



UNITED NATIONS  
SERBIA



# 2021 RESULTS REPORT





# Foreword by the UN Resident Coordinator in Serbia

**2021—A year of reflection, a year of growth**, beyond the shock of the pandemic, yet still within it. We stabilized the ground under our feet, with a hint of nostalgia for the past, but building forward differently, mostly trying to deal with our losses, understand our new vulnerabilities and find a balance, as individuals and as a society, in a world increasingly shaped by uncertainties.

**2021—A year of movement**, with new technology, new medicines, revived climate action, social movements and, sadly, massive movements of people fleeing conflicts and poverty. A year when we were reminded that **peace is frail and needs to be cultivated every day, everywhere, rather than hate**.

**2021—A year of transition**, for Serbia and for the United Nations Country Team. The new government operated with a sense of urgency triggered by the anticipated elections agenda scheduled for early 2022, leaving less than 18 months for making a difference on the ground. The year was the first for implementation of the UN Cooperation Framework, our blueprint to support the country in achieving the joint ambitions of the national development priorities, Agenda 2030 and the EU Accession Agenda. The three strategic priorities of this cooperation focus on i) the green transformation, ii) harnessing the human capital, and iii) the rule of law, human rights, gender and good governance. It is an exciting endeavour that will fast-track Serbia's progress towards a sustainable future, opening multiple new opportunities for economic and social development, and leaving no one behind.

**2021—A year dedicated to planting the seeds for this future.** Jointly with our partners, we supported much of the efforts on accelerating the ambitious reform processes in the area of human rights, gender equality, social protection, climate change and the green agenda. Serbia is just the right size to trailblaze the transformation, with seven million well-educated people and multiple sources of financing. Yet, the commitments at COP26 were insufficient, corruption and divisive narratives remain a threat to a healthy and inclusive economy and society, and the rising energy-related geo-political tensions show that a just transition will be the most challenging endeavour for years to come.

**Throughout 2021, we pushed for dialogue and building trust.** Multiple platforms were set up, including through the sustained efforts of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights. Participatory governance—with social dialogue as a key tool—is central to sustainable development and democracy. We saw that building trust in institutions, in science, in the media, addressing the legacies of the past and building a new social contract are long-haul endeavours that require genuine and strategic intention from all stakeholders, transparency and a change in entrenched behaviours. Dialogue with impact is possible when emotions are minimized, and accountability accepted from all sides.

Outside on the streets, demonstrations grew, in collective actions between activists and citizens. A greater awareness and informed participation of citizens in shaping the country's future—their own future—can lead Serbia towards a vibrant social, political and demographic resilience. **This can only happen if we all understand and embrace the concept of shared responsibility and mutual accountability, between the state and the citizens. We must nurture a culture of knowledge and discernment** – starting in schools.

**Innovation is an important element of a progressive society.** The UN contributed to multiple innovative solutions to historical and fresh challenges, in the areas of education, health, pollution and other environmental issues, finding solutions to vaccine resistance, and extending the reach to the private sector, an essential enabler to Agenda 2030, and a force for the social and economic fabric of communities throughout Serbia.

This year again, **our greatest focus remained on fighting inequalities**: widening and securing access to decent work, to quality and inclusive social, health and education services, closing the gap on violence against women and girls, promoting the integration of refugees and asylum seekers, changing the narrative and opportunities for persons with disabilities and for elderly people, and so much more. Fighting inequalities is about dignity for the right holder and for the duty bearer. It is about solidarity and compassion.

The UN is a unique partner. Our role is shaped and guided by universal norms, values and principles, along with international conventions; it is both normative and developmental. Our vision of the world is one where society grows with equality and care among people, and in harmony with the environment. We will continue to commit with honesty, perseverance and courage.

