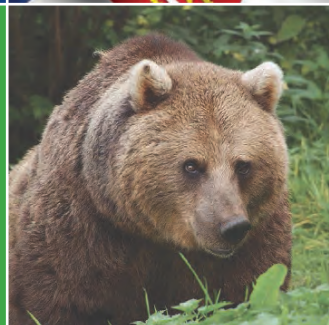



UN Country Team in Serbia

# COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Common Country Analysis (CCA) responds to the urgency of the 2030 Agenda by delivering an evidence-based joint analysis of the context for sustainable development in Serbia. The analysis integrates the UN's overall commitment to the principle of Leave No One Behind, the UN Charter values, and to international norms and standards. It rests on traditional and non-traditional quantitative and qualitative data and sources, including a broad consultation process.

This CCA examines the state of affairs and progress in the achievement of the core areas of the SDGs. It takes into account the limited nationalization of the SDGs, which curtails the opportunity to prioritize policy interventions. It provides an up-to-date COVID-19 socio-economic impact analysis across six areas and uncovers the remaining challenges that help define both opportunities and cross cutting issues. The challenges include structural path-dependencies; slower than needed reform processes; embedded inequalities; incomplete strategic, legislative and policy frameworks and limited effectiveness and gaps in practical implementation. Therefore to contribute to delivering the 2030 Agenda in Serbia, this CCA provides tailored analytical insights and identifies areas for structural intervention.

Firstly, structural reforms in the areas of justice and security, freedoms, fundamental rights, judiciary and procurement, anti-discrimination, the fight against corruption, public administration and decentralization require more dynamism, while the cooperation between state and civil society needs to be strengthened.

Secondly, the social exclusion analysis emphasizes that a range of social and ethnic groups remain vulnerable, discriminated against and excluded. In particular, this relates to the Roma, rural population, LGBTI, persons with disabilities, migrants, women victims of gender-based violence, children and youth exposed to poverty and social exclusion, as well as the older population. In an environment of increasing inequality, gender inequalities are particularly prominent and complex, and are manifested in

different areas — from political and social participation, employment, and ownership of assets, to the division of responsibilities in the household and care for family. The labor participation gap between vulnerable groups and the general population, as well as between women and men is also significant. The persistence of social exclusion, inequalities, and inconsistent human-rights policy making and implementation could impede the achievement of the SDGs in Serbia. Growth must be more inclusive to “Leave No One Behind.” Also, to drive positive change it is necessary to address key population and demographic challenges, manage migration with a holistic perspective and ensure that the population has comprehensive and equal access to key resources, services (health care, education, social protection) and the labor market. These are the prerequisites for human centered development and well-being.

Thirdly, effective climate change and environmental policies — and their potential to trigger economic transformation — are limited by structural features illustrated by high carbon and energy intensity, high levels of air pollution and unsustainable management of natural resources and waste. Other sectors such as agriculture and forestry can greatly contribute to these transformative goals if they take a more dynamic and sustainable pathway. Serbia needs to define a national vision inspired by the 2030 Agenda — with a well-defined pathway towards its goals — and embark on a resilient low-carbon growth strategy that is decoupled from environmental pressures and in line with the EU accession priorities.

Finally, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis remains the main disruptor to the system. The socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is profound and complex. It is felt by the entire population and across all vital sectors within society, but particularly in health, the economy, the social sector, education, and the environment. While the pandemic has amplified existing structural challenges and inequalities, it has also provided an array of opportunities for recovering back better.





# 1

# INTRODUCTION

UN Country Team in Serbia

**COMMON COUNTRY  
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## 1.1 IDENTITY AND PURPOSE OF THE CCA

The new generation of the CCA delivers **integrated, forward-looking, and evidence-based joint analysis** of the context for sustainable development in a country. It is no longer just a report prepared once at the start of the program cycle, but rather an essential function of a United Nations Country Team (UNCT) that generates tailored and analytical insights at the country level.

The new CCA consolidates analyses of relevant issues for the achievement of each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), and across SDGs. It reflects systems thinking, an approach that captures the interlinked relationships and capacities necessary to identifying and addressing the pathways for achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

In addition to underpinning the Cooperation Framework (CF) programming cycle, the CCA is also an up-to-date source of information on the country context for the whole UN. It is informed by — and feeds into — senior leadership discussions on emerging issues, early warning, and prevention. As a *living* document, it is regularly updated with analyses on emerging issues, such as the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) of COVID-19 in the case of this CCA. This update includes data available in October 2020, and the next update will be performed in 2021.

## 1.2 DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This CCA is data-driven and looks beyond official national statistics to draw on all sources of qualitative and quantitative data from across the data ecosystem, including non-traditional data sources.

The CCA is a result of a broad consultation process led by the UNCT and the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO). This pro-

cess includes several bilateral and group meetings and brainstorming sessions with the Development Coordination Office's focal point for CCA/CF, the Resident Coordinator, and the Results Groups Chairs present in Serbia. In addition, thematic consultations were held with international financial institutions working in Serbia, the EU and international development partners (SIDA, GIZ, SDC, EIB, OSCE, Council of Europe). Government institutions and partners were consulted both bilaterally (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of European Integration, Minister in charge of SDGs, Statistical Office, Public Investment Management Office and Public Policy Secretariat) and in a group manner (e.g. the Ombudsman, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Office for Human and Minority Rights, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Youth and Sport). In addition, group consultations with CSOs that focus on human rights, gender, Roma, people with disabilities, refugees and other vulnerable groups, environmental issues, and regional cooperation were also conducted. Finally, the CCA document has been open to the UNCT throughout the whole process, with UNCT comments incorporated into the final document by the RCO, with the latest intervention in early November 2020.

To analyze the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a fact-finding mission between the UN and the Public Investment Management Office (PIMU) was launched. While UN agencies started several assessments (including some jointly with Government partners), PIMU and the Statistical Office reached out to all line ministries to start collecting data. The result of this exercise was a factual report that was used as one of the sources for the SEIA. The CCA update related to COVID-19 is a result of a broad, collaborative effort between the UN system, the Government of Serbia, representatives from the business community and civil society. It rests on internal UNCT expertise, and as such it demonstrates the impressive level of analytical and coordination capacity of the UNCT in Serbia to produce a high-quality piece of analysis. These strengths will be the cornerstone of future analytical work, including the regular updates of the CCA.



# 2

## CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING THE 2030 AGENDA AND SDGs

UN Country Team in Serbia

**COMMON COUNTRY  
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The COVID-19 crisis has brought an unprecedented shock to the system, in terms of both the depth and the extent of its impact. This impact is felt by the entire population and across all vital sectors within society, but particularly in health, the economy, the social sector, education, and the environment. It has amplified existing structural challenges and inequalities across societies and between nations, yet initiated an array of opportunities through tailored response strategies.

In Serbia, the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been severe and multifaceted (detailed in the SEIA, Annex 1). Evidence indicates that response and recovery illustrated also in the Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP) have the potential to facilitate the transition pathway towards achieving the 2030 Agenda goals (detailed in SERP, Annex 2).

## 2.1 POLICIES, PROCESSES, AND MECHANISMS SUPPORTING THE SDGs

### 2.1.1 National framework for strategic development

National development priorities are defined in a set of key strategic documents, aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Key national strategic documents are detailed below.

- ▶ The Program of the Government of the Republic of Serbia defines the priorities of the Government, derived from the Prime Minister's manifesto. It is operationalized through the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Government Program (APIGP).
  - ▷ The program for the 2017–2020 Government set the following priorities: connecting Serbia with Europe and the world; faster economic growth; more efficient delivery of public services; protection of human rights and security; digitalization; education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
  - ▷ On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the new Prime Minister announced six goals of the new Government: fighting the coronavirus pandemic and strengthening the health care system; preserving the vital interests of Serbs in Kosovo\*<sup>1</sup>; fighting organized crime; maintaining Serbia's independence and independent decision making; the rule of law and speeding up reforms on the EU path; and strengthening the country's economy.
- ▶ The Economic Reform Program (ERP) defines reform priorities for three years and it is produced and reviewed within

the EU accession process. The aim of the ERP is to enable sustainable and inclusive economic growth, narrowing the gaps between Serbia and the EU Members States.

- ▷ The documents are produced every year, examining a two-year period, and are reviewed by the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN Council), which provides recommendations for the next planning cycle. The current ERP covers the period from 2020 until 2022.
- ▶ The Employment and Social Reform Program (ESRP), adopted in 2016, defines priorities in the areas of the labor market and employment, human capital and skills, social inclusion, and social protection, and addresses challenges in the reform of pension and health care systems.
  - ▷ The Report on the Implementation of the ESRP (2019), is the main mechanism for monitoring and dialogue on social policy and employment in the process of EU integration. The second report was released in October 2020.
- ▶ The National Priorities for Development Assistance (NPDA) is a multi-annual planning document that serves as a key instrument for the Government to define the strategic directions of Serbia's development. The new draft prepared by the Ministry of European Integration (MEI) covers the period until 2025 and is pending adoption by the Government. This document will also support the activities planned through the National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA). The document defines priorities in these crucial sectors: public administration reform, justice, internal affairs, transport, environment, energy, competitiveness, human resources and social development (including health), and agriculture and rural development. The document represents a basis for negotiations with potential development partners. It is aimed at precisely defining potential areas of cooperation and directing donor support towards the implementation of the most vital socio-economic reforms, as well as strengthening the administrative and institutional capacities of Serbia.
- ▶ The Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) with an Action Plan, has been drafted and is expected to enter the inter-ministerial consultation process. The LCDS should address the expectations of the Paris Agreement to progressively increase climate actions (commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions) while presenting possibilities, as well as recommending preferable options, for the alignment of Serbia's GHG emissions pathway with the EU's in an affordable and socially fair way (MEP 2019).

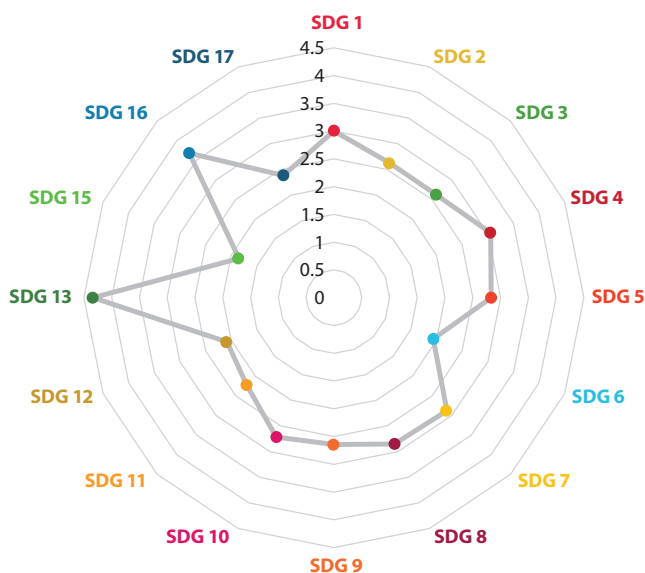
These major development and/or reform programs in Serbia completely or partially match the 29 SDG targets, while sectoral or multi-sectoral policy strategies, programs and action plans match 88 SDG targets (GoS 2018e). Furthermore, 121 out of 138

<sup>1</sup> References to Kosovo\* shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



relevant SDG targets are matched (at least imprecisely) by one or more overarching or sectoral/multi-sectoral policy documents (GoS 2018e).

**Figure 1** Correspondence of national policy framework with SDGs, score on 0–5 scale



Source: GoS 2018e

There are numerous **sectoral or cross-cutting strategies and action plans** setting out reforms in diverse areas. Examples include **The National Investment Plan** which defines key investment projects for future development, and which was launched by the Prime Minister and President at the end of 2019; and the **Industrial Policy Strategy**, focused on the period from 2021 to 2030, which was adopted by the Government in March 2020.

In its analysis of the national policy framework (2018), the Public Policy Secretariat (PPS) emphasised that it was too detailed, lacked clear priorities, frequently contained ambitious goals, and was inadequately harmonized given the limited resources for implementation. An opportunity to improve the existing framework came with the new **Law on the Planning System (2018)**. This stipulates consolidating the national strategic framework through a single overarching development plan by defining development priorities in a coherent and comprehensive manner;<sup>2</sup> and nation-

alizing SDGs with specific targets in line with these priorities. It also encourages local self-governments to localize specific SDG targets in integrated local development plans.

### 2.1.2 SDG initiatives and monitoring bodies

The Republic of Serbia is committed to all 17 SDGs. The country submitted the first **Voluntary National Report (VNR)** to the High Political Forum in the summer of 2019, describing achievements in SDGs according to available indicators, with specific emphasis on local communities and youth. The **lack of nationally specific targets** limits opportunities to provide more precise interventions, to prioritize allocation of funds, and to clearly monitor achievements. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia administers the **SDG monitoring platform**, which currently covers 76 out of 240 indicators.

Serbia has established an **Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the Implementation of the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030 (IMWG)**.<sup>3</sup> This committee is chaired and coordinated by the minister without portfolio responsible for demography and population policy and consists of specially appointed representatives from 26 relevant line ministries, government offices, and agencies (GoS 2019). The IMWG aims to:

- Coordinate and consolidate the positions and activities of all relevant ministries regarding the 2030 Agenda;
- Provide mechanisms for monitoring its implementation;
- Devise a process for adopting the national strategy for sustainable development with a financial plan that would integrate individual strategies and harmonize the achievement of the SDGs;
- Establish statistical monitoring of goals and targets;
- Prepare periodic reports on the implementation and continuous provision of information to the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the Republic of Serbia and the UN system.

The UNCT in Serbia works closely with the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on advancing the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia, and helps convene SDG-related activities. UNCT members (individually and collectively) cooperate closely with the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) in supporting data related activities. The MICS survey, DevInfo and judiciary statistics are models of joint work and cooperation undertaken to improve data.

<sup>2</sup> A provision (article 53) of the Law defines that the Government of the Republic of Serbia submit to the National Assembly a proposal of the National Development Plan by January 1, 2020. This has not yet been completed.

<sup>3</sup> The IMWG was established by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, adopted on December 30, 2015.



The IMWG was involved in the development of the 2018 Mainstreaming, Acceleration, and Policy Support Mission (MAPS) report, and was fully in charge of coordinating and developing the first VNR report for Serbia in 2019. The functioning and efficiency of the IMWG cannot however be assessed with full confidence at this stage. The success of the IMWG in localizing, promoting, and mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda is relatively low and cannot be measured adequately. It remains to be seen how the IMWR mechanism will continue to function, and under which mandate and capacities, with the new Government formed in October 2020.

The **Focus Group of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia** for the development of control mechanisms for the SDG implementation process and implementation oversight was established in 2017. It oversees and supports the implementation of the SDGs. The localization of the SDGs is ongoing and is a key priority of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities.

**A database of SDG indicators** is made available by the SORS and there were continued efforts in 2020 to expand the number of government sources that provide SDG indicator data. SDG data availability at the local level is hampered by many of the indicators being sourced from national surveys that lack disaggregation by lower administrative levels (for example municipality).

The UNCT in Serbia worked closely with the SORS to organize a number of workshops in 2018 and 2019 on SDGs. These were to continue completing the mapping of data sources and baselines for SDG statistical indicators that are not produced by the NSI and to establish data sharing protocols/MoUs with other institutions, including data producing line Ministries, national independent institutions, etc. As a result, SORS adjusted their DevInfo platform and database and shared SDG related statistics for those indicators that are already available (44 indicators available initially). After the last set of workshops, the number of SDG indicators in the database increased from 44 indicators (or 18% of available indicators) to 68 (or 27.9% of indicators).

## 2.2 STATE OF DEMOCRACY, RULE OF LAW, AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

### 2.2.1 Political and institutional reforms in line with the EU accession process

**Serbia maintains multi-faceted foreign policy engagements with a wide range of EU and non-EU countries, while main institutional reforms are fully committed to its EU objectives.**

Serbia became an EU candidate country in 2012. Currently, 18 of 35 negotiating chapters of the EU acquis are opened, with 2 chapters provisionally closed. The open chapters include Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, Justice and Security, and Procurement, which are critical for political and institutional reform. Serbia has established a procedural basis for addressing reforms of the judicial system, including constitutional reforms and those aimed at fighting against corruption and organized crime.

Serbia's non-EU partnerships range across different countries and sectors. Examples include cooperation with Russia (on energy and military), China (on infrastructure and energy), the USA (through a newly established Development Finance Corporation office), and former non-aligned countries (on military and agriculture).

### 2.2.2 Elections and state of democracy

**Parliamentary elections were held in June 2020 despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and an opposition boycott.**

Significant changes in electoral laws were enacted prior to elections, including measures related to: voter registration; post-election inspection of voter lists by voters; election observers; preventing the misuse of state resources; the functioning of the media regulatory body; lowering the threshold for candidate lists to obtain seats in Parliament (from 5% to 3%); and increasing representation of women and national minorities. In these elections, the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) won 60.65% of votes and secured a two-thirds majority, or 188 seats in the 250-seat parliament. The Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) won 32 seats, and the Victory for Serbia (PzS) wing of the Serbian Patriotic Alliance (SPAS) won 11 seats. The remaining seats went to minority factions for which the electoral threshold did not apply.

A special election mission by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and



Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) assessed that the elections were overall well-run, though a number of their previous recommendations were unaddressed, including: introducing lower party donation limits, an expenditure ceiling, and financial reporting and disclosure prior to election day (ODIHR 2020). The imbalanced advantage enjoyed by the incumbent Government was also highlighted, including its dominance of the media (ODIHR 2020).

The Republic of Serbia has relatively strong representation of women in the Government, with women named to half of the ministerial posts in October 2020. In the National Assembly, women hold almost two-fifths (38.8%) of the legislature's 250 seats, placing Serbia 28<sup>th</sup> in the world out of 188 as of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 (IPU Parline 2020). While participation of women at the local level is lower, there have been improvements in the last decade: the average share of women among the representatives in local assemblies increased from 18.7% in 2014 to 30.3% in 2016 (SIPRU 2018a).

## 2.2.3 Human rights

**Fundamental human rights and freedoms are enshrined in the Constitution of Serbia. The state is bound by 8 out of the 9 UN core human rights treaties, the European Convention on Human Rights, and numerous conventions of the Council of Europe (CoE).<sup>4</sup> Human rights and rule of law developments are shaped through regular interactions with UN Human Rights mechanisms, CoE mechanisms (Venice Commission, GRECO), and the EU accession process.**

The legal framework of the Republic of Serbia is mostly harmonized with international standards concerning human rights (EC 2020d). Serbia submits periodic reports on the implementation of the ratified conventions to the relevant UN Treaty Bodies and under Universal Periodic Review (UPR). It partakes in the work of the General Assembly's (GA) Third Committee dealing with human rights issues. The full list of UN human rights treaties, ILO Conventions, and other conventions to which Serbia complies is presented in Annex 3. Serbia was last reviewed by the Universal Periodic Review Working Group Session 29 (UPR WG 29) in January 2018 and accepted 175 out of 195 recommendations addressed by UN Member States.<sup>5</sup>

The Council for Monitoring the Implementation of UN Human Rights Mechanisms Recommendations (serving as the National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-Up, NMRF), established by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2014, is a body with a mandate to monitor, gather information and data, and report to all UN Human Rights Mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council under the UPR. The NMRF — composed of a president and 9 members appointed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia from officials and civil servants in the relevant ministries — meets regularly to fulfil their mandate. Serbia's NMRF has established continuous cooperation with civil society organizations, mainly the Platform of Organizations for Cooperation with UN Human Rights Mechanisms, as well as with other stakeholders in the country. The NMRF is committed to producing human rights indicators to measure the progress of adherence to guidance and reviews from UN mechanisms, as well as to produce and submit a mid-term report under the UPR, with a respective Action Plan of implementation within the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle.

Human rights and rule of law developments are also shaped and assessed through the EU accession process. They are addressed by EU Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights and Chapter 24: Justice, Freedom, and Security, which represent foundations of the accession process and are given utmost priority in the negotiations.<sup>6</sup> The implementation of the Action Plans for Chapter 23 and 24 are assessed semi-annually and reported to the European Commission (EC). The Ministry of European Integration published the Non-paper on the state of play regarding Chapters 23 and 24 for Serbia (EC 2020) in June 2020, with an overview of achievements and remaining reforms. An overview of the human rights situation in Serbia, as reflected in the National Report for Serbia (submitted within the UPR process),<sup>7</sup> along with the assessment of the same topics by the EC in its Progress Report (EC 2019), is presented in Annex 4.

Certain rights that are explicitly recognized in international human rights instruments have however not yet been introduced into Serbia's domestic legal framework, which has negative impacts on the most vulnerable groups. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia does not, for example, guarantee the independence of the judiciary,<sup>8</sup> as well as the right to vote in regard

<sup>4</sup> Except for the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The ratification of optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is still pending. A list of all signed COE conventions is available at [https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/search-on-states/-/conventions/treaty/country/SAM/RATIFIED?p\\_auth=sjH1v3er](https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/search-on-states/-/conventions/treaty/country/SAM/RATIFIED?p_auth=sjH1v3er).

