



UNITED NATIONS  
SERBIA



# 2023

## RESULTS REPORT





# FOREWORD BY THE UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR

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**2023 in Serbia turned out to be both a transition year and a chaotic year, one for the record book when it comes to multiple impacts of climate change, societal tensions, and a low point in the Belgrade-Pristina dialog. 2023 was also a year of achievements and resilience. Economic growth held steady, due in part to sustained foreign investments, subsidized energy prices, a vigorous construction sector, and an ever-reliable agriculture contribution to the GDP.**

The legislative framework for implementing a comprehensive green agenda further expanded, along with structural reforms in the energy sector and the beginning of rationalisation of the state-owned EPS. Serbia took over the chairmanship of the Carpathian convention, a new incentive to focus on bio-diversity and sustainable development, while awareness is raising on contemporary topics such as Biotech, One Health and more. A small but growing share of business investments are now linked to, and shaped by, sustainability practices, including through green bonds, energy efficiency and waste management innovations in production cycles. The digital transformation of the economy and of society continued as one of Serbia's most successful endeavours, even if it has become clear that structural adjustments are required to reduce the risk of increased inequalities. The employment market expanded, to a point where Serbia, like other European countries, faces some labour shortages in both skilled and unskilled jobs.

Tragedy hit home twice in May, when two consecutive mass shootings in Belgrade left several children and young adults dead early May, throwing Serbian citizens in a state of shock and anger, leading to protracted streets demonstrations and political convulsions until the end of the year. These sad events triggered a renewed focus on the mental health of young people and the commitment of several ministries to carve prevention mechanisms in their plans and actions. The country fulfilled its normative obligations to

international human rights mechanisms and treaties, reporting on the 4<sup>th</sup> Universal Periodic Review cycle and preparing for the 5<sup>th</sup>, while maintaining its platform of low intensity engagement for social dialogue between the government and civil society. It marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The government also adopted the National Youth Strategy and the Strategy for Active and Healthy Aging, two important frameworks that can help reduce discrimination and inequalities. Further adjustments to the

gender and anti-discrimination legislative framework have been acted, both on gender equality and gender-based violence, yet the rate of femicide has not decreased, and much more is required to support local social and protection services and expand women economic empowerment, particularly in rural areas. Much awaited laws on media freedom were adopted at the end of 2023, they will require substantial attention for a meaningful implementation that will provide a safe, transparent and diverse media environment.

Mixed migration flows continued at a similar level as in 2022, unabated by the expansion of border infrastructure and stronger security management. 120,000 persons came through Serbia, in search of a better future into Europe. Serbia is not yet perceived as a reasonable landing country, asylum procedures remain slow, but integration of refugees in the job market have been successful and could be built on. Migrants and people seeking asylum, 70 percent of which come from Afghanistan, Irak, Syria, are still in need of dedicated protection mechanisms, as violence against them remains a daily reality.

Serbia re-committed to several key international initiatives, firming up its engagement to the Sustainable Development Goals along six core transitions and endorsing key sustainability declarations on food, energy and global cooling at COP28. The formulation of the National Development Plan was initiated early in 2023 by the adoption of enabling bylaws, and work continued throughout the year to design the structure of the plan and shape its priorities.

In this complex geo-political environment, the UN in Serbia accelerated its own pace of action on the three strategic priorities agreed with the government of Serbia agreed in the UN Cooperation Framework: the green transformation, building on human capital, and strengthening the Rule of Law and Human Rights agenda, resulting in an overall delivery of more than USD 80 million. While a sustained emphasis was put on expanding institutional and physical capacities at local level in municipalities, the UN normative work continued on a wide scope of sectors such as the decent work agenda, gender, demographic resilience, the human rights framework, health including mental health, road and industrial safety and air pollution.



**Françoise Jacob**  
UN Resident Coordinator

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## UNITED NATIONS COUNTRY TEAM IN SERBIA

Comprised of 20 UN agencies, funds and programmes (12 in-country and 8 non-resident), the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Serbia is headed by the Resident Coordinator (RC), who serves as the appointed representative of the UN Secretary-General for development work within the country.

Implementation of the key UN Strategy in Serbia, the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025 is guided by UNCT, with the Steering Committee presided over by the UN RC alongside both the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of European Integration. In collaboration with government and additional partners, the UNCT is committed to unlocking the potential of green and sustainable development that is inclusive in nature, lessening inequalities in order to boost well-being, social equity and human potential and build mutual trust and accountability within Serbia and throughout the Western Balkans region, in line with the EU Accession and Agenda 2030.



## KEY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS OF THE UN IN SERBIA

The UN system's key development partners in Serbia include the government, donor governments and development agencies,

international development organisations and financial institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), academia and think-tanks, religious leaders, the private sector and the media.

UNCT expresses its deep appreciation to the donors and other financial contributors who supported the initiatives in 2023, both financially and in-kind, and to our implementing partners for meaningful engagement and dedication.



# CHAPTER 1

# KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN SERBIA AND REGIONAL CONTEXT



Geographical area

**77,474 km<sup>2</sup>**

88,361 km<sup>2</sup> with Kosovo  
under UNSCR 1244/99  
(Statistical Office of RS - SORS)

Population

**6 647 003**

(2022 Census) (SORS)

At-risk-of-poverty rate

**20%**

(2022) (SORS)

Internet Freedom Score

**71/100**

(Free) (Freedom House, 2023)

Female legislators, senior  
officials and managers

**33%**

(2021) (UNECE) (SORS)

Unemployment rate (15 and over)

**9.1%**

(IV quarter 2023) (SORS)

Global Gender Gap Index

**38/146**

(2023) (global ranking), score 0.760

Corruption perception index:

**104/180**

(global ranking, 2023)

Proportion of youth of age  
15–24 years not in education,  
employment or training

**M:13.4% | F:13.3%**

(2022) (SORS)

GDP per capita (current US\$)

**9,538**

(2022) (World Bank)

Global Freedom Score

**60/100**

(Partly Free) (Freedom House, 2023)

HDI 0.805

**65/193**

(2022) (Human development report)

Rule of Law Index: 0.48

**93/142 Global rank**

**11/15 Regional rank**

(2023) (World justice project)

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Serbia reasserted its commitment to sustainable development, standing as one of only 40 countries worldwide that reaffirmed its pledge during September's SDG Summit.

This commitment represents a forward-looking vision, aligned with six key SDG transitions, aiming to accelerate achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Serbia also reaffirmed its intention, after a seven-year lapse, to develop a National Development Plan (NDP) to guide the country's sustainable development over the next decade, closely linked to the strategic goal of EU membership. In June, the government adopted a regulation setting out management and coordination procedures for development of the NDP. In November, at COP28, it signed several key declarations including those on sustainable food systems, climate and health, renewables and energy efficiency, and global cooling. Overall, the country is making progress towards

achievement of Agenda 2030 in several key areas, as evidenced by analysis by the Serbian National Statistical Office (SORS) that shows progress in 43 indicators and by the recent Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) index that scored 75.9 percent, surpassing the regional average by more than four percent and the EU average by three percent.

The government continued its reform efforts to decarbonise the economy and move forward on the green transition. The first renewable energy auctions were held in the summer, the Programme for Adaptation to Changed Climate Conditions was adopted, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial Update Report was submitted to UNFCCC. Implementing its commitments under the UN conventions and

the 2020 Sofia Declaration posed a formidable challenge. Currently, Serbia uses nearly four times as much energy as the EU average to produce one Euro of GDP and depends on coal for more than 65 percent of its energy needs. The realities of **climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution** are increasingly impacting citizens' lives. During the summer, deadly storms, floods and heatwaves resulted in fatalities, property damage and agricultural losses.

After a subdued start in the first quarter of 2023, **GDP growth** rebounded later in the year, bolstered also by a EUR 2.4 billion loan from the IMF in late 2022 and strong foreign investments flows. Yet, stubborn inflation significantly dampened the benefits perceived by Serbian citizens from economic expansion. The Census results—released starting in April

2023—attest to definite progress across various dimensions of **human capital** compared to that of 2011, including an increase in educational attainment and a contraction in at-risk-of-poverty rates. Progress remains slow in other domains, as seen in the high prevalence of non-communicable diseases and low expenditure in social protection services, which is below the EU average both with regard to adjusted per-capita expenditures and percentage of GDP.

The year was marked tragically with a school shooting in May in Belgrade, followed the next day by a mass shooting in a suburb of the capital, each claiming many lives. These events triggered large weekly demonstrations, with thousands of citizens across the country demanding an end to violence in society and in political discourse. Amid continuing social tensions, **early Parliamentary elections were held** on 17 December and **concurrently with local elections** in 65 local self-governments. This was the third time such early parliamentary elections were held in four years. Although carried off without disruption, they were characterised by numerous procedural shortcomings, including inconsistent application of safeguards during voting and counting, frequent instances of overcrowding, breaches in secrecy of the vote, and numerous instances of group voting.

The **4<sup>th</sup> cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** took place in May, resulting in 256 recommendations to government

including on ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which was ratified in September. The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human rights (UDHR) was marked by a year-long campaign that contributed to the adoption of key strategies on youth and healthy ageing and reaffirmed the commitment to combat discrimination and promote equality.

Regionally, cooperation with Albania and North Macedonia continued under the **Open Balkan Initiative**. The agreements were signed facilitating movement of citizens across borders and the integration of the job markets of the Western Balkan countries under **the Berlin Process**. Although the war in Ukraine contributed to increased tension in the region, dialogue with Pristina culminated in an agreement begun in Brussels on the path to Ohrid, North Macedonia. Implementation of these arrangements was hindered by persistent delays and disagreements over interpretation and sequencing of commitments, including those under previously concluded agreements, while northern Kosovo<sup>1</sup> was—throughout the year—a hotspot for inter-ethnic tension and violent confrontation.

1 All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

## CHAPTER 2

# UN IN SERBIA SUPPORT

## TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

### 2.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The national vision for sustainable development is articulated in a number of sectoral strategies, while the government's ambition to develop the National Development Plan – an overarching sustainable development strategy – should further enhance the implementation and synergies of both the 2030 Agenda and EU accession.

In such environment, and in spite of the regional geopolitical circumstances and the continuing social tensions, the United Nations Country Team in Serbia maintained the priority of sustainable development and the imperative of **breaking the cycle of crisis and recovery** and, through doing so, nurturing a more resilient economy and cohesive and inclusive society.

Working towards decarbonisation of the economy, the UN deployed efforts to **reduce energy intensity and emissions** and increase the country's renewable energy capacity. UN agencies worked collaboratively on issues including air pollution, energy efficiency, energy poverty and the circular economy transition. In support of the priority of climate adaptation, UNCT supported the submission of an Action Plan for Adaptation to Changed Climate Conditions, assisted local self-governments (LSGs) in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in their activities, and helped strengthen community resilience. Equitable **economic and employment opportunities** were promoted, including by accelerating Serbia's green transition through support to small and medium enterprises and municipalities in turning innovative business ideas into investments. Serbia's participation and leadership of **global and regional initiatives** was facilitated, notably with the organisation of a Dialogue on Climate Change, ahead of the annual UN global conference on climate change (COP28), as well as progress in implementation of the food systems pathway and the convening of a Conference of the Parties of the Carpathian Convention (7<sup>th</sup> meeting) in Belgrade.

The UN continued to promote **universal access to quality health services** and strengthen the resilience of the public health system to shocks and crises, including through an enhanced e-Health agenda. Key areas of priority were healthy lifestyles, control of tobacco use and mental health. The UN activities focused on extending access to **social protection** services to those left further behind, including Roma, disadvantaged women, young people leaving supervised care, persons with disabilities, and older persons. Effective support was provided to address **gender-based violence (GBV)** and the empowerment of women and girls from

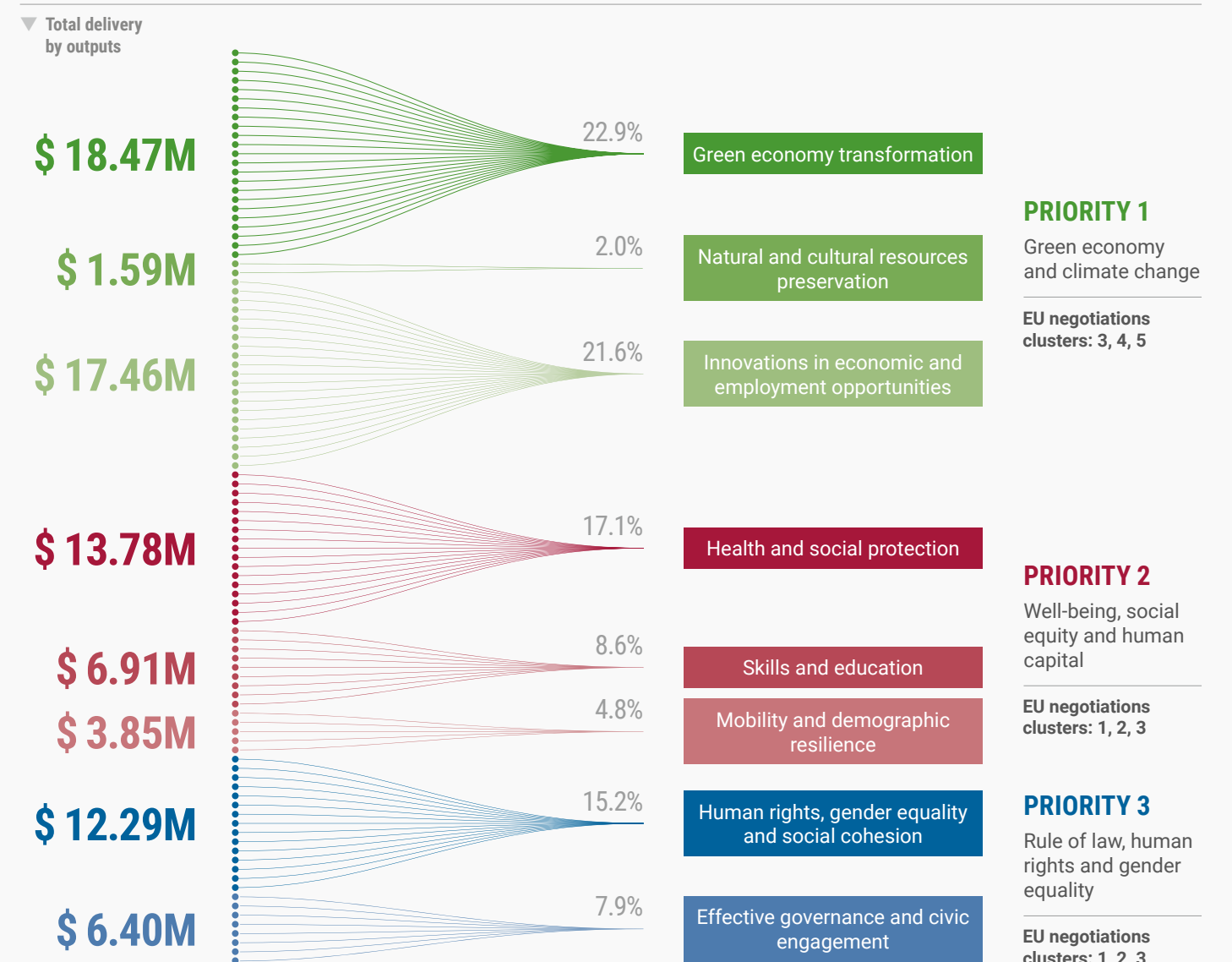
Serbia's development priorities are aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the strategic goal of EU membership, building on the strong synergies between the two processes.

vulnerable population groups. The process of making **education more inclusive**—including for migrants and refugees—gathered pace, in partnership with LSGs, teachers and advisory bodies.