**Françoise Jacob**

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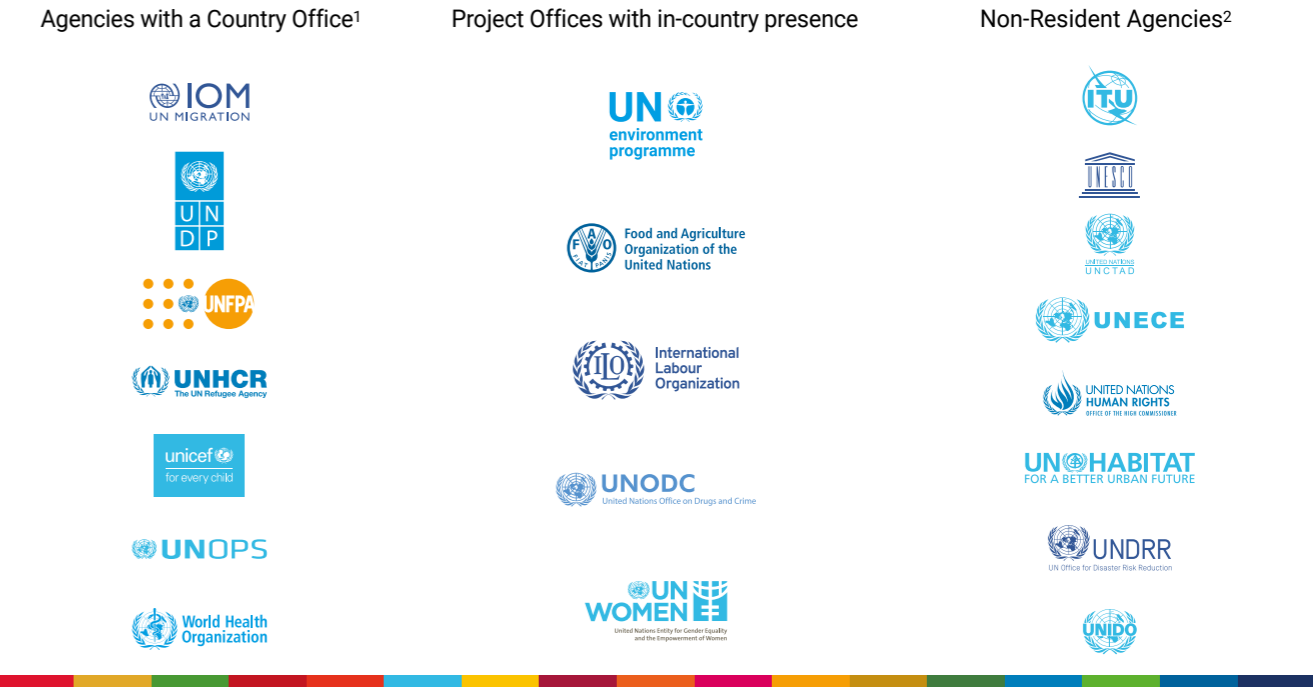
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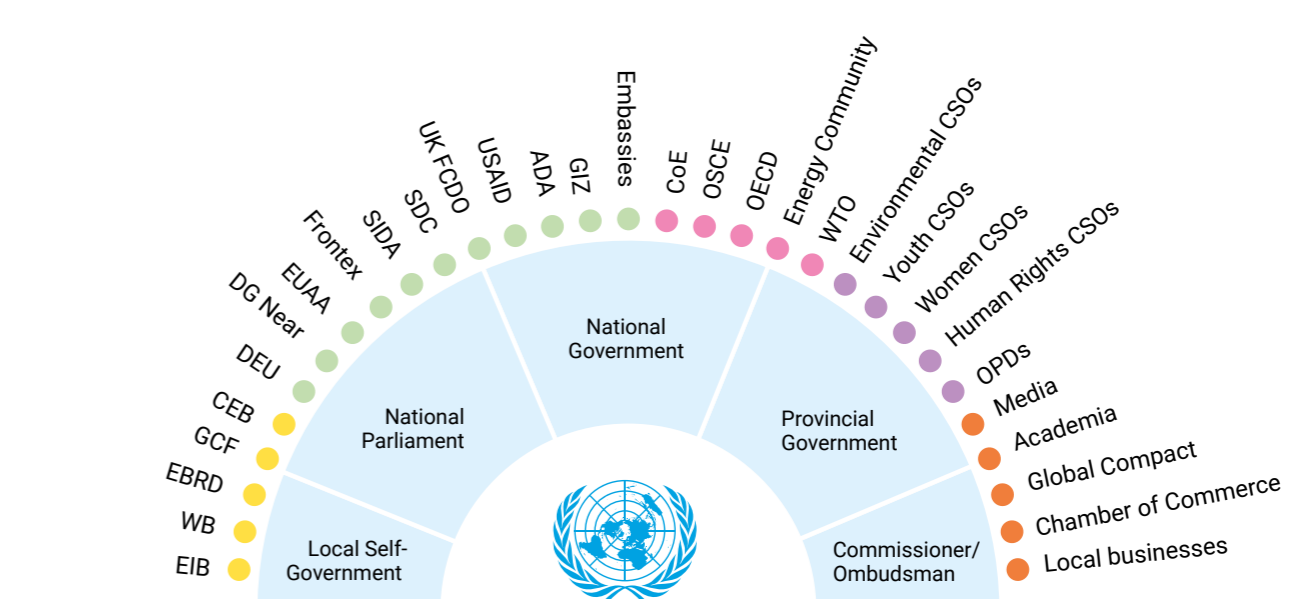
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The United Nations Country Team in Serbia



Twenty United Nations agencies, funds and programmes comprise the UN Country Team in Serbia, chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC), the designated representative of the UN Secretary General for development operations in the country. One new Agency—International Telecommunication Union (ITU)—joined UN in Serbia for implementation of the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025.

Key development partners of the UN in Serbia



1 UNFPA operates as a Country Office under UNDP  
2 OHCHR has national programmatic capacity embedded within the Resident Coordinator's Office  
3 National government: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/sastav/en/10/members-of-government.php>

# Chapter 1: Key developments in Serbia and regional context

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In Serbia, the year 2021 was marked, as was the previous year, by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts. Whereas the early months saw a successful vaccination campaign, supported by the United Nations (UN) and the development community, resistance to vaccination persisted over the year.