<sup>5</sup> The country received 190 recommendations and it supported 175 recommendations at the adoption of its UPR outcome at HRC 38, in June 2018. This was an increase of 26 per cent with respect to the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle (GoS 2019).

<sup>6</sup> A credible enlargement perspective for, and enhanced EU engagement with, the Western Balkans, European Commission, Strasbourg, 6.2.2018.

<sup>7</sup> National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, Human Rights Council, Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Twenty-ninth session, 15–26 January 2018.

<sup>8</sup> The main obstacle is the possibility of political interference in the work of the High Judicial Council (HJC) and the State Prosecutorial Council (SPC) which leaves scope for political influence. Constitutional changes in the area of independence of Judiciary are still not conducted.



of legal capacity,<sup>9</sup> but also some of the rights concerning adequate standard of living, notably the rights to adequate housing, nutrition and water supply.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, there are still parts of Serbia's legal framework that are not fully compliant with international human rights standards, including the Law on Social Welfare, the Law of Individual Property Tax, the Criminal Code, Family Law, and the Law on Financial Support for Families with Children.<sup>11</sup> Violation of human rights in the Republic of Serbia is mostly due to improper implementation, or lack of implementation of regulations (EC 2020d).

The anti-discrimination framework is shaped by the **Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination** (2009), which is undergoing revision.<sup>12</sup> The expired **Strategy for the Prevention and Protection from Discrimination** for the period 2013–2018 and the accompanying Action Plan have not yet been replaced.

According to the EC Serbia Report (2019), the **legal framework for respecting and protecting minorities and cultural rights**<sup>13</sup> is in place and generally upheld. However, minorities remain underrepresented in public administration. The Roma are among the most marginalized minority groups in Serbia, as they face significantly higher levels of exclusion and discrimination in all areas of life.

A 2016 public opinion poll on citizen's attitudes towards discrimination in Serbia by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality showed that most respondents reported that discrimination in Serbia was not sanctioned, and most citizens did not possess the necessary knowledge to recognize discrimination. Citizens saw Roma, the LGBTI population, and people living in poverty as the groups most discriminated against in Serbia, with

employment as the area in which discrimination was most evident. Social distance<sup>14</sup> was regarded as greatest towards the LGBTI population, the Albanian ethnic minority, and refugees, as well as towards people living with HIV, people with an intellectual or mental disability, and the Roma ethnic minority. Citizens identified the Government and the media as the most important potential actors in reducing discrimination, although the media was also perceived as an actor that often displayed discrimination in its reporting (CPE 2016).

Additional concern is the independence and autonomy of institutions for the protection of human rights, such as the Ombudsman,<sup>15</sup> the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality,<sup>16</sup> and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection.<sup>17</sup>

Media freedoms and freedom of expression are also limited, even though a set of new media laws that prohibit monopolization of media ownership and mandates media plurality was approved in recent years. However, in practice, the process of privatization of the media has led to an increasing concentration of ownership of local media.

Furthermore, the database of attacks and pressures against journalists maintained by the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia (NUNS) recorded 62 cases of pressures in 2017, twice as many as in 2016. In the first eight months of 2018, as many as 34 cases of pressures were recorded (Vukasović 2018). Many journalists received threats (Human Rights Watch 2018). This environment for journalists has led to growing levels of self-censorship among the media (Vukasović 2018), which may limit the understanding and knowledge of human rights among the general population, as well as among decision makers. In this regard, in the third UPR cycle, the Republic of Serbia received several recommendations on the need for better protection of freedom of expression and media freedoms. The Serbian State Authorities were recommended to conduct proper investigations of all threats and violence targeting independent journalists and media (Human Rights Council 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, ("Official Gazette RS", No 98/2006) in Article 52 foresees that only a person with full legal capacity has the right to vote, which is contrary to Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

<sup>10</sup> See International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11.

<sup>11</sup> See: Law on Social Welfare (Official Gazette RS, Nos. 24/2011); Law on Individual Property Tax (Official Gazette RS, No 95/2018); Criminal Code (Official Gazette RS, 85/2005, 88/2005, 107/2005, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016, and amendments 2019); Family law (Official Gazette RS, 18/2005, 72/2011 and 6/2015); Law on Financial Support for Families with Children (Official Gazette RS, No. 113/2017, 50/2018).

<sup>12</sup> The draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of the Discrimination is pending adoption.

<sup>13</sup> Serbia is a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society with a diverse population. Minority communities live in relatively concentrated areas in Vojvodina (Hungarians, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Croats, Bunjevci, etc.), the Sandžak region (Bosniaks), eastern Serbia (Vlachs and Romanians), and southern Serbia (Albanians). Serbia has representative and administrative structures in place that provide these communities an interface with central authorities to address their needs (culture, language, education, etc.), for example, through opportunities for elective representation at the central and municipal levels, in national minority councils, and in the case of south Serbia, the Coordination body for Prešev, Bujanovac, and Medvedja. In the case of Sandžak and south Serbia, economic development, youth employment, expanding transportation links and infrastructure and expanding opportunities for education and Serbian language acquisition (in case of the Albanian minority) are measures that would further integrate these communities.

<sup>14</sup> Social distance is a measure of perceived or desired closeness or remoteness towards a particular social or ethnic group as evidenced by the level of intimacy tolerated between them.

<sup>15</sup> The procedure for the election of the new Ombudsperson was carried out in an accelerated and non-transparent manner, and the candidate of the ruling party was elected only by the votes of the ruling coalition. The Ombudsman institution works in a truncated composition, as the newly elected Ombudsperson did not appoint his four deputies whom should provide expert support to the work of the Institution. For more information, see Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2017, Human Rights in Serbia 2017 — Law, Practice and International Human Rights Standards, pg. 249–255.

<sup>16</sup> One of the regular mandate activities of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality is to initiate strategic litigations, which in recent years has been limited.

<sup>17</sup> After the expiration of the mandate of the previous Commissioner, the new Head of the Institution was elected with significant delay, after 7 months.



## 2.2.4 The rule of law

The fight against corruption has been declared as one of the key national priorities, yet accountability and anti-corruption measures face significant challenges.

To combat corruption more effectively, the special Department for the Fight against Corruption was established within the Ministry of the Interior (MoI 2020). The Government of Serbia recognizes that “Despite the existence of a legal and institutional frame, significant challenges remain for the implementation of the principle of accountability, especially anti-corruption as one of its key elements” (GoS 2019a). This is supported by the Corruption Perception Index (2018), which ranked Serbia 87<sup>th</sup> out of 198, with a score of 39 (out of 100), a decline from the previous year (Transparency International 2019).

A particular issue is the frequent adoption of laws by urgent procedure,<sup>18</sup> which has also been highlighted by the European Commission and the European Council anti-corruption body (GRECO) in their reports on Serbia. Adoption by urgent procedure often circumvents participation and consultation with interested groups, CSOs and rights-holders groups.<sup>19</sup>

Even though ratified international human rights treaties are an integral part of the domestic legal framework, their direct application in all judicial areas is insufficient.<sup>20</sup> The Republic of Serbia, for example, has still not conducted the necessary Constitutional changes for the independence of the Judiciary. This has been a point of focus in discussions on potential constitutional changes, specifically the possibility of political interference with the work of the High Judicial Council and the State Prosecutorial Council (YU-COM 2018).<sup>21</sup> These necessary constitutional changes were mentioned in numerous recommendations of different UN human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review recommendations (UN Human Rights Council 2018), and in recommendations in the latest concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee (UN HRC 2017) regarding the implementation

of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as in the Action Plan for Chapter 23 (MoJ 2018).

**“First, the rule of law must be strengthened significantly. Today, the countries show clear elements of state capture, including links with organized crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration, as well as a strong entanglement of public and private interests. All this feeds a sentiment of impunity and inequality. There is also extensive political interference in and control of the media. A visibly empowered and independent judiciary and accountable governments and administrations are essential for bringing about the lasting societal change that is needed.”**

**A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, EC, 2018**

## 2.2.5 Decentralization

**A need to further facilitate decentralization processes is recognized by the Government, which is reflected in its initiative to draft a new strategic framework.** To address a range of existing governance challenges, the Government pursues decentralization and a devolution of authority to the local level. These measures are proven to promote local development and stabilize population flows to urban areas. A precondition for decentralization is the expansion of local authorities' competence and financial autonomy. The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, in cooperation with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, is preparing a new strategic framework for decentralization related reform (MPALS 2019a), which should further facilitate decentralization processes. Challenges remain and are manifested in part in suboptimal financial autonomy. As the National Coalition for Decentralization indicated in its analysis based on the data provided by the Ministry of Finance, Serbia is still lagging behind the EU in fiscal decentralization (NCD 2016).

## 2.2.6 Relations between state and society

**Cooperation between state and civil society represents a crucial challenge for the state of democracy and freedoms.** According to several international indices, the level of democracy in Serbia has declined over the last four years.<sup>22</sup> The differences in perception between the Government and civil

<sup>18</sup> According to the data from the website “otvoreni parlament”, the percentage of laws, together with modifications and amendments to existing laws, that were adopted by accelerated procedure was as high as 64.4%.

<sup>19</sup> In accordance with Article 167 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of Serbia, a law may be adopted by accelerated procedure if there is a risk to the functioning of state organs and organizations, human lives and health, or national security. Accelerated procedure may also be applicable to laws confirming international agreements or those harmonizing national with European jurisprudence. Whoever proposes such a law is under obligation to provide an explanation as to why it is necessary to pass that particular law by accelerated procedure.

<sup>20</sup> Numerous UN Mechanisms for Human Rights recommended to the Republic of Serbia direct application of international human rights standards before domestic courts — Human Rights Committee (CCPR/C/SRB/CO/3), Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/C.12/SRB/CO/2) etc.

<sup>21</sup> The new draft text of the Constitutional Amendments does not exclude political influence on the Judiciary, press statement.

<sup>22</sup> Freedom of the World 2020, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2020> ; Nations in Transit: Serbia, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/nations-transit/2020>; Democracy Index 2019, Economist Intelligence Unit, January 2020, available at <https://www.eiu.com/n/global-democracy-in-retreat/>; Bertelsmann Political Transformation Index: Serbia, available at <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-SRB.html>.



society groups, movements, and organizations are visible across many issues. The EU urges dialogue on these issues for accession countries.

**“Governments should ensure stakeholders can actively participate in the reform and policy making process, for example by establishing inclusive structured dialogues on reform priorities with the involvement of an empowered civil society. An enabling environment for civil society organizations is therefore crucial.”**

**A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, EC, 2018**

Challenges related to media freedom and freedom of expression (detailed in section 2.2.3) have also contributed to frayed relations between state and society.

### 2.2.7 Public administration reform and data driven policies

**Public administration reform has been ongoing for years, guided by the national strategy and supported by complementary processes, such as the introduction of gender responsible budgeting and the improvement of official evidence and statistics needed for data driven policies.**

Public sector reform is guided by the Strategy of Public Administration Reform in the Republic of Serbia, and Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the 2018–2020 period. The monitoring report on the implementation of this Strategy and AP (through 2018) showed that 43% of activities had been implemented and 46% of results achieved (MPALS 2019b). Serbia has a well-developed public sector, structured in a traditional manner and characterized by a large number of administrative staff within a “rank in person” system. This results in rewards being largely detached from performance, thus reducing incentives for the adoption of new methods. As part of austerity measures, a hiring freeze has also been in effect for over five years, which has reduced capacities and flexibility for reform. Reform should generate a more flexible evidence-based policy formulation and policy implementation model.

The development of a modern customer service-oriented approach within the Government is a second major area requiring reform, with digitalization being a critical element. Serbia also requires more people skilled in project preparation and management, which is necessary for the design and implementation of effective development projects. System inefficiencies in public procurement need to be addressed to achieve greater

cost efficiency, reduced time, and increased transparency. Broad and consistent efforts must be made toward greater inclusion, especially of educated women.

Engendering national and local budgets is stipulated by the Budget System Law, but major gaps remain. Despite many capacity-building initiatives on the gradual introduction of gender responsive budgets, many budget users still lack the skills to implement the new system.

Progress in statistics is visible in the increased number of regular surveys for monitoring socio-economic trends, which improves administrative data and their inflow into official statistics, in the aligning of national statistics, and in the work of the main national institution for statistics — the Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia with Eurostat. However, there are still data gaps that limit capacities for data driven policies, including those aimed at SDG achievement and based on the principles of Leave No One Behind (LNOB).

## 2.3 ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

### 2.3.1 Structure of the economy and its implications for sustainable development

In the last biennium — prior to the COVID-19 pandemic — **GDP growth** was accelerating in Serbia: from 3.2% in the 2016–2017 biennium to 4.7% in the 2018–2019 biennium (MFIN 2020a). This was reinforced by other positive trends: the unemployment rate decreased from 15.0% to 12.1% over the same period (SORS 2020c) and more people were economically active (from 66.2% to 68.0%). Importantly, more young people also entered the workforce, as reflected by the lower number of young people not in education or employment (SORS 2020a). Relative wages also increased: average net earnings were 49,650 RSD in 2018 and 54,919 in 2019 (SORS 2020b).

Despite this positive performance, **GDP per capita** in Serbia stood at 7,213 USD. This is second among the countries of the Western Balkans, less than half of the average for Central Europe and the Baltics (16,918 USD), and less than a quarter of the EU average of 41,387 USD (World Bank 2019b).

Serbian GDP has also been affected — albeit more mildly than other European countries — by the COVID-19 pandemic. While GDP is estimated to have grown by 5.1% in the first quarter of 2020, the second quarter saw a decline of 6.4% (SORS 2020h). Overall, the Ministry of Finance revised their estimate for GDP growth in 2020 to -1.8% (MFIN 2020b). Growth is expected to resume next year, reaching 6% (MFIN, 2020b).



However, GDP alone is not an accurate reflection of the way in which the economy performs for citizens or of the long-term impacts of growth on sustainability. For example, a high percentage of the Serbian population lives in **poverty**. This percentage has only slightly decreased, even during the positive economic performance in the pre-COVID-19 years: from 7.2% in 2017 to 7.1% in 2018 (SIPRU 2019a). Additionally, the margin between the highest and lowest percentile of the Serbian population widened in 2018 for the first time since this indicator began being recorded (SIPRU 2018b). The Gini coefficient, another indicator of **inequality**, also increased between 2015 and 2018.<sup>23</sup>

It may be inferred from the data that GDP growth was not enough to lift the most vulnerable population out of poverty. In other words, marginalized groups were only partially affected by GDP growth and increases in formal employment and wages. This is confirmed by the **low share of people among the poorest** whose primary source of income was wages (32.4% in 2017 compared to 25.1% in 2018). This population group's main source of income was pensions, which accounted for 45% of their total income (SIPRU 2019a). Social transfers were another significant revenue source, reducing the risk of poverty by 5.3% and covering approximately 210,000 individuals, or some 88,000 families (ILO 2020).

These facts hold important implications for the priority of LNOB. They showcase the necessity for a better understanding of the dynamics of vulnerability and **emphasize the needs of populations at risk of marginalization**, which could be addressed by strengthening the social transfer program and widening its scope. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable population groups, covered in the COVID-19 chapter, reinforces this conclusion.

Another contributor to people living in poverty is **the high share of low-wage workers**, which accounts for 22.9% of the Serbian workforce, against an EU average of 17.2%. The average for younger workers is even higher at over 30%. Low wages often reflect lower educational attainment (48% of low-wage workers have lower education), and a high share (36%) of fixed-time or temporary contracts (World Bank 2019a). The creation of **good quality jobs**, through innovation, education, and incentives for the formalization of employment is therefore paramount to increasing inclusivity and fair development.

Another key factor for progress in this field is supporting Serbian firms' competitiveness and performance on export markets, particularly through ensuring that the regulatory and administra-

tive environment responds to the needs of businesses, especially Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). In recent years, Serbia has demonstrated significant progress, as reflected in the "Ease of doing business" indicator. This increased from 70 in 2016 to 75.7 in 2020, moving Serbia to 44th out of 190 (World Bank 2020c). Another key priority is accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), ongoing since 2005 yet still not concluded. This is particularly important as Serbia's current account deficit expanded from 2.9% in 2016 to 6.8% in 2019 (World Bank 2020d). The **sectors** which could be prioritized towards generating employment are trade, hospitality, construction, and professional activities, which generated 89% of all new jobs in the last biennium (ILO 2020). Also, investment in the health sector will have an impact on the community, employment levels, transport sector, cohesion and the environment.<sup>24</sup>

A key area of action for inclusive growth is gender equality. **Women** in Serbia are less active in the job market (with an activity rate of 42% vs. 58% for men in the working age population) and earn lower wages across almost all age groups (SORS 2019e). This is partly a result of the unequal distribution of unpaid work by sex: in Serbia, women spend almost four and a half hours a day (4.36) doing unpaid work, whereas men spend little more than two hours (UN WOMEN 2020b).

When in paid work, women are concentrated in low productivity sectors and in the care economy, and are reportedly discriminated against in recruitment, promotion, pay and benefits, the availability of training opportunities, and in relation to maternity and parental leave. Strengthening gender equality, taking action to provide needed social services such as childcare, and valuing the unpaid work of women could accelerate both economic and social development. For example, it has been estimated that expanding the coverage of preschool education for children aged 0–6 from the current 47.9% to 52.0% would result in a direct economic benefit of 398.3 million against an estimated cost of 212.5 million, without even taking into account the social benefits (Ibid.).

There is large untapped potential for reducing Serbia's environmental impact and decoupling economic growth in Serbia from natural resource consumption and emissions. A key step in this regard is **foundational strategic planning**. Serbia has not yet completed its National Energy and Climate Plan, the legal framework for climate action in compliance with its obligations under the Paris Agreement and in line with the EU accession process.

<sup>23</sup> Based on the Household Budget Survey (HBS) — the consumption based Gini coefficient — increased from 25.6 in 2015 to 28.4 in 2018, whereas based on the results of the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) — which is income based — the same indicator decreased from 40.0 in 2015 to 35.6 in 2018.

<sup>24</sup> The South-Eastern Europe Health Network, in partnership with the Center for Health and Development Murska Sobota, the WHO Regional Office for Europe, The Center for Regional Policy Research and Cooperation STUDIUM and University of Oxford, are in the process of producing a feasibility study on opportunities for investment in health in the SEE2020 framework for inclusive growth.

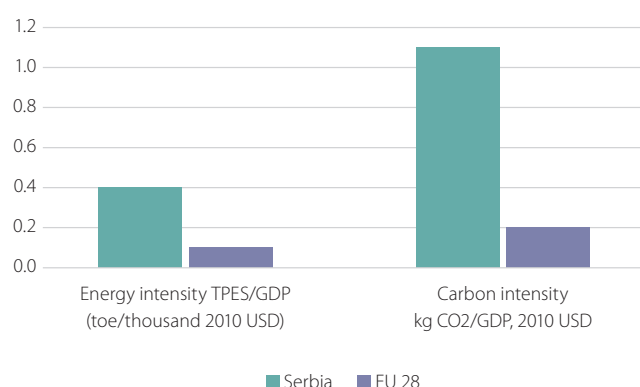


The country has also not established a comprehensive national resource efficiency policy, though some aspects of resource efficiency are covered by various policies and initiatives (EEA 2019b). Only the Program for Circular Economy is provisionally expected by the end of 2020.<sup>25</sup>

As for economic indicators, the **environmental goods and services sector** could contribute much further to GDP growth. The share of gross value added by the environmental economy in Serbia was 0.5% in 2017 (Eurostat 2017; SORS 2019c),<sup>26</sup> compared to an EU average of 2.2%.

**Energy intensity**, defined as the ratio of primary energy supply to GDP — the main indicator used internationally to track progress on energy efficiency — remains very high in Serbia. In 2017 it was 0.4 (toe/thousand 2010 USD), higher than all the other Western Balkan countries (except Bosnia and Herzegovina) and almost four times higher than the EU 28 average of 0.1. Additionally, carbon intensity measured by carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions<sup>27</sup> per unit of GDP (kg CO<sub>2</sub>/2010 USD) was reported at 1.1 (Figure 2). This indicator has declined in the last two decades, but it is still significantly higher than the EU 28 average (about 0.2).