With a focus on the **demographic transition**, the UN prioritised the quality of life of younger and older persons, and inter-generational solidarity. It supported Serbia in **aligning with international human rights and gender equality (GE) standards** through harmonisation with international commitments, and by promoting meaningful participation of civil society organisations, academia and communities in a year-long HR campaign to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The capacities of national mechanisms were strengthened for improved implementation of the recommendations following the 4<sup>th</sup>

Universal Periodic Review (UPR), along with efforts to enhance the rule of law through increased capacity of the justice and social protection systems, along with prioritisation of **anti-corruption and anti-trafficking measures**. Efforts to enhance **governance systems at the local level** were boosted, with increased capacity for gender- and child-responsive budgeting, localising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda and supporting people-centred digital transformation. The UN continued to extend protection to **migrants and refugees** through policy development and legal assistance. Emergency preparedness initiatives included efforts to reduce further outbreaks of the COVID-19 pandemic, and implement measures for gender-sensitive disaster risk preparedness and response, while regional cooperation focused on controlling small arms and fostering security.

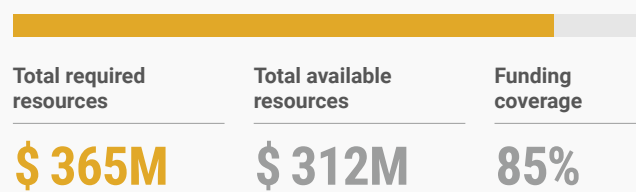
### UNCT 2023 Cooperation Framework Outcome Expenditures



## 2.2 ACHIEVING RESULTS FOR SERBIA: COOPERATION FRAMEWORK PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES

With three priorities and eight interlinking and mutually reinforcing outcomes, the UN Cooperation Framework provides a blueprint for addressing key development priorities that contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda and ensuring a greener, healthier and better future where no one is left behind.

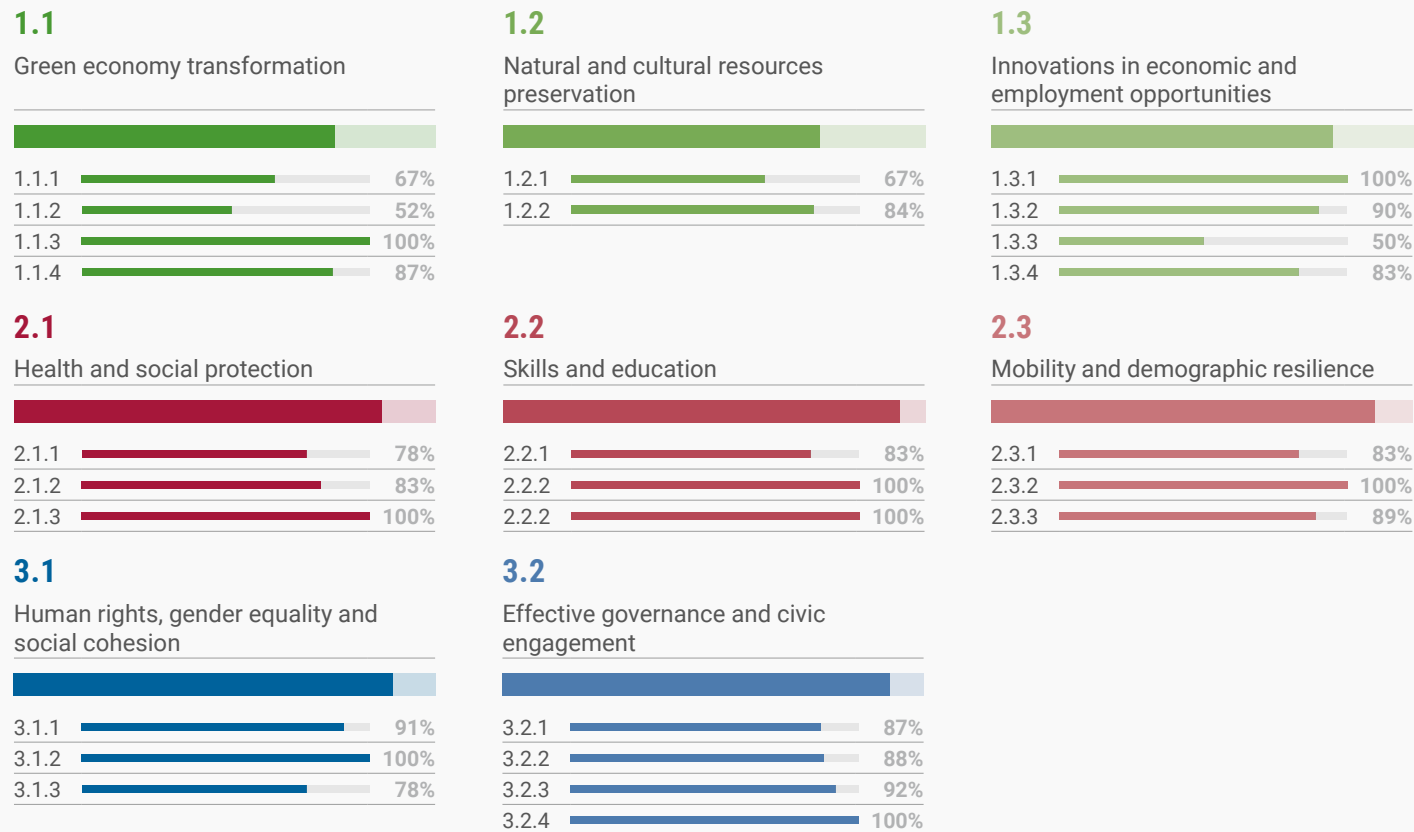
### Multiyear funding overview (2021-2025)



### Yearly funding overview in 2023



### Achievement of Cooperation Framework indicators in 2023 Output Results Framework\*



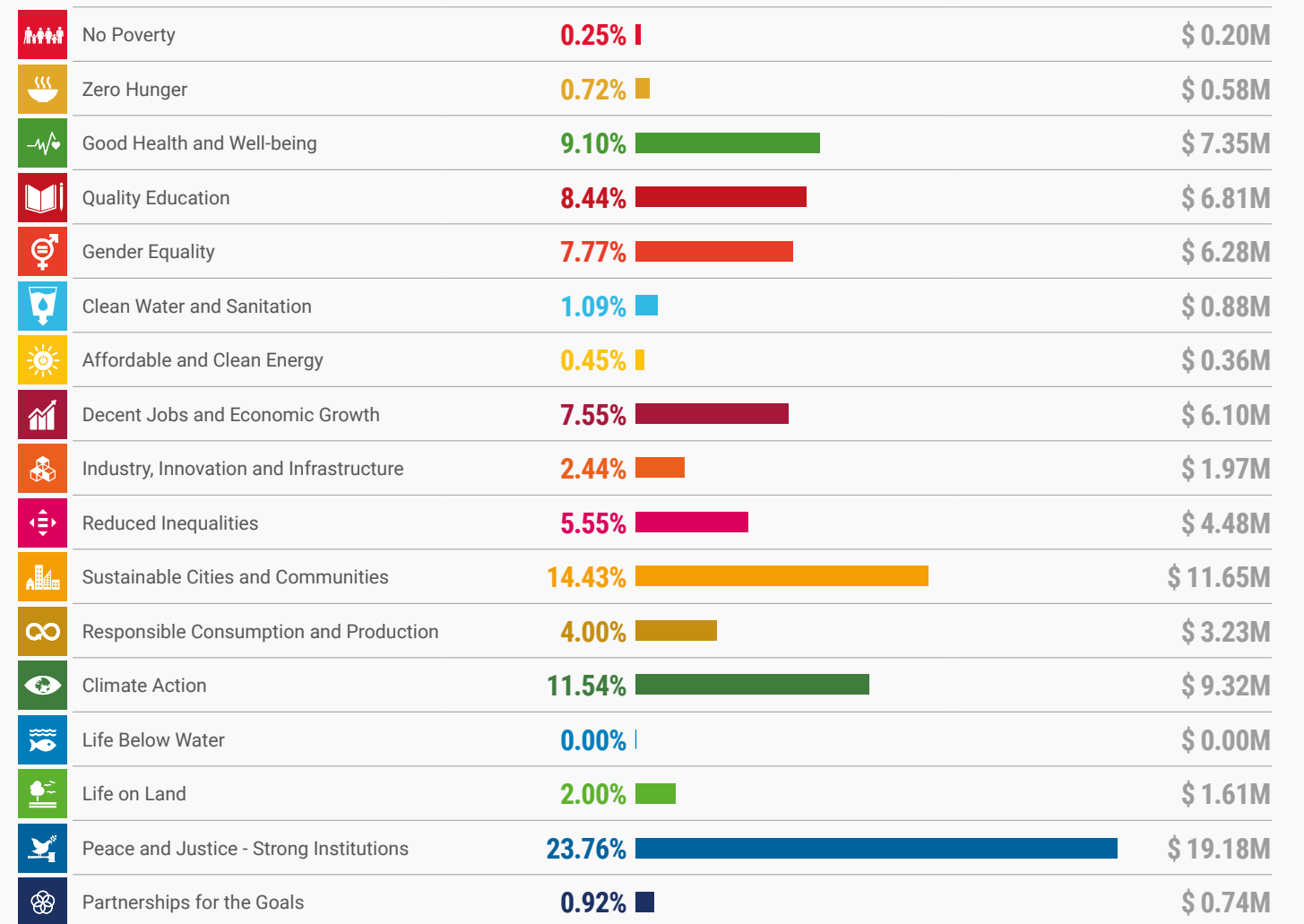
\* The progress of each output indicator is assessed by the responsible UN agency according to the actual progress made against the annual targets, using the following traffic light and 4 point scoring system: Green (3 points) planned results achieved; Yellow (2 points) minor

elements still to be completed; Orange (1 point) limited progress achieved; Red (0 points) no measurable progress. The percentage of achievement is calculated based on the total score per output.

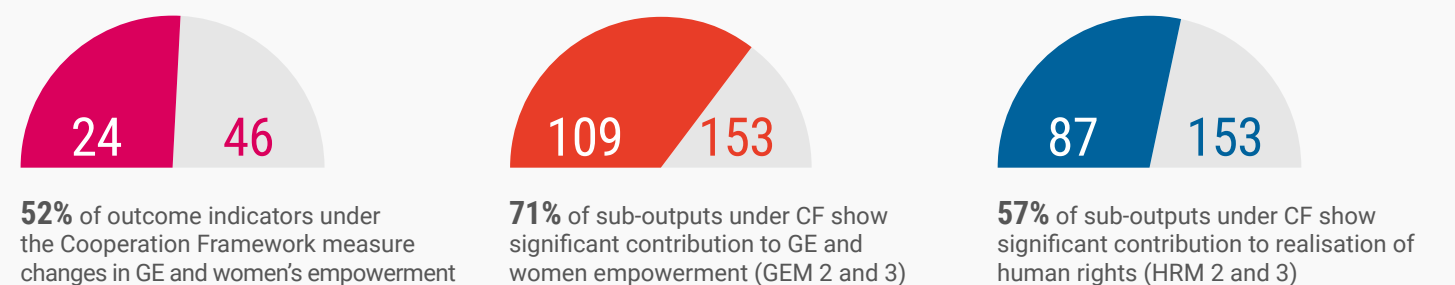
### Five top contributing partners to advance the SDGs in 2023



### UN Country Team contribution to SDGs in 2023



### UN Country Team contribution to human rights and gender equality



A snapshot of the results achieved in 2023 at country-level for 31 out of 64 indicators of the UNSDG Global Output Indicator Framework

## 2 ZERO HUNGER



### ENDING HUNGER AND STRENGTHENING FOOD SYSTEMS

- 2.1 Cross-sectoral policies, strategies and investment programmes to eradicate hunger and food insecurity are developed
- 2.2 65 rural organisations and beneficiaries in agrifood systems improved work conditions
- 2.3 10 institutions were supported in policy implementation to reduce malnutrition through dietary guidelines

## 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



### QUALITY HEALTH, SOCIAL AND PROTECTION SERVICES

- 3.1 2 strategies, on active and healthy ageing and on reproductive health 2024-2030, were supported in their development
- 3.2 National authorities were assisted in health systems transformation and improvement of primary health care
- 3.3 4000 premature sick and newborn babies were supported through childhood illness services

## 4 QUALITY EDUCATION



### STRONG, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- 4.1 Serbia scored 4 out of 7 for inclusivity and gender equitability in the education system and learning opportunities
- 4.3 Over 1,000 people benefited from access to skills and life-long learning, including 150 Roma women and 66 women with disabilities



## 5 GENDER EQUALITY



### GENDER EQUALITY

- 5.1 8 policy plans to eliminate violence against women and girls (VAWG) were developed (1 provincial, 7 local)
- 5.2 21 measures were implemented to address discriminatory gender and social norms, stereotypes, and practices, including child marriage
- 5.4 The Council for Gender Equality and Coordination Body for GE were supported to address discriminatory gender and social norms
- 5.7 Mechanisms in place to advance women and girls' decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care
- 5.8 At least 112,000 children and adults had access to safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian, development or protection personnel