Coupled with the emergence of the Omicron variant in the latter part of the year, suboptimal vaccination rates contributed to an accelerated circulation of the virus.<sup>4</sup> These factors posed additional risks to economic productivity and development, while straining the health, social welfare and education sectors.

Despite the risks and challenges presented by the pandemic, the **Serbian economy proved resilient**. Following a contraction of less than one percent in 2020, by far the smallest in the region, the economy grew by 6.5 percent in 2021.<sup>5</sup> Such growth can be attributed to several structural factors, as well as a large government stimulus package, which is continuing in 2022. This positive trend was accompanied by an expansion of the activity rate of people of age 15 years and above, and a decrease in the unemployment rate.<sup>6</sup> These areas of progress present Serbia with an opportunity to use its current strong performance in support of its national development priorities, so that growth leaves no one behind (LNOB) and fuels the Green transformation.

The government's ambition and actions in support of Agenda 2030 were constrained by its short-term mandate. Elected in the last trimester of 2020, with a new election cycle scheduled for April 2022, the current **government has a mandate of less than two years**. A referendum, to be held in January 2022, on amendments to the Constitution, specifically judiciary matters, represents an important development.

**Growing inequalities** remain a serious impediment to a just society. Several social and ethnic groups—notably the Roma, rural communities, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) persons, persons with disabilities (PwD), migrants, survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), children and youths exposed to poverty and social exclusion, and older persons—remain vulnerable, discriminated against and sometimes excluded from the labour market. The population decline continues, partly due to a negative birth rate, emigration and youth disenchantment with the future.<sup>7</sup> Against this background, it is important for Serbia to recognise and further cultivate the potential of migration in responding to development priorities. In response to the **three global and local emergencies of climate change, pollution and ecosystems degradation**, progress was made through adoption of new laws and policies (e.g. the Law on Climate Change, and the Law on Energy Efficiency), issuance of a Green Bond by the National Bank of Serbia, and establishment of a National Coalition for Reduction in Energy Poverty.

In the latter part of the year, **environmental protests** were staged against lithium mine investments in western Serbia, urban air pollution and illegal dumpsites along the Danube River, exhibiting increased awareness among citizens and a will to shape Serbia's future in favour of the healthy environment and respect for human rights. During 2021, Serbia, among the European Union (EU) aspirants in the Balkans, had comparative success in using its stronger economic performance to also develop its regional political leadership credentials. Successful 'vaccine diplomacy' during the vaccine rollout, as well as the public promotion of regional infrastructure projects, were central to this effort. Integration into the EU remains a key priority of the government, and measures are being implemented to meet the requirements for accession. A new cluster on **Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity** was established in 2021 and, despite a tense regional political environment, the Action Plan for Implementation of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans was adopted in November 2021, identifying concrete joint actions within agreed timelines.

4 As of the end of 2021, 46.5 per cent of the population in Serbia was fully vaccinated, against an average of over 70 per cent in the European Union (EU) (WHO).

5 In the fourth quarter of 2021, real GDP increased by almost 7 per cent in comparison to the corresponding period of the previous year (SORS).

6 From quarter to quarter, the unemployment rate decreased by 0.6 pp (SORS).

7 Territorial and socio-economic analysis of the programme area (Interreg IPA Programme 2021–2027).



Population (estimation)

**6,899,126**

(2020) (SORS)



Unemployment rate (15 and over)

**9%**

(2020) (SORS)



GDP per capita (current US\$)

**7,720**

(World Bank)



At-risk-of-poverty rate

**21.7%**

(2020) (SORS)



Female legislators, senior officials and managers

**31.4**

(UNECE)



The Global Gender Gap Index

**19/156**

(global ranking), score 0.780



Global Freedom Score

**64/100**

(Partly Free)



Internet Freedom Score

**71/100**

(Free) (Freedom House, 2021)



Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training

**17% 15%**

(2020) SORS



HDI 0.806

**64/189**

(2019)



Corruption perception index:

**96/180**

global ranking (2021)



Geographical area

**77,474 km<sup>2</sup>**88,361 km<sup>2</sup> with Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99 (SORS)

▲ Country context  
Sources: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia; The Economist Group; Heritage Foundation

## Chapter 2: UN in Serbia support to national development priorities

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### 2.1. Executive summary

In 2021, the United Nations in Serbia kickstarted the work on core development priorities on the green transformation, investment in human capital and strengthening good governance and human rights.

The Government of Serbia focused on fast-tracking a large package of legislative changes towards a greater alignment with EU accession criterion. The UN provided joint policy advice to a number of legislative and policy changes, in the areas of anti-discrimination, gender equality, violence against women and girls, same-sex unions, the law on the ombudsman, strategy on de-institutionalization, climate change, energy and environment, pollution, and urban development. The engagement continued in national dialogues with partners to cover a large scope of Agenda 2030, share key messages, influence the development agenda and nurture a constructive engagement between all parties.