**Figure 2 Energy and Carbon intensity in Serbia and EU 28**



Source: IEA 2020

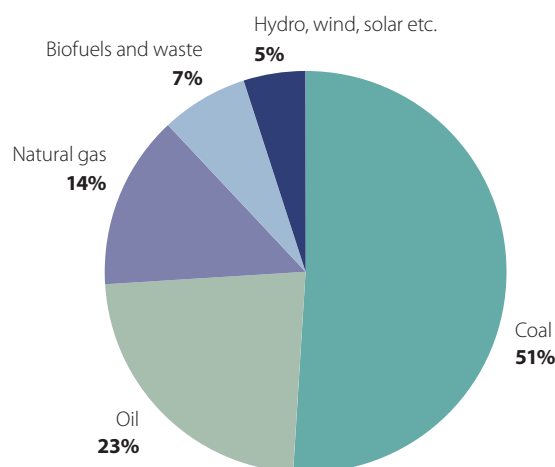
<sup>25</sup> As announced by the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

<sup>26</sup> Note that for the EU this indicator is expressed as percentage of GDP rather than gross value added.

<sup>27</sup> From fuel combustion only.

Regarding the composition of **total primary energy supply (TPES)**,<sup>28</sup> Serbia still has a very high share of fossil fuels (88%), with half of its total energy supply coming from coal (Figure 3). There is significant potential and space for improving energy production and use, especially in energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.

**Figure 3 Total primary energy supply (TPES) by source, Serbia**



Source: IEA 2020<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> TPES here excludes electricity and heat trade. Coal also includes peat and oil shale where relevant.

<sup>29</sup> TPES here excludes electricity and heat trade. Coal also includes peat and oil shale where relevant.



## 2.4 THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

A set of SDGs lead the way for developing environmental protection and preventing human-induced climate change. SDG 6 sets the targets related to clean water and sanitation, SDG 7 addresses affordable and clean energy, SDG 8 deals with decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, SDG 9 prioritizes sustainable industrialization, SDG 11 requires reducing the adverse environmental impacts of cities, SDG 12 calls for responsible consumption and production through stewardship of natural resources, SDG 13 defines climate action, and SDG 14 calls for the preservation of aquatic life and SDG 15 of terrestrial life.

**Serbia has invested efforts in developing a legal framework, policies, institutions, and instruments for environmental protection and climate change action. However, the strategic and legal framework is not finalized (pending Climate Change Strategy) and any practical implementation lacks environmental effectiveness. Environmental pollution remains a key challenge for Serbia and substantial efforts and funding are required to meet the obligations arising from Chapter 27 of the EU accession process. The regulatory framework in the field of environmental protection and management of natural resources is fragmented and poorly coordinated by various bodies.<sup>30</sup>**

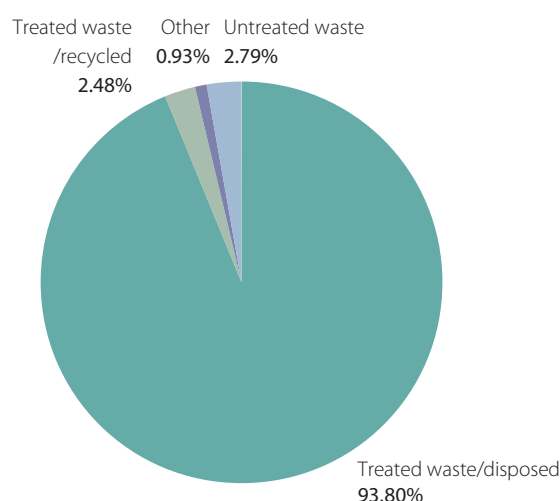
Challenges include: insufficient and ineffective control and management of waste; water quality and management; industrial and air pollution; a lack of climate change mitigation efforts; designing appropriate climate adaptation policies; noise reduction; disaster risk reduction in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030; and ensuring the protection and survival of the country's rich biodiversity (MEI 2019a).

### 2.4.1 Waste and waste management

In 2019, sectors including agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities, construction, and other service activities generated waste amounting to 64.5 million tons, 75.6% of which comprised of non-hazardous waste and 24.4%

of hazardous waste. The greatest share of hazardous waste was generated by mining and quarrying (29.2%). Upward trends in generated waste quantities were exhibited in agriculture, forestry, and fishing (an increase of 40.7%), mining and quarrying (an increase of 39.2%), manufacturing (an increase of 6.1%), construction (an increase of 10.1%) and other service activities (an increase of 0.5%), while decreases were recorded in electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply (0.1%), and water supply, sewerage, waste management, and remediation activities (14.8%). Total recycled waste quantities in 2019 increased by 6.2% relative to 2018, primarily due to increased metal waste recycling. In 2019, a total of 64.5 million tons of waste was created (Figure 4). Of this waste, 62.7 million tons was treated, while 1.8 million tons (2.79%) remained untreated. However, only 1.6 million tons (2.48%) was recycled, with the vast majority of waste (60.5 million tons or 93.8%) disposed.

**Figure 4 Waste treatment in the Republic of Serbia in 2019**



Source: SORS 2019h

Municipal waste production in Serbia appears comparable to other similar European countries, with increases recorded in waste generation and insufficient waste recovery. The recycling rate of municipal waste is significantly lower than in EU countries. It stood at 0.3% in 2018, a decrease compared to 2012, 2013, and 2015 (Eurostat 2019). The amount of waste generated has increased over the years, but per capita generated communal waste is lower than the EU 28 average (Eurostat 2019).<sup>31</sup> The share of hazardous waste in the period 2011–2018 ranged from 0.6% to 1.3% of total waste, with 0.8% in 2018 (SEPA 2019a). Lim-

<sup>30</sup> Besides the lack of policy coordination and institutional capacities, funding is also critical and establishing an efficient system of financing (especially at the local level) is still far from being realized. In 2016, less than 0.5% of GDP was allocated to environmental policy (the average in the EU is 2.8%), while in 2014, environmental taxes averaged about 1.56% of GDP (among the member states of the OECD).

<sup>31</sup> 2017: Serbia-308 kg, EU 28-486 kg.



ited waste recovery compared to the EU 28 average is a matter of concern. Challenges include the need for expedited closure of Serbia's non-compliant landfills and investments in waste reduction, separation, and recycling. No progress has been made on medical and hazardous waste.

## 2.4.2 Water and sanitation

**Serbia invests efforts in the improvement of access to clean water and sanitation, but significant challenges remain un-addressed.** The Protocol on Water and Health and to the Water Convention, of which Serbia is a part of, identify improved water management as critical to achieving good human health and well-being. This requires the protection of water ecosystems, and preventing, controlling, and reducing water-related diseases. Under the Protocol, Serbia has carried out several activities. In 2015, it set intersectoral targets that helped define concrete objectives at the national and/or local level. Also, it has worked on strengthening the legal framework for the safe management of drinking water and sanitation, particularly through the use of risk-based approaches such as Water Safety Plans. However, the enforcement of regulations for safe drinking water remains a challenge, especially in small-scale water supply systems in rural areas.<sup>32</sup> The legal framework does not recognize the specific needs of different vulnerable groups for access to water and sanitation (i.e., persons with disabilities), as it recognizes only vulnerability in terms of financial resources (FAO 2015).<sup>33</sup> According to reports from the Institute of Public Health Batut, in 2018, 61% of city water supply systems provided drinking water of adequate quality, while the remaining 39% provided water of inadequate quality, either in terms of physical-chemical properties (11%), microbiological properties (12.3%), or both in 15.6% cases (IPH 2018b). Investment in water sector infrastructure ranks among the highest needs in the country, totaling almost EUR 6 billion.

<sup>32</sup> Serbia identified knowledge gaps in the baseline analysis related to the small-scale water supply systems in rural areas and the situation of WASH services in schools and health-care facilities. To address this situation, it carried out systematic analyses to improve the evidence base (UN MAPS 2019).

<sup>33</sup> In 2016, Serbia applied the Equitable Access Score-card, a self-assessment tool developed under the UNECE — WHO Regional Office for the Europe Protocol on Water and Health that allows countries to establish a baseline measure of the equity of access to water and sanitation. Equitable access is measured along different dimensions, including (a) geographical disparities, (b) adequate consideration for the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups, and (c) affordability. Based on the findings of the self-assessment, Serbia developed an Equitable Access Action Plan for 2019–2022, which identifies a number of concrete measures to improve access to safe drinking water and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups. For more information see: "The Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in practice: Findings and lessons learned from the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health in the pan-European region", available at [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/publications/WH\\_17\\_Human\\_Rights/ECE\\_MP.WH\\_17\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/publications/WH_17_Human_Rights/ECE_MP.WH_17_ENG.pdf)

International cooperation and transboundary water management is of particular importance, as Serbia is dependent on water resources originating outside of its territory (90% are transit waters flowing through country via the Danube, Sava, and Tisa rivers and other waterways). Serbia is a party to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes ("Water Convention") and implementing its obligations helps to improve protection and management of waters both at transboundary and national levels. As a party to international water commissions, Serbia scores high on the SDG indicator 6.5.2, measuring the coverage of operational cooperation arrangements for integrated water resources management, but various challenges remain in transboundary water management, such as a lack of human and financial capacities.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.4.3 Air pollution

**The issue of air pollution has recently gained increased attention in the public discourse and in national policies due to an increased awareness among citizens.** Serbia faces significant air quality problems, due to solid-fuel-based (traditional biomass and fossil fuels) heating of individual households and public buildings, industrial emissions (including but not limited to thermal power plants) and increased urban road traffic. The share of households that consume solid fuels in mostly technologically outdated, inefficient devices is very high in Serbia — standing at 56.6%. 84.5% of households in the first decile of consumption use solid fuels largely in these inefficient devices, equivalent to approximately 200,000 households (SORS 2019a). The challenges in addressing these issues include the lack of a comprehensive policy response for technology and fuels switch, as well as financial limitations. This puts the air pollution and energy poverty nexus very high on the 2030 Agenda. Tackling this challenge contributes to the achievement of SDGs 7, 11, 12, and 13 simultaneously.

Serbia satisfies most of its electricity demand from domestic production, 70% of which relies on domestic lignite of low quality, while the remaining 30% is generated by hydropower plants. Belgrade and other cities are faced with unsatisfactory air quality (SEPA 2018a). According to estimates from the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the WHO, each year 1,004 deaths in Belgrade can be attributed to exposure to air pollution (Čolović Daul et al. 2018), while 6,394 deaths were attributed to the same cause in urban areas of Serbia in 2016. According to

<sup>34</sup> Sava cooperation and cooperation with Romania are affected by governance issues (responsibility for water shared between ministries, the lack of a mechanism for the implementation of measures, and/or unexpected extreme events), and cooperation with Hungary is affected by a lack of information and reliable forecasts. There is no agreement with Kosovo\*.



the European Environment Agency, Serbia occupies second place in Europe for the number of years of life lost due to the PM<sub>2.5</sub> exposure per 100,000 inhabitants (EEA 2019a). An additional issue is that the EU Directive on Large Combustion Plants is not effectively implemented, with no effective reduction of SO<sub>2</sub> pollution levels (ECS 2020).

Serbia is a party to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its Protocol on Long-term Financing of the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP), the Protocol on Heavy Metals, and the Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The country, however, has not accepted the amended versions of these Protocols and has not yet ratified the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication, and Ground-level Ozone (The Gothenburg Protocol) to the Convention. The revised Gothenburg Protocol contains measures related to transport, industry, and agriculture, and its implementation should aid in accomplishing SDG 3 (on good health and well-being), SDG 11 (on sustainable cities and communities), and SDG 12 (on sustainable consumption and production).

#### 2.4.4 Landmass and biodiversity

**Biodiversity in Serbia is rich in quality but not in quantity, and the Government plans to extend the portion of land-mass under protection.** A total of 7.66% of Serbia's landmass is under some sort of protection, in 469 areas (IPNS 2020),<sup>35</sup> while different pieces of legislation envisage an increase of protected areas.<sup>36</sup>

The draft Nature Protection Strategy for the period 2019–2025, to be aligned with the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia and the UN Strategic Plan for the Convention on Biological Diversity 2011–2020, is still in development.

According to the Rulebook on the Proclamation, Protection, and Strict Protection of Wild Flora, Fauna, and Fungi Species (PIS 2010), 1,760 species are under strict protection and 868 under a protected regime. Almost all mammal, bird, amphibian, and reptile species are under some protected regime, as well as a vast number of insect and plant species. More than 50% of strictly protected species are on the list of international conventions

and EU Directives, most of these represented in either the Bern Convention, the Bonn Convention, or the Bird Directive.

#### 2.4.5 Climate change

**Serbia has invested efforts in institutionalizing and integrating climate change policy into the existing policy framework.** It has strengthened resilience and adaptive capacities to climate-induced impacts, including climate-related hazards, improving education, raising awareness, and expanding human and institutional capacities with respect to climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction, and early warning. Major challenges remain in reducing carbon and energy intensity stemming from its fossil fuel-based economy. The share of modern renewables (excluding large hydro) is negligible in Serbia, which is going to miss its renewable energy target for 2020 mandated by the EU integration process (Eurostat 2020a). Major improvements could be made in the mitigation of emissions, energy efficiency, and the refurbishment of buildings. In 2019, Serbia initiated the Country Program of Priorities (CPP) to be considered for funding from the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The final CPP is expected to be adopted in 2020. A draft Climate Change Strategy with an Action Plan has been developed, but not yet adopted.

More effective mitigation and adaptation policies are needed as Serbia has been facing various changes in climate resulting in extreme weather events, such as above-average temperatures, droughts, floods (six incidents since 2003), affecting people and the economy, especially agricultural production.<sup>37</sup> Climate change projections indicate a high probability of continuing temperature increases, along with more frequent and prolonged droughts, which represent serious issues for the country's development and especially for sectors such as agriculture, forestry and management of natural resources.

#### 2.4.6 Industrial risks

**Serbia is a Party to the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, which aims to protect people and the environment by preventing industrial accidents as far as possible, reducing their frequency and severity, and mitigating their effects.**

<sup>35</sup> Of which 5 are national parks, 18 nature parks, 6 protected habitats, 21 landscapes, 69 reserves, 314 nature monuments, and 36 areas of cultural and historic importance.

<sup>36</sup> Law on the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia from 2010–2020, the Regional Spatial Plan of AP Vojvodina until 2020, Medium-term program for the protection of natural resources 2011–2020 and Annual programs for the protection of natural resources of the Institute for Protection of Nature of Serbia and the Institute for Nature Protection of AP Vojvodina envisage an increase in protected areas.

<sup>37</sup> Serbia is also exposed to floods, but according to the INFORM Risk Index, Serbia has an exposure index of 3.1 out of 10, placing Serbia in the group of low risk countries. Serbia is starting initial work for renewing the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction in line with Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, see more at <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/Countries/Country-Profile-Map>.



The country is also a beneficiary of the Convention's Assistance and Cooperation Program, under which it has been receiving assistance for enhanced prevention, preparedness, and response to industrial accidents and transboundary cooperation. The biggest challenges lie in insufficient coordination between national and local authorities, mandates for industrial safety, environmental protection, land-use planning and construction, emergency management and response, and chemicals and water management. The Serbian Ministry of Environmental Protection plans to establish a National Policy Dialogue (NPD) for Industrial Safety for coherent and risk-informed policymaking for industrial safety across different sectors. Moreover, the NPD will support the implementation of international frameworks, particularly the Sendai Framework and SDGs 3, 6, 9, 11, and 12. The launch of the NPD for Industrial Safety in Serbia planned for 2020/2021 should effectively assist Serbia in advancing policy reforms towards enhancing its environmental governance, industrial safety, accident prevention, disaster risk reduction, and emergency response.

#### 2.4.7 Environmental protection policies and funding

**Serbia participates in key international instruments for environmental protection yet lacks institutional and financial resources.**

Serbia actively participates in efforts under the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention, accessed in 2009) and under its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ratified in 2011). Both instruments can be used as cross-cutting tools to support the country's efforts in the implementation, follow up, and review of a number of SDGs, particularly SDG 16, as well SDGs 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15, in conjunction with Goal 17.

The most significant challenges for Serbia are insufficient levels of national funding, a lack of financing mechanisms, and weak administrative capacities for the procurement of available funds. Since 2010, environmental financing stood at around 0.8% of GDP. The main sources of financing are the national budget (0.3% of GDP) and fees gained as revenues of budgetary environmental funds (about 0.3% of GDP). Private economic sectors invested about 0.14% of GDP for this purpose, 86% stemming from the energy and mining sector. The greatest donor has been the EU and all activities are implemented within the negotiation process related to Chapter 27 of accession (SEPA 2019b). Payments for environmental services in agriculture and forestry are not implemented. Direct payments in Serbia are still not har-

monized with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) scheme. There are no defined requirements for complying with Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) or with the Statutory Management Requirements (SMR) as a precondition for exercising the right to direct payments. Serbia still lacks a designated fund that would allocate its special purpose revenues to environmental, renewable energy, and energy efficiency measures.

## 2.5 AGRICULTURE, FOOD SYSTEMS AND FORESTRY

### 2.5.1 Agriculture and food systems

In 2018 agriculture, forestry, and fishing accounted for 6.3% of GDP, the fourth largest sector after manufacturing at 14.5%, wholesale and retail trade and the repair of motor vehicles at 11.5%, and real estate at 7.0% (SORS 2019d). In 2019, 452.7 thousand people (or 15.6% of the total employed persons aged 15 and above), were employed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Almost half of them were informally employed (SORS 2020c).

The agriculture sector together with the food processing industry generates 9.4% of Serbia's GDP, accounts for 16% of employment, represents 18% of total exports, and contributes 6.1% of the country's Gross Value Added (GVA). Serbia's main export partners are the EU and countries of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). The competitiveness and general productivity of these sectors is relatively low. A plan for the development of organic production, defining its goals and measures, was adopted as an integral part of the National Program for Rural Development. There is no Code of Good Agricultural Practices, nor any similar instruments. Efforts to align policies and their implementation with the EU Green Deal are necessary, particularly its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies.

A key characteristic of the Serbian agri-food sector is the territorial duality of the farm structure and overall agri-food system, embedded in natural, historical, and governance variables. In the northern part of the country (Vojvodina) — where farms are larger — greater commercial contribution is expected towards the acceleration of economic growth (SDG Target 8.1 and SDG Target 8.2), through modernization in many segments of the food-chain (SDG Target 9.2 and SDG Target 9.3), and through mainstreaming sustainable production practices and reducing negative environmental impacts (SDG 12). In the territory of Central Serbia — where farms are smaller and more fragmented — contributions are expected in employment growth (SDG Target 8.3) and pover-



ty reduction, by increasing the productivity and income of small-scale food producers (SDG Target 2.3), and promoting sustainable production practices (SDG Target 2.4 and SDG Target 2.5).

Food systems are also important for adopting a comprehensive, integrated set of intersectoral activities that improve nutrition through the life-course and reduce the non-communicable diseases (NCD) burden in Serbia. Many of these activities have been outlined in the National Programme for Obesity Prevention in Children and Adults (GoS 2018d). Food loss and food waste is underexplored in Serbia (no comprehensive data are available), leaving big room for improvement. Similarly, diffuse pollution in agricultural soil caused by pesticides, empty pesticide containers, and fertilizer in agriculture requires further action (assessment of risks and strategies for their reduction) to protect the environment and to introduce sustainable agricultural production.

### 2.5.2 Forestry

Forests in Serbia cover around 30% of the country's total area, 37% in central Serbia and 6% in Vojvodina (SORS 2017a). This is considerably less than the 41% projected for 2050 by the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) goals defined under the Target Setting Program and the national Law on Spatial Planning of the Republic of Serbia. The forest sector in Serbia produces around 2.3% of the national GDP. Much of the forest in Serbia is located in hilly or mountainous regions, which impedes optimal forest management. Serbia's forests are characterized by high genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity, but forest conditions are unsatisfactory with a high percentage of poor-quality forests, inadequately tended artificially established forests, and an insufficient percentage of high-quality and highly valuable natural forests.

Forest degradation, along with the resulting habitat loss and fragmentation, is currently one of the key environmental problems faced by Serbia. Forest degradation on a large scale has resulted not only in the loss of forest carbon, biodiversity, and other key ecosystem goods and services, but also has substantially reduced the potential for Serbian forests to act as carbon sinks.

Some of the main causes of degradation include inadequate policies and strategic frameworks, poor forest management practices, illegal extraction of timber, forest fires, as well as pressure from the agricultural, energy, and construction sectors.

## 2.6 SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable economic growth and well-being work together to the benefit of people and society. By providing people with opportunities for greater well-being and helping them realize those opportunities, Serbia would not only promote well-being as an intrinsic good, it would also be investing in people's potential as a key driver for long-term economic growth, societal resilience and stability. Similarly, by paying attention to the sustainability of well-being over time, Serbia can maximize the potential for long-term economic growth and better protect the economy from adverse shocks.