## 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



### DECENT AND RIGHTS-BASED WORK

- 8.1 A legal framework incorporating international human rights norms and standards at work developed
- 8.2 109 private sector entities (including MSMEs) improved performance and income generation
- 8.3 5 workers and employees organisations increased capacity to promote employment and decent work
- 8.4 400 people benefited from programmes to prevent and address child labour, trafficking, and forced labour



## 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



### SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

- 9.2 426 private sector entities (including MSMEs) introduced innovative business practices to mainstream environmental sustainability

## 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



### REDUCED INEQUALITIES

- 10.2 National and local development policies were supported to integrate migration and recognise migrants as contributors to sustainable development
- 10.3 At least 8,000 internally displaced, migrants and refugees benefited from integrated and targeted interventions, including on strengthening social cohesion

## 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



### REDUCED INEQUALITIES

- 11.1 National urban policies for sustainable cities and communities were formulated and resourced
- 11.2 Government-enhanced participatory urban planning was supported

## 13 CLIMATE ACTION



### CLIMATE ACTION AND RISK REDUCTION

- 13.1 Policy measures for the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement were initiated
- 13.3 National Disaster Risk Reduction strategy was prepared for adoption

## 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



### RULE OF LAW AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

- 16.1 Quality, free and universal birth registration services are available and vital statistics are high
- 16.2 National Mechanism for Reporting globally recognised as strong, with direct and meaningful civil society engagement
- 16.3 4 initiatives were implemented to end all forms of violence, promote the rule of law, and ensure equal access to justice
- 16.4 Significant progress was made on meaningful participation of rights holders in public processes, including from vulnerable groups
- 16.6 497 children in conflict with the law and over 2,000 people were assisted to access justice

## 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



### MONITORING THE SDGS

- 17.2 Progress was made in gender-responsive budgeting despite limited alignment of national budgeting system with Sustainable Development Goals
- 17.3 Monitoring and analysis of progress towards the SDGs was improved, with report on Urban Development Indicators published



## 2.3 ACHIEVING RESULTS FOR SERBIA – DETAILED ANALYSIS

# GREEN ECONOMY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### PRIORITY 1

#### CONTRIBUTION TO SDGs



#### CONTRIBUTING UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES



#### CONTRIBUTION TO EU NEGOTIATIONS CLUSTERS



#### CONTRIBUTION TO EU NEGOTIATIONS CHAPTERS



#### BUDGET: PLANNED / DELIVERED



### ZORAN RADELJIC

DIRECTOR OF MASTER SOLAR



We've made significant strides in drastically reducing our CO2 emissions, achieving an impact equivalent to planting nearly 17,000 trees a year. Our focus is on establishing energy-independent facilities, sourcing all the energy we need from renewable resources. This is a pivotal part of realising our sustainable transformation and marking our valuable contribution to the global green agenda.

Master Solar is a beneficiary of a grant from the initiative of the EU for the Green Agenda in Serbia, partnered with UNDP.



OUTCOME 1.1

GREEN ECONOMY TRANSFORMATION

OUTPUT 1.1.1

Clean energy and energy efficiency

In line with Serbia's renewed commitment under the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 33.3% compared to 1990 levels, the Low Carbon Development Strategy for 2023–2030 was adopted in June. To achieve this ambition, efforts have been made to decarbonise Serbia's energy system, which has helped to increase **installed renewable energy capacity by 7.9 MW and reduce emissions by 12,457 TCO<sub>2</sub> per year**. Results included: i) Alignment of the **regulatory frameworks** with the EU *acquis*, through developing a **Plan for a just transition to a low carbon economy**, aiming to Leave No-one Behind (LNOB); ii) Promoting **energy efficiency investments in public buildings**, resulting in, at least, a 30 percent reduction in primary energy consumption and a decrease of up to 20 percent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the public buildings sector, improved working conditions and safety at work, and protection and preservation of the cultural heritage; iii) Transitioning to bio-waste, progressed through Local Waste Management Plans improved by integrating circular economy principles in seven municipalities, assessments conducted for the use of sludge in combination with biomass in three municipalities, and ten Local Air Quality Plans developed; and iv) Innovative business ideas that present innovative solutions for energy efficiency, energy poverty, and renewable energy received seed funding and were featured at the Fair of Green Ideas, Project and Innovations organised in Kalemegdan in June. These included "Liquid Tree" for air purification and reduction of carbon dioxide emissions (UNDP). Additionally, a Dialogue on Climate Change organised ahead of COP28 enhanced intergovernmental cooperation and engagement of development stakeholders in efforts to reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

30% REDUCTION

in primary energy consumption and a **decrease of 20% in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions** in public buildings sector

60 BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

worth **USD 30 million** launched to improve energy efficiency and renewable energy, while decreasing energy poverty



12,457 TCO<sub>2</sub>

reduced emissions per year



▲ © UN Serbia / Jadranka Ilić



> 880,000

people sensitised on harmful effects of air pollution

▲ © UNICEF Serbia / Pančić

OUTPUT 1.1.2

Clean air

UN agencies worked synergistically to further implementation of the **Air Protection Programme 2022–2030**, through: i) **Policy development** at both national (e.g. Air Protection Law) and local levels (e.g. Air Quality Plans); ii) **Implementation of air quality measures** such as afforestation, design of geothermal heating systems and air pollution control devices through public tenders and open challenges; and iii) Investments in innovative measures (e.g., biomass pellet production) in cooperation with municipalities, private sector, universities and research institutes (UNDP). **Awareness of harmful effects of air pollution** increased across age groups through: i) Social media campaigns and direct actions reaching 880,000 people (250,000 teenagers) in more than 15 municipalities; ii) Findings on the impact of landfill fires on people's health featured during the International Day of Clean Air; and iii) Installing air pollution sensor devices in 46 schools, reported on the website [www.decazavazduh.rs](http://www.decazavazduh.rs) (UNICEF, UNEP). In addition, the Youth4Air Ambassadors Generation 1.0 programme mobilised 30 youths to involve 2000 others in air quality awareness. The first-ever **Youth Declaration on Clean Air** was adopted, following consultation with more than 1,000 young people from across Serbia, while a new generation of **Youth4Air Ambassadors** from 30 cities was convened and young people actively involved in developing local policies to improve air quality in four selected municipalities through consultations, local campaigns and research. The Ministry of Health (MoH) signed a **declaration prioritising urgent, far-reaching action on climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and land degradation** during the WHO ministerial conference on environment and health. **Capacity-building** activities were conducted to mainstream nature-based solutions (NBS) in Belgrade urban plans (UNICEF, UNEP, UN Habitat).

46 SCHOOLS

with functional **air pollution sensor devices**



First ever **Youth Declaration on Clean Air** adopted

© FAO / Oliver Bunic



Policy framework on Climate Change strengthened along with 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial Update Report to UNFCCC



**200 TONS**  
of production waste eliminated



Analyses of road traffic accidents and e-Vehicle charging systems straightened road safety

**OUTPUT 1.1.3**

**Climate change, infrastructure**

The UN team has contributed to the improvement of the government's policy framework on climate change, resulting in the adoption of an **Action Plan for Adaptation to Changed Climate Conditions** and submitted the **2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial Update Report to UNFCCC** in December (UNDP). Establishment of an environmentally sound PCB management system resulted with significant progress in reducing toxic pollutions through elimination of 200 tons of production waste (UNIDO). **Sustainable urban mobility plans** (SUMPs) are being prepared for the city of Kragujevac (UN Habitat, UNEP, UNESCAP, UNECE). At the national level, a road traffic accident analysis and technical assistance on efficient implementation of UN legal instruments improved implementation of the Road Safety strategy, and enhanced security of e-Vehicle charging systems (UNECE, WHO). **Awarenessraising** to promote the uptake of circular economy principles and the One Health Approach to combat antimicrobial resistance targeted national authorities and ministries, businesses, national experts and UN agencies (UNECE, WHO). The contribution of urban development to sustainability was well documented and understood through preparation of a progress report on monitoring of urban development SDG indicators in cooperation with SORS (RCO, UN Habitat).

**OUTPUT 1.1.4**

**Community Resilience**

UN continued to support LSGs in **implementing their Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) legal obligations**, including preparation of assessments and plans. **Community resilience** was enhanced by increasing the capacity of 435 experts from national, local and provincial authorities and IPPC district heating facilities to issue integrated pollution prevention and control permits (UNDP). **National food security** was strengthened and **rural livelihoods** enhanced through assistance to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM) and LSGs in DRR and Management in Agriculture, Development of Climate-Smart Agriculture and Organic Farming, and to a network of 34 agricultural extension stations (FAO). Eighteen LSGs were engaged in peer-to-peer learning and fundraising for DRR measures implementation through regional exchange platforms (UNDRR). A new initiative was launched aiming to **explore the connection between climate change, the environment, and human mobility**. By bringing together relevant sectoral representatives and academia, the initiative aims to lay foundations for exchanges on the migration, environment, and climate change nexus, as well as to promote exchanges of relevant knowledge and expertise (IOM). **Collaboration between government and the private sector was improved** with establishment of working groups on climate change and agricultural insurance, resulting in quick decisions in supporting farmers affected by heavy rainfalls and floods in mid-2023. **Climate change in agriculture was introduced into schools' curricula** (FAO).



One Health Approach to tackling antimicrobial resistance calls for improvements in human, animal and plant health, and raising awareness of the environmental dimension of the One Health



Farmers affected by heavy rainfalls and floods in mid-2023 received **quick recovery assistance** through enhanced collaboration between government and private sector

**435 EXPERTS**

trained in integrated pollution prevention

**18 LSGs**

improved DRR measures through regional exchange platforms

OUTCOME 1.2

# NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES PRESERVATION

OUTPUT 1.2.1

## Cultural and historical resources

Government continued to integrate cultural considerations into national and local development strategies, with a focus on youth engagement. The national youth strategy 2023–2030, adopted in January 2023, includes an initiative to develop youth creativity (UNCT). In cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and the Institute for Cultural Development Research, an **innovative approach to cultural policies was developed** to promote dialogue and information sharing among local actors, and active participation in equitable development of the sector. The approach aims to inform decision making, leading to adoption of equitable and sustainable policies. An inclusive and participatory approach **to access financial resources the cultural sector** was facilitated, resulting in strengthened regional cooperation, increased artist mobility and improved circulation of creative goods and services, while protecting Serbia's cultural heritage (UNESCO).

OUTPUT 1.2.2

## Ecosystems and biodiversity

With UN support, **Serbia successfully hosted the seventh Conference of the Parties of the Carpathian Convention (COP7)** culminating in adoption of the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, a comprehensive instrument supporting implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the regional level. COP7 resulted in enhanced cooperation between environment ministers of Serbia and Romania to seal the establishment of a transboundary Ramsar site in the Djerdap Gorge (Iron Gate) National Park, along the Danube River, a wetland area straddling the border between Serbia and Romania (UNEP). Protection of forests as an essential hub of biodiversity was enhanced through: i) Introduction of a new web-based information system aimed at strengthening the national **forest** inventory and forest management, and combating soil degradation, ii) Pilot activities in Kikinda and Dimitrovgrad focused on reducing land degradation through afforestation, agro-forestry plantation and shelterbelts, and iii) Research into wood consumption that contributed to enhancing awareness of GHG emissions (FAO). National capacity to assess and **remediate soil and water pollution** from agriculture was strengthened, including through cooperation with national institutes including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), with studies on diffuse soil pollution and contamination in three selected municipalities, the elaboration of environmental guidelines and indicators for risk assessment, and the delivery of farmer capacity-building activities. The identification of gaps for compliance with the obligations for statutory management requirements for farmers, in accordance with the EU *acquis*, was initiated to address water pollution, plant protection, animal feed, livestock welfare, identification and traceability, and nature conservation, and to minimise the risks of zoonotic disease (FAO).

The National Report on the Progress on the Implementation of the UN convention on Desertification and Drought was officially submitted and presented at an event focused on the role of women in sustainable land management (UNEP, UNDP). The **natural value of Protected Areas (PAs) was enhanced** through capacity building on various digital tools (e.g. Climate Atlas, Disaster Risk Registry) benefiting some 400 experts, support for biodiversity and ecosystem projects (e.g. performance-based payment agreements), low-value grant agreements with CSOs and upgrading of information systems and biodiversity databases in the institutes for Nature Conservation of Serbia and of the Vojvodina province. The tourist offer in the protected area of Vlasina Lake has been enriched by 47 km of reconstructed and landscaped hiking trails, which contribute to the protection of nature and the preservation of local culture and traditions. To improve the protection of wetlands in Serbia and preserve their flora and fauna, the Ministry of Environment Protection (MEP) was supported to improve the legislative framework through analyses of the Nature Protection Law and a Decree on Ecological Networks on biodiversity and wetlands (UNDP). Guidelines on **digital agriculture requirements** for EU pre-accession countries were developed to aid alignment with EU standards, particularly the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), covering digital information systems for CAP management, strategies for digitalising agriculture and support for farm advisory services and smart village projects (ITU, FAO).



Alignment with the EU Common Agricultural Policy facilitated through improved strategies for **digitalising of agriculture** and farm advisory services



Access to financial resources ↑ in regional cooperation, artist mobility and circulation of creative goods and services



Carpathian Biodiversity Framework adopted on 12 October 2023 in Belgrade, the first region to adopt a regional biodiversity framework

### 3 MUNICIPALITIES

strengthened capacities to assess and remediate soil and water pollution from agriculture

© UNDP Serbia / Momira Marković



47 km

of reconstructed and landscaped hiking trails enriched the tourist offer in the protected area of Vlasina Lake

> 400

protected area managers competent in the use of digital tools to improve information systems and biodiversity databases



▲ © Marija Piroški

## OUTCOME 1.3

## INNOVATIONS IN ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

## 13 LSGs

developed territorial strategies and set the foundations for sustainable urban development

## 1,416 PROFESSIONALS

(52% women) with gender mainstreaming skills in local development strategies

## \$ 6.5 MILLION

leveraged for Serbia's green transition through innovative solutions

## 65 FARMS IN 20 VILLAGES

in South-East Serbia improved organic livestock production

## OUTPUT 1.3.1

## Local development strategies

Thirty-one LSGs from the regions of Sumadija and Western Serbia and Southern and Eastern Serbia laid the foundations for future sustainable urban development by developing territorial strategies, applying key aspects of integrated territorial development and establishing mechanisms to support the implementation of the strategies. The strategies align with the EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027, Strategy for Sustainable Urban Development and Smart Specialisation Strategy of Serbia. A total of 1,416 professionals from 85 LSGs and 11 regional development agencies increased their capacity to mainstream gender in local development through targeted trainings, workshops and study visits (UNOPS). Eight municipalities improved their management of waste by developing or improving plans, incorporating circular economy principles, and integrating planning for organic waste and sludge management (UNDP).