The Common Agenda served as an agenda of UN's action throughout the year, across its four broad areas for renewed solidarity between peoples and future generations, a new social contract anchored in human rights, better management of critical global commons, and global public goods that deliver equitably and sustainably for all.

The UN Country Team (UNCT) and its partners supported Serbia's participation in the Conference of the Parties 26 (COP26) UN Climate Change Conference. The year represented another starting point for stronger focus with the youth representatives selected to the pre-COP Youth4Climate conference and the UN General Assembly. Ahead of the UN Food Systems Summit, the UN team supported national and local dialogue among stakeholders which provided a foundation for the development of a National Sustainable Food System pathway.



▲ Young people actively participate in finding solutions for the climate crisis

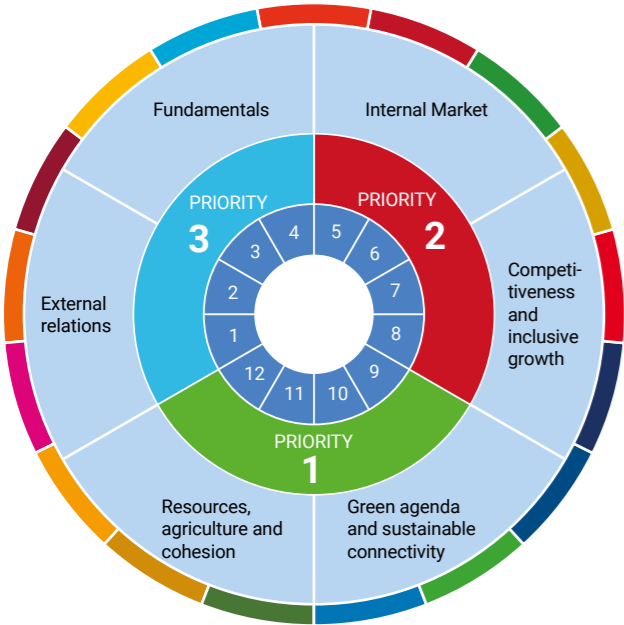
In its normative capacity, the UN continued to monitor the legislative and strategic protection and guarantees of human rights, in line with international treaties, conventions and standards. Additional focus remained on delivering high quality analysis and real-time reporting, tapping into the expertise of all relevant agencies and resulting in action-oriented reports to the UN Committee Against Torture, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the analytical report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the first mid-term report to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

The pandemic highlighted the need for stronger intergenerational connections and expanding newer initiatives to connect people of different ages. With the start of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), the regional launch of the first UN Global Report on Ageism was held in Belgrade. The UN continued to support dialogue, trust-building and social cohesion through programmatic initiatives in close cooperation with the EU and its member states, as well as other regional partners, such as the Council of Europe, Regional Cooperation Council and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

2.2. Achieving results for Serbia: Cooperation Framework priorities and outcomes

Across three priorities and eight interrelated and mutually reinforcing outcomes, the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021–2025 represents a blueprint for overcoming the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing key development priorities and challenges for

achievement of the objectives of the eighth 5-year Plan to lead to achievement of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the ensuring of a greener, healthier and better future, where no one is left behind.



UN support continued for monitoring of progress towards achievement of the SDGs. In 2021, the monitoring was strengthened to include 107 indicators, an increase of 18 percent from

the initial version, including eight additional environmental indicators.

SDG 1	SDG 2	SDG 3	SDG 4	SDG 5	SDG 6	SDG 7	SDG 8	SDG 9	SDG 10	SDG 11	SDG 12	SDG 13	SDG 14	SDG 15	SDG 16	SDG 17
1.2.1 ▲	2.1.2 ▲	3.1.1 ▲	4.1.2 ×	5.1.1 ×	6.1.1 ▲	7.1.1 ▲	8.1.1 ▲	9.1.2 ▲	10.1.1 ×	11.5.1 ×	12.1.1 ▲	13.1.1 ×	14.b.1 ×	15.1.1 ▲	16.1.3 ×	17.1.1 ▲
1.2.2 ▲	2.2.1 ▲	3.1.2 ▲	4.2.1 ×	5.2.1 ×	6.2.1 ×	7.1.2 ×	8.3.1 ▲	9.2.1 ▲	10.3.1 ×	11.5.2 ▲	12.2.2 ▲	13.1.2 ×		15.1.2 ▲	16.1.4 ×	17.3.2 ▲
1.3.1 ▲	2.2.2 ▲	3.2.1 ▲	4.2.2 ▲	5.2.2 ×	6.3.1 ▲	7.2.1 ▲	8.4.2 ▲	9.2.2 ▲	10.4.1 ▲	11.6.1 ×	12.5.1 ▲	13.1.3 ×		15.2.1 ▲	16.2.1 ▲	17.4.1 ▲
1.4.1 ×	2.a.1 ▲	3.2.2 ▲	4.3.1 ▲	5.3.1 ▲	6.3.2 ▲	7.3.1 ▲	8.5.1 ×	9.4.1 ▲		11.6.2 ×				15.6.1 ×	16.2.2 ▲	17.6.2 ▲
1.5.1 ×		3.3.2 ▲	4.5.1 ×	5.4.1 ×	6.4.1 ▲		8.5.2 ▲	9.5.1 ▲		11.b.1 ×				15.a.1 ▲	16.3.1 ×	17.8.1 ▲
1.5.2 ▲		3.4.1 ▲	4.6.1 ▲	5.5.1 ▲	6.4.2 ▲		8.6.1 ▲	9.5.2 ▲		11.b.2 ×				15.b.1 ▲	16.3.2 ▲	
1.5.3 ×		3.4.2 ▲		5.5.2 ▲	6.a.1 ▲		8.7.1 ×	9.c.1 ▲							16.5.1 ×	
1.5.4 ×		3.7.1 ▲		5.6.1 ×	6.b.1 ▲		8.10.1 ▲								16.6.1 ▲	
1.a.2 ▲		3.7.2 ▲		5.6.2 ×											16.9.1 ▲	
		3.8.1 ▲		5.a.2 ×											16.b.1 ×	
		3.9.3 ▲		5.b.1 ▲												
		3.b.1 ▲														
		3.c.1 ▲														