The EU accession agenda, as the Government's main strategic priority, addresses commitments to the European social development model, supporting Serbia's ongoing commitments to being a socially responsible country. The commitments to address social inequalities are integrated into the Government's growth agenda, together with education reform, employment incentives for youth and vulnerable groups, support for social entrepreneurship, and an increase in the minimum wage (GoS 2019b). These measures also contribute to the achievements of SDGs promoting social inclusion and the well-being of the population, in particular SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10, as well as to the principle of LNOB — which is at the core of the 2030 Agenda.

To achieve inclusive and socially sustainable development, Serbia must address key population and demographic challenges, manage migration with a holistic perspective, ensure the population has equitable access to key resources, services (health care, education, social protection) and the labor market. All are prerequisites for human centered development and well-being. Particular attention should be paid to the LNOB mission and to addressing those most neglected and unequal first.

### 2.6.1 Demographic trends and challenges

**Like other Eastern and Eastern European countries, Serbia faces unfavorable demographic trends: significant population decline and rapid ageing. A negative migration balance (driven by high emigration and low fertility rates) leads to a decrease in overall population numbers and changes in age structures, with an increasing proportion of older people.**

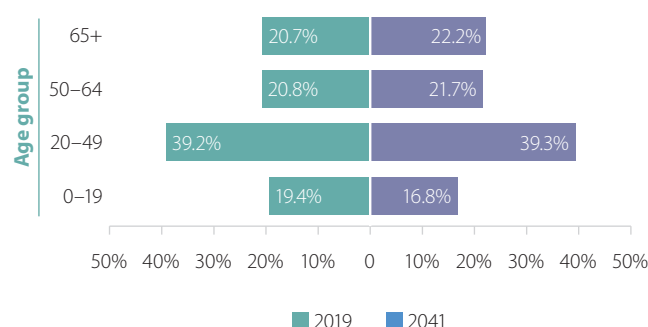
The rate of natural population growth has been negative for many years, and in 2019 was -5.3. On average, Serbia's population declines by 36,125 people annually, primarily due to nega-



tive population growth (based on Statistical Office data covering 2007-2018). The World Bank estimates that, if current trends continue, the population of Serbia will fall to 5.51 million by 2050 (World Bank 2020a).

Serbia is demographically relatively old, with 20.7% of its residents aged 65 years and older in 2019 (SORS 2019b).<sup>38</sup> According to projections, by 2041 the proportion of persons older than 65 will increase to 22.2% (SORS 2019f). Population ageing in Serbia correlates with lower fertility rates, migration, and a modest increase in life expectancy. The average age of the population increased from 40.9 years in 2007 to 43.3 years in 2019. In the same period there was an increase in the average life expectancy of males and females by approximately two years (from 70.7 years to 73 years for men and from 76.2 to 78 years for women). Natality is low but has been relatively stable.<sup>39</sup> The total fertility rate is below the replacement level, and from 2007-2019 went almost unchanged, from 1.38 to 1.5 children per woman, respectively. The average age of a mother at the birth of her first live-born child increased from 26.2 years in 2007 to 28.7 years in 2019 (SORS 2019g). Although similar trends are present across Europe, Serbia and other Eastern European countries do not compensate for decreasing population numbers with immigration entrants, as is the case in Western Europe. The economic knock-on effects on a country striving to join the EU are evident and amount to billions of dollars in the short term. In the longer run, there are costs related to decreasing working age population that support those of pensionable age.

**Figure 5 Population pyramid for Serbia comparing 2019 and 2041**



Sources: SORS 2020g; SORS 2019f

<sup>38</sup> From 2007 to 2019, the percentage of young people (0-14) fell from 15.5% in 2007 to 14.3% in 2019, while the percentage of the population aged 65 and over increased from 17.2% (2007) to 20.7% (2019).

<sup>39</sup> In the period 2007-2017, the birth rate remained on the same level, around 9.2%, while the crude death rate rose from 13.9 to 14.8 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants.

## 2.6.2 Migration

**Serbia experiences dynamic international and internal migration flows. The strategic and legal framework for migration management has been expanded, yet there is a need to improve the effectiveness of migration management policies and to align them with relevant laws for international protection and with EU standards, particularly regarding the status of refugees.**

Internal migration trends have led to the depopulation of rural areas (particularly in south and southeast Serbia) and the concentration of the population in large cities (particularly Belgrade). This is driven by better employment prospects in large urban areas, better communal infrastructure, public, education and health services, as well as cultural life. Most internal migrants are women (mostly for marriage or education) and younger individuals (51.5% are aged 15-34 years). The mobility of young people contributes to higher regional disparities in Serbia, with many areas (above all in the south and southeast) facing depopulation, economic decline, and various problems of social exclusion (Bobić et al. 2016).

The emigration of Serbian citizens continues to be high. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 50,000 citizens of Serbia migrate each year to Western European countries, mainly Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, and Italy. Migrants are mainly younger individuals of reproductive age, and professionals that are in demand in EU labor markets (such as medical professionals, care providers, drivers, and construction workers). It is projected that the emigration of young and educated people from Serbia could rise by 20 to 30% in the next five years (Petrović et al. 2020).<sup>40</sup> To more effectively manage international migration — keeping development in mind — Serbia has adopted the Strategy for Economic Migration.

Recent studies have shed light on the reasons behind emigration. The “Youth in Serbia 2018/2019” survey conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) on a representative sample of 1,100 respondents aged 14 to 29, revealed that as many as three quarters of young people expressed a desire or intention to emigrate. The leading reason was the improvement of living standards (28%), followed by the possibility of professional advancement. A 2018 survey among 11,013 university students (10,244 from state and 769 from private faculties and colleges), administered by the Cabinet of the Minister for Demography and Population Policies, showed that one in three students (32.4%)

<sup>40</sup> With GDP growth of 4%.



planned to leave the country and work abroad (MDPP and SORS 2018). The main reasons were the inability to find a job in a desired profession (27.3% of students), low-paid jobs in a desired profession (21.3%), and low living standards (20.1%). Empirical research conducted by the Fiscal Council shows that this trend can be reversed only if Serbia improves its institutional framework and implements comprehensive public sector reforms (in, for example, health, education, etc.). The importance of strong institutions corresponds with the research results. The findings emphasize that a significant rise in average wages (to 900 EUR/month) — if unaccompanied by other reforms — would not prevent people from emigrating, but would only curtail its growth (Petrović et al. 2020).

Moreover, in the last five years, Serbia has become a transit country for foreign citizens moving towards the EU in search of international protection or better economic opportunities.<sup>41</sup> The number of stranded migrants in and outside Government facilities is increasing on an annual basis. The reception and accommodation of migrants in reception and asylum facilities ranged from 2,521 to 5,309 people in 2019. The occupancy in 2020 shows a somewhat stable trend, generally in line with the Government's accommodation capacities. However, a significant increase was recorded in March and April 2020 with more than 8,000 migrants accommodated. This corresponded with mobility restrictions and border closures imposed in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic's peak.

Three new laws related to managing the refugee and migration situation were adopted in 2018: the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection (LATP), the Law on Foreigners, and the Law on the Protection of State Borders, along with the adoption of the Strategy on confronting irregular migration in the Republic of Serbia (2018-2020), and the Strategy on economic migrations of the Republic of Serbia (2021-2027). The LATP is partly aligned with EU standards, and while Serbia implemented the majority of international obligations defined by this law, challenges related to the provision of legal identity and travel documents for persons granted international protection, the provision of health insurance cards, and the removal of administrative fees for work permits still remain. Migration policies also face significant gaps in data, particularly regarding emigration, diaspora, and circular migration.

<sup>41</sup> Migrants originally came as a result of the Syrian war, but after the first (and largest) wave the population on the move also came from other Asian (Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan) and African countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Eritrea, Somalia, etc.), making the current influx a mixed migration flow of people and children.

## 2.6.3 Health and well-being

**The general health of the population is marked by low engagement in sports and recreation, a high percentage of smokers, high morbidity and mortality due to cardiovascular and malignant diseases, and an uneven distribution of services. Population health and the health care system have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.**

Health is a fundamental human right and a key contributing factor to well-being. The health of the population and the performance of the health care system were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Between March 6<sup>th</sup> and November 5<sup>th</sup>, there were 51,083 confirmed cases of COVID-19, resulting in 844 deaths (WHO 2020)<sup>42</sup>.

Health and social care workers are essential to building strong and resilient health systems. In 2014, Serbia ranked among the top five countries in central and southeastern Europe for the number of physicians and nurses per 100 000, and this figure was above the average for SEEHN countries, but significantly below the average for the WHO European Region and the EU average. While information on the trends in health workforce migration is not available, research provides evidence on high intention to work abroad (Šantrić-Milićević et al. 2014, 2015; Gačević et al. 2018). This can pose an additional challenge in reoccurring waves of COVID-19 and other emergencies.

Regarding other health indicators, Serbia is in a mixed situation in comparison with the EU. The maternal mortality rate fluctuates, but overall it shows a decreasing trend. In 2018, the maternal mortality rate reached 14.1 per 100,000 live births (IPH 2018a), which is higher than in EU member states. Neonatal mortality is 4 per 100,000 newborns (UNICEF 2018). The infant mortality rate of 4.9 per 1,000 live births (IPH 2018a) is still high compared to the EU average. The under-5 mortality rate is 7 per 1,000 newborns (IPH 2018a). The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (SORS and UNICEF 2020) indicated that child mortality rates are notably higher in Roma settlements than the national average (estimated infant mortality rate among children in Roma settlements is 8 per 1,000 live births, while the probability that a child will die before their fifth birthday is about 9 per 1,000 live births).

The communicable disease mortality rate was 3.7 per 100,000 people in 2017, while the distribution of deaths by age in 2017 showed that the highest age-specific mortality rate from infectious diseases was recorded in those aged 60 and over, just as in

<sup>42</sup> Accurate as of 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 10:36am CET.



2016. Serbia is a country with low HIV and TB prevalence (IPH 2018b).<sup>43</sup> In 2018, unprotected sexual intercourse was the mode of transmission in 92 per cent of all newly identified cases, with 76 per cent among men having sex with men. The number of sexually transmitted infections among youth might be underreported, while lack of comprehensive sexual education contributes to risky behaviour among young people.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have significant socio-economic consequences for the development of the country and calls for an immediate strengthening of the health system to respond to the growing burden of NCDs. The loss of productivity due to NCDs is significant: for every 10% increase in NCD mortality, economic growth is reduced by 0.5% (Bloom et al. 2011).

Overall mortality linked to chronic NCDs has increased (IPH 2018a). Cardiovascular diseases and malignant tumors accounted for more than two thirds of all deaths in Serbia over the last decade. The prevalence of cerebrovascular diseases is 2.5 times higher than in the EU 28, and the prevalence of diabetes is 2.25 times higher (WHO 2015). The Program for Cancer Control Improvement (2020–2022) was adopted in August 2020 (GoS 2020). High mortality rates can partly be explained by a lack of timely doctors' visits and subsequent diagnosis at a later stage of the disease when treatment is less successful, and death more likely. Undernourishment remains an issue of concern in Serbia with 5.6% of people undernourished (FAO 2018), but obesity (including a higher prevalence of overweight children among lower income groups) is more common than malnutrition. The prevalence of obesity among adults steadily increased from 17.3% in 2005 to 21.5% in 2016 (WHO 2016a).

Serbian citizens show low engagement in sports and recreation and more than a third of the population smokes (IPH 2014).<sup>44</sup> Progress in the area of tobacco control is limited, and much work remains to be done to fully implement the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Challenges are related to gaps in the legislation, inadequate enforcement, and low levels of compliance with the law. The use of tobacco in public places is not aligned with the EU recommendations and there is no ban on smoking in the hospitality sector. With a stronger set of policies consistent with the WHO Framework Convention on To-

bacco Control, smoking prevalence in Serbia could be reduced by 29% within five years, by 37% within 15 years and by 44% within 40 years, resulting in almost 535,000 averted deaths in the long term (WHO 2016b).

The use of modern contraceptives is low (21 per cent) with an unmet need for family planning of 8.8 per cent among married women or in union (SORS and UNICEF 2020). The absence of disaggregated data constrains analysis of the demand for family planning among different population groups. Young people are at high risk of unsafe behaviours. The birth rate for adolescent girls aged 15–19 years in the general population is 12 per 1,000 women, while in Roma settlements it is 163 births per 1,000 women, which is 13.5 times higher (SORS and UNICEF 2020).

Cervical cancer is a significant preventable cause of women's disability and premature death. The latest estimates are that women in Serbia (both with respect to developing and dying from cervical cancer) rank 5<sup>th</sup> among 40 countries, with a standardized incidence rate of 20.3 per 100,000 and a standardized death rate of 7.0 per 100,000. Public awareness of cervical cancer is low, and the quality and coverage of cervical screening requires improvement (IARC 2018).

Inequalities in health status and access to health care are present in Serbia. Women experience worse health conditions than men — they report a higher share of chronic illness than men (by 6.6%), and more frequently perceive their health as bad or very bad (SIPRU and World Bank 2016). Health indicators are much worse for vulnerable groups (older people in rural areas, the Roma, persons with disability, people with multiple disadvantages). Despite the universal healthcare coverage<sup>45</sup> provided by statutory health insurance, 14.9% of the population over 16 have unmet healthcare needs. In most cases, this is due to financial barriers, distance, or transportation problems, and/or long waiting lists (Popović et al. 2017).

The density of resources (i.e. the number of doctors and the number of hospital beds per inhabitants), and annual allocations for health from both public and private funds are better than in comparable countries, yet Serbia is one of the nations with the highest share of citizens with unmet medical needs (7.6% in 2014) when compared to EU Member States. Complaints usually focus on the conduct of health workers and the organization of the health system. Financial constraints represent a significant reason for unmet needs for medical care, which are more frequent among lower educated people and

<sup>43</sup> In 2017, 178 recently HIV-infected individuals were registered, with men having sex with men (MSM) accounting for the highest number (119). Most were in the 40 to 49 age group. According to vital statistics, 55 persons died by Morbus HIV. Contrastingly, newly registered TB cases amounted to 743, which indicated a permanent, multiyear drop, whereby Serbia now falls within the group of TB low-burden countries in Europe (Batut 2018c).

<sup>44</sup> The latest available data from the Health Survey conducted by the IPHS in 2014 shows that 34.7% of Serbian adults (over 15 years of age) are smokers. The use of psychoactive substances in the general population (at least once during their lives) was recorded at 8.0% of the total population aged 18 to 64 (10.8% of men and 5.2% of women; Batut 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Health care in Serbia is financed through the mandatory health care insurance of all employees, self-employed persons, and their families, and the state provides retired persons, unemployed persons, refugees, and other sensitive groups with insurance.



the poorest people. Evidence suggests that benefits are not equal across the population: certain population groups (such as the most disadvantaged, the uninsured and Roma) experience problems accessing primary care services. There is also an uneven territorial distribution of resources and the lack of health service integration with social services at the local level, including the absence of long-term elderly care, palliative care, mental care services, limited primary care services, and access to health care institutions in remote and rural area (MEI 2019a).

## 2.6.4 Education

**Educational attendance is high at the primary school level, relatively high at the secondary school level, but unsatisfactory at the poles of formal education: pre-school and university education. Education reform has been prioritized in the national development agenda, but challenges remain, particularly regarding a low functionality of knowledge, persistent discrepancies between vulnerable groups and the general population, and gender gaps.**

Serbia, in general, has a low level of educational attainment. More than one-third of the population over 15 have only attained primary education or less. Only 16.2% of the general population have completed tertiary education (more women than men). People living in non-urban areas have lower levels of education than average. People from disadvantaged groups are also characterized by lower levels of qualifications, with 65.6% of people with disabilities and 87% of the Roma national minority having only completed primary school or below.<sup>46</sup>

Serbia has one of the lowest rates of participation in pre-school education in Europe. 74% of children aged between 4 and 6.5 attended pre-school education in Serbia in 2016, compared to 96% in the EU (MoESTD 2019), with much lower coverage among children from vulnerable groups and/or less affluent municipalities. The pre-primary enrollment rate of Roma children between 3 and 5 years of age living in Serbia, for example, is considerably lower compared to the non-Roma population living in close proximity (World Bank 2019c).

The population coverage of primary education was 97% in 2018, with secondary education at 89.3%, and tertiary education at 54.7% (SORS 2018). The completion rate of primary education was 97% and secondary education was 84.7% (SORS 2018). MICS 2014 data indicate that the net attendance rate of children living in Roma settlements was again much lower than that of children from the general population (84.95% vs. 99.1%). The disparities were even higher in secondary education, where net attendance for children living in Roma settlements was only 28%, compared to 86% for children in the general population (UNICEF 2014).

From the perspective of the quality and functionality of education, according to the latest available survey by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), students finishing primary education in 2018 in Serbia demonstrated considerably lower key competency levels than their peers from EU countries. Between 30% and 40% of students in Serbia were functionally illiterate, twice the EU average. This share was much higher in the poorest group of students, where it ranged from 60% to 75% (Baucal & Pavlović-Babić 2009). Students in Serbia also scored lower than average in mathematics (OECD 2019).<sup>47</sup>

Regarding equal access to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, approximately 48% of the relevant generational group attends universities or colleges, and this number has shown a slight upward trend. The greatest problem appears to be a discrepancy between education qualifications and labor market needs, the balance of which is crucial in order to achieve the target of increasing the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills.

Gender disparities in tertiary education are evidenced in the lower participation of men in tertiary education (55.3% of students were women in 2017) and in gender segregation according to fields of study (SORS 2017b). Women are concentrated in the fields of education, arts and humanities, social sciences, business, administration, law, health, and natural sciences, while men are concentrated in the fields of ICT education, engineering, manufacturing, and construction (SORS 2017b). In 2017, 14,122 students earned MA diplomas and 952 earned PhDs. 60.7% of MAs and 49.7% of PhDs were earned by women. Data indicate that while women account for the majority of students at the undergraduate and MA levels, men earned the majority of PhDs.

<sup>46</sup> 2011 Census of Population, Households, and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia — Educational Attainment, Literacy, and Computer Literacy (2013); Roma population in Serbia (2014), Persons with Disabilities in Serbia (2016), Republic Statistical Office, Belgrade.

<sup>47</sup> An earlier study (Lazarević and Orlić 2018) investigating the 2012 PISA scores within Serbia (between schools), found that the proportion of certified mathematics teachers and the number of teachers were important predictors of PISA mathematics literacy.



## 2.6.5 The labor market

**Labor market indicators show improvement in recent years, but the Serbian labor market performance remains below the EU average, and there are labor participation gaps between vulnerable groups and the general population and between women and men.**

In 2019, the activity rate of the working age population (15–64) was 68.1%, compared to 73.4% in the EU 27. Similarly, the employment rate was 61.7% compared to 68.6% in the EU 27 (Eurostat 2020c). The gender gap in the labor market has been consistently pronounced, most recently showing a 13.6% difference in activity rates and a 12.9% difference in employment rate, in favor of men (Eurostat 2020c).

Labor market inclusion is problematic for various social groups. Youth, persons with disabilities, some ethnic minorities (particularly the Roma), older workers, and forced migrants are some of the most prominent groups facing obstacles in labor market participation and decent working conditions. In terms of youth, one fifth (20.1%) of young people were not employed or enrolled in training or in education programs (NEET) in 2018. While this was a decrease of 1.6% from 2017, this positive trend was not only a consequence of an increase in youth employment (by 2.4%) or of a decrease of unemployment (by 8.8%), but also of a negative demographic trend and of the emigration of young people. Notably, the size of the population aged 15–29 decreased by 1.8% between 2017 and 2018 (SIPRU 2019b).

Furthermore, the employment rate of young people (15–24) was only 21.5% in 2019 and the employment rate of older workers (55–64) was 50.2%, also lower than the EU 27 average (Eurostat 2020c). The employment rate in the Roma population was only 21% in 2017 (UNDP and World Bank 2017), and the employment rate for persons with disabilities was only 9% in 2011 (Marković 2014).

While discrimination in the labor market is still persistent in Serbia, the perception of discrimination is low in almost all labor market actors (below 5%), indicating low awareness of labor rights and of capacities to recognize discrimination based on various grounds, such as nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious belief, or other. Among women reporting personal experience with discrimination, 45% indicated that it was based on gender, 44% on age, 37% on marital and family status, 24% on appearance, and 23% on health status (CPE 2020). Those perceived as the groups most discriminated against in the labor market are persons with disabilities, older workers, the Roma minority, people living with HIV/AIDS, migrants, the poor, and the LGBTI population (CPE 2020).

## 2.6.6 Poverty, social exclusion, and social protection

**Inequality has been increasing in Serbia and poverty remains relatively high compared to the average levels for the EU 28.**

The at-risk-of-poverty rate<sup>48</sup> has remained relatively stable at around 25% (24.3% in 2018 and 25.7% in 2017, in comparison to 25% in 2014), which is higher than the EU 28 average of 16.9% (SIPRU 2014).