## OUTPUT 1.3.2

## Economic transformation

The innovation **challenge call programme** continued to accelerate Serbia's green transition by supporting SMEs and municipalities to turn innovative business ideas into investments, through incubation, acceleration and co-financing for green projects, funding 103 projects (USD 55 million, leveraging USD 6.5 million) and providing grants to the 19 best innovative solutions for a faster transition to a circular economy (UNDP). The **Smart Manufacturing Innovation Centre (SMIC) at University of Novi Sad** was established, aiming to leverage economic benefits from adopting 4IR technologies and boost Serbia's manufacturing competitiveness by showcasing, assessing readiness for, and offering trainings in, digital technologies and automation. A draft programme (inspired by SMIC), promoting a system of smart manufacturing innovation hubs across the country, received validation from national stakeholders, while seven large companies benefited from exchange with Slovenian manufacturing companies (UNIDO).

**Market access for fruit and vegetable producers was enhanced** through: i) Webinars and export guide to the UK and Nordic markets; ii) Knowledge exchange among over 400 experts, professionals and government representatives at the regional agribusiness conference GROW UP held in Kopaonik; and iii) Improved alignment of organic agriculture policies with the EU, backed up by dedicated market research. Sixty-five farms in 20 villages in South-East Serbia saw improvements in the organic livestock production value chain through field visits, on-farm demonstrations and networking opportunities for smallholder farmers. Organic livestock production promotional materials were created in collaboration with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce. **Awareness of how transforming food systems** is key to biodiversity conservation and climate resilient, sustainable food production was enhanced through intersectoral



## 270 JOBS

created (25% for women) in underdeveloped regions of Serbia by supporting SMEs



▲ © FAO / Victor Sokolowicz

dialogues on World Biodiversity and World Food days and by supporting Serbia's participation in the Food Systems Summit+2 Stocktaking Moment. The value of agro-ecology to advance social and environmental responsibility was brought to a wider audience through the portal Small-scale food producers in Serbia (FAO). The **Digital Development Country Profile** was finalised, strengthening understanding of the role of ICT development enablers to facilitate achievement of the SDGs, including assessment of digital transformation nationally and analysis of digital trends and gaps (ITU). **Serbia's e-Waste profile** (legislation, management, statistics, transboundary movements and stakeholder mapping) was validated by MEP and EPA. The **Regional e-Waste Monitor for the Western Balkans** was developed and consulted with national focal points and launched in December (ITU, UNEP, UNITAR). Support was provided to MoH to **quantify the healthcare sector's contribution to the Serbian economy** (WHO).

## OUTPUT 1.3.3

## Science, technology and innovation

The introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has transformed various aspects of life, including work, learning and communication. In partnership with 'Machinery' – an organisation of professionals working in data science, AI and machine learning – a series of #DigitalTalks has been launched, bringing together stakeholders to help shape the national conversation around digital transformation, the adoption of new technologies and their impact on work, education, cybersecurity and the arts. **The Biotech Future Forum**, organised in partnership with the World Economic Forum, gathered more than 500 participants from 30 countries. Special emphasis was placed on the introduction of green biotechnology in creating a sustainable future, in line with the **UN Resolution on the**

## OUTPUT 1.3.4

## Decent employment

A **Labour Force Survey (LFS)** revealed that more than **82,000 young people of age 5–17 were engaged in child labour**. **Map Child Labour** concluded with trainings for supervisors and professionals in social protection centres in Uzice, Kraljevo, Nis and Kladovo and a public campaign held in the affected rural areas of Sumadija and Western Serbia. Access to grievance mechanisms for workers in Serbia's automotive, electrical, and textile industries was improved, through the development and dissemination of training materials based on ILO's guidelines, reaching more than 70 mediators and arbitrators, and 30 compliance officers from 23 Serbian companies in German supply chains. Additionally, an outreach campaign educated management at 11 companies and more than 400 workers in five regions on Due Diligence legislation, aiming to enhance workplace processes and worker–employer consultations. The analysis and capacity building of the forestry union contributed to the development of the Occupational Safety and Health Strategy (ILO). A total of 270 new jobs were created by supporting 632 SMEs with equipment procurement, standards implementation, mentoring and training in digitalisation, finance, greening and circular economy. In addition, grants for 45 women and youth start-ups were approved, with the aim of generating 50 new jobs in Serbia's underdeveloped regions (UNOPS).

PRIORITY 2

CONTRIBUTION TO SDGs



CONTRIBUTING UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES



CONTRIBUTION TO EU NEGOTIATIONS CLUSTERS



CONTRIBUTION TO EU NEGOTIATIONS CHAPTERS



BUDGET: PLANNED / DELIVERED



# WELL-BEING, SOCIAL EQUITY AND HUMAN CAPITAL

© Osmić Nikolina

## TAMARA MOJOVIC

COUNSELLOR AT SVEJEOK



In my work it is not just the outcome of the conversation but also the message it imparts: there is someone who provides space for empathy and understanding; there is a support system, with someone who acknowledges their struggles and comprehends their feelings. The value of the space, and the comfort we provide, through our counselling should not be underestimated, as it is often something they return to. In each conversation, I strive to convey the message that no situation is without hope and that no child is alone: there are people genuinely concerned for their well-being.

Ms Mojovic is providing mental health support through the UNICEF-supported SveJeOk platform.

## OUTCOME 2.1

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

## OUTPUT 2.1.1

## Health and social protection

The UN worked on strengthening the resilience of the national public health system to future shocks and crises through ongoing support for the **reconstruction of laboratories of the National Institute for Public Health (IPH) and of Kragujevac and Nis IPHs**, in accordance with Biosafety Level 2 Standards (posing a moderate hazard to personnel and the environment). In-depth analysis of the integrated information system and the e-Health agenda made a **substantial contribution to the drafting of the Law on Documentation and Records in the Health Sector** (WHO, UNDP). Moreover, support for the development of a digital database for data collection on perinatal mortality improved technical capacities in healthcare (UNICEF).

Serbia reported on the decreasing levels of immunisation coverage of all paediatric vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, posing the threat of possible outbreaks of measles and preventable diseases. To reduce the risk of outbreak, support was provided to MoH to **intensify outreach to children who had missed their measles vaccine in 2020 and 2021**. This effort reversed the trend and helped contain a measles outbreak in January 2023. A range of means of communication was implemented in all Public Health Centres, and a foundation set for establishing a digital application in 2024 for an **e-Health immunisation record**.

In partnership with the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography a new comprehensive **Strategy for Preserving and Enhancing Reproductive Health (2024–2030) was developed**, focusing on maternal and infant health, reproductive cancer prevention, family planning, infertility treatment and reproductive health rights for vulnerable groups. The cervical cancer prevention and control through human papillomavirus vaccination, as well as improved health literacy among marginalised populations, including Roma women and girls, and those with disabilities, was strengthened (UNFPA). To enhance institutional and professional capacities to achieve standard neonatal care and apply family-oriented developmental care principles, MoH was supported in developing and publishing a national guideline for basic and specialised neonatal care, and epidemiological guidelines for parental presence in eight neonatal intensive care units (UNICEF).

Early childhood parenting programmes were integrated in one-fifth of Serbia's municipalities, and inter-sectoral **Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services reached 60 percent of districts**. Innovative practices focusing on playful, gender-balanced and responsive parent–child interaction impacted positively more than 35,000 young children and their caregivers, with a notable increase in father participation (40%, up from 30% in 2022) (UNICEF).

3

## PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTES

receive new high-safety-standard laboratories



## INCREASES IN VACCINE COVERAGE

for HPV and measles

## &gt; 35,000 CHILDREN

and caregivers benefited from innovative early childhood services

19,800 people in Serbia succumb to tobacco-related diseases annually, representing over 20% of all deaths. With WHO support, the Ministry of Health is formulating a new Tobacco Control Law to curb consumption.

## OUTPUT 2.1.2

## Innovative social care services

The UN continued to **strengthen social services through civil-public partnerships in 23 LSGs, reaching more than 6,300 direct beneficiaries** (63% female). **A total of 28 social services were established or improved**, facilitating better access to education, health and social services for disadvantaged citizens. The health services were established in 11 villages and clinics closed during the pandemic were reopened. **Additionally, more than 600 vulnerable women, men and children, including persons with disabilities (PwD), improved access to social protection** through 20 social interventions implemented in partnership with CSOs (UNOPS).

Adequate housing to the most vulnerable communities, particularly those living in, or are at risk of, poverty was provided through social housing support. **By December, 307 families comprising 1,033 members** (482 male and 551 female) **had transitioned to planned housing solutions for vulnerable families** (UNOPS).

The UN bolstered the capabilities of professionals aiding refugees and migrants, particularly for child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) response. **The national child protection system to better address the needs of unaccompanied and separated children in mixed movements of refugees and migrants** was assisted in their identification and referral to three child protection and reception institutions, in Belgrade, Nis and Sid (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM). Legal assistance and counselling were provided to children who expressed their intent to apply for asylum.

**Child protection and GBV response services offered to refugee and migrant women and children, including from Ukraine,**

**reached 1,659 women, girls and boys for GBV services, and more than 5,000 children for child protection (UNICEF, IOM).** In addition, 1,382 women and children received culturally appropriate basic supplies, including dignity kits to mitigate the heightened risks they face, while 107 empowerment activities on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in mixed movements of refugees and migrants were conducted for refugee and asylum-seeking women in the Krnjaca Asylum Centre.

The **return and reintegration of 598 Serbian nationals**, mainly from Germany, Austria and Belgium, was facilitated. Returnee-focused models addressed institutional and administrative bottlenecks, yielding tangible outcomes. **Three local returnee reintegration strategies and action plans were adopted, three local multi-stakeholder platforms were established** in and coordinated by beneficiary municipalities, and more than **420 returnees were supported in job preparedness and income generation** through soft, digital and technical VET trainings (IOM).

Advancing youth empowerment was ensured through the development of a **budgeted Action Plan for the initial three years of implementation of the Youth Strategy (2023–2030)**, endorsed by the government in July. Additionally, methodology was developed for the Youth Well-being Index, with baseline assessments conducted in 17 municipalities in order to monitor progress in youth policies. Establishment of the first four Youth Centres in Subotica, Sombor, Nis and Mionica fortified the institutional support system for youth, ensuring effective implementation of the Strategy (UNFPA, UNICEF).



307 FAMILIES

at risk of poverty received new homes



▲ © UNOPS Serbia / Sanja Knežević



© UN Serbia / Saša Džambić

**60**  
misdemeanour judges empowered to implement law on violence prevention

**>100 LSGS**  
established databases for free legal aid offices

**OUTPUT 2.1.3**

**Gender-sensitive services for victims of violence and abuse**

UN agencies provided effective support to address GBV through monitoring of implementation of the laws and capacity-building activities. **Average monthly reports of domestic violence cases from the Prosecutor's Office increased, from 1,500 in 2018 to more than 2,000 in 2023, indicating growing trust in institutions and the measures implemented** (UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA). In support of women living in rural areas, **19 women CSOs were strengthened to inform beneficiaries about violence against women (VAW) and gender-based discrimination, reporting mechanisms and available specialised services.** Additional 12 CSOs strengthened their capacity to identify VAWG and available reporting mechanisms through a rural women's grant programme. **As a result, nearly 7,000 rural women benefited from the provision of free online and face-to-face medical, legal and psychological counselling, while more than 300 rural women were empowered to become economically independent and start their own agricultural businesses** (UN Women).

As a result of UN team advocacy, the **draft Action Plan 2024–2025, for implementation of the Strategy for prevention and combating of GBV against women and domestic violence,** was revised and now includes **three measures for improving the safety of women and girls in public space.** The development of a Vojvodina provincial gender-responsive Development Plan (2023–2030) was supported along with the general protocol on GBV proceedings. Capacities for implementing laws on violence prevention for 60 misdemeanour judges from the Ministry of Justice were enhanced, while databases for municipal free legal aid offices were established in 101 LSGs, with training of 50 local officials to better understand the needs of GBV survivors (UN Women).

The National Coalition to End Child Marriage (NCECM) was supported to take part in a high-level side event at the 78<sup>th</sup> session of UNGA, where the government signed a statement of commitment to end the practice of child marriage. This commitment resulted in amendments to the the Criminal Code, as per the NCECM's advocacy for legislative change (UNICEF).

**7,000 WOMEN**  
received free medical, legal and psychological counseling

**300 RURAL WOMEN**  
launched personal agribusinesses successfully

**OUTCOME 2.2**  
**SKILLS AND EDUCATION**

**OUTPUT 2.2.1**

**Formal education**

Access to and participation in quality and inclusive early and pre-university education was in the focus of UN agencies. As result, some 5,000 pre-school professionals increased capacities for implementation of the **new pre-school curricula**, reaching more than 95 percent of all pre-school professionals, while the **inclusive education teams from all 162 public pre-school** benefited from training focused on advancing the inclusive education practice. Additionally, 156 primary school psychologists, pedagogues and teachers participated in the online training 'On the Joint Learning Path', while pre-school and primary school principals and educational counsellors from all 174 LSGs across Serbia received training in managing the transition from pre-school to primary education. The Ministry of Education was assisted in **forming a working group to enhance and align the legal and policy framework for inclusive education,** alongside a technical advisory group dedicated to undertaking a feasibility study on inclusive education financing. As a result, 20 LSGs were actively engaged in establishing local inclusive education networks. More than 4,500 teachers enhanced inclusive pedagogy skills that will impact the quality of inclusive education in more than 200 schools across Serbia. The capacities of 160 Inter-sectoral Committees nationwide were enhanced for an efficient assessment of children's needs and matching them with appropriate learning support. In 30 elementary schools, 5,500 students with the highest learning needs received support through **learning clubs and EdTech Libraries**, with an additional 17,000 students from 30 schools and 10 municipalities accessing psycho-social support. To boost children's STEM education, 350 teachers in 46 schools across 15 municipalities enhanced capacities for interdisciplinary **STEM learning projects**, with 46 STEM boxes distributed (UNICEF). The Ministry of Education was assisted to improve education access for migrant and refugee children by providing school mentors and translating educational materials into languages spoken by the diverse migrant and refugee communities. This resulted in 25 primary schools, 13 secondary schools and 1 pre-school being **fully capacitated for educating migrant and refugee students** (IOM).



