existing leadership capacities provide an important foundation for strengthening gender-responsive ecosystem governance under the project.

Consultations undertaken during project preparation demonstrated that women in rural communities possess extensive practical knowledge related to pasture conditions, seasonal water availability, biodiversity changes, traditional grazing systems, medicinal plants, and local ecosystem degradation trends. Women participants also identified locally appropriate restoration approaches, including rehabilitation of degraded pastures, protection of riparian vegetation, and sustainable management of non-timber forest resources. Integrating this local ecological knowledge into restoration planning and adaptation pathway development can strengthen the sustainability and local ownership of ecosystem-based adaptation interventions.

Despite structural inequalities, women in Moldova demonstrate significant resilience and adaptive potential. Existing women-led community initiatives, local entrepreneurship, informal support networks, and participation in local governance structures create important opportunities for strengthening gender-responsive adaptation pathways. Women's active roles in household resource management, biodiversity conservation, and community organization can support long-term sustainability of restoration interventions when combined with targeted institutional support, technical training, and equitable access to project benefits.

5.3 Access to Productive Resources

Resource	Key Challenges	Opportunities
Land	• Women own only 20% of agricultural land; inheritance laws favour men • Social norms discourage claiming land rights • Women work on land without ownership, limiting security	• National Strategy (2023–2030) promotes gender-sensitive land reform including joint titling • Community-based management can leverage women's knowledge
Water	• Women depend on surface water impacted by climate change (–15% in a decade) • Low representation in water governance • Time spent collecting water reduces income opportunities	• Include women in water committees for equitable distribution • Promote water-saving technologies (drip irrigation, rainwater harvesting)
Finance	• Only 15% of rural women access credit vs. 25% for men[1] • No collateral, low literacy, discrimination as barriers	• Microfinance tailored to women (low collateral, flexible terms) • Financial literacy training programs

[1] Only approximately 15% of rural women access formal credit services compared to approximately 25% of men, reflecting persistent gender disparities in access to finance and collateral ownership (UN Women and UNDP Moldova, 2025).

Resource	Key Challenges	Opportunities
	• Informal work limits savings and investment capacity	
Technology	• Digital divide: 40% rural women use internet vs. 55% men[2] • Limited access to modern farming tools • Cultural norms reduce technology adoption	• Training on digital and farming technology • Subsidies and cooperatives for tools • Expanded rural internet infrastructure

6. Barriers to Information and Services

Women in rural Moldova face significant barriers to accessing information and essential services, including:

- Only 40% of rural women regularly use the internet; 10% fewer women than men complete secondary school in rural areas, leaving many without digital skills.
- Women farmers report significantly lower access to agricultural extension services and climate-resilient agricultural information than men (FAO Moldova; UN Women Moldova, 2024).
- Rural women, particularly elderly women and women from remote communities, report greater difficulties in accessing healthcare and social services due to transportation barriers, poverty, and limited rural infrastructure (UN Women Moldova; WHO Europe, 2024).
- Gender-specific services, including maternal care and GBV support, remain underfunded and scarce in rural areas.
- Social and cultural norms discouraging attendance at meetings, combined with caregiving responsibilities, reduce available time to seek information and services.
- Minority women (Gagauz, Roma) face additional language barriers with limited materials available in native languages.

Limited access to climate-related information further constrains women's adaptive capacity in rural areas. Rural women rely more heavily on traditional information channels, including television and informal community networks, while lower levels of digital access and digital literacy reduce access to online climate information, agricultural extension services, and adaptation-related opportunities. These barriers may limit women's participation in ecosystem restoration activities and climate-informed decision-making unless communication and outreach approaches are adapted to local contexts and literacy levels.

Stakeholder consultations conducted during project preparation emphasized the importance of accessible, repeated, and locally adapted communication approaches for effective participation of women and vulnerable groups. Participants highlighted the importance of using local communication channels, including social media platforms, local meetings, schools, community networks, and local public authorities, to disseminate information regarding restoration activities and participation opportunities. Information disclosure strategies should therefore be adapted to local literacy levels, language preferences, and digital accessibility conditions to ensure meaningful and inclusive engagement throughout project implementation.

7. Stakeholder Engagement and Consultations

7.1 Stakeholders Consulted

The consultation process included national and subnational administration (including municipal-level governance), international agencies, civil society organisations (CSOs), NGOs, and local community stakeholders including local action groups, community leaders, representatives of marginalised groups, and community representatives.

[2] Approximately 40% of rural women regularly use the internet compared to 55% of men, limiting access to digital climate information, agricultural extension services, and online economic opportunities (National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova; UNDP Moldova, 2024–2025).

Key consultation modalities included:

- A national consultation workshop in Chisinau: government counterparts, NDA representatives, line Ministries, environmental and forestry experts.
- Three local-level workshops including Cimislia and Basarabeasca (October 9, 2025), using a mixed-method approach combining face-to-face meetings, virtual calls, and workshop formats.
- Semi-structured consultations guided by a questionnaire adapted to participant numbers and interests.

Consultation activities included participation of women representatives, local authorities, civil society organisations, women foresters, women farmers, and vulnerable groups from target districts. Sex-disaggregated participation data and consultation summaries will be maintained by the PIU as part of project stakeholder engagement documentation.

Approximately 180 participants were engaged through consultation activities, including women representatives, local authorities, civil society organisations, women foresters, women farmers, and representatives of vulnerable groups from target districts.