Data on absolute poverty prevalence show that non-urban populations are more vulnerable (10.5%), especially in eastern and southern Serbia (12.1%). When key elements of absolute and relative poverty profiles are considered together, it is apparent that the unemployed, people with no education, multi-person households, and non-urban populations are severely vulnerable (SIPRU 2018c).

According to data from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC 2018), inequality in income distribution in Serbia stands at 35.6% of the Gini coefficient (SORS 2020f), which is third highest among all European countries (EC 2019).<sup>49</sup> Due to inequality, Serbia recorded a loss of 14.4% in human development, yielding an Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) of 0.685 in 2018, rather than 0.799 (UNDP 2019). Certain groups (addressed further in Chapter 4.3 on “Leave no one behind”) face higher risks of poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination, and they require special focus in the development agenda.

Social protection helps reduce poverty and social inequalities. Serbia is a low spending, low poverty reduction country (GoS 2016), with social protection expenditures representing less than 25% of the Serbian GDP in 2016, compared to a ratio of 29% in the EU 28. Social transfers were also less effective than in the EU, reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate by approximately a third in 2016.<sup>50</sup>

The number of people entering the social protection system increased by 3% since 2017 and 11% since 2014, reaching 753,996 in 2017 (RISP 2017). In the same period, the number of children entering the social protection system increased by 6%, although the share of children in the general population has been declining (RISP 2018). These trends are putting pressure on the Serbian social protection system, which has recorded staff reductions in centers for social work (MEI 2019a).

<sup>48</sup> The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the proportion of persons whose income per consumer unit after social transfers is less than 60 percent of the median of the national income per consumer unit.

<sup>49</sup> If measured by the HBS method, the differences are closer to the EU average (28.4% in 2018). This is because income in kind is important in Serbia, especially for lower deciles, to which most rural populations belong.

<sup>50</sup> In the EU, social transfers reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate from 25.9% to 17.3%.



While social justice may be a priority in the Government's agenda, certain changes of laws and regulations negatively impact the most marginalized and vulnerable categories of the population (for example, the introduced taxation of people holding leases on social housing apartments and social housing in protected environments, a reduction in state funding for social protection, health, education, and general public services, decreased entitlements for women during maternity leave, etc.). This has been noted by the UN Human Rights Team in Serbia, various Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and UN Human Rights Mechanisms.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.6.7 Gender equality and gender based violence

**Gender inequalities are perhaps the most pervasive forms of inequalities, rooted in social structures and marked by imbalances in power between men and women, and sustained through diverse discrimination patterns. In Serbia, gender equality laws and policies generally stand, but lack practical implementation.**

According to the latest Gender Equality Index (2018),<sup>52</sup> gender equality in Serbia improved from 52.4 points in 2016 to 55.8 in 2018 but remained lower than the EU 28's 66.2 points (SIPRU 2018d). Gender inequalities persist in the domain of work. While the participation of women in the labor market increased from 2016 to 2018,<sup>53</sup> segregation worsened, indicating a further concentration of women in the sectors of social services. Similarly, gains in the domain of knowledge were recorded, but these were mainly due to increased participation, while segregation in educational profiles worsened. Monetary gender inequalities improved slightly during the same period, but a gender pay gap persists. Data on intersecting inequalities reveal that certain groups face lower achievements than average and higher gender gaps, such as single persons, single parents, and couples with two

or more children. Data on time indicate a disproportionate burden of household work and family care is placed on women. While improvements in the political participation of women are continuing (50% of the ministerial positions in the new Government established in October 2020 are held by women),<sup>54</sup> the gender gap in economic power has worsened and the gender gap in social power (measured by the participation of women in top sports organizations, media, and decision making bodies for financing research) is among the largest when compared to EU member states (SIPRU 2018d). Violence against women and girls remains one of the key challenges for women's rights in Serbia. Gender-based violence, including femicide, is widespread, constant and is similar in prevalence to other Western Balkan countries. (Konstantinović Vilić et al. 2019).<sup>55</sup> There were at least 26 cases of femicide in 2017, 30 in 2018 and 27 in 2019 (NWaV 2019).

According to data from an OSCE survey on the well-being and safety of women, over one fifth of women older than 15 had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by either their partner or another person. Partner relationships carry the greatest danger of these forms of violence, as indicated by a rate of physical and/or sexual violence committed against women by their current or former partners that is two times higher than by other persons (17% versus 8%). In partner violence, psychological violence is most common; 44% of women reported having experienced it. According to research, 42% of women older than 15 have been exposed to sexual harassment and every tenth woman has been a victim of stalking (OSCE 2018).

Women from vulnerable groups, such as Roma, women with disabilities, migrant, older, and rural women, and single mothers are particularly disadvantaged in their access to resources and economic, social, and political participation. They also face higher risks of gender-based violence<sup>56</sup> due to vulnerability and more difficult access to protection services. Among women in Roma

<sup>51</sup> For more, see <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/ENACARRegion/Pages/RSIndex.aspx>.

<sup>52</sup> The Gender Equality Index measures gender equality in key EU gender equality policy domains: work, knowledge, money, time, power, health, intersectional inequalities, and violence against women. The Index measures simultaneously the level of achievement and the gender gap on a scale from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating lowest achievement and a high gender gap and 100 indicating highest achievements with no gender gap. See more at the European Institute for Gender Equality <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019>.

<sup>53</sup> However, it should be noted that activity and employment gender gaps are still prominent. The magnitude of the gender gap in labor participation is evident in the much higher inactivity rate of women (42% vs. 58% for the working-age population). Many other indicators reveal the disadvantaged position of women in the labor market, such as the concentration of women in low productivity sectors and in the care economy. Discrimination is also evident in the realm of recruitment, promotion, pay and benefits, the availability of training opportunities, and in relation to maternity and parental leave. Additional effort is needed to encourage women to participate in occupational areas where they are traditionally under-represented, to facilitate reconciliation of professional and private life for women and men, to prevent and combat sexual harassment of women in the workplace, and to increase women's access to employment and entrepreneurship (CEDAW, ICESRC Concluding Observations).

<sup>54</sup> Quotas in the National Assembly have led to greater political participation by women, which represent 33% among Members of Parliament. However, their participation in decision-making in the executive branch of government, and at the local level, is significantly lower. Only 5% of municipal presidents or mayors are women. As a result, political discourse and budgetary allocations do not focus on, or adequately finance, gender equality measures.

<sup>55</sup> Research conducted in 2019 found that only 10% of cases of femicide received the maximum sentence of 40 years. Usually, the sentence ranged from 10–15 years, which sends a message to the public that femicide is not treated as a most severe crime.

<sup>56</sup> Two surveys were conducted in the course of 2018/19, highlighting the critical issues Roma women and women with disabilities face, and requiring urgent action. (1) Based on a survey conducted by Roma CSO Bibija, as many as 92% of Roma women have experienced some type of physical or sexual violence after the age of 18. Moreover, 16.9% of girls from Roma settlements get married before turning 15 and 57% before turning 18, compared to the majority population, in which it is 0.8% and 7%, respectively; (2) Another survey highlighted the exposure of women with disabilities to gender-based and domestic violence, conducted by the CSO Out of the Circle from Vojvodina in 2018. 37.5% of women that participated in the survey stated they were victims of physical violence, while 29.5% of interviewed women stated they had been raped (forced to have sex without consent).



settlements, 57% married before the age of 18, compared to 6.8% in the general population (UNICEF 2014).

The first Gender Equality Law in Serbia was adopted in 2009. In 2016 an improved version of the Law was drafted, but it has not yet been adopted. The National Strategy for Gender Equality was adopted for the period 2016–2020, with a related action plan for 2016–2018. The Action Plan for 2019–2020 was drafted but has not yet been adopted. The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence (2017) provides a better framework for the protection of women victims of violence against women (VAW), but Serbia has no specific strategy for the elimination of gender based VAW (the previous one expired in 2015). The National Action Plan for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (UNSCR 1325) was adopted for the period 2017–2020. Gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting have been the focus of dynamic policy efforts, with women's NGOs and gender advocates playing a critical role in these achievements.

## 2.7 LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

**The principle of Leave No One Behind** mandates policies to prevent discrimination and expand opportunities for vulnerable groups so that every individual can participate in social, economic, political, and cultural life with equal rights. This is relevant for Serbia as a country with high inequalities in income distribution, and it is a key UN principle for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

**A range of ethnic and social groups are subject to exclusion, discrimination, or vulnerability in Serbia. Reports by UN Human Rights Mechanisms, the EC, the CoE, and other sources indicate high levels of discrimination faced by many groups of rights-holders in the country, namely Roma, rural populations, the LGBTI community, persons with disabilities, migrants, women victims of gender-based violence, children and youth exposed to poverty and social exclusion, and older persons, among others.**

Legal solutions that have been recently adopted are still not fully aligned with international norms in the area of human rights and the LNOB principle, which negatively impacts the most marginalized and most vulnerable. For example, the Amendments to the Law on Individual Property Tax<sup>57</sup> (which introduced taxation of people holding leases on social housing apartments and social

housing in protected environment), austerity, and similar measures<sup>58</sup> led to a reduction in the allocation of state funding for social protection, health, education and general public services. This contributes to increasing the overall poverty rate and disproportionately affects women. The Law on Social Welfare<sup>59</sup> limits the allocation of social welfare funds afforded to the most marginalized and most vulnerable categories of the population to the period of nine months in a calendar year, with allocated amounts far below those needed for the realization of the right to adequate standard of living. The Law on Financial Support for Families with Children significantly decreased the entitlements of women during maternity leave as well as the rights of parents of children with disabilities and Roma children. The newly adopted Law on Free Legal Aid could lead to the absence of free legal aid provisions for the most vulnerable categories. The Criminal Code<sup>60</sup> does not recognize the whole definition of torture (leaving certain acts of torture legally invisible) and introduces life-imprisonment and life-imprisonment without parole sentences. This constitutes degrading punishment while also denying prisoners the fundamental right to hope. As a final example, Family Law<sup>61</sup> does not allow same sex marriages and partnerships.

These trends are related to inadequate regulatory impact assessments of the proposed legal solutions on human rights and the position of various vulnerable groups, particularly women, persons with disabilities, children and youth, Roma, LGBTI persons, refugees and others. There is also slow improvement in harmonization of the areas recognized as high priority by both UN Human Rights Mechanisms and the European Commission, with the relevant international standards. A lack of coordination and cooperation among governmental sections and decision-making entities is also present, preventing policy creation that is human rights-compliant (EC 2020d).

A number of public policies have been adopted to improve the status of certain vulnerable groups and tackle important social issues. According to the Parliamentary SDG Focus Group, an internal analysis showed that 81 active national strategies were in place, which are designed to be horizontally and vertically aligned to each other (UN MAPS 2019). Most of the adopted strategic documents are not based on disaggregated data and are not created according to the human rights-based approach,

<sup>58</sup> See: Budget System Law (Official Gazette RS, Nos. 54/09, 73/10, 101/10, 101/11, 93/12, 62/13, 63/13 (Corrigendum), 108/13, 142/14, 68/15 (other law), 103/15, 99/16, 113/17, 95/18, 31/19, 72/19); Law on the Maximum Number of Employees in the Public Sector (Official Gazette RS, Nos. 68/2015, 81/2016, 95/2018); Law on Temporary Regulation of Salary i.e. wages and other steady income calculation and payment bases of public fund users (Official Gazette RS, Nos. 116/2014 and 95/2018).

<sup>59</sup> See Law on Social Welfare (Official Gazette RS, Nos. 24/2011).

<sup>60</sup> See Criminal Code (Official Gazette RS, 85/2005, 88/2005, 107/2005, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016, and amendments 2019).

<sup>61</sup> Family Law (Official Gazette RS, 18/2005, 72/2011 and 6/2015).

<sup>57</sup> See Amendments to the Law on Individual Property Tax, (Official Gazette RS, No 95/2018), Article 2.



nor are they harmonized with recommendations issued by the UN mechanisms of human rights and the European Commission. The MAPS team notes from its findings that a lack of application and practical implementation of these policies remains a challenge, particularly in the broad areas of social policy (UN MAPS 2019). In addition to poor implementation, there are frequent delays in adopting the Action Plans for the implementation of some strategic documents. Reports on implementation support the fact that the strategies and the accompanying Action Plans are insufficiently implemented and do not contribute significantly to the improvement of human rights.

The main challenges include: a lack of practical implementation at all levels; insufficient budgetary allocations; a lack of clear partition of jurisdictions between state institutions and other institutions responsible for strategic measures and activities; and inadequate follow-up mechanisms. An additional problem is limited consultations with social groups — especially those from vulnerable categories — in the processes of creation, implementation, and monitoring of public policies.

### 2.7.1 Populations in rural and remote areas

Populations in rural areas face higher poverty rates than those in urban areas (10.5% vs. 4.9%), especially in south and eastern Serbia, which are the poorest according to both absolute and relative poverty lines (UNDP 2018). They also face problems of poor infrastructure, a lack of social services or poorer quality social services (such as education and health care), and an absence of important cultural and social resources, which improve the quality of life.

### 2.7.2 Persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities, particularly persons with mental (intellectual and psychosocial) disabilities, are largely excluded from almost all aspects of social life. This includes: exclusion from the open labor market and medicalized approaches, the inaccessibility of working spaces, a lack of reasonable accommodation, an insufficient position in the legal framework and practice, a lack of good quality education and healthcare, to deficiencies in independent living, legal capacity, political participation, and decision making. Moreover, they face widespread lack of physical accessibility in public institutions and spaces. A primary cause is the absence of political will — there was a five year gap in adopting a new Strategy for Promoting the Position of Persons with Disabilities (after the previous one expired in 2015, a new one was not adopted until 2020), and the absence of a National Accessibility Strategy and Deinstitutionalization Strategy, requiring allocated funds and defined priorities that would enable the tracking of their progressive realization.

The lack of disaggregated data on persons with disabilities makes monitoring the situation difficult, hampering the creation of appropriate measures. Particularly invisible are children with disabilities in the most vulnerable situations, such as children in residential institutions; children with intellectual, mental, and multiple disabilities; children living in poverty; unaccompanied minors; children working in the streets; and those in transit. In the past ten years, significant progress has been made in improving the legal framework and equality of children with disabilities in Serbia, but they still face substantial barriers to their inclusion in society. They frequently encounter negative attitudes, and 29% of children with disabilities have been refused access when trying to use public services due to inaccessible facilities or inadequate conditions, while 26% stated having been discriminated against because of special conditions being set that amounted to indirect discrimination (UNICEF 2017).<sup>62</sup> Discrimination most often relates to the education system, with which children have the most contact. Yet it is encouraging that more than 90% of the population believes that with adequate support children with disabilities can make great achievements in their lives (UNICEF 2017).

### 2.7.3 The older population

Pensions are an important protector from financial poverty for those of older age. Due to the pension coverage, the risk of poverty for persons over 65 is below the national average (SORS 2019). However, this risk increases for people over 75+, as they: spend their savings accumulated during their years of employment; have lower capacity to generate additional income; and have increased expenses related to healthcare services due to different chronic conditions (UN DESA n.d.).

According to the 2011 census, approximately 85% of the population that meets the retirement age is covered by pensions. Persons over 65 not covered by pensions are one of the most vulnerable groups of older people. In 2014, it was estimated that there were more than 240,000 older people not covered by pensions in Serbia (Matković and Stanić 2014), with projections showing that this figure will rise. Pension adequacy is also low in Serbia; the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) rate for older people in 2016 was 31.2%, while the severe material deprivation rate was 20.9%, which is much higher than EU 28 averages (Pejin Stokić and Bajec 2017). The material deprivation rate is especially frequent among older women (Babović et al. 2018). According to the 2016 Labor Force Survey (LFS), the employment rate for the

<sup>62</sup> According to the National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia, 45% of parents state that either they or their children have experienced some kind of insult, degrading treatment, or harassment due to a child's developmental disabilities. Situation Analysis: Position of children with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia, National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia, 2017.



population aged 65 and over was 15%, but while 19.5% of older men were employed, only 9.6% of older women were, and this was mostly in agriculture (Babović et al. 2018).

The current number of pensioners is approximately 1.7 million and the number of employees is slightly less than 2.2 million (PIO 2020), which is not enough for stable and regular payments of pensions only from the pension fund. With both the elderly population projected to increase in its proportion relative to the general population and the proportional reduction of the working population, the sustainability of the pension system represents a future challenge.

Although persons older than 65 account for more than 20% of the population, they represent only about 15% of social services beneficiaries (Babović et al. 2018). The most frequently used service is home help. The social protection system mostly provides forms of support for critical situations, such as accommodation in institutions (Babović et al. 2018), while community services and independent living support services are less developed (SIPRU 2018e). Long-term care services for the elderly are fragmented between the social protection, health care and pension insurance systems (Todorović and Vračević 2018). Due to this fragmentation, coordination is difficult. Less than 10% of persons over the age of 65 receives any of these existing services within this system. Informal care givers are instead the backbone of long-term care (Todorović and Vračević 2018).

Ageism (i.e. prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination based on age) seems to be a somewhat socially acceptable form of discrimination (Janković et al. 2018). Research in 2015 showed that 19.8% of interviewees older than 65 had been exposed to some form of abuse and violence in their older age, of which the highest risk seemed to be of financial abuse. However, other forms such as physiological or physical abuse were also present (Janković et al. 2015). The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence does not recognize older people as a particularly vulnerable group.

#### 2.7.4 Asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons

Over the past several decades, Serbia has experienced large, successive waves of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, internally displaced people (IDPs) from Kosovo\*, returnees from the EU, and more recently migrants and refugees from Syria and elsewhere. The returnees from the EU are primarily Roma who face serious challenges in social inclusion (CYI 2019).<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> It is documented that during 2017, almost 4,000 Serbian citizens, mostly from Germany, were returned to Serbia. Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, 'Migration profile, 2017', 2019. A survey of readmitted families living in informal settlements in Belgrade highlights the multiple vulnerabilities faced by these households and the need for strengthening support services that would ensure their well-being.

Serbia has developed capacities and expertise in providing national-level aid and local integration services, yet issues remain, for instance around the children of stateless persons. Data collection on migration needs to be improved. The multiple deprivations experienced by people in transit must continue to be addressed, as well as of families returned to Serbia under the readmission agreement with the EU. At the 2019 Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, Serbia made five pledges related to local integration, education, and emergency preparedness. This initiative is welcome and shows the determination of Serbia to continue its work in protecting refugees and asylum seekers and upholding the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees.

#### 2.7.5 Roma and national minorities

Roma<sup>64</sup> are the most discriminated group in Serbia, facing difficulties in almost all aspects of inclusion: including education, employment, housing, and healthcare. Roma children continue to face discrimination in the education system — only 6% of children from Roma settlements attend early learning programs, only 64% finish primary school on time, and only 22% attend secondary school, of whom only 15% are girls (OSCE 2016). In contrast, there is an overrepresentation of Roma children in special schools. In response, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development has adopted a rulebook on the criteria and procedure for the enrollment of Roma students in secondary schools, which promotes enrollment in secondary schools and informs Roma children and their parents about the advantages of enrollment in secondary schools (Janković et al. 2015; SIPRU 2020a).

Unemployment is particularly high among the Roma, and those who are employed are usually engaged in low paying jobs, while many make their living working in the informal economy (often subject to hazardous working environments). Poverty is widespread and many people do not have access to such necessities as electricity, safe water, and sanitation. Conditions are particularly poor in informal settlements lacking basic infrastructure, where 160,000 reside.

Access to basic services amongst the Roma, such as health care and social assistance, is limited. For example, while routine immunization coverage in Serbia is 97%, coverage among the Roma is estimated to be as low as 20–30%, according to the In-

<sup>64</sup> According to the last population census, there were 147,604 Roma in 2011. This is almost certainly an underestimation, as many Roma do not identify as such in censuses for fear of discrimination. Domestic and international sources estimate Serbia's Roma population to be 300,000–460,000, which would mean that Roma are the largest minority in Serbia (<https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-16/>). According to the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations (SCRM), the internally displaced population (IDP) includes some 21,000 Roma, accounting for some 10.5% of the entire IDP population ([http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Eng/Situation\\_and\\_Needs\\_of\\_IDPs\\_2018.pdf](http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Eng/Situation_and_Needs_of_IDPs_2018.pdf)).



stitute of Public Health of Belgrade. According to the World Bank, problems with access to public services are driven by discrimination, a lack of language skills and are exacerbated by many Roma lacking personal documents.

Hidden discrimination is widespread, including by public officials. Negative stereotypes prevail, and there are many reported cases of ill-treatment by police. In 2016, Serbia adopted the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma 2016–2025, as well as the first Action Plan for its implementation (for the period 2017–2018). The subsequent two-year Action Plan (for the period from 2019–2020) is still pending and overdue. According to the Ombudsperson of Serbia's 2019 Special Report on the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma (Protector of Citizens 2019), the Strategy and Action plan were established on good grounds, but practical results have been limited, especially regarding poverty reduction and the socio-economic position of Roma.