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**> 5,000 PRESCHOOL PROFESSIONALS**  
built capacity to implement new preschool curriculum

**162 PUBLIC PRE-SCHOOL**  
promoted inclusive education practices

**PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL**  
principals from all 174 LSGs across Serbia improved knowledge on managing the transition from pre-school to primary education

**> 4,500 TEACHERS**  
from 200 schools improved their skills in inclusive pedagogy

**5,500 STUDENTS**  
supported through learning clubs

**17,000 STUDENTS**  
received psycho-social support

**25 PRIMARY SCHOOLS 13 SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND 1 PRE-SCHOOL**  
prepared for educating migrant and refugee students



▲ © UNICEF Serbia / 2023 / Živojinović

**OUTPUT 2.2.2**

**Informal education and life skills**

Joint UN work with government included informal initiatives to boost youth employability and facilitate refugees' access to education and employment opportunities. **Youth employability has been improved** through the creation of a digital career guidance tool on the National Qualifications Agency website, benefiting 1,846 students in 78 schools. Additionally, the incentives to develop youth potential and competences in problem solving, creativity, leadership and communication directly involved **296 Roma and other minority adolescents and another 3,620 indirectly, while three Innovation Clubs for youth brought together 629 young people, 33 with disability** (UNICEF). In providing access to education and employment, partnership with IKEA Serbia was extended, along with the initiative #ForRefugees private sector network, which involves nine companies and business associations willing to support the integration and well-being of refugees. **In 2023, 26 refugees found, and 66 were referred for employment** (UNHCR). Support was provided to **180 schools and 340 teachers, reaching nearly 55,400 students in grades VI and VII** to prevent substance abuse and prepare early adolescents to resist risky behaviours and develop skills for overcoming stressful situations (UNODC).

**OUTPUT 2.2.3**

**Women and girls' empowerment**

The UN empowered women and girls from sensitive population groups to advocate for their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including family planning. In collaboration with CSOs, 150 women and girls from six Roma settlements across Belgrade improved health literacy. Sixty-six women with disabilities were empowered to advocate for their sexual and reproductive health and rights, while 32 health professionals improved the quality and accessibility of health services for these women in six municipalities across Serbia (UNFPA). In partnership with the Association Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia and the Faculty of Arts in Nis, a report on the mechanisms contributing to gender inequalities in the cultural and creative industries was developed, exposing precarious working conditions in a country where **women hold multiple jobs (20.4%) and receive lower pay than their male counterparts for equivalent work (25%)**. The creation of the **Network for Gender Equality in Arts and Culture** underscores a dedication to enhancing the status of women in the country's cultural sphere (UNESCO). More than 50 young women and girls were supported in exploring opportunities offered by ICT and in acquiring new digital skills in order to continue with their education and develop further their careers, on the occasion of the International Girls in ICT Day (UNDP).

**OUTCOME 2.3**

**MOBILITY AND DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE**

**OUTPUT 2.3.1**

**Evidence-based development and population policies**

Public servants in local governments have been empowered to develop and implement local migration policies to address the needs of refugees, IDPs, returnees, migrants without legal status and asylum seekers. As a result, **28 municipalities established Local Action Plans (LAPs)**, with nine adopted by Local Migration Councils (IOM). The Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography was supported in preparing an **ex ante analysis and the subsequent Strategy for Active and Healthy Aging and Action Plan (2024–2026)**, which was adopted in December 2023; while the government became a **member of the Commission of Population and Development (CPD)** in October. To mark the International Day of Older Persons, two annual events showcased older persons as creative, diverse and full of life, portraying the beauty found in the aging process (UNFPA).

**OUTPUT 2.3.2**

**Mobility of skills, knowledge and capacities**

Capacity building in computer skills and business development was provided to 85 young people, including Roma, returnees and minority groups, in Ivanjica and Prokuplje to enhance **their labour market integration** and to mitigate the negative effects of migration. A total of 36 Roma returnees were also trained in computer numerical control, and tailoring and sewing (IOM).



▲ © UNDP Serbia

**28 MUNICIPALITIES**

empowered to implement local migration policies

**85 YOUNG PEOPLE**

from minority groups improved their chances for employment through gaining skills in IT and business

**92 REFUGEES**

employed through #ForRefugees private sector network

**1846 STUDENTS FROM 78 SCHOOLS**

improved their chances for employment

**150 WOMEN AND GIRLS**

from Roma settlements in Belgrade improved their ability to identify, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions



The **Returning Point Service** piloted innovative research, problem identification and solution mapping of the psychological effects of repatriation, a first-of-its-kind. The capacities of the Service were enhanced to guide returnees through the repatriation process and reintegration into the country (UNDP). The Statistical Office was supported in validating and correcting international migration and population data using the 2022 census. The focus was on analysing migration flows from 2011 to 2018 to understand the demography, labour market participation, employment and unemployment, that will help to identify links between internal and external migration, and the impact of labour migration on family labour supply (UNFPA).

### OUTPUT 2.3.3

## Inter-generational dynamics, community cohesion and cultural connections

**Social cohesion and social protection programmes across ten local communities provided assistance to more than 2,200 beneficiaries.** Mutual interaction and understanding were promoted between local and migrant populations, enhancing intercultural exchange and fostering public discourse on xenophobia, discrimination and anti-migrant attitudes within the education system (IOM). Pupils and teachers from 13 secondary schools were sensitised to the needs of refugees and the potential they bring. For most, this was their first face-to-face encounter with displaced people, providing them with an opportunity to witness the knowledge, skills and talents that refugees bring to their host communities (UNHCR).

**The national framework supporting youth and adolescent volunteer activities was strengthened,** providing significant expertise to government and culminating in establishment of a dedicated working group for the development of a new law on volunteering (UNICEF).



▲ © IOM / François Lhoumeau

## UN COUNTRY TEAM RESPONSE FOLLOWING MASS SHOOTING CRISIS IN SERBIA<sup>1</sup>

In May 2023, Serbia suffered the tragedy of two mass shootings that resulted in the loss of 18 lives, including ten children, seven young adults of age 18 to 25 year and one school security guard. Invited by the government, UN agencies were involved straightaway in the emergency response, supporting affected families, the community, ministries, national institutions and partners, immediately mobilising resources and expertise.

The UN supported the development of an emergency intervention plan for the affected Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School, including comprehensive psychological first aid, and advocated for allocation of sufficient government funds to implement a one-year support programme for all affected schools. Educational material was developed and distributed to all schools across Serbia in the first days following the tragedy. Direct support was provided through establishing crisis support telephone lines with the Institute for Mental Health, additionally expanding the capacity of online counselling and SOS helplines. The government Working Group for Youth Mental Health and Safety Support was assisted to provide monitoring and create new forms of support for children, families and teachers.

The Ministry of Health was assisted in strengthening the primary healthcare system, including mental health services. Fifty psychologists and paediatricians were trained to address mental health issues in youth and develop digital platforms and guidelines. Also, 210 mental health and psycho-social support professionals in five Serbian cities were trained, enabling them to implement the Minimum Service Package for Youth model.

In partnership with government and with the support of the Ministry of the Interior, a highly successful public awareness campaign for the voluntary surrender of weapons was developed, using various media channels and outreach methods. As a result, a significant number of firearms—82,398 weapons, 4,243,139 pieces of ammunition and 26,485 explosive devices—were surrendered just one month following the double tragedy.

Government was further assisted to enhance coordination and improve the mental health system for adolescents and young people through facilitating a Memorandum of Understanding among six line ministries, led by Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, to bolster implementation of the National Mental Health Programme 2019–2026. Enhancing mental health policies, access to services and support for caregivers, benefiting children and youth nationwide, was the particular focus of this coordinated action.

The Ministry of Education was supported in enhancing crisis preparedness by revising protocols, creating handbooks, and training all 17 district school administrators in new procedures.

<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive UN response to mass shooting include interventions by UNICEF, OHCHR, UNDP–SEESAC, UNFPA, UNODC, UNOPS and WHO.



Emergency intervention plan for the affected "Vladislav Ribnikar" primary school was developed



Educational material developed & distributed to all schools across Serbia



Established crisis support helpline with Institute for Mental Health

**50**

psychologists and paediatricians trained to address mental health issues in youth

**210**

mental health and psycho-social support enabled to implement model Minimum Service Package for Youth



**82,398 WEAPONS**

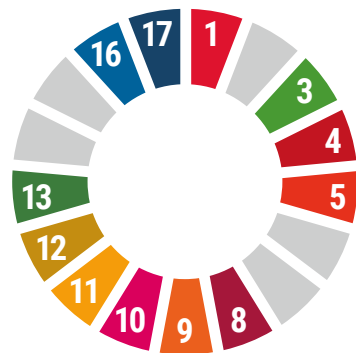
**4,243,139 PIECES OF AMMUNITION**

**26,485 EXPLOSIVE DEVICES**

were surrendered just one month following the double tragedy

### PRIORITY 3

#### CONTRIBUTION TO SDGs



#### CONTRIBUTING UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES



#### CONTRIBUTION TO EU NEGOTIATIONS CLUSTERS

1 2 3

#### CONTRIBUTION TO EU NEGOTIATIONS CHAPTERS

5 9 10 18 23 24

#### BUDGET: PLANNED / DELIVERED

\$ 24.2M \$ 19.2M

# RULE OF LAW, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY



**ESMA LJAJIC**

**PRESENTER OF THE BOSNIAK NATIONAL COUNCIL**



The enduring lesson I've taken from the regional initiative Youth 4 Inclusion, Equality and Trust is the importance of celebrating our differences and fostering understanding, as ignorance is the principal feeder of hate speech, and hate speech often results in dire consequences.

Ms Ljajic is a participant in the regional initiative Youth 4 Inclusion, Equality and Trust, implemented by UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, and UN Women.

### OUTCOME 3.1

## HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

#### OUTPUT 3.1.1

### Polymaking and implementation



A campaign honouring UDHR's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary led to the ratification of the **Optional Protocol** to the International Convent on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

#### 148 JUDGES

and social workers improved skills in children's rights in family law cases

#### 100 JUDGES

certified to handle family law cases



GlobE network launched to boost Western Balkans' anti-corruption efforts

#### > 1000 WOMEN

advocated for equal inheritance rights, combating stereotypes

#### > 3 MILLION PEOPLE

reached by national campaign on inheritance rights

The UN continued to support the government of Serbia in strengthening human rights and the gender equality framework through harmonisation with international commitments, and promoting meaningful participation of CSOs, academia and communities. Cooperation with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue (HR Ministry) resulted in **improved compliance with international human rights framework**. Development of a **Human Rights Strategy** has been initiated, **implementation monitoring of the Anti-Discrimination Strategy** has been improved, and the National Action Plan for GE 2022–2023 analysed to feed into the analyses for development of the **next plan**. In the commemorations for the **75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UDHR and implementation of the Human Rights 75 initiative**, HR Ministry was supported in implementation of a year-long campaign that concluded on 10 December in the celebration of Human Rights Day. The campaign resulted with the **ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, while the **ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child** was initiated (OHCHR, UN Women).

UN agencies strengthened capacities of the justice and social protection systems by increasing the knowledge and evidence base for **enhanced implementation of the National Strategy on the Rights of Victims and Witnesses of Crimes**. An advanced multi-sectoral programme on child rights in family law proceedings bolstered competencies of 148 professionals, bringing the total number of judges and social workers equipped with relevant skills to 600, while 100 new judges were certified to handle family law cases. In partnership with the Republican Institute for Social Protection, **an advanced guide for professionals dealing with diversionary measures** was created, while an **in-depth analysis of implementation of diversionary measures over 2017–2022 was finalised** (UNICEF).

In order to **strengthen international cooperation for the investigation of corruption**, Western Balkan jurisdictions **established a regional component of the GlobE network**. In cooperation with the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, **a campaign 'Serbia without Corruption'** was organised, in which more than 100 university students from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis and Kragujevac were trained. A **capacity-building programme to combat illicit trafficking in cultural goods** for police units and the customs judiciary was designed (UNODC, UNESCO).

**Nine LSGs were supported to develop new and implement existing local Action Plans (APs) on GE**, while **26 public sector gender focal points enhanced knowledge to lead effective implementation of the GE law**. Negative consequences of **stereotypes and patterns in the area of inheritance rights** were the focus of UN interventions, resulting in **strengthened partnerships** between 92 women from CSOs and government institutions to combat these stereotypes, 1,170 women improving their knowledge of inheritance rights, receiving legal advice and being made aware of the negative consequences of stereotypes and patterns,

while the national campaign on inheritance rights reached more than three million people. Five women CSOs influenced local development, resulting in 977 women increasing their knowledge and skills in advocacy techniques, monitoring of GE policies, data collection and evidence-based local policies, while a total of 600 women and girls were informed about patients' rights. Some 39 civil servants involved in programming of EU -funded cross-border cooperation programmes increased their knowledge and skills to analyse, assess and include GE in their work (UN Women).

**Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and people facing statelessness remained high, both on the UN agenda and in the migration policy coordinated with the EU**. Support was provided for the further development of policy and strategic frameworks to ensure the protection of the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons through a **draft strategy**, the expansion of the learning offer of the Migration Training Centre in Plandiste and the strengthening of the analytical function of migration management authorities. The fight against trafficking in human beings included technical assistance for enhanced implementation of the Schengen Action Plan and support to border police in the fight against border crime (IOM, UNDP). Efforts to eradicate and prevent statelessness are being intensified through the **global #IBelong campaign to end statelessness by the end of 2024**. Mapping of persons at risk was conducted in 45 municipalities and cities (> 210 informal settlements), with 785 persons at risk identified. Some 261

people were provided with legal aid and assistance with civil status registration or documentation, and 124 people registered their birth, or obtained or confirmed their nationality (UNHCR).