7.2 Key Findings from Consultations

Key findings from local consultations include:

- Awareness and capacity gaps: Low participation of women in seasonal restoration labour due to competing household and childcare responsibilities. Women prefer longer-term employment contracts for financial stability.
- Gender integration opportunities: Women identified flexible scheduling, small-group training workshops in proximity, and accessible formats as critical for meaningful participation.
- Existing women's leadership: Women are already integrated into development structures — Moldsilva employs skilled women foresters; five of 23 City Halls in the area are women-led.
- Access to grants: Women successfully access grants and subsidies; stakeholders recommended creating separate grant categories for women/youth and adding evaluation score points for women-led enterprises.
- Awareness-raising approaches: Women representatives suggested high-visibility, repetitive social media campaigns (Facebook) as effective outreach tools.
- Security and accessibility: Remote and degraded land poses access challenges; provision of gear (rain boots, protective clothing) and specialised machinery was recommended for inclusive participation.

Women’s feedback during stakeholder engagements directly shaped key elements of project design. Specifically: women’s identification of childcare and time constraints as primary participation barriers informed the inclusion of childcare support provisions and flexible scheduling requirements in the GAP and ESMF; women’s recommendations for proximity-based, small-group training formats influenced the design of capacity-building activities under Components 1 and 3; recommendations for separate grant categories and bonus scoring criteria for women-led enterprises were incorporated into the design of Component 3 livelihood support, which under the revised project design is delivered through direct procurement and transfer of assets and tools (superseding the earlier AIPA green grant mechanism); and women’s identification of access barriers related to lack of appropriate protective equipment informed the specification of inclusive occupational health and safety measures for restoration activities. These design adaptations are reflected in the corresponding GAP actions and ESMF mitigation measures.

8. Gender Considerations for Project Design

8.1 Gender Mainstreaming Across All Components

Across all project components, the project will ensure the active and meaningful participation of women, men, youth, and vulnerable groups in consultations, restoration planning processes, and implementation activities through gender-responsive engagement approaches. These will include:

- Flexible scheduling of meetings adapted to women's time constraints from domestic and care responsibilities.
- Accessible consultation formats adapted to literacy levels, language needs, and local cultural contexts.

- Provision of childcare support where appropriate to reduce participation barriers.
- Gender balance targets applied in stakeholder engagement activities and capacity-building events.
- Orientation of all implementing partners on gender-responsive implementation approaches consistent with the GAP and ESMF.
- Grievance redress mechanisms made equally accessible to both women and men across all project areas, including through multi-channel GRM access points (physical, phone, online, and anonymous), confidential SEA/SH reporting pathways, and targeted outreach to ensure women's awareness of available grievance channels.

8.2 Component-Specific Considerations

Component 1: Institutional Capacity Development and Data-Driven Planning

Gender-responsive facilitation approaches will be applied in restoration prioritisation processes, silvopastoral planning instruments, and consultations. Traditional ecological knowledge held by women in target communities will be identified and integrated into restoration prioritisation and participatory planning exercises.

Component 2: Climate-Resilient Ecological Infrastructure Restoration

Restoration interventions will be implemented using gender-responsive participation approaches to ensure equitable opportunities for women and men to engage in restoration activities and benefit from improved ecosystem services. Women's roles in biodiversity conservation, shelterbelt management, and landscape stewardship will be recognised and strengthened through participation targets and outreach to women-headed households eligible for assisted natural regeneration (ANR) support.

Component 3: Community Engagement, Climate-Resilient Livelihoods, and Local Stewardship Systems

Gender-responsive community engagement will ensure women's meaningful participation in participatory landscape planning, local governance, and stewardship activities. Particular emphasis will be placed on women's economic empowerment through support for women-led restoration cooperatives, vocational training, and restoration-linked livelihood diversification. Stewardship and incentive mechanisms will include measures to ensure equitable participation of women and vulnerable groups in community co-management structures and local decision-making processes.

Component 4: Project Management and Monitoring

Gender-responsive implementation will be applied through PIU coordination, safeguards implementation, and MEL systems. Monitoring and evaluation will include sex-disaggregated indicators to track participation and support adaptive management. The PIU will designate a Gender Focal Point and support operationalisation of commitments across all reporting processes.

8.3 Knowledge Gaps and Capacity Needs

Key capacity building needs identified include:

- Technical training in climate-smart agriculture, sustainable forest management, and integrated ecosystem-based agroforestry (soil health, water management, agroforestry, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable land use).
- Financial literacy skills for female entrepreneurs and self-employed women (budgeting, cash flow management, financial planning, access to markets).
- Digital literacy and access to digital climate services for rural women.
- Leadership and governance skills to strengthen women's participation in forestry and pasture management decision-making.
- Communication and collaboration with financial institutions to develop gender-responsive tailored financial products and services.

Consultations with LPAs, environmental authorities, and implementing institutions identified important institutional capacity constraints affecting implementation of gender-responsive adaptation activities. Several local institutions reported shortages of technical staff, limited experience with gender-responsive environmental programming, and

insufficient financial and operational resources for sustained community engagement. Strengthening institutional capacity for inclusive stakeholder engagement, gender-responsive monitoring, and participatory restoration planning will therefore be important for effective implementation of the project's ecosystem-based adaptation interventions.

Consultations also identified potential community resistance associated with temporary grazing restrictions, land-use changes, and restoration-related access limitations affecting agricultural and pasture activities. Women from rural households may be disproportionately affected where restoration measures influence household subsistence activities, livestock grazing patterns, or access to natural resources. Continuous consultation, transparent communication, and inclusive decision-making processes will therefore be essential to minimize social tensions and support community acceptance of restoration activities.

Failure to integrate gender-responsive approaches into project implementation may result in unequal access to restoration benefits, exclusion of vulnerable women from adaptation opportunities, reduced effectiveness of ecosystem restoration activities, and reinforcement of existing socio-economic inequalities. Inclusive participation and targeted support measures are therefore critical to ensuring equitable and sustainable climate resilience outcomes.