According to the 2011 Census, there were 21 national minorities in the Republic of Serbia, accounting for about 13% of the population (SORS 2012).<sup>65</sup> Their status is regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (GoS 2006), ratified international and regional treaties,<sup>66</sup> the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities (GoS 2018a), the Law on National Councils of National Minorities (GoS 2018b), and the Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts (GoS 2018c). In 2016, Serbia also adopted the Action Plan for the Realization of the Rights of National Minorities (UNHRC 2017)<sup>67</sup> under Negotiating Chapter 23, which was developed in cooperation with representatives of the National Councils of National Minorities and various associations. The Action Plan, *inter alia*, foresees the right of national minorities to be proportionately represented in the public sector and state institutions, yet national minorities remain underrepresented (EC 2020d). In the parliamentary elections of 21 June 2020, four

parties representing national minorities obtained overall 19 seats (EC 2020d). Representation at other levels of public administration is unclear, but authorities have recently begun collecting data on the representation of persons belonging to national minorities (EC 2020d).

In the schoolyear 2019/20, primary education in 8 languages of national minorities<sup>68</sup> took place in 68 local self-government units, and secondary education took place in 27 (OHMR 2020). The subject "Maternal Language with Elements of National Culture" was taught in 16 languages of national minorities in 178 local self-government units, in a total of 374 schools in Serbia (OHMR 2020). According to the data for the schoolyear 2019/2020, it was attended by 13,826 pupils, 6,977 of who were girls (OHMR 2020).

Reports stemming from a review by UN Human Rights Mechanisms (CESCR 2014; OHMR 2018) and other relevant sources (EC 2020d) indicate that members of national and ethnic minorities continue to face discrimination in different segments of life and that Serbia must step up measures to systematically apply anti-discrimination laws and policies.

## 2.7.6 LGBTI

LGBTI persons experience high levels of discrimination, negative public attitudes, and stigma. Despite the clearly defined objectives in the expired National Anti-Discrimination Strategy, no progress has been made in the adoption of legal measures recognizing same-sex partnerships, which would enable equal enjoyment of all rights by partners of the same sex.<sup>69</sup> Serbia has no legal provisions or procedures for recognizing gender where this differs from the sex assigned at birth, even in cases of gender-affirming surgery. Though steps are being taken, such as the adoption of the Rules on the Issuance Method and the Gender Change Certificate of the competent health institution, trans persons remain deeply pathologized, thus unable to exercise their basic human rights. Intersex persons still remain invisible, unrecognized by policies or mechanisms. Transsexualism is still classified as a mental disorder, despite the WHO removing it from its list of illnesses in 2019.

Personal security is a top priority for the LGBTI community. A 2015 National Democratic Institute (NDI) poll indicated that over 70% of LGBTI respondents were exposed to psychological violence and harassment (up 15% from 2014), while 23% reported having been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation or

<sup>65</sup> The most numerous national minorities are Hungarians (3.53%), followed by Roma (2.05%) and Bosniaks (2.02%). There is also a significant percentage of Slovaks (0.73), Croats (0.81%), Montenegrins (0.54%), Vlachs (0.49%), Romanians (0.41%), and Macedonians (0.32%), while the following minorities have less than 20,000 members: Bulgarians, Ruthenians, Bunjevci; and these a few thousand: Germans, Slovenians, Albanians, Ukrainians; and a few hundred: Poles, Ashkali and Greeks.

<sup>66</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27); European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

<sup>67</sup> This strategic document was produced in compliance with the recommendations from the Third Opinion of the Advisory Committee of the CoE on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in Serbia. In order to ensure coordination in the operation of the competent institutions, as well as inclusiveness, transparency, and the appropriate quality of the monitoring process, oversight of the implementation of the activities from the Action Plan was entrusted to the Council for National Minorities, a working body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia composed of representatives of the competent government bodies and the presidents of the National Councils of National Minorities.

<sup>68</sup> Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovakian, and Croatian.

<sup>69</sup> Sexual acts between consenting adult men were decriminalized in Serbia in 1994. Until 2008, the Ministry of Health considered homosexuality to be an illness.



gender identity (SOGI). LGBTI persons are discriminated against in the workplace, with Serbia's LGBTI community ranking the enjoyment of economic and social rights and the elimination of labor discrimination as their second-highest priority for change. LGBTI persons living with HIV face greater discrimination than almost any other group in Serbia, and the HIV epidemic in Serbia is becoming highly concentrated among men who have sex with men (which represents 73% of all reported HIV cases).

### 2.7.7 Persons with HIV/AIDS

In 2019, 3,200 people (of all ages) in Serbia lived with HIV (UNAIDS 2020). This is an increase of 78% since 2010, when 1,800 people (all ages) lived with HIV (UNAIDS 2020). The HIV prevalence rate (for those aged 15+) has however remained the same between 2010 and 2019, at <0.1%. Yet, the HIV incidence per 1,000 population (also for those aged 15+) has increased slightly, from 0.02 in 2010 to 0.03 in 2019. This increase is driven by the 15–49 age group, where HIV incidence (per 1,000) increased from 0.04 to 0.05 between 2010 and 2019, while the HIV incidence for those 50 and above remained stable at <0.01 (UNAIDS 2020).

The Strategy for Prevention and Control of HIV Infection and AIDS in the Republic of Serbia, 2018–2025, has been adopted, which promotes protection from discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS. HIV treatment is available free of charge for all patients with medical insurance.

People living with HIV are stigmatized and subject to violations of their right to privacy. Vulnerability of people living with HIV in the Republic of Serbia is mostly manifested through discrimination and stigmatization at work and in connection with work, as well as when accessing health care institutions (EC 2020d; Belgrade Centre for Human Rights 2017).

## 2.8 REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

**Serbia is actively involved in regional processes for improving cooperation and regional development. Kosovo\* remains a major political issue, as do, to a lesser extent, the legacies of past conflicts during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Numerous regional mechanisms now provide the basis for more integrative and sustainable regional development.**

Serbia's EU membership ambitions, its maintenance of a multi-vector foreign policy, and good relations with partners beyond Europe are fundamental elements of national policy, around which there is general accord. Serbia is actively engaged in several regional coordination mechanisms and processes, such as in the fields of economic development and trade, strengthening transport and communications infrastructure and interconnectivity, and peacebuilding through dialogue, with a focus on youth. Examples include, but are not limited to, Serbia's active role in CEFTA, the Transport Community, the Berlin Process and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, the Regional Cooperation Council, the Multi-annual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans (WB), and the Energy Community Treaty.

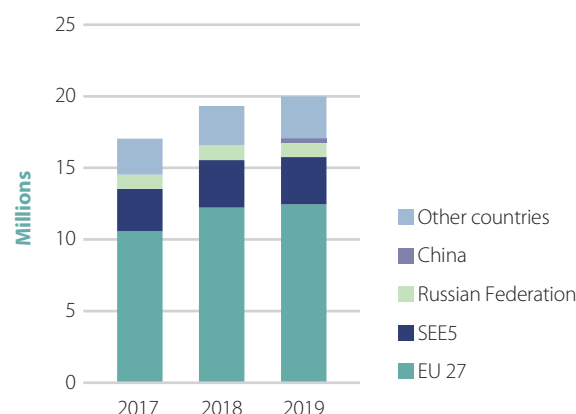
Beyond Europe, Serbia has expanded its partnerships with other countries and in other regional arrangements and processes, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union, which have significantly broadened Serbia's financing and economic relationships. These partnerships and regional and sub-regional processes, along with Serbia's own EU reform agenda, should be leveraged and aligned with its commitment to implement the SDGs, particularly 16 and 17.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Serbia contributes to international peacekeeping by assigning their military capacities to peacekeeping operations. Serbia contributes nearly 300 uniformed personnel, as well as niche capacities in the field of medical support, in several UN Peacekeeping Operations. In this regard, Serbia is a leader in the region, and is one of the top European troop contributor countries (TCCs).



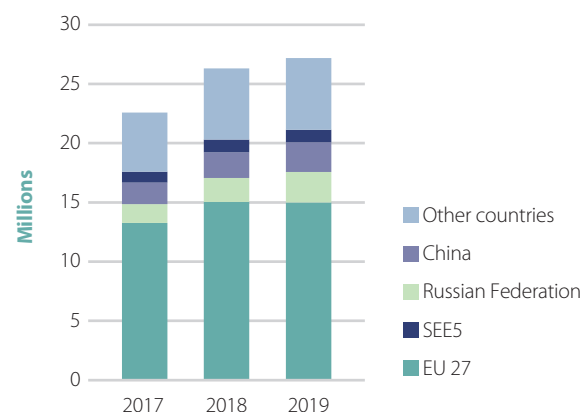
The EU remains Serbia's most important trading partner, with a high and growing share of the country's trade. The potential for trade within the subregion remains under-leveraged, representing only a small share of external trade (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

**Figure 6 Total export (Trade value in 1000 USD)**



Source: WB, World Integrated Trade Solutions database

**Figure 7 Total import (Trade value in 1000 USD)**



Source: WB, World Integrated Trade Solutions database

Regional initiatives and the EU accession process are mutually reinforcing. Since 2019, Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia (later supported by Montenegro) have cooperated in establishing a 'mini-Schengen' zone that would eliminate the residual barriers for the free flow of people, goods, services, and capital, and would be open to all parties in the WB, including Kosovo\*. Serbia is active in the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) — which promotes regional cooperation, the Euro-Atlantic integration of South-East Europe, and the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), complementary to the EU Stabilization and Association Process. The region's Governments have prioritized fighting international organized crime in areas such as firearms, drugs, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking. Through the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (PCC SEE), Serbia is actively engaged in improving sub-regional cooperation on transnational organized crime, and police and judicial cooperation in countering people smuggling and trafficking in the WBs. Furthermore, a Joint Action Plan on Counterterrorism for the WBs was signed in October 2018 between representatives of the WB partners and the EU.

Despite positive trends in regional processes, challenges remain. The normalization of relations with Kosovo\* remains a major barrier. Other challenges include disaster risk reduction, the

mixed-migrant crisis, and, more recently, the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, the provision of services, economic development, and employment. The region is characterized by intense carbon and energy use, hindering energy transition as a transformative policy and the mitigation of climate change (IEA 2020). Alarming levels, sources, and consequences of air-pollution are shared features of the WB region. Poor connectivity and coordination plague the region, impeding trade and labor flows and hampering competition in global markets. In addition, the infrastructure in most secondary cities in the WB countries is inadequate.

According to civil society assessments in the region and UN Human Rights Mechanisms' reviews, no real progress is being made in the processing of war crimes, while the duration of trials is overly long. Progress is also absent in the field of victims' rights, while the number of missing persons is not declining at the expected speed. The promotion of war criminals in the public sphere happens frequently (HLC 2020). Although regional cooperation in the field of transitional justice exists and is addressed by national and international processes and frameworks, there is still space for acceleration, given the high number of war crimes and the slow rate at which progress is being reported, and a need to build stronger mutual trust in the region.



## 2.9 FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE

In accord with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), Serbia should align all financing flows with development priorities, including SDG budgeting. This has not yet been done, but some estimations predict almost half of the national budget could be mapped to SDGs. The Government has devoted a specific budget line for financing the IMWG.

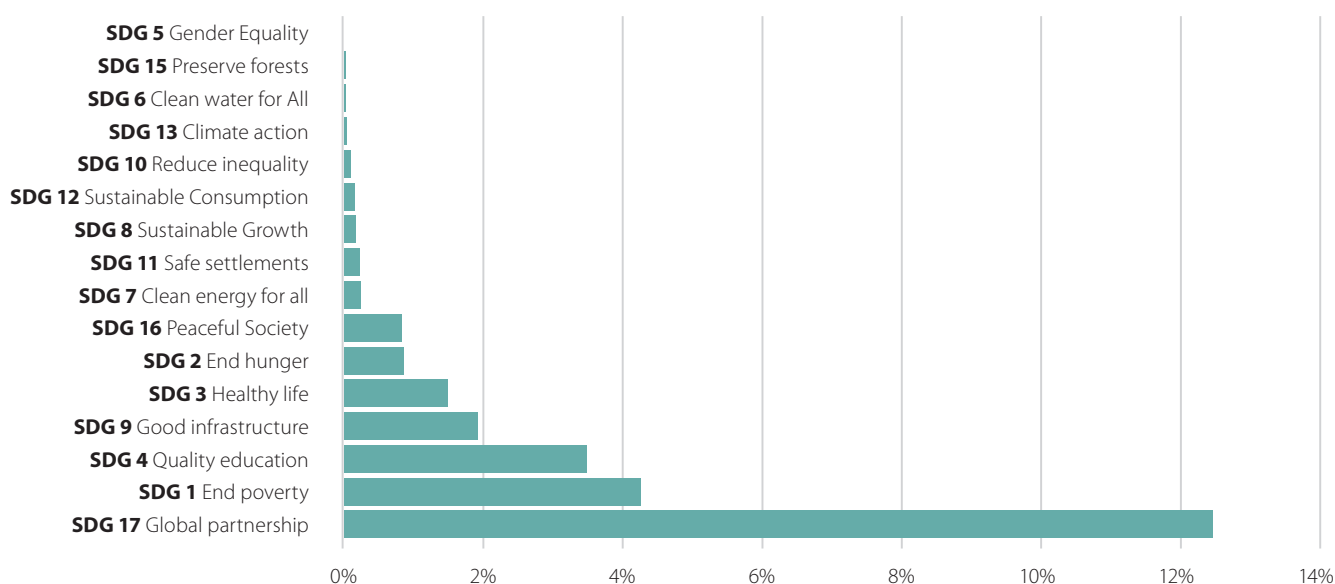
### 2.9.1 Domestic sources of funding

The MAPS mission estimated that in 2018, 47% of national budget spending could be tied to the 17 SDGs. The UNDP's analyses of the Serbia Financial Framework for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda showed that in 2018 Government funds allocated for SDG targets amounted to 29.7% of GDP. In 2020, the amount has fallen to 26.1% of GDP (Labus 2019), due to a reduction of

public debt (SDG 17) and fiscal consolidation. Figure 8 shows the distribution of funds allocated for SDGs as a percentage of GDP in 2020. Major cities (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac, and Nis) have increased funding for 2030 Agenda targets, with budget shares rising from 2.0% of GDP to 2.2% (Labus 2019).

An assessment of the funding of the SDGs at the local level was not conducted due to the complexity of financing and the potential scope of the analysis, but the budget of Serbia includes transfers of funds to local communities, meaning a significant part of local revenues is included in the calculations of the above. This corroborates the conclusion from the MAPS report that local authorities need sufficient funds and sufficient capacities for citizen services due to local self-governments providing more than 70% of public administration services to citizens, such as utilities, primary health care centers, and schools — with responsibility transferred from the national to the local level. A comprehensive database of SDG funding from the private sector is not currently available.

**Figure 8 Sustainable Development Goals by share of funds in GDP 2020**



Source: Labus 2019



## 2.9.2 External sources of funding

Serbia benefits from multilateral and bilateral donors, as well as from UN agencies. Serbia receives significant international assistance from numerous international partners, averaging 1,118.53 million USD<sup>71</sup> annually from 2016 to 2018, which represents 14.7% of all official development assistance aid received in Europe (OECD 2020). The EU is the largest provider of financial assistance, followed by Germany and Sweden. The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), through its previously agreed annual programs (2014–2020), has contributed over 1.5391 billion EUR in total. Of this, EU contributions for the IPA 2020 Program total 239.6 million EUR, including IPA Rural Development (IPARD), the Regional Housing Program, and support to civil society organizations (EC 2020b). This EU assistance is associated with many SDGs, especially SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals), but also SDG 1 (Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The MAPS mission analysis conducted in 2018 showed a total estimate of 5.7 billion USD of assistance in loans on concessional terms. The three largest sources were the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), and the World Bank. The MAPS mission concluded that Serbia needs significant additional resources to achieve its SDG 2030 objectives (UN MAPS 2019). A comprehensive database of SDG funding from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) on an annual basis is not available.

## 2.10 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

### 2.10.1 Impact on the healthcare system and Serbia's health response

**The early response to COVID-19 in Serbia was led and coordinated by the Ministry of Health and was grounded in the strong pre-existing framework of public health laws. Adequate emergency response and disease surveillance systems, highly skilled teams of experts in the National Public Health Institute (NIPH), and the network of 24 district institutes of public health (IPHS) also helped to delay the onset and the magnitude of the outbreak (the chronology of the pandemic and the governmental response can be found in Annex 1).**

The Serbian health system was still overburdened by the increasing number of patients in the first few weeks of the pandemic, necessitating complex and lengthy medical assistance. However, at the outset of the crisis, the government responded quickly and effectively to the first phase of the pandemic and three important factors helped the Serbian health system overcome this first dramatic phase of the emergency: the relatively larger amount of available resources in public hospitals in Serbia compared to many of its neighbors; the heavy restrictions imposed by Serbia and the timing with which they were introduced; and the fact that health care facilities were provided with the required personal protection and other equipment relatively quickly. These allowed the worst of potential health impacts to be mitigated. Other positive factors include:

- ▶ Improved communication: national health authorities, with support from the WHO and other UN agencies (including UNICEF, UNHCR, and UNFPA) quickly expanded the country's capacity for communication and public education in the months prior to the first case emerging in Serbia;
- ▶ Bolstering the capacity of public health services to enable emergency response, such as clarifying certain designated hospitals as points of treatment for COVID-19 cases, working to implement laboratory testing with the country's Institute of Virology, Vaccines and Sera "Torlak", and defining approaches for providing healthcare for those with suspected cases;
- ▶ Training, repurposing, and mobilizing the healthcare workforce according to priority services;
- ▶ UNICEF managed to mobilize more than 1.5M USD from corporate donors and the private sector in Serbia in support of the healthcare system;
- ▶ Led by the WHO, the UN country team in Serbia developed a Country Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP), based on Serbia's identified priority needs in fighting COVID-19, structured around a few core pillars;
- ▶ In May 2020, the Government signed a 100M USD loan with the World Bank to support the Emergency COVID-19 Response Project, which will focus on strengthening testing, diagnostic, and intensive care capacities across the country in the face of COVID-19.

Despite these positives, two main health system challenges in Serbia were made clear during the crisis:

- ▶ the public health system's capacity (or lack of capacity) to identify, isolate, test and treat all cases of COVID-19 that emerged, and moreover to trace and quarantine applicable contacts of those infected; and

<sup>71</sup> Average for 2016, 2017, and 2018.



- the available capacity (or lack of capacity) of Serbia's health-care system to dual-track its efforts and provide regular health services while at the same time aggressively treating and addressing COVID-19 as an overarching national crisis.

Additionally, all non-essential health procedures (including diagnostic or treatment, as well as elective surgeries) were temporarily suspended during the State of Emergency and only gradually reintroduced as macro-health conditions improved. Patients turned away from such diagnostic and treatment services during this time were particularly affected, as they were prevented from using public healthcare services and had to turn to private health services. Ultimately, this further increased the burden on private households for "out-of-pocket payments" and expenses (non-reimbursable payments directly incurred by the patient).

## 2.10.2 Impact on the social welfare system

**COVID-19 resulted in drastic changes to social protocols in all areas of life – from social interactions to working environments, and from public transport to education. While the first emergency response to the COVID-19 crisis was (to an extent) effective in preventing social exclusion and the deepening of poverty, the crisis also exposed gaps and opportunities for the government and development stakeholders to further strengthen the social welfare system in Serbia, including through improving access to services for vulnerable groups.**

Serbia's projected fall in GDP as a result of COVID-19's economic impact will have a negative effect on the already strained social protection budget in the country. Depending on the trajectory of the crisis, it is estimated that 125,000 to 327,000 citizens could become newly poor due to the economic fallout (World Bank 2020b).<sup>72</sup> To continue to support all people in the provision of crucial services (such as health and education) but also to support the most vulnerable, the adequacy and coverage of welfare state expenditures (currently accounting for around 25% of GDP<sup>73</sup>) will have to be revisited.

Social assistance during the pandemic consisted of a combination of cash and in-kind assistance, but many groups who needed assistance most direly found themselves left out of or under-included in benefits programs, such as families with children, children, residents of substandard housing settlements (primarily Roma populations), the homeless of those at risk of

homelessness, and those who do not possess personal identification and travel documents. The most significant measure introduced by the Government was an emergency cash payment to each adult citizen equivalent to 100 EUR, intended to cover over 6.2 million people. Social insurance measures included extended coverage of unemployment benefits, extended social assistance entitlements on the basis of previously issued decisions, and one-off cash assistance (equivalent to 35 EUR) to all pensioners and beneficiaries of temporary benefits who exercised their rights.