#### OUTPUT 3.1.2

### Oversight and independent bodies

Following the **4<sup>th</sup> UPR review in May 2023, Serbia received 256 recommendations**, the majority of which were supported by the government. The capacity of the National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRF) to monitor, implement, follow up and report on UN human rights mechanisms was strengthened through nationalisation of the OHCHR National recommendations tracking database. The cooperation with the HRC Special Procedure on Freedom of Opinion and Expression was facilitated, resulting in preliminary observations highlighting the need for legal reforms to be accompanied by effective implementation of laws and political will to combat dangerous rhetoric against minorities and journalists (OHCHR). Members of the **Network of Organisations for Children (MODS)** were supported to participate in public and **bilateral consultations, including on the status of Serbia's EU accession process**. In partnership with the **Child Rights Centre, baseline measurement of indicators to monitor implementation of the CRC recommendations was developed** (UNICEF).

#### 785 INDIVIDUALS

at risk of statelessness identified through the #IBelong campaign in

#### >210

informal settlements



#### 124

obtained or confirmed nationality and birth certificates



### 200 POLICE OFFICERS

specialised in secure weapon, ammunition transportation and storage



### > 700 ASYLUM SEEKERS

received legal counseling and

### > 200 LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Serbia made four pledges at the Global Refugee Forum, including on issuance of ID cards and travel documents. Pathways to citizenship for beneficiaries of international protection were established and asylum seekers can now access the labour market

#### OUTPUT 3.1.3

### Home affairs

With UN technical assistance, a new public policy document on the fight against trafficking in human beings—Programme 2024–2029 and AP 2024–2026—was prepared for public consultation in cooperation with the Anti-Trafficking Coordination Office, while the new Law on Weapons and Ammunition, harmonised with the EU *acquis* and international practice, was drafted in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Implementation of the adopted Schengen Action Plan (July 2023) was supported through procurement of equipment for the Border Police Directorate. Implementation of the adopted Amendments to the Law on Foreigners and the Law on Employment of Foreigners was enhanced (IOM, UNDP–SEESAC). Significant progress was made in digitalisation of the readmission process through establishment of Electronic Readmission Case Management System, to facilitate communication between EU and Serbia (IOM). In cooperation with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, regular information sessions on Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme were organised resulting in the safe return of 89 migrants to their countries of origin. The efficiency of criminal proceedings in trafficking was improved, with a focus on identifying perpetrators and assisting victims (IOM). The Customs Administration and Designated Postal Operator established a partnership to facilitate exchange of information on concealed illegal firearms, ammunition and prohibited goods, while valuable insights on risk analysis and inspection of parcels were gained through a learning study tour to Charles de Gaulle Airport (UNODC).

To enhance security and help prevent illicit trafficking, a comprehensive upgrade of MoI’s SALW storage site was completed, while 200 police officers improved their knowledge of best practices, logistics and security measures for the storage, transport and safekeeping of weapons and ammunition. Public awareness of the misuse and illegal possession of firearms and the misuse of pyrotechnics was raised through campaigns organised by MoI, while the knowledge base of journalists and police officers on the ethical reporting on GBV with firearms was supported. Regional cooperation among Western Balkan and other SEE countries on crime scene investigation, cyber patrols and firearms, drugs and migrant smuggling and human trafficking, the impact of the war in Ukraine and the migrant crisis on firearms trafficking was facilitated (UNDP–SEESAC). Refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and stateless persons had access to an improved and systematically implemented legal framework and were able to exercise their rights in accordance with international standards (UNHCR).

Following UN team advocacy, MoI adopted a law allowing for the issuance of travel documents to refugees, and Serbia made four pledges at the Global Refugee Forum, including on issuance of ID cards and travel documents.

Support for review of the Law on Foreigners resulted in establishment of a pathway to citizenship for beneficiaries of international protection, while amendments to the Law on Employment of Foreigners resulted in allowing asylum seekers to access the labour market six months after filing an asylum application. Free legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees to ensure access to the territory and asylum, including at international airports, was provided to 227 persons, and 749 received legal counselling (UNHCR).

### OUTCOME 3.2

## EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

#### OUTPUT 3.2.1

### SDGs and governance systems

The UNCT launched a novel joint funding mechanism aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens in 99 cities and municipalities in Serbia over a four-year period. The 34 LSGs involved received technical assistance, capacity building and grants for projects contributing to the improvement of social protection at the local level, in particular the social inclusion of the most vulnerable social groups (UNOPS, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNEP).

Efforts to enhance governance systems for planning, budgeting and monitoring of national and local development resulted in 90 percent of budget users at the national and provincial levels adopting gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) and improved GE through the financing of 117 budget programmes, 283 activities and projects, 507 gender-sensitive targets and 900 indicators, while five more LSGs improved their procedures and policies on GRB. A total of 488 journalists and civil servants in national, provincial and local institutions increased their knowledge of GRB and the advancement of GE. Meanwhile, 30 representatives of ministries, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and CSOs enhanced capacities for implementation of synchronised application of GRB and climate financing resulting in future energy efficiency interventions to empower multiple discriminated groups of women (UN Women, UNOPS).



### 90% BUDGET USERS

adopted gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) nationally, provincially

### > 400 JOURNALISTS

and civil servants trained in GRB and GE advancement

### 30 REPRESENTATIVES

of ministries, IFIs and CSOs increased knowledge on GRB and climate financing



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**150 TRAINING VIDEOS**

on the National Academy of Public Administration learning app

**350 CERTIFIED TRAINERS**

in Creative Thinking Masterclass



**> 2000 CHILDREN AND PENSIONERS**

trained for safe Internet use

**> 400 MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES**

trained in e-Government

The active participation of children, young people and their families in the decision-making process in 73 municipalities was strengthened through the inclusion of children’s priorities in local plans and budgets. To enhance decision-making, evidence on the global economic crisis’s impact on families with children was generated. Cash-based assistance reached 96 vulnerable families in South-West Serbia, with a focus on single-parent households. Additionally, results from poverty projections for older persons and the second National Transfer Accounts (NTA) analysis in Serbia were consolidated and shared with decision makers to support evidence-based planning (UNICEF, UNFPA). Nis will be the first city in Serbia to develop a **Voluntary Local Review (VLR)** with UN support, while five underdeveloped municipalities in Serbia were supported in the preparation and adoption of their **local development plans**. A **pilot coordination mechanism for micro-regional development** involving municipalities and institutions with shared jurisdiction over the Golija Nature Park was established (UN Habitat, UNDP).

Advancing public financial management (PFM) reforms critical to meeting EU standards continued with the establishment of the EU PFM Facility, a technical hub for the Ministry of Finance, Tax Administration and Public Procurement Office to advance public procurement, taxation, customs union and financial control reforms.

By **introducing modern techniques that combine e-Learning, teaching and work experience**, National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) services were made more accessible through the M-learning app, generating more than 150 training videos, an advanced learning programme for senior civil servants and a masterclass on creative thinking for NAPA-accredited trainers (UNDP). Digital transformation was supported by the UN, with the focus on development of user-centric services and training provided to all citizens to bridge the digital divide. The skills of children and pensioners in digital literacy, smart and safe use of the Internet, data protection and robotics have been improved in eight cities and municipalities across the country, and municipal staff have gained additional skills in e-Government services. Mapping of existing, and possibilities for procuring new equipment in public care institutions was carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Policy (UNDP, UNFPA, ITU).

**OUTPUT 3.2.2**

**Civic engagement**

The UN team continued to work with local governments and CSOs to **improve partnerships, efficiency and transparency**, promoting the Linked Open Data methodology for **transparent CSO funding**, and improved service delivery in line with development strategies in seven municipalities, with 29 projects awarded (UNDP). **Parliamentary development** led to discussions on agricultural subsidies, the budget and fiscal discipline, and environmental issues. Locally, support for digitalisation continued with e-Parliament established in eight local assemblies, enabling e-Session management and increased transparency. Finally, a **Citizen Satisfaction Survey** was conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government (UNDP, UNOPS).

**Youth human rights, GE and empowerment at the local level were promoted through peer support**. Experienced members of the UN Youth Advisory Group (YAG) supported their peers in six municipalities to develop and implement initiatives that demonstrate the importance of meaningful youth engagement and the promotion of human rights. Eighty-one young participants improving their knowledge and skills in media literacy, social entrepreneurship and the green agenda, and in formulating LAPs for engagement in their communities (UNFPA, UN Women). Additionally, more than 100 young people increased awareness on the right to education via Youth Talks (OHCHR).

UNCT and its partners had a **significant impact on LGBTI rights advocacy** and contributed to the holding of Belgrade Pride Week 2023, including the Human Rights Conference on the legal protection needs of the trans, intersex and gender variant communities. HR Ministry was supported in **developing manuals on human rights standards**, starting with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OHCHR).

**> 80 SERBIAN YOUTHS**

gained media, entrepreneurship, green agenda skills

**> 100 YOUNG PEOPLE**

increased their awareness of the importance of education



In 2023, the UN team prioritised meaningful discussions on legal protections for transgender, intersex, and gender variant communities, aligning with Pride’s values of acceptance, inclusion, and diversity.



▲ © Vanja Gagovic

## 4.8 MILLION PEOPLE

reached through national immunisation campaign

## > 100

### LABORATORY TECHNICIANS

trained in biosafety, biosecurity, and waste management



UN Secretary-General acknowledged efforts in the Western Balkans to prevent and control illicit possession, misuse, and trafficking of firearms, ammunition, and explosives

## 500 YOUTH

enhanced intercommunity trust, understanding, and diversity respect

### OUTPUTS 3.2.3

#### Emergency preparedness and response

A **national campaign to promote vaccination**, reaching 4.8 million people (90% of the target population of >60-year-olds) was conducted. More than 100 laboratory technicians in 24 national public health institutes and reference laboratories were provided with capacity development focusing on biosafety, biosecurity and waste management, while 16 microbiologists are now qualified to provide mentorship to laboratories to improve the Laboratory Quality Management System (WHO).

DRR actors' capacities and capabilities were strengthened to engage vulnerable and at-risk groups in the prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery from crises and disasters, leaving no one behind. Support was provided to the ministries of defence and armed forces in the Western Balkans to identify their role in **gender-sensitive disaster preparedness and response** (UNDP-SEESAC). The UN provided humanitarian cash transfers (HCT) to **address protection risks and ensure dignified stay for migrants and refugees from Ukraine**, while dignity, choice and flexibility for asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant families were promoted by facilitating HCT to meet their needs and link them to additional support services (UNHCR, UNICEF).

### OUTPUTS 3.2.4

#### Regional and trans-border cooperation

The effective implementation of the Roadmap for a Sustainable Solution to the Illicit Possession, Misuse and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Ammunition in the Western Balkans has contributed to a safer region through sustainable mechanisms, fully harmonised with EU and other international standards, to identify, prevent, prosecute and control the illicit possession, misuse and trafficking of firearms, ammunition and explosives. This achievement was acknowledged by the UN Secretary General in his report to the Security Council in November (UNDP-SEESAC).

The UN team support to regional and cross-border cooperation, confidence building and security have resulted in: i) **Awareness raised of the nature of the serious crime of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants** and assistance provided for Serbia to address gaps in implementation of legislative and institutional frameworks, with a particular focus on regional and cross-border cooperation (UNODC); ii) **Roles of young people strengthened in promoting better mutual understanding, constructive narratives, respect for diversity and trust** by empowering 500 young people in addressing negative narratives, hate speech and harmful content, while building capacities in the media, advocacy and social entrepreneurship sectors (UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, UN Women); and iii) **Sustainable investment improved along the Belt and Road initiative by building capacity and establishing a network of Sustainable Investment Promotion facilities**, with Serbia as an early pilot (UNDP).



## 2.4 SUPPORT TO PARTNERSHIPS AND FINANCING AGENDA 2030

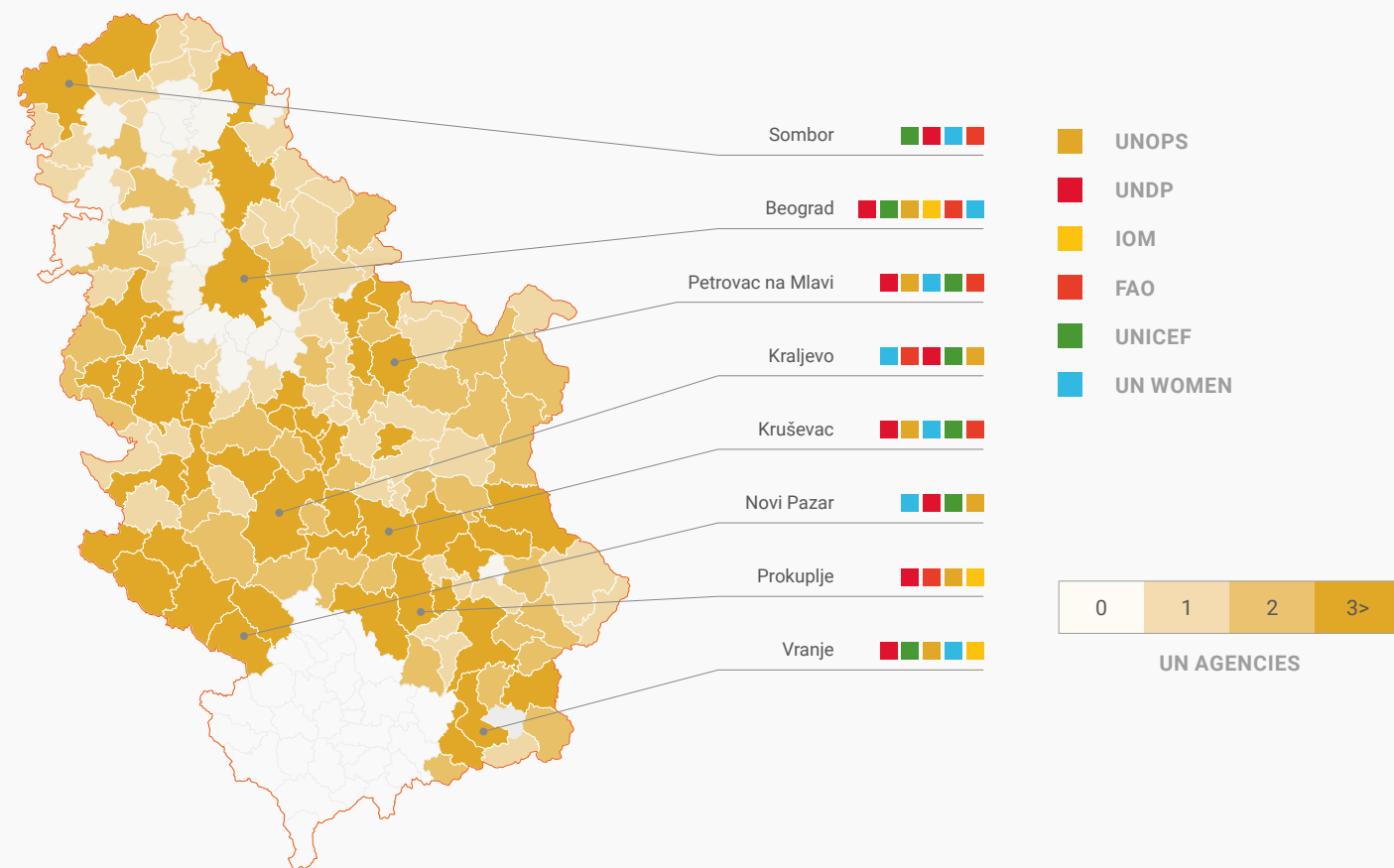
**\$22.8 MILLION**

committed by the Government of Serbia for the UN Cooperation Framework priorities in 2023

In 2023, the UN team both consolidated and diversified its partnerships base and leveraged its resources to accelerate achievement of the SDGs through implementing the priorities of the UNCT Partnership and Resource Mobilisation Strategy. Engagement with the government, the EU member states, international organisations, international financial institutions and the private sector was crucial in advancing financing for sustainable development.