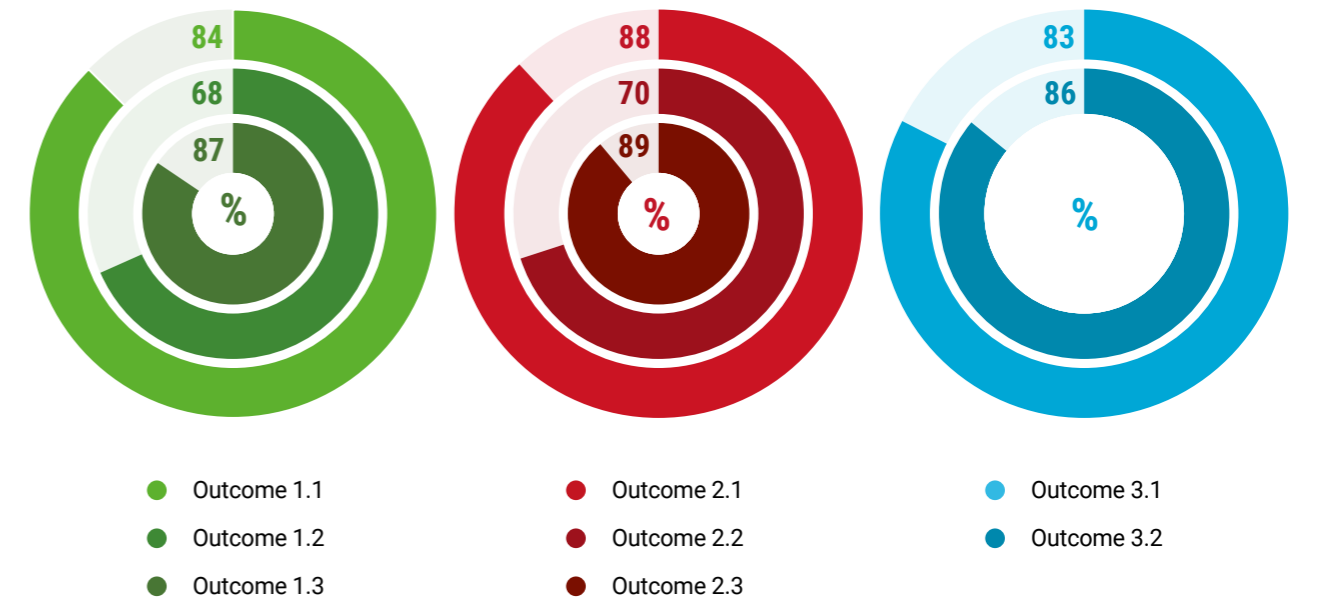
▲ Progress towards the (SDG Progress Report 2021, Statistical Office RS)

Implementation of the Cooperation Framework in 2021 reached a delivery of USD 66 million, based on funding provided by government and development partners at the local, regional and global level. For more information see section 2.7. Financial Overview and Resource Mobilisation.

Results achieved by UN in Serbia in 2021 are assessed against the SDG goals and targets. Out of the USD 66 million delivered, more than 82 percent has supported the acceleration of seven SDGs, with the highest investment at 17 percent for SDG 16, followed by 16 percent for SDG 11 and then SDG 10, SDG 3, SDG 8, SDG 12 and SDG 13.



▲ Expenditures for SDGs



▲ CF indicators' progress per Outcome

## BOX 1

## UN in Serbia support to COVID-19 Recovery Efforts

The joint efforts to fight COVID-19 remained at the forefront in the first half of the year, adding to the **quick availability of vaccines through government procurement, multiple public vaccination centres and the government focus on economic recovery.** Agencies maintained flexibility to adjust their programming to continue and implement the Socio-Economic Response Plan developed in 2020.