In-kind benefits were aimed at preventing the spread of the virus, addressing basic needs, and relaxing strained household budgets. They included distribution of food, hygiene packages, protection gear, medicines, and deferrals of public utility and rental payments (UN Women and UNFPA 2020). Over 69,000 vulnerable people — including Roma living in settlements, vulnerable women, women in situations of violence, the homeless, older persons, and poor households — received 8,136 packages (though not in all municipalities), according to the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU 2020b). Pre-existing gaps in basic needs fulfillment created heightened health and human rights risks during the crisis, including the lack of access to safe water, sanitation, and electricity in sub-standard settlements across the country (OHCHR and SIPRU 2020a).

The number of reported cases of domestic violence decreased during the state of emergency, while psycho-social support to women in situations of violence provided through emergency helplines increased by 30% compared to the pre-COVID-19 period (UN Women 2020a). These seemingly contradictory data points suggests this issue needs to be more deeply examined.

Although children and young people were not recognized as a group particularly at risk, they were identified as potential virus transmitters who could (sometimes unwittingly) more quickly spread COVID-19 among those they interacted with. As such, to help prevent the spread of the virus, kindergartens, schools, and universities in Serbia were closed in mid-March. The entire education system was required to switch to remote teaching and learning, within the limited resources available, and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development prepared an "Operational Plan for the Continuation of Schoolwork in Difficult Conditions," entailing the implementation of distance learning through TV and online platforms.<sup>74</sup> The speed of response and selected approach seemed effective, as 99% of students in primary and secondary education were able to access the learning platforms, with a 98% usage rate (UNICEF 2020a).

<sup>72</sup> Poverty estimates are based on \$5.50 (2011 PPP) per person per day.

<sup>73</sup> The biggest share of it is spent on pensions.

<sup>74</sup> Registering children for primary school admission and the self-assessment test for eight-grade primary school students for preparing for their final test were also performed online.



### 2.10.3 Impact on the economy, businesses and jobs

**The Serbian economy was hit hard by COVID-19, but businesses in general demonstrated short-term resilience. The crisis most heavily impacted smaller companies and sectors directly restricted by the lockdown, such as travel, hospitality, and transport. Government measures aimed at easing the impact were well received and perceived as useful by the majority of businesses.**

The severity of the impact was moderated by a robust macroeconomic environment, the distinctive structure of Serbia's economy, the relatively lower integration of Serbian businesses into the global supply chain networks, and businesses own financial resources which they relied on to face immediate liquidity issues.<sup>75</sup> While the economy showed solid resilience, negative impacts were felt by certain businesses and in certain industries. Small enterprises were hit the hardest, while medium-sized companies showed the highest resilience. According to one survey, 75% of SMEs reported revenues lower than expected due to the COVID-19 impact, while only 3% reported higher than expected revenues (CEVES 2020). The most affected industries were those most restricted by the lockdown, such as travel, hospitality, and transport, while the least affected were the agricultural and food sectors. Cultural and creative industries were also heavily affected (UNESCO 2020).<sup>76</sup>

The marked liquidity shock to businesses was buffered primarily by businesses' own financial reserves (according to CEVES 2020, 63% sustained the crisis this way), but the government's fiscal measures to protect businesses were also well received by a majority of surveyed businesses. The most utilized of these measures were those related to the payment of minimum wages and the deferral of taxes (CEVES 2020).

**In terms of jobs, COVID-19 disrupted a period of employment growth in Serbia, which had emerged due to an improving macroeconomic outlook and economic growth during the 2018–2019 period. As consequences of the pandemic, a relatively low number of layoffs was recorded against high losses of working hours. This was mainly due to the employment preservation**

**measures implemented by the Government. However, various vulnerable groups of workers faced more adverse impacts from the pandemic.**

Economically, Serbia's losses differed little from those recorded in Europe and globally, as many economic activities had to stop completely, while others operated at reduced capacity or saw the nature of their businesses fundamentally change as public health measures were introduced. Importantly, statistics show that not all workers who stopped working during the lockdown were laid off. Some employers opted to continue paying their workers, through savings, loans, or with the support of the newly introduced employment retention programs. Based on official data, overall employment declined in the second quarter by 5,570 workers, which is a 0.25% drop compared to the end of 2019 (SORS 2020d). This reduction does not include temporarily lost jobs in the informal economy in April, which were later regained after the lockdown measures subsided.

In addition to the jobs lost thus far, the jobs that remain are still subject to a significant drop in productivity due to adjusted working norms and a high loss in the overall number of working hours being contributed to the economy. The ILO estimated a loss of 510,000 full-time equivalent (FTEs)<sup>77</sup> work hours for the second quarter of 2020, which represents the sum of all the lost working hours in Serbia due to COVID-19, including lost time from shorter working hours, unemployment, inactivity, and being employed but not working (workers who remained attached to their existing jobs but did not engage in any work at all).

Informal workers were among the most vulnerable groups and bore the heaviest brunt of the crisis. Despite these workers' livelihoods being significantly endangered by the lockdown, they were almost entirely invisible to Government support schemes. As many as 70% of informal workers claimed that their financial situation deteriorated during the crisis, while 36% responded that they did not have enough resources to make ends meet (OHCHR and FCD 2020). In contrast to other countries in the region, Serbia had no targeted support for this vulnerable population, nor were they recognized by any strategic document or COVID-19 relief plan.

Women's working conditions were slightly more negatively affected than men's, as women were exposed to a higher workload (22% impact on women vs. 16% on men) and slightly longer working hours of 8% for women vs. 7% for men (SeConS 2020), yet a slightly higher share of men than women reported

<sup>75</sup> For businesses that are included in global supply chain networks (including SMEs), COVID-19 reduced their resilience due to the high and complex dependence of the businesses on the many global players that were affected and their endangered operations in the face of lockdown measures (UNDRR 2020).

<sup>76</sup> Cinematography, publishing, design, the music industry, and many other creative industries have experienced a reduction in the scope of their business activities due to the lockdown measures, resulting in a decrease in income, with 26% of enterprises in this sector laying off at least some of their employees (UNESCO 2020).

<sup>77</sup> Based on the ILO's methodology and forecasting model, which is comprised by estimating the number of working hours lost every week due to the crisis, and then transforming this information, for the purpose of illustration, into full-time job equivalents (FTE).



having reduced salaries during the same time period and being forced to take unpaid leave. Youth have also been impacted by the crisis, reporting increased anxiety related to work in the post COVID-19 period (UNICEF 2020b).

## 2.10.4 Macroeconomic impact

The health crisis is expected to result in a contraction of GDP in 2020 between 3% and 5.3% YoY, primarily due to an expected fall in remittances, foreign direct investments, exports, as well as in personal and corporate expenditure and investments (EC 2020; IMF 2020; UN DESA 2020).<sup>78</sup> While significant, this drop is relatively smaller compared to many other European countries.

A lower expected decrease in GDP compared to other countries in the region and the EU is based on a number of factors, including: the ambitious fiscal and monetary measures deployed by the Government and the National Bank of Serbia (NBS); the relatively modest share of tourism; and the large share of the country's GDP concentrated in sectors that have been less heavily impacted by the crisis, including agriculture, forestry, and fishing (15.2% combined), administrative and support services (9.0% combined), and the IT sector (5.5%). These sectors, in total, make up over 30% of GDP (SORS 2019d).

Serbia's relatively stable macroeconomic fundamentals prior to the COVID-19 outbreak ensured that the fiscal space needed to spend money to protect lives and livelihoods throughout the crisis was available to policymakers. As such, the Government of Serbia and the NBS reacted quickly and provided fiscal and monetary support to ease the negative effects of the first wave of COVID-19. The measures had a particularly important and positive effect on affected businesses' liquidity and in disincentivizing them to dismiss workers. The stimulus measures that were introduced helped secure workers with a certain minimal level of salary and allowed for the postponement of payment obligations at the consumer level for those individuals with debt. Furthermore, the one-off cash handout of 100 EUR per person that was distributed to all adult citizens provided fast relief and covered more than 6.2M people across the country and cost about 1.3% of GDP. However, this universal fiscal measure could have been more impactful and fairer had it specifically targeted those in need and included income or other eligibility thresholds. Instead, the Government may have reached some

who did not actually need the payments and at the same time failed to reach every person, including some of those most vulnerable.

## 2.10.5 Impact on social cohesion and community resilience

The COVID-19 crisis is unprecedented not only in the depth of its impact, but also in the extent of its impact on the entire population and across all vital sectors of society – health, economy, the social sector, and education chief among them. Handling this crisis is particularly difficult at the local level, where municipalities vastly differ in their resilience and capacity to respond.

Both urban and rural communities were negatively affected by the crisis, but with somewhat diverse effects. The most affected communities (based on reported COVID-19 cases in Serbia during the first wave of the crisis)<sup>79</sup> were large cities and regional centers, with the southern and eastern regions of Serbia most greatly impacted due to COVID-19's rapid spread in these areas.<sup>80</sup>

The pressure on household incomes, coupled with widespread anxiety about jobs and earnings, led many households, regardless of income level, to cut household spending where possible. Based on consumer prices (which indicate demand trends in the short term), households spent most heavily on basic necessities (food and beverage), while investment consumption was reduced (SORS 2020e). Among households with children (which constitute approximately one-third of all households in Serbia), 25% reported an increase in unplanned costs (UNICEF 2020c). These were mostly COVID-19 related, primarily in the form of medical and pharmaceutical products, medical services, hygiene, and food costs.

For many sector specific areas (health, social protection, education, etc.) the national level institutions were charged with the responsibility of setting the overall strategy and plans, while local self-governments (LSGs) had frontline operational roles in administering these priorities that were set by the national level institutions. Because Serbia as a whole, and most regions, lack an adequate local governance framework, the overall crisis management process was mostly ad hoc and dependent on the individual human and financial capacities of LSGs themselves. Two-thirds of LSGs indicated a lack of relevant internal proce-

<sup>78</sup> Serbia's GDP in 2020 is expected to drop by between 2.5% and 5.3% YOY, according to the different estimates available, as follows: The European Commission projects a 4.1% drop, the IMF projects a 3.0% drop and UN DESA projects a 3.6% drop.

<sup>79</sup> Accurate as of June 2<sup>nd</sup>, since there is currently no access to territorially disaggregated data on confirmed cases.

<sup>80</sup> Statistics on COVID-19 retrieved as of June 3, 2020 from the official website on COVID-19 cases in Serbia (<https://covid19.data.gov.rs/>).



dures, protocols, and other normative acts that could help regulate organizational processes in a systemic way during a crisis of this nature, while only 3% of LGSs stated the opposite, namely that they had sufficient procedures, protocols, etc. (UNOPS 2020). Similarly, 60% of LGSs confirmed that their decision-making process related to COVID-19 was rather ad-hoc. Thus, there was significant variation in the overall institutional capacity to respond to the crisis at the local level across the country. The municipalities with weak capacities saw those weaknesses exacerbated during the crisis. For example, social protection coverage was weak and worsened at the local level during the pandemic, partly due to the lack of capacity of relevant local institutions to identify those hit hardest by the crisis and develop new ways of helping them.

As in other countries, one of the main challenges throughout the COVID-19 period was the inherent contradiction of the Constitutional human rights and standards and the uneven effect of the restrictive measures, which affected some categories of society more than others. These concerns were addressed progressively throughout the crisis, often on an ad hoc basis. Certain liberties are assessed as being particularly affected by the restrictive measures, such as those of expression and of information.

The pandemic placed new constraints on social cohesion and political engagement, with the absence of democratic institutions such as the National Parliament from the decision-making process at national level. The initial gap in social dialogue and democratic engagement on COVID-19 response was also reflected at the local level, where most LGSs did not include CSOs in their emergency task forces or decision-making processes. Nevertheless, local CSOs played an important role in humanitarian work, providing support to vulnerable groups, providing access to relevant and timely information, and providing free legal support and consultations. Associations, networks, and businesses stepped in by providing support and donations to communities and local institutions. The same lack of participation and social dialogue was visible at the national level.

## 2.10.6 Impact on the environment and climate change

**Findings show that movement restrictions and other suppression measures enacted to curtail the pandemic resulted in short-term environmental gains, such as a fall in air pollution and a fall in greenhouse gas emissions. However, there were also numerous adverse effects to the environment and Serbia's progress on environmental priorities.**

Data from the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) on air quality during the lockdown and state of emergency period shows a significant decrease in NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations compared to the same period the previous year, largely due to reduced traffic.<sup>81</sup> Data from independent sources in Serbia, however, confirm that other key pollutants (such as fine particulate matter, or PM<sub>2.5</sub>) increased during this period (REF 2020). A similar drop in greenhouse gas emissions was seen globally during the crisis, which may be attributed to lockdown and movement restrictions instituted in response to COVID-19 (UNFCCC 2020). In Serbia, drops in the industrial, transport, and agricultural sectors were likely, but less so in the energy and waste management sectors.

Air pollution from electricity production and individual heating is likely to have remained the same, as these have not been significantly reduced by COVID-19 work and travel behavioral changes. However, due to loss of jobs and economic hardship, poorer households not connected to central heating may have opted for the cheapest and most polluting options for heat, particularly at the beginning of the crisis. This may have had spill-over effects in terms of increased energy usage, air pollution, and their ensuing health consequences.

Reduced overall public spending because of budgetary reallocations has negatively affected highly needed investments in environmental protection projects, such as those in wastewater treatment, waste management and maintenance of protected areas. Before the crisis, Serbia had planned significant investments in the energy and environment sectors in 2020, including large loans for energy and environmental infrastructure projects.<sup>82</sup> Even without the intentional reduction of these investments due to the COVID-19 crisis, it is reasonable to expect delays or a reprioritization of these projects resulting from fiscal

<sup>81</sup> SEPA response to UNDP inquiry.

<sup>82</sup> For instance, 500 million EUR from the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) for infrastructure in environment protection, 80 million EUR from KfW for water supply, and another 85 million EUR from investment banks, 271 million EUR for Belgrade waste water treatment facility, 30 million EUR from the EIB on irrigation for climate change adaptation, and several other loans (the Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia for 2020, Official gazette of the Republic of Serbia 84/2019 and 60/2020 — decree).



and public debt constraints in the country, which are likely consequences of the 3% reduction in GDP for 2020 (FC 2020b). Shrinking budgets will also adversely affect biodiversity conservation, landscapes, forests, and natural resources, especially from an environmental governance standpoint.

Investments in renewable energy received a blow when favorable tariffs were removed during this time period, with the result being that companies needed to compete with fossil fuels on the market, negatively impacting biomass rates (or, rates of or-

ganic matter used as fuel) in particular. The government support measures to companies during the crisis were also blind to environmental criteria, missing an important opportunity to support Serbia's transformation to a greener economy.

During the peak of the COVID-19 infection there was also a short-term increase in the quantity of medical waste coming from healthcare facilities, during which time the waste management system functioned close to its maximum capacity.



# 3

## MULTIDIMENSIONAL RISK ANALYSIS

UN Country Team in Serbia

**COMMON COUNTRY  
ANALYSIS**



This multidimensional analysis presents the risks that could impact Serbia's development trajectory and hamper national efforts to achieve the SDGs, reduce inequalities and exclusion, and meet the obligations of international human rights laws. Table 1 below presents an assessment of the risks grounded in the UN-established 12-factor multidimensional risk analysis, augmented with COVID-19 related risks. Monitoring and managing risks is important to both SDG achievement and EU accession, as these require major reforms to be carried out in a consultative, coherent, and forward-looking manner.

Internal risks to the UN's capability in driving the SDG agenda in Serbia stem from two major factors. The first is related to the primacy of the EU integration process, which, while often complementary to the SDG agenda, drives the reform mode and pace. The second is the competition for limited financial resources in a crowded development policy arena.

**Table 1 Multidimensional risk analysis**

SDG	RISK AREAS	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT
ALL	Political environment	Risks to the stability of established political and government structures in the country resulting from politically-driven internal or regional factors	Lack of sub-regional cooperation among regional partners	Medium	Medium
			Prolonged EU accession process	Medium/Low	High
ALL	Governance and institutional capacity	Risk to institutions that would hinder the full realization of the inclusive, gender-responsive development agenda	Limited capacity for comprehensive risk management	Medium	High
			Limited commitment to fully embrace accountability and transparency frameworks	Medium	High
			Centralized political system that could impede localization of development initiatives	High	Medium
			Limited capacity for inclusive evidence-based policy making	Medium	High
			Capacity gaps in responding to reform needs and resistance to change	Medium	High
10, 16, 17	Justice and rule of law	Risk to the fair, effective and comprehensive implementation and application of the principles of justice, the rule of law and accountability from issues	Scope of political influence on the appointment and independent action of the judicial system	Medium/High	High
			Implementation gap of legislation and policies on human rights issues.	Medium/High	High
10, 16, 17	Democratic space/civil society voice and participation	Risks to democratic and human rights institutions, and to civil and political rights resulting from shrinking civic space, exclusion, repression, and intimidation	Limited space for civil society and human rights defenders unable to exercise their mandate	Medium	Medium
			Obstruction of media and civic actors	Medium/High	High
			Limited inclusion of young people, women and other groups in social and political life	Medium/High	High
			Mechanisms of engagement between citizens and the state are not effective leading to disenfranchisement and degradation of public trust	Medium	Medium



SDG	RISK AREAS	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT
1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11	Social cohesion, gender equality and non-discrimination	Risks to social unity and equality resulting from direct and indirect discrimination, horizontal inequalities and demographic trends	High entry barriers to labour market and inequalities in access	Medium/High	High
			Rural-urban divide	High	High
			Intergenerational gap	Medium	High
			Insufficient attention to informal sector and care work	Medium	Medium
			Gender-based violence and discrimination	Medium/High	High
			Insufficient attention to social capital, education and skills development for vulnerable groups	High	High
3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 16, 17	Public health	Risk to the population, the economy and stability of the country resulting from actual and emerging health emergencies	Prevention and response to new COVID waves	Medium/Low	High
			Increase in preventable or treatable health issues	Medium	Medium
			Limited dual track capacities during emergencies	Medium	Medium
			Air pollution and other pollutants affecting public health, including smoking	High	High
1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16	Economic stability and growth	Risks to economic growth and stability resulting from structural inefficiencies and COVID-19 impact	Economic recession, due to impact of COVID pandemic, constrains social and environmental expenditure and investments (GDP growth)	Medium	Medium
			As a reaction to the COVID-19 crisis, international economic partners enact protectionist policies, leading to difficulties for Serbian firms in accessing markets, and resulting in a widening current account deficit	Medium	Medium
			Limited development of financial sector makes firms unable to access funds needed for the transition to a green and sustainable economy	High	High
			Limited access to global markets, Mini-Schengen initiative is not fully embraced in the WB region	Medium	Medium/High
6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15	Environment and climate change	Risks to the ecology of the territory, its ecosystem and its people resulting from issues associated with the environment, climate and natural resources	Lack of commitment to implement the structural reforms needed to boost low carbon growth	High	High
			Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption (with high negative environmental externalities) including in agriculture and forestry	High	High
			Increased frequency of extreme weather events and resulting natural hazards	High	High
3, 8, 16, 17	Migration	Risks to the population and to the stability of the country resulting from pressures associated with displacement and/or migration	Outmigration affecting national and local capacities for development	Medium/High	High
			Future influx of migrants/refugees beyond absorption capacity	Medium	Medium



# 4

## TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES



UN Country Team in Serbia

**COMMON COUNTRY  
ANALYSIS**



## 4.1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACCELERATING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS

Based on the identified development challenges, the opportunities for accelerating the achievement of the SDGs include:

- 1 **Improve governance** by taking decisive action against system inefficiencies and corruption, making the judiciary independent and effective, improving policy coherence across sectors, and consulting broadly during the policy making process (with CSOs, the private sector, and academia). **Further promote social coherence by building trust and strengthening regional cooperation** with WB countries.
- 2 Decisively **address exclusion and inequalities** that affect women and children; youth not in employment, education or training; Roma; other ethnic minorities; the rural population; LGBTI persons; people with disabilities; refugees and asylum seekers; older people; and other vulnerable groups.
- 3 Build a robust, **innovative, and resilient low-carbon economy for accelerated and job-rich growth** in line with EU requirements and citizens' expectations. **Decouple economic growth from environmental pressures.** Mitigate and adapt to climate and other environmental challenges in line with the Paris Agreement and the EU environmental and climate change standards by improving performance in all areas of environmental protection and climate change and environmental governance, by managing cultural and natural resources more sustainably — including agriculture, forest management, by improving human health, and building multi-level resilience.
- 4 **Strengthen health and social protection systems**, including in the emergency context. **Increase the quality of jobs and develop effective solutions to curb emigration of the labor force**, by combating the informal economy, by creating decent employment opportunities and by promoting rights at work. These opportunities should be equally accessible for all. Also, migration is largely an issue of opportunity. Assuring quality education geared to labor market needs, responsive local governance and a healthy environment, along with broad-based economic growth that provides good jobs, could persuade Serbia's young people to build their futures at home.