### Government of Serbia

The government remains the UN’s main counterpart in implementation of the priorities of the Cooperation Framework. Coordination was anchored in the Joint Steering Committee, which met twice during the year, co-chaired by the RC, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of EU Integration. UN agencies worked with all levels of government—central, provincial and local, covering 130 of the 174 LSGs across the country—and with all branches of power, including independent oversight institutions.



The UN team engagement was crucial in promoting **inter-ministerial cooperation over the environment and climate change** (COP28, Carpathian Convention COP7) and a coordinated response from six line ministries to advance the system of **mental health support for children and youth**. The focus of the **digitisation agenda approach shifted from institution-centred to people-centred**, with the aim of providing solutions for the 30 percent of the population that is underserved by, or unable to access or use, e-Government services.

With UN technical support, the government improved delivery of SDG-aligned financial resources for: i) Upgrading the tax and customs administration systems through the established Public Finance Management Facility; ii) Embedding the SDG vision into public building reconstruction investments through integration of energy efficiency principles; and iii) Integrating further GRB at national, provincial and local levels, and introducing child-friendly budgeting at the local level.

The **Serbia government is the major donor to the UN system in the country**: in 2023, it provided USD 22.8 million in co-financing (28% of the total) in support of the Cooperation Framework strategic priorities.

### Partnerships with IFIs and the private sector

The UN leveraged the work on larger financing instruments, including with the IFIs of Team Europe and private

sector investment, towards the green and just economy transformation.

As a result, the **Green Agenda in Serbia, a UNDP-led programme with UNEP participation** (with a total of USD 17.8 million from EU, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland), is working closely with the European Investment Bank (EIB) to scale up investments and identify bankable projects, analyse the policy, legal and institutional framework and identify opportunities for establishing a sustainable financing mechanism for future green projects. The programme is also generating USD 17.2 million from the private sector, with USD 3.1 million in grants to support innovative projects that enable and accelerate the green transition in Serbia, in line with the ambitious goals of the Green Agenda and the commitments stemming from the Sofia Declaration to the targets of 2050.

The **PRO Programme – Local Governance for People and Nature – a joint USD 9.4-million-initiative of UNOPS, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNEP** (donor: Switzerland) is associated with USD 160 million in investments from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the French Development Agency (AFD) to upgrade Serbia’s waste management system, with the closure of 15 municipal dumpsites and the development of six regional waste management centres across 42 municipalities.

The partnership with the private sector focused on two main objectives: accelerating sustainability principles through cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Global Compact, and implementing project-based initiatives to address diverse development challenges.



▲ © UNDP Serbia

▼ Partnerships with the private sector progressed with the:



In May, the **UN and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry signed a Declaration of Intent** to promote responsible business practices, advocate for sustainable policies, enhance capacity for SDG integration and facilitate responsible investment. Through alignment with the **Global Compact Strategy, Serbia's network was strengthened**, becoming an independent entity in June and comprising more than 50 companies committed to sustainability and responsible practices, and prioritising human rights, labour standards, environmental sustainability and anti-corruption.

Project-based **collaboration among private sector companies and UN agencies** continued in the effort to tackle various challenges. Initiatives included finding innovative solutions for energy efficiency and pollution reduction, empowering women economically, promoting the inclusion of PwD in the labour market, and creating opportunities for refugee employment and integration.

### Partnership with EU Delegation to Serbia

In line with the **joint guidance to strengthen EU-UN cooperation for SDG realisation** and complement roles for shared priorities, including the 2030 Agenda and EU accession goals for Serbia, a new platform of cooperation between the UNCT and the EU Delegation was established. This platform fosters regular exchanges on mutual programmatic areas of interest through strategic dialogues held on country needs, common priorities and potential joint actions. Two strategic policy dialogues were held, focusing on human capital and social inclusion, and refugees and mixed migrations. The dialogues resulted in concrete action points to enhance joint policy engagement with national and local governments, facilitate mutual consultations in planning and programming frameworks (e.g., EU Growth Plan), identify potential EU-UN coordinated initiatives, and conduct joint advocacy to enhance visibility and coherence.

### CSO, academia and media



Partnerships with CSOs have been instrumental in facilitating the participation of rights-holders in policymaking, improving services for vulnerable groups such as women experiencing violence, older people, refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as addressing biodiversity conservation and promoting sustainable ecosystems

CSOs are core partners for the UN in its efforts to support the most vulnerable: one-fifth of all programme support was delivered in collaboration with such organisations. In 2023, the focus remained on working with women NGOs through open-door and high-level engagement, and with human rights NGOs, PwD organisations, youth platforms, Roma organisations and environmental NGOs. This cooperation resulted in: i) Increased participation in policymaking of rights-holders groups in the areas of human rights and GE, and advanced interaction between CSOs and UN human rights mechanisms; ii) Strengthened digital accessibility and digital innovation ecosystem for older people; iii) Enhanced services for women experiencing violence and discrimination; iv) Awareness raising on inheritance rights, with a specific focus on rural women; and v) Legal support and integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

**Collaboration with academia** led to the strengthening of the regional academic network, such as with the faculties of political sciences of the universities of Belgrade, Sarajevo and Podgorica to promote media and information literacy and cultural diversity, with a particular focus on strengthening the resilience of youth to potentially harmful online content. **With media** the efforts focused on combating violence and discrimination through ethical reporting and improving the capacities of media outlets to counter misinformation and disinformation.

## 2.5 RESULTS OF THE UN WORKING MORE AND BETTER TOGETHER: UN COHERENCE, EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

### A. Planning and implementing together

In the third year of implementation of the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, UN agencies advanced and further exploited the benefits of joint programming to achieve coherent results, streamline interventions, enhance accountability and strengthen joint advocacy and communication.

The Results Groups served as a key mechanism for identifying synergies and fostering inter-agency collaboration. The portfolio of ongoing joint programmes increased through improved access to global pooled funds (Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund, SDG Fund, UN Disability Fund, UN Peacebuilding Fund UN, Road Safety Fund) and member state donors committed to support coherent UN system action through interventions in health, socio-economic development and reduction of inequalities (EU, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland), with allocated funding of USD 28.2 million. A further three joint programmes were approved in 2023, with implementation to start in 2024, funded by the SDG Fund with a focus on digitisation and SDGs localisation, and by Sweden to promote GE, with committed funding of USD 5.5 million.

A series of thematic updates have been developed with the aim of informing UN programming, sharing comprehensive data and complex information with the wider development community, and jointly advocating with national and local partners in the areas of **asylum and migrations** and **corruption**. As a result of UNCT's extensive analytical work throughout the year, the **Common Country Analysis 2023 update** was developed, an evidence-based analysis of the context for sustainable development in Serbia.

The UN Team's commitment to gender mainstreaming was further strengthened through adoption of the Gender Equality Screening Tool, which ensures that all of the organisation's individual and joint programmes integrate gender considerations in a systematic manner. UNCT also ensured the systematic use of gender and human rights markers in joint workplans. The Team recorded steady progress in its annual System-wide Progress Assessment on Gender Equality, with 100 percent achievement of indicators, while notable progress was made in the System-wide Progress Assessment on Disability Inclusion.

Implementing the Youth 2030 Strategy is a strategic focus for the UN team, with USD 7.5 million invested in youth programming in 2023. UNCT engaged both directly and indirectly with youth from across the country, harnessing the power of four youth groups that support the UN's strategic engagement: UNCT Youth Advisory Group, UNICEF Youth Advisory Board, PBF Youth Ambassadors and UNCT Peer Educators.

▼ Gender Scorecards 2022

100%

(15 of 15 indicators meet or exceed requirements)

▼ Gender Scorecards 2023

100%

(15 of 15 indicators meet or exceed requirements)

▼ Disability Scorecards 2023

86%

(12 of 14 indicators meet or exceed requirements)

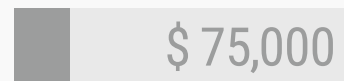
▼ Disability Scorecards 2022

93%

(13 of 14 indicators meet or exceed requirements)



▼ Estimated cost avoidance by UNCT



▼ Realised cost avoidance by UNCT



In 2023, UN Serbia's social media reached over 1 million people, an increase of 10% from 2022

**15% MORE FOLLOWERS**

on all UN Serbia social media channels



Instagram followers grew by 23%, a 4% increase compared to last year

**B. Operating together**

The Operations Management Team (OMT) worked together to improve joint operations in procurement, recruitment, finance, ICT and administrative services. This teamwork resulted in an estimated cost avoidance of USD 460,000 enabling efficiency gains and quality improvements in UNCT's shared services. The upgraded heating plant at UN House continued to reduce CO2 emissions by 30% per year. Through the Business Operating Strategy and common services, OMT continued its commitment to using digital platforms and dashboards, while exploring the potential of AI tools for further efficiency gains. In addition, the team undertook several efficiency projects within UN House, such as a paperless initiative that resulted in a 90% reduction in paper consumption, demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and operational excellence.

**C. Communicating Together**

The Joint Communications strategy 2021–2025 continued with various communication and advocacy activities, aiming to improve visibility of the Cooperation Framework and Agenda 2030. The efforts were carried out under the RC and the UN Communications Group, enhancing collaborative initiatives across UN agencies.

The UN team actively took part in various advocacy activities, delivering speeches, appearing on TV, writing op-eds, and leading working groups at different forums such as Parliament, corporate and social events, and UN-run events and media outlets.

Discourses mainly focused on addressing climate change, combating inequality and hate speech, eradicating VAW, and upholding human rights. Important multi-agency events from 2023 are included.

- The 16 Days of Activism campaign successfully organised with over ten events, including a youth activity and an influencer-led video campaign which reached 265,000 people and surpassed 500,000 video plays on Instagram.
- Preparatory event for COP28 on climate change involved government, international partners, civil sector and other pivotal stakeholders.
- UN Day observed the unveiling of a biodiversity mural on UN House and launched a campaign for world peace, diversity, solidarity and tackling the triple planetary crisis, reaching an audience of some 40,000.
- A SDG Summit campaign leveraged media partnerships and had a social media reach of more than 40,000.
- A media conference organised on the International Day for Countering Hate Speech involved officials including the Human Rights Minister, Commissioner for Protection of Equality, heads of CoE and the OSCE mission to Serbia, and media representatives.
- World Bicycle Day and Environment Day were commemorated through a ten-day campaign highlighting the urgency of addressing the triple planetary crisis, supporting sustainable urban transport and ecosystem restoration, and encouraging climate action and individual responsibility. This campaign reached about 150,000 people.
- The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights included 60+ events and various collaborations.
- International Women's Day online campaign reached approximately 40,000 people.

▼ © UN SERBIA / Jadranka Ilić



Urban cycling grows in Serbia as cities unite for International Bicycle Day 2023

**2.6 EVALUATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Based on the recommendations of the 2019 evaluation of the UN Development Partnership Framework 2016–2020, the UNCT strengthened the management architecture, joint work and advocacy, and partnership with implementing partners, including a systematic monitoring and evaluation system. Key achievements in 2023 include the introduction of innovative forms of cooperation among UN agencies through various joint programming modalities, resulting in a significant increase in the number of successfully funded joint programmes, as well as joint advocacy by the UN team with the EU delegation on social protection and mixed migration, with IFIs on just economic transition, and with the private sector on promoting human rights principles in the business environment (see the Partnerships section for details).

## 2.7 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW AND RESOURCES MOBILISATION\*

In 2023, the UNCT in Serbia allocated USD 95.56 million across three strategic priorities of the UN Cooperation Framework. The delivery rate by the year end was at 84.5 percent (USD 80.76 million utilised). Strategic Priority 1 accounted for 46.5 percent, Priority 2, 29.7 percent, and Priority 3, 23.7 percent, of the total amount delivered (Chart 1). Eighteen UN agencies utilised the resources in 2023 (Chart 5).