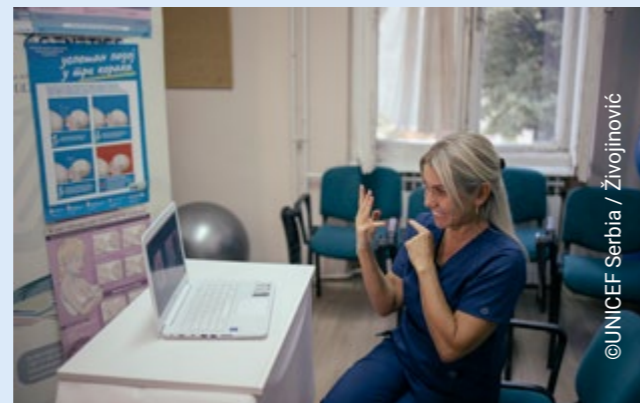


was promoted and a more intensive **promotion of COVID-19 vaccination among education professionals** and the population resulted in increased vaccination coverage, particularly among pre-school professionals, while specific measures for promotion of COVID-19 vaccination were implemented in Roma settlements in 25 municipalities.



**TOTAL  
Expenditure**

**\$12.430.596**



▲ COVID-19 programme of support to strengthen the capacity of community nurses for the video advising in 18 locations throughout Serbia.

### Health first

As a result of joint efforts of the Government of Serbia, the UN and the EU, COVID-related health-care services were delivered to citizens of Serbia, migrants and several thousand citizens of other countries. WHO provided continuous technical guidance to the authorities that enabled evidence-informed public health and clinical interventions, having in mind fast generation of scientific evidence during the pandemic caused by novel virus, and extensive infodemic.

**3.3 million people**  
have been vaccinated

**2 million people** were diagnosed and treated for COVID-19

**9 million tests** have been performed

**700,000 doses** of vaccines were delivered by UNICEF through the COVAX facility. Three agencies cooperated to support vaccine campaigns in a national context of slow uptake of vaccination.



**1**

Procurement of one ambulance vehicle and items related to vaccinations



**12**

deep freeze units

**32**

freezers

**33**

refrigerators

for the 27 national and local healthcare institutions as well as two cold rooms at the central national vaccine storage at the Institute for Virology, Vaccines and Sera "Torlak".

Temporary engagement of



**194**

medical and non-medical workers in

**23**

public health institutions was organised,



**26**

specialised vehicles for transportation of vaccines and medical teams for vaccination



**41**

containers for COVID-19 triage and testing were delivered to



**24**

institutes for public health throughout Serbia enabling vaccine transportation to remote health stations and increasing outreach in vaccination and testing.

## Protecting people

**Social Protection and Inclusion:**

**More than  
13,000**

members of the most vulnerable Roma families and people facing homelessness were urgently supported to cope with the COVID-19 crisis through the delivery of 4,350 food and hygiene packages



**2,000 families**

with children living in poverty received cash transfers



**Roma settlements in**

**25**

municipalities reached in immunization campaign

The campaign aimed to provide information to the residents of substandard settlements among the Roma in the process of vaccination against COVID-19 by registering at the e-Government portal. The campaign reached

**11,442**

Roma men and women,

while an immediate interest in vaccination was recorded among one in four inhabitants of the informal settlements visited.

The WHO RCCE Project 'COVID-19 Vaccination Roll-Out in Serbia' (funded by USAID) was launched in October 2021. Direct field activities relevant to empowerment of civil society and

faith-based organizations to inform the interventions targeting the most vulnerable population were conducted in November and December in three regions with low vaccination rates: Kolubara, Raška Sandžak area—and North Banat. The success rate of vaccination among the assisted population after the outreach visits increased by an average of 41%.

Over the same period, promotion of vaccination within the project was realized through the Chamber of Pharmacists of Serbia, with



**40**

pharmacists in eleven local communities in the regions with a low vaccination rate



**31**

pharmacy units



**5875**

citizens benefited from the counselling services, among whom approximately

**52%**

expressed their certainty to vaccinate immediately after the assistance.

**Child Protection:**

The delivery and handing over of



**1,000**

disinfection dispensers

**60,000**

litres of disinfectant

**to 330**

schools and kindergartens was organised at the beginning of the school year.

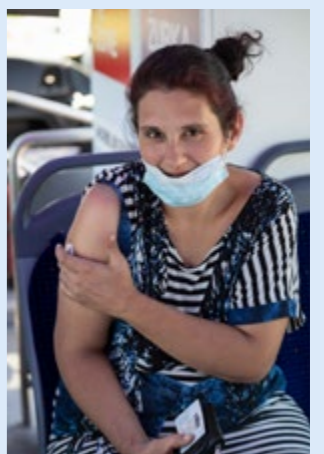
## Economic response and recovery

At the local level, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) worked on improving the Local Emergency Response System in 30 Local Self Governments (LSGs), aiming to contribute to enhanced LSG preparedness to respond to emergencies by conducting Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA). The selected LSGs received customized technical assistance to improve the internal legal and institutional framework and strengthen the capacities of human responses in COVID-19 emergency management.