## 4.2 CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Three essential elements cut across the challenge areas; these are governance, data, and gender.

- Reform of the judiciary and fundamental rights, justice, security, and procurement are all critical for the country's reform agenda, and at the center of the EU acquis. Serbia needs to continue harmonizing national development policies in the form of an overarching development plan, aligned directly and explicitly with the SDGs. The commitment of the Government to decentralization adds a new and critical dimension to this process, while the introduction of a more "people-centered" approach to development would be a significant step towards aligning with the UN system. Serbia needs to 'nationalize' the 2030 Agenda by defining nationally specific SDG targets, which would enable the tracing of fund allocations to the policies, measures, and interventions facilitating SDG achievements in line with the Addis Ababa Convention. The full nationalization of the 2030 Agenda should respect the principles of policy consistency.
- To move towards evidence-based policy making and data-driven design of policy choices, data collection across all sectors and levels must be improved. Comprehensive and disaggregated data should serve as a basis for tackling the structural roots of the main challenges and is indispensable to the development of alternative policy scenarios which must underpin policy decisions and solutions. Also, the national capacity for monitoring the delivery of policies and programs should be improved to enable a comprehensive assessment of policy implications and better targeting of those in need.
- There is a good basis for gender mainstreaming of the latest United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), which should be used as the starting point (UNCT 2018). Special attention must be focussed on promoting gender equality and inclusiveness for vulnerable groups, where traditional cultural norms are strong.



## 4.3 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This analysis offers the following broad conclusions related to the achievement of the SDGs. They are embedded in the strategic priorities of the new Cooperation Framework for Serbia.

- 1 The persistence of social exclusion, inequalities, and inconsistent human-rights policy making and implementation could impede the achievement of the SDGs. **Growth must be more inclusive to “Leave No One Behind”.** The process of revision of the anti-discrimination framework should be accelerated. Increased capacity building compliant with the 2030 Agenda governance model, increased space for NGOs, access for the most vulnerable, and addressing gender equality and discrimination are all areas which would contribute to strengthening the country’s development while simultaneously improving human rights.
- 2 Serbia needs **to define a national vision inspired by the 2030 Agenda, with a well-defined pathway towards its goals; it should embark on a resilient low-carbon growth decoupled from environmental pressures and in line with EU accession.** As there is a significant agreement between the EU chapters of accession and the SDGs, it would be beneficial to further align the two processes. The UN can build a consensus around this in collaboration with development partners.
- 3 Serbia needs to move towards **evidence-based policy and decision making, increase policy coherence,** continue to strengthen institutional capacities, and introduce a comprehensive and reflective multi-level statistical system to progress towards Agenda 2030.
- 4 **Rather than just recovering to pre-COVID-19 levels, Serbia should use this as an opportunity to build forward better, including integrating elements of a green recovery, increasing the resilience of the economy and society to future potential shocks and improving well-being and equality among all its citizens.**



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# ANNEXES



## **Annex 1**

**Socio-Economic Impact Assessment  
of COVID-19 Pandemic in Serbia**

## **Annex 2**

**Socio-Economic Response Plan**

## **Annex 3**

**Status of Signing/Ratification/Accession  
by Serbia to the core UN human rights treaties,  
ILO Conventions and other conventions**

## **Annex 4**

**Universal Periodic Review (UPR) outcomes  
and the EU accession chapters**



# ANNEX 1

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN SERBIA

Available online: [Socio-Economic Impact Assessment](#)



# ANNEX 2

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESPONSE PLAN

Available online: [Socio-Economic Response Plan](#)



## ANNEX 3

### STATUS OF SIGNING/RATIFICATION/ACCESSION BY SERBIA TO THE CORE UN HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES, ILO CONVENTIONS AND OTHER CONVENTIONS

Treaty Description	Treaty Name	Signature Date	Ratification Date, Accession(a), Succession(d) Date
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	CAT		12 Mar 2001 (d)
Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture	CAT-OP	25 Sep 2003	26 Sep 2006
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	CCPR		12 Mar 2001 (d)
Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty	CCPR-OP2-DP		06 Sep 2001 (a)
Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	CED	06 Feb 2007	18 May 2011
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	CEDAW		12 Mar 2001
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	CERD		12 Mar 2001 (d)
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	CESCR		12 Mar 2001 (d)
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	CMW	11 Nov 2004	
Convention on the Rights of the Child	CRC		12 Mar 2001 (d)
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	CRC-OP-AC	08 Oct 2001	31 Jan 2003
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography	CRC-OP-SC	08 Oct 2001	10 Oct 2002
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	CRPD	17 Dec 2007	31 Jul 2009
Individual complaints procedure under the Convention against Torture	CAT, Art.22	YES	12 Mar 2001
Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	CCPR-OP1	YES	06 Sep 2001
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	CED, Art.31	YES	18 May 2011
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	CEDAW-OP	YES	31 Jul 2003
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	CERD, Art.14	YES	12 Mar 2001
Optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	CESCR-OP	NO	
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	CMW, Art.77	-	
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child	CRC-OP-IC	NO	
Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	CRPD-OP	YES	31 Jul 2009



## Fundamental

Convention	Date	Status	Note
<a href="#">C029 — Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C087 — Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C098 — Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C100 — Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C105 — Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)</a>	10 Jul 2003	In Force	
<a href="#">C111 — Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C138 — Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)</a> <i>Minimum age specified: 15 years</i>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C182 — Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)</a>	10 Jul 2003	In Force	

## Governance (Priority)

Convention	Date	Status	Note
<a href="#">C081 — Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C122 — Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C129 — Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C144 — Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144)</a>	13 May 2005	In Force	

## Technical

Convention	Date	Status	Note
<a href="#">C002 — Unemployment Convention, 1919 (No. 2)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C003 — Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Denounced on 02 Dec 2011
<a href="#">C008 — Unemployment Indemnity (Shipwreck) Convention, 1920 (No. 8)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C009 — Placing of Seamen Convention, 1920 (No. 9)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C011 — Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C012 — Workmen's Compensation (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 12)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C013 — White Lead (Painting) Convention, 1921 (No. 13)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C014 — Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921 (No. 14)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C016 — Medical Examination of Young Persons (Sea) Convention, 1921 (No. 16)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C017 — Workmen's Compensation (Accidents) Convention, 1925 (No. 17)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C018 — Workmen's Compensation (Occupational Diseases) Convention, 1925 (No. 18)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C019 — Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention, 1925 (No. 19)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	



Convention	Date	Status	Note
<a href="#">C022 — Seamen's Articles of Agreement Convention, 1926 (No. 22)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C023 — Repatriation of Seamen Convention, 1926 (No. 23)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C024 — Sickness Insurance (Industry) Convention, 1927 (No. 24)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C025 — Sickness Insurance (Agriculture) Convention, 1927 (No. 25)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C027 — Marking of Weight (Packages Transported by Vessels) Convention, 1929 (No. 27)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C032 — Protection against Accidents (Dockers) Convention (Revised), 1932 (No. 32)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C045 — Underground Work (Women) Convention, 1935 (No. 45)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C048 — Maintenance of Migrants' Pension Rights Convention, 1935 (No. 48)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C053 — Officers' Competency Certificates Convention, 1936 (No. 53)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C056 — Sickness Insurance (Sea) Convention, 1936 (No. 56)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C069 — Certification of Ships' Cooks Convention, 1946 (No. 69)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C073 — Medical Examination (Seafarers) Convention, 1946 (No. 73)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C074 — Certification of Able Seamen Convention, 1946 (No. 74)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C080 — Final Articles Revision Convention, 1946 (No. 80)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C088 — Employment Service Convention, 1948 (No. 88)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C089 — Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised), 1948 (No. 89)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C090 — Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention (Revised), 1948 (No. 90)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C091 — Paid Vacations (Seafarers) Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 91)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C092 — Accommodation of Crews Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 92)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 15 Mar 2014 by convention MLC, 2006
<a href="#">C094 — Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949 (No. 94)</a>	10 Dec 2014	In Force	
<a href="#">C097 — Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)</a> <i>Has excluded the provisions of Annex III</i>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C102 — Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)</a> <i>Has accepted Parts II to VI, VIII and X. Part VI is no longer applicable as a result of the ratification of Convention No. 121.</i>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<a href="#">C103 — Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Automatic Denunciation on 31 Aug 2011 by convention C183



Convention	Date	Status	Note
<b>C106</b> — <a href="#">Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1957 (No. 106)</a> <i>The Government has declared that the Convention also applies to persons employed in the establishments specified in Article 3, paragraph 1.</i>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C109</b> — <a href="#">Wages, Hours of Work and Manning (Sea) Convention (Revised), 1958 (No. 109)</a>	24 Nov 2000	Not in force	Instrument not in force
<b>C113</b> — <a href="#">Medical Examination (Fishermen) Convention, 1959 (No. 113)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C114</b> — <a href="#">Fishermen's Articles of Agreement Convention, 1959 (No. 114)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C116</b> — <a href="#">Final Articles Revision Convention, 1961 (No. 116)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C119</b> — <a href="#">Guarding of Machinery Convention, 1963 (No. 119)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C121</b> — <a href="#">Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 [Schedule I amended in 1980] (No. 121)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C126</b> — <a href="#">Accommodation of Crews (Fishermen) Convention, 1966 (No. 126)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C131</b> — <a href="#">Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C132</b> — <a href="#">Holidays with Pay Convention (Revised), 1970 (No. 132)</a> <i>Length of holiday specified: 18 working days. Has accepted the provisions of Article 15, paragraph 1(a) and (b).</i>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C135</b> — <a href="#">Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971 (No. 135)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C136</b> — <a href="#">Benzene Convention, 1971 (No. 136)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C139</b> — <a href="#">Occupational Cancer Convention, 1974 (No. 139)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C140</b> — <a href="#">Paid Educational Leave Convention, 1974 (No. 140)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C142</b> — <a href="#">Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C143</b> — <a href="#">Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C148</b> — <a href="#">Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention, 1977 (No. 148)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C150</b> — <a href="#">Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150)</a>	15 Mar 2013	In Force	
<b>C155</b> — <a href="#">Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C156</b> — <a href="#">Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C158</b> — <a href="#">Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C159</b> — <a href="#">Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C161</b> — <a href="#">Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C162</b> — <a href="#">Asbestos Convention, 1986 (No. 162)</a>	24 Nov 2000	In Force	
<b>C167</b> — <a href="#">Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 (No. 167)</a>	16 Sep 2009	In Force	
<b>C181</b> — <a href="#">Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)</a>	15 Mar 2013	In Force	
<b>C183</b> — <a href="#">Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)</a> <i>Period of maternity leave: 16 weeks</i>	31 Aug 2010	In Force	
<b>C184</b> — <a href="#">Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184)</a>	12 Mar 2019	Not in force	The Convention will enter into force for Serbia on 12 Mar 2020.
<b>MLC, 2006</b> — <a href="#">Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006)</a> <i>In accordance with Standard A4.5 (2) and (10), the Government has specified the following branches of social security: medical care; sickness benefit; unemployment benefit and employment injury benefit.</i>	15 Mar 2013	In Force	



Amendments of 2014 to the MLC, 2006	18-Jan-2017	In Force	
Amendments of 2016 to the MLC, 2006	08-Jan-2019	In Force	
Amendments of 2018 to the MLC, 2006	26-Dec-2020	Not in force	Formal disagreement period until 26 Jun 2020



# ANNEX 4

## UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR) OUTCOMES AND THE EU ACCESSION CHAPTERS

Third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review	Serbia EU Progress Report 2019
<b>International obligations and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and bodies</b>	
<p><b>Consider ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and Members of Their Families; the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on communications procedures.</b></p>	<p>Serbia has ratified eight of the nine international human rights instruments. It has yet to become a party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families</p>
<b>National human rights framework</b>	
<p><b>Design and implement a human rights action plan, and revise laws with a view to strengthening the independence of the Ombudsman and facilitating their interaction with the international human rights mechanisms and civil society organizations.</b></p> <p><b>Harmonise domestic legislation with the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and integrate the crime of enforced disappearance into national legislation while establishing a legislative framework for accessing files relating to cases of enforced disappearance and other human rights violations.</b></p>	<p>The legislative and institutional framework for upholding human rights is broadly in place. Amendments improving the legislative framework related to national minorities were adopted in June 2018. However, consistent and efficient implementation of legislation and policies needs to be ensured.</p> <p>As a large number of recommendations by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) had not been implemented, the CPT issued a report in June 2018 following its ad hoc visit to Serbia, stating that ill-treatment is an accepted practice within the current police culture.</p> <p>The Public Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of the Interior conducted training on the official methodology for investigations into allegations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment.</p> <p>A new commission for the implementation of standards in police conduct related to investigating cases of torture has been established but there has been no impact yet.</p> <p>Secondary legislation needed for the appropriate implementation of the law on the police, which should regulate the treatment of individuals detained in police custody, is delayed.</p> <p>A law for the prevention of ill-treatment and abuse in social institutions has yet to be adopted.</p>
<b>Equality and non-discrimination</b>	
<p><b>Continue to combat all forms of discrimination, including hate speech, incitement to violence and discrimination against vulnerable groups; promote greater accountability and implement the Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination; as well as the law on anti-discrimination, especially concerning national minorities.</b></p> <p><b>Take concrete steps to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and their freedom of assembly and expression, including by amending the Criminal Code in order to clearly criminalize racism and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; and take steps towards making a provision in law for same-sex civil partnership and marriage.</b></p>	<p>In the field of non-discrimination, legislation is broadly in line with European standards, although it needs to be further aligned with the acquis.</p> <p>The European Commission's new recommendation on standards for equality bodies, adopted on 22 June 2018, will need to be taken into account.</p> <p>The anti-discrimination strategy expired in January 2018 and a new one has yet to be adopted. The 2016 amendments to the criminal code related to prohibition and punishment of criminal racial acts and other acts of discrimination have yet to be fully aligned with the acquis.</p> <p>According to the Equality Commissioner's annual report, the largest number of complaints relate to discrimination on grounds of disability, age and gender-based discrimination. Human rights defenders, together with LGBTI persons, often face hate speech, threats and violence. These abuses should be promptly and properly investigated and penalized.</p> <p>Step up measures to protect the rights of persons facing discrimination, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable individuals; actively pursue investigation and convictions for hate-motivated crimes; and adopt a new anti-discrimination strategy;</p>



### Administration of justice, including impunity and the rule of law

**Continue combating impunity for grave violations of international law and intensify efforts to uncover the fate of missing persons; while also extending cooperation to the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals and implement the War Crimes Prosecution Strategy.**

**Continue strengthening the independence, accountability and effectiveness of the justice system while ensuring implementing of the National Strategy for Judicial Reform 2013–2018; seek to provide increased protection to human rights defenders including through increased accountability for those threatening their rights, and take additional measures to combat hate speech.**

Serbia needs to fully cooperate with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), including by fully accepting and implementing its rulings and decisions. There have been public and repeated challenges by Serbia, including from the highest levels, of the judgments of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Serbia's state of non-cooperation in relation to the arrest of people indicted for contempt of court had not been resolved by the time the IRMCT assumed the jurisdiction, rights and obligations of the ICTY. The final decision as to whether this case will be adjudicated by the IRMCT or in Serbia is pending.

### Fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life

**Continue defending fundamental freedoms by ensuring safety for journalists and writers, including by carrying out thorough, prompt and independent investigations into allegations of threats and violations against human rights defenders, journalists and others.**

**Promote greater independence and pluralism of the media, including through increased transparency concerning ownership and financing of media and through the implementation of media laws adopted in 2014 aimed at protecting freedom of expression.**

Create an enabling environment in which freedom of expression can be exercised without hindrance and ensure that threats, physical assaults, the instigation of violence, and cases of invasion of privacy against journalists and bloggers are properly and swiftly followed up by law enforcement and the judicial authorities, as well as publicly condemned by government officials;

Ensure the full implementation of media laws, and strengthen the independence of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media and boost its capacity to work proactively;

Adopt and implement a new media strategy, in a transparent and inclusive manner;

Ensure suitable funding of public broadcasting services, transparent and equitable co-funding for media content serving the public interest, and increased transparency in media ownership and advertising.

### Right to an adequate standard of living

**Increase efforts to improve housing conditions for those most in need.**

A working group for drafting a national housing strategy has been established. Many Roma households have no access to electricity, drinking water or connection to the sewage system.

### Right to education and training

**Promote inclusive education for all children by, amongst others, reducing non-attendance and school drop-out rates; implementing the Strategy of Education until 2020; and ensuring that students of ethnic minority groups enjoy greater access to school textbooks in their native language.**

Some progress was made in increasing the participation of disadvantaged students in all levels of education. Pieces of secondary legislation were adopted to provide for more effective support to students in need of additional support in education. However, the implementation of measures to reduce drop-out rates and segregation has yet to be strengthened. The action plan on inclusive education has not been adopted.

### Women

**Take measures to ensure greater equality between men and women, including by supporting economic empowerment of rural women and by applying the principle of equal pay for work of equal value to bridge the gender wage gap.**

**Consolidate legal measures to prevent all forms of discrimination and violence against women, including domestic violence, and ensure the thorough implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of Violence against Women and Young Girls in the Family and Partnership Relations.**

Concerning equality between women and men, the adoption of a new Law on gender equality has been seriously delayed

A new EU Index of Gender Equality for Serbia was published in December 2018, indicating that the largest amount of progress made in gender equality was in the area of politics, due to the increased participation of women in the Parliament, Government, and Local Assemblies. Older, rural and Roma women, as well as women with disabilities continued to be among the most discriminated against in society. The role of the media in perpetuating gender stereotypes and minimizing gender-based violence remains a concern.

On violence against women and domestic violence, adoption of the related strategy and action plan has been seriously delayed. The coordination body for gender equality submitted a first national report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention on violence against women to the Council of Europe in July 2018. Since the adoption of a new law against domestic violence, a high number of cases of violence have been reported; police and social workers need to be further trained to implement the law efficiently. A new SOS hotline for female victims of violence was set up.



Children	
<b>Take legislative and other measures with a view to raising the level of protection of children from abuse and violence and through the adoption of laws that explicitly prohibit corporal punishment of children in all contexts, including at home.</b>	An integrated national framework to ensure proper implementation of the rights of the child has yet to be established. The National Council for Child Rights set up a working group for the drafting of the action plan for children, as the previous plan had expired in 2015. A working group on early development of the child was also set up within the National Council. Statistical data on vulnerable groups is still not disaggregated, particularly on Roma children and children with disabilities. Violence against children remains a concern.
<b>Eradicate all obstacles that limit access to education for children with disabilities.</b>	In particular, there are concerns over violations of the rights of children with disabilities, who also face challenges regarding access to inclusive education. Integrated, community-based services should be further expanded.
Persons with disabilities	
<b>Take concrete measures to protect persons with disabilities from all forms of discrimination and to help ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in the fields of education and employment as well as access to housing.</b>	No progress has been made on the rights of persons with disabilities. Serbia is party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There is a lack of funding for the development of community-based services, licensed service providers and social services. The adoption of a strategic framework on disability is still pending. Placement and treatment in social institutions of people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities is still not regulated in accordance with international standards. Serbia is still lacking a comprehensive strategy on deinstitutionalization.
Minorities and indigenous peoples	
<b>Consolidate legislation aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and, in particular, ensure greater integration of Roma people within the Serbian society.</b>	Ensure a consistent implementation of legislation regarding national minorities, including Roma, leading to a tangible improvement in the effective exercise of their rights across the country.
Human trafficking	
<b>Continue taking measures to combat human trafficking in persons, including by increasing human and financial resources dedicated to the Office for Coordination against Trafficking in Persons, placing a specific focus on migrants and refugees, in line with the Human Rights Committee's recommendation.</b>	<p>The number of convictions for organized crime (notably in the fight against trafficking in human beings) remains low.</p> <p>Serbia is implementing its strategy for the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings 2017-2022, particularly for women and children, while an action plan for 2019-2020 is under development.</p> <p>Serbia is starting to be more proactive in terms of detection, identification and protection of victims of trafficking in human beings. Specialized investigation teams were established in 27 criminal police units throughout Serbia. Capacity building of Serbian authorities on prevention and identification of victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labor exploitation is ongoing. The capacity of the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection still needs to be strengthened. A victims' shelter was opened in February 2019. Although the legal framework provides grounds for it, compensation is rarely granted. There is no fund or scheme for compensation.</p>
Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons	
<b>Create a strategy for the integration of refugees into Serbian society and improve procedures for asylum seekers.</b>	The Government has taken some measures and adopted a strategy to solve the problems of refugees and IDPs. However, solutions remain slow and limited, with a need for increased funding. Roma IDPs remain the most marginalized and vulnerable. Serbia is engaged in the regional dialogue on durable solutions for internally displaced persons (the 'Skopje process').