Chart 1: UNCT total budget (core and non-core) vs. delivery (core and non-core), 2023

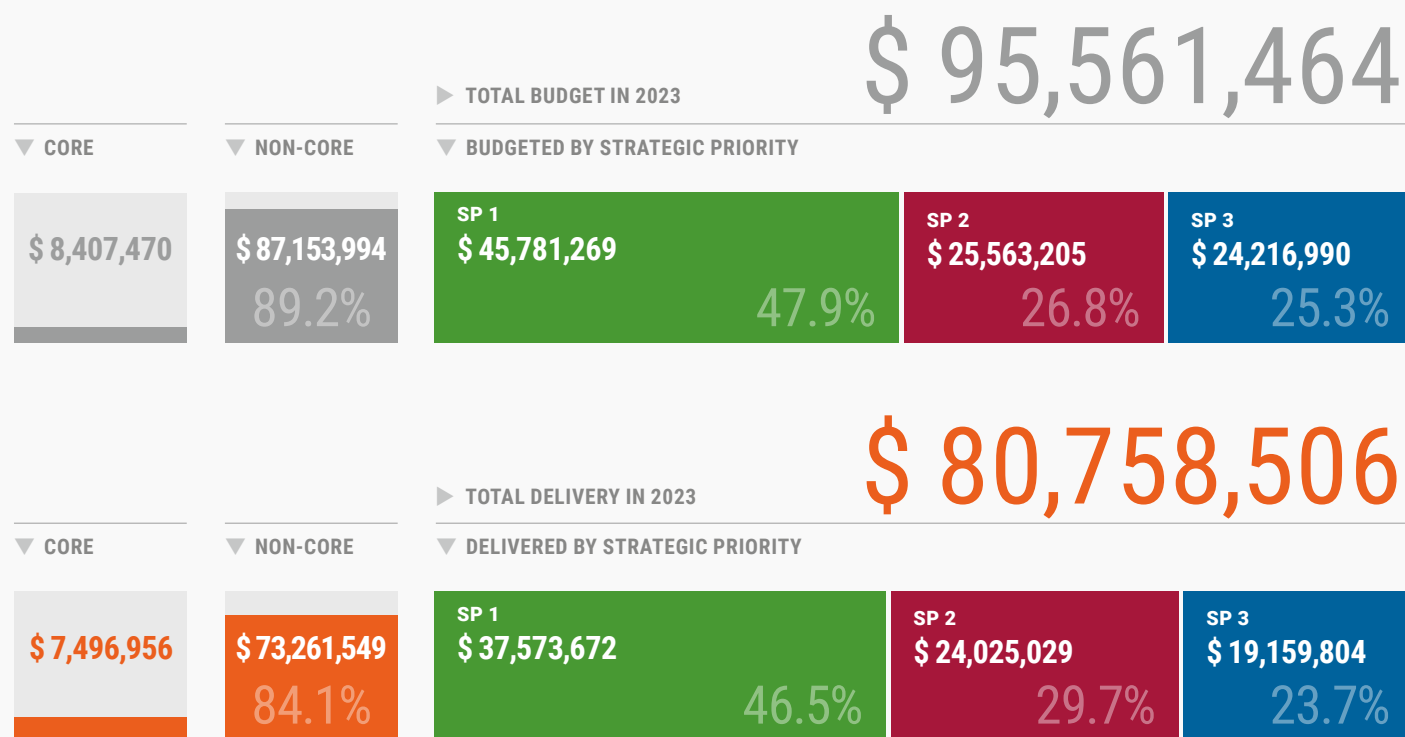
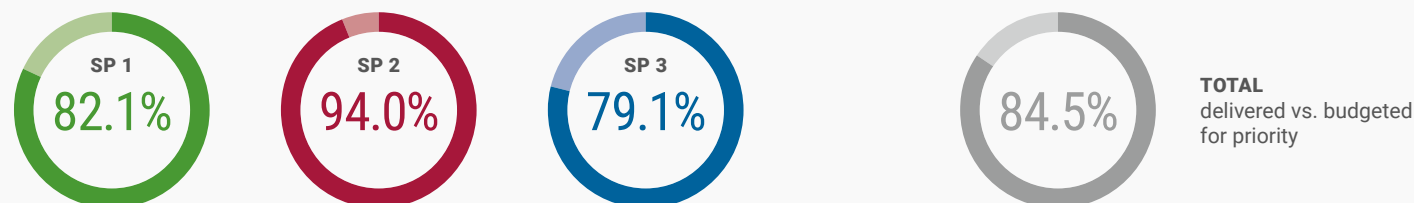


Chart 2: Budget delivery for strategic priority in percentage



Of the diverse sources of financing in 2023, 49.1 percent came from locally raised, earmarked donor contributions. The EU was the largest single donor accounting for 37.7 percent, followed by the Government of Serbia with 28.2 percent. UN core

resources accounted for 9.3 percent, and pool and thematic (vertical) funds, 9.7 percent, while private sector funding and IFIs accounted for 2.4 percent and 1.3 percent, respectively.

Chart 3: Delivery by funding source

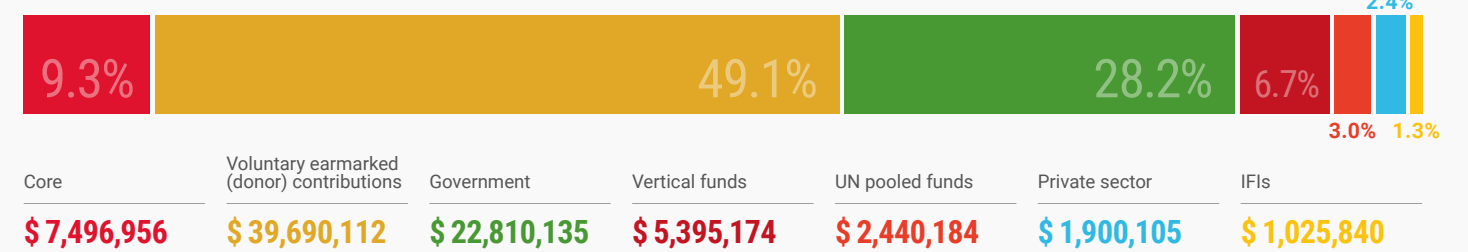


Chart 4: Delivery by donor (%)

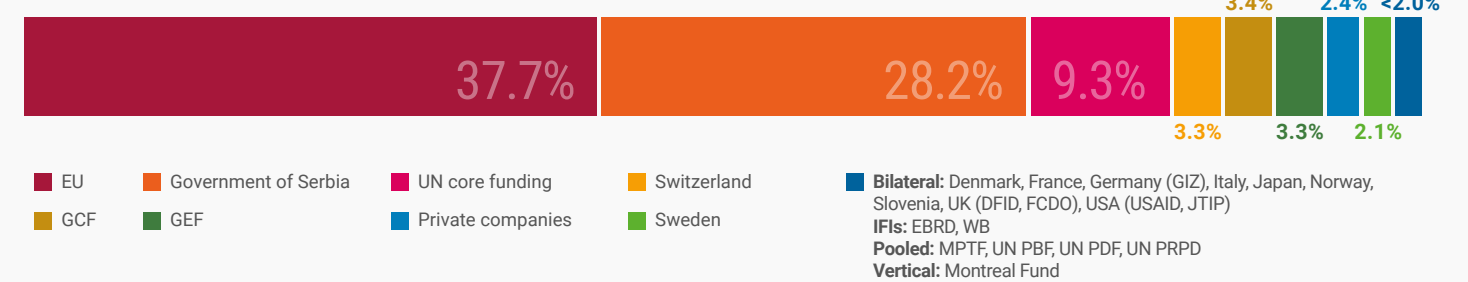
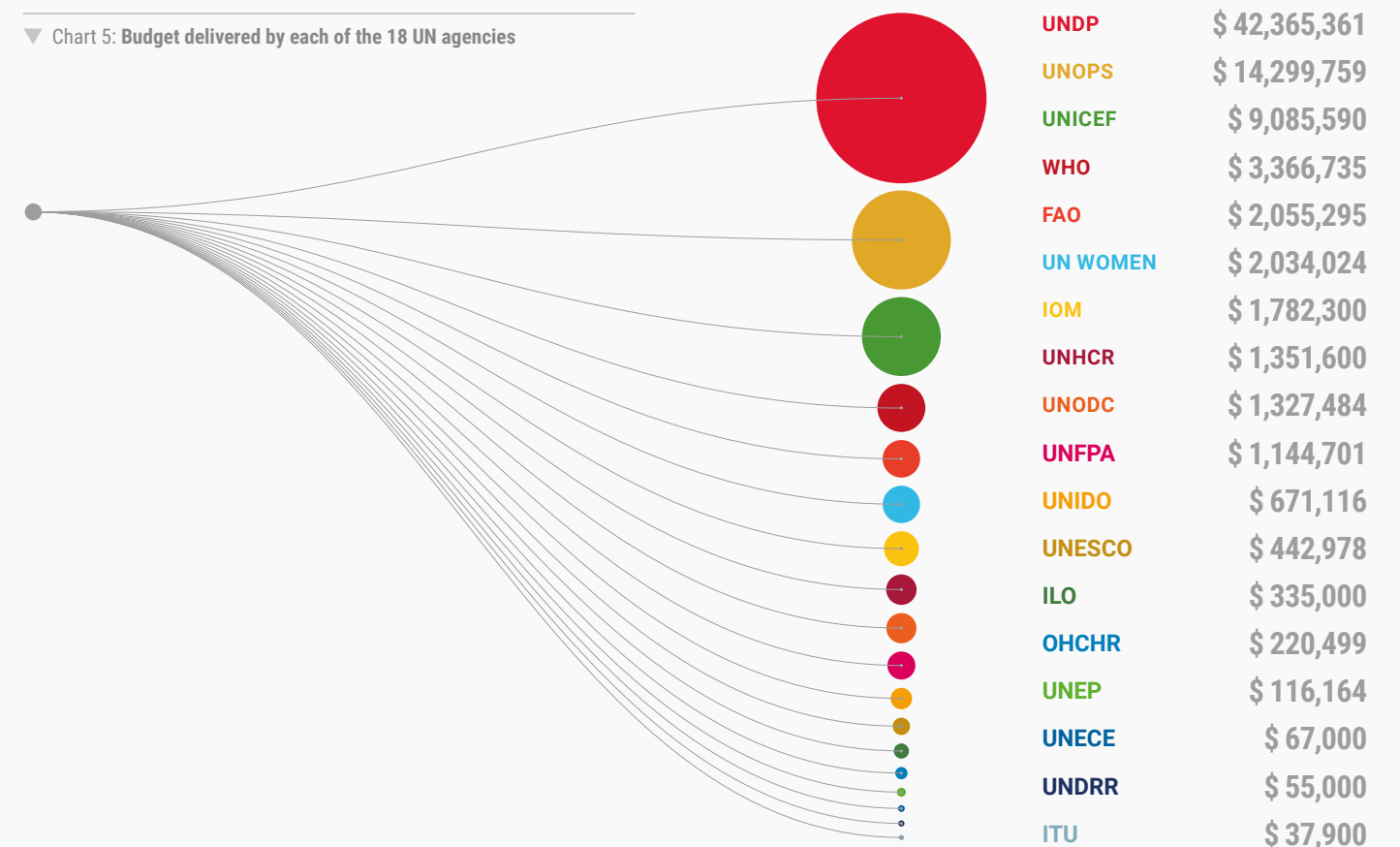


Chart 5: Budget delivered by each of the 18 UN agencies



The total funding required to implement the Serbia-UN Cooperation Framework over the five-year period (2021-2025) is estimated at USD 365 million. Of this amount, the UN system

mobilised USD 312 million (85.4 percent) by the end of 2023, confirming that funding targets are on track to achieve all planned results and outputs for the duration of the strategy.

\* Financial data is provisional and may vary upon financial certification.

## CHAPTER 3

# INTO THE FUTURE



▲ © MaxNova / Stefan Vidojević

The world is off track to achieve the SDGs by 2030, as ambition, urgency and resources have been lacking amidst a series of setbacks. In the case of Serbia the country is on course to achieve about 25 percent of the SDGs by the deadline, above the global average of 18 percent. On the positive side, there is greater awareness that the principles outlined in Agenda 2030 are transformative and relevant for each and every country.

Serbia's renewed commitment to the SDGs, as expressed at the 2023 UN General Assembly, is articulated around six key transitions that can ground its future national development plan in sustainability: i) Just energy transition; ii) Transformation of the education system; iii) Social protection and jobs; iv) Sustainable food systems; v) Digital transformation; and vi) The fight against the triple planetary crisis. This will be the blueprint for the work of the UN in the coming years, along with our ambitions to strengthen human capital, expand the human rights and gender agenda and provide safer solutions for refugees and migrants.

We have experienced four years of successive crises: the COVID-19 pandemic, disruption in global supply chains, shifting energy economics, high inflation and climate-related emergencies. One of the major challenges this year will be to orientate our focus towards necessary, meaningful long-term structural transformations in both society and the economy, away from short-termism and the temptation to manage our future through reactive and conservative decision making.

Climate change and ecological crises remain the biggest long-term threats. The world is heating up faster than anticipated, generating natural disasters of greater magnitude and instability. The green transformation should not be pitched against industrial or infrastructure development, but as a means to

support them and their sustainability. Many technological, social and business solutions are available, and achieving significant reductions in GHG emissions by 2030 is within Serbia's capabilities. It just requires genuine political commitment, concerted action and integrated policymaking across key economic sectors, flexible incentives and extensive engagement with citizens and stakeholders.

Promoting solidarity and addressing inequalities will remain at the core of UN actions in 2024, in the spirit of LNOB. Since 2021, the UN in Serbia has promoted the 'just transition' approach, which acknowledges the need for economic progress while simultaneously demanding it be anchored in social and environmental responsibility. It shapes solutions for the more vulnerable segments of the population, in times of deep change such as in the closing of coal mines. Monitoring alignment of the quality, integrity and compliance of large infrastructure investments with sustainability principles will be equally important for Serbia, as the country embarks on its Expo2027/Serbia2027 multi-billion-dollar endeavours. Such processes need to be transparent and effective to not only secure healthy development, but also address corruption. While we will continue to focus on developing local economies and fair social systems, we must support the optimisation of labour needs and opportunities, comprehensive migration policies and greater attention to the multiple aspects of demographic resilience.

The rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence is becoming a major challenge, as well as an asset. It will lead to dramatic changes in how our society and economy function, and accelerate technological progress to solving many problems. However, unfettered AI development can worsen inequalities and disrupt social order. We will need to balance the race for

profits and power with the need to preserve human rights and dignity.

Peace is our most precious possession. As we start 2024, we must recommit to the pursuit of peace in all circumstances. We, the people ... determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war... opens the Preamble to the UN Charter adopted in 1945. Navigating what is now described as a new multipolar global order will foster new major challenges and geopolitical divides. We see increased polarisation both within societies and among countries, including in Serbia, as a direct threat to democracy and to shaping a sustainable and peaceful future. Fighting hate and divisive speech, disinformation and multiple forms of violence, and promoting a culture of dialogue, understanding and solidarity will strengthen the fundamentals of democratic governance, along with meaningful participation of citizens and civil society.

Transformation of any kind is often seen as a threat; instead we have a unique window to shape a new future, with new opportunities of all kinds, in industries, in education, in agriculture, in jobs. In September 2024, the UN General Assembly will gather around the Summit of the Future, where key milestones will be agreed upon to shape our future world.



UNITED NATIONS  
SERBIA



# 2023 RESULTS REPORT