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) worked with five Local Self Governments (Čačak; Kraljevo; Kruševac; Vrnjačka Banja; Zrenjanin) in conducting public health system resilience assessments to strengthen local disaster resilience agendas and linkages with health-related disaster risk.

Brankica Živanović is one of the residents of the settlement of "Bangladeš" in Novi Sad, who, through the @mladivolonteri campaign in informal Roma settlements, was informed and applied for vaccination against COVID-19.

**"I am here because of vaccination, to protect my dearest ones – my kids and my husband. It really means a lot that this bus reached out our settlement, and to feel that we are not excluded,"** says Brankica Živanović.



2.3 Achieving results for Serbia: Detailed analysis

PRIORITY 1:  
SERBIA HARNESSES THE FULL POTENTIAL OF A GREEN,  
SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

UN Agencies:    FAO, ITU, UNDP, UNDRR, UNECE, UNEP, UNESCO, UN Habitat, UNCTAD, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNOPS, WHO, ILO, UNHCR



EU Accession Clusters 3, 4, 5



National priorities:  
Innovation, Digitalization, Green Jobs, Energy.



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Outcome 1.1: Serbia adopts and implements climate change and environmentally friendly strategies that increase community resilience, decrease carbon footprint and amplify equitable benefits of investments

The legal and policy framework expanded significantly with the adoption of key texts, including the **Climate Change Law**, the **Nature Protection Programme**, and **four new laws on mining and energy**. Draft **Low-Carbon Development Strategy and Action Plan** are being aligned with the draft **National Integrated Climate and Energy Plan** whereas the first **National Air Quality Protection Programme** is pending adoption after public hearing held in November-December 2021. The **first green bond** was issued while key investments continued to be made to improve the quality of air, soil and water. The Action Plan for the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which guides implementation of the Green Agenda until 2030, was adopted. In recognition of Serbia's progress, **Cluster 4 on the 'Green agenda and sustainable connectivity'** was opened in the negotiations with the EU in December 2021. The resurgence of activism and pressure from citizens with regard to multiple environmental issues in the second half of the year reflect an increasing awareness and desire to explore and shape new paradigms for a healthy, safe and prosperous future.

Clean Energy and Energy Efficiency    100% 

Changing, adapting and expanding the legislative, regulatory and policy framework sits at the core of the UN in Serbia's action and support. Successful examples include the following:

- Establishment of a system for monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, paving the way towards a future national emission trading system;
- Establishment of a National Coalition for Energy Poverty, with **Just Transition** placed at the core of its mandate;
- Mainstreaming of the gender perspective in the energy and environmental policies;
- Organization of multi-stakeholder events, including Serbia's Climate Talks and Renewable Energy Hard Talk, towards a more inclusive and participatory consultative process.

In preparation for the COP26, Serbia's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP) were prepared, though not submitted. Meanwhile, the city of Belgrade adopted environmentally friendly strategies and plans, including the Green City Action Plan, including strategic advice from the UN.



▲ Serbia's Climate Talks ahead of COP26

Setting up effective financing mechanisms is key to supporting the green transformation. Serbia issued a first-ever EUR 1 billion green bond that will finance infrastructure, renewables and energy efficiency projects. The UN supported government in de-risking and leveraging financing for innovative technologies and solutions for reducing GHG emissions. Some 30 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) were supported (by UNDP) to shift towards low carbon and circular economy business models, and mobilized more than USD 40 million of private capital and commercial borrowings. These solutions contributed towards reducing GHG emission by the equivalent of 0.7 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. **Meanwhile, private and public finance was mobilized in support of the Green Transition.** The Energy Efficiency Renovation of Central Government Buildings (CGBs) programme got under way with technical preconditions and preparation of a proposal for GCF financing (UNDP). Climate-related investments by the private sector were promoted in partnership with the GCF and with preparation of challenge calls including 'Digitalizing the green economy'. Successful projects were presented in the Climate Smart Innovation Platform, a match-making place to drive innovation, blending of finance, partnerships and knowledge-sharing.

Under the priority of awareness raising, various studies and innovative tools were developed, including the following:

- Climate Landscape Analysis and Its Impact on Children ([link](#));
- Assessment of the Potential of Blue and Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) in the city of Belgrade;
- Scaling-Up Green Finance for the Private Sector in Serbia in the Post-Pandemic World ([link](#));
- National consultations to inform development of a Regional Strategy on Climate Proofing of Infrastructure, with focus on road transport infrastructure Climaproof portal ([link](#)).

Clean air50%

Air pollution is estimated to have caused more than 15,000 premature deaths in 2018.<sup>8</sup> In response, the City of Belgrade developed several key policy documents and strategies, using UN methodologies and technical assistance, including the Draft Air Quality Plan 2030, the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan and the Green City Action Plan.

Fourteen innovative ideas were identified for reduction of air pollution and improvement of air quality in response to the public call ‘Clean Air Innovation Challenge’. Their implementation will be supported with grants, technical assistance and equity co-financing. Awareness-raising activities targeted specific population groups such as public health professionals and children. An online STEM multidisciplinary course was developed and 150 air quality measuring devices containing low-cost sensors for the detection of pollutants were assembled and are being calibrated.

Climate change & Community resilience100%

The UN team continued its efforts and support towards a greater alignment of policies, strategies and action plans with the principles of the Sendai Framework and the EU Seveso directive, contributing extensively to the first draft of the NAP,<sup>9</sup> the development of a National Disaster Risk Register and a National Irrigation Strategy.

**UN Serbia and partners launch a new initiative to address air pollution from domestic heating**

On the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies, the UN in Serbia launched a coherent plan for tackling the causes and effects of air pollution, while stressing that air quality in the region is an increasing cause for alarm. In response to air pollution stemming from household solid fuel burning across the country, UN agencies (UNEP, UNDP, UNOPS and UNICEF) came together with a number of partners and stakeholders to launch a joint programme to address such pollution.

**More info:** [\(link\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> European Environment Agency, [Air Quality in Europe](#)  
<sup>9</sup> For the sectors of Agriculture and Water Management, Infrastructure, Energy, Forestry and Health.

The climate projection tool that can “zoom in” at 1x1 km and provide detailed data of climate scenarios up to 2050 was developed for practical application in urban development planning, land use planning, hydrological planning, tourism development and many other sectors (UNEP).

In October 2021, Serbia became the first country in the ECA region to establish a National Policy Dialogue on Industrial Safety, under the framework of the Convention on the Trans-boundary Effects of Industrial Accidents to advance policy reforms and tailings management. In addition, and as part of an initiative to strengthen national capacities of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia for assessing chemical risks, a comprehensive Road Map on the involvement of the health sector in the management of industrially contaminated sites was developed for further action.

Capacities for disaster management were enhanced with interventions at both local and national levels, including support with physical assets (reconstruction of the Sector for Emergency Management facility), modernization of the Early Warning System of the City of Belgrade, roll-out of Disaster Resilience Scorecard assessments, engagement of LSGs in the global Making Cities Resilient 2030 initiative, and a full mapping exercise of the vulnerabilities of LSGs that ranks municipalities according to risk and provides recommendations for actions to be taken at the national and sub-national level.

Outcome 1.2: Natural & cultural resources are managed in a sustainable way

To support nature protection and biodiversity conservation, the Nature Protection Programme for 2021–2023 was adopted in May 2021. Additionally, under a regional project for the countries of the Drina river basin, an integrated management and monitoring tool and interconnection of the energy and water systems were developed.

Based on gaps and challenges identified in the assessment on Blue and Green Infrastructure (BGI) and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) conducted in early 2021, an alternative strategy and a guide for future urban planning in Belgrade were elaborated (UNEP).

Cultural and historical resources83%

The UN supported Serbia’s cultural and historical resources, areas among those most impacted by the COVID pandemic. Information systems were designed and developed and digital access to the resources facilitated as part of global campaigns to protect the world’s heritage and diversity from natural and

human-induced hazards. In partnership with the Ministry of Culture and other stakeholders, a unified network for online access to the country’s archaeological sites was designed and innovative solutions developed for a digital upgrade of its tangible and intangible heritage. IT experts, university students and high school pupils were brought together to develop a visual and narrative content for the Felix Romuliana digital laboratory. Meanwhile, work for the inclusion of Vinča-Belo Brdo on the World Heritage tentative list of properties of outstanding value made progress.

UNESCO supported the Ministry of Culture to implement Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda at the national level in Serbia and urban level in the city of Leskovac. The results will inform policy and budget planning at the central and local levels as well as provide bases for the next Voluntary National Review of Serbia.

Ecosystems and biodiversity54%

Ahead of the UN Food Systems Summit, the UN team supported national and local dialogue among stakeholders with a focus on sustainable food production, inclusive value chains, food loss and food waste, and the role of education in promoting a healthy lifestyle. The dialogue provided a foundation for the development of a National Sustainable Food System pathway, which will inform the new strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture and related institutions in 2022.

The UN supported the adoption of good forestry management practices, with the goal of increasing the country’s proportion of high-quality and valuable natural woodlands. The second national forests inventory is in progress and, once completed in 2022, will create a basis for evidence-based decision making and sustainable management. Capacity building of Serbian foresters and forestry institutions is ongoing, through direct training targeting foresters and the development and implementation of forest management plans for 41 municipalities, as well as through the improvement of operational capacities and information management systems. At the regional level, the South-East Europe Platform to Beat Pollution fostered the application of the ‘polluter pays’ principle in implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The platform identified key areas for prioritization, including gaps in risk assessment and management, and inter-country and trans-boundary coordination.

The UN, in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency and research organizations, focused on reducing the use of pesticides, enhancing the capacities of Serbian authorities to identify substances of very high concern (SVHCs) and persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and increasing knowledge and awareness among farmers on the unsustainability of their use.

Action-oriented recommendations, such as access to finance, to land ownership and childcare services targeting women from rural areas were developed as part of the Country Gender Assessment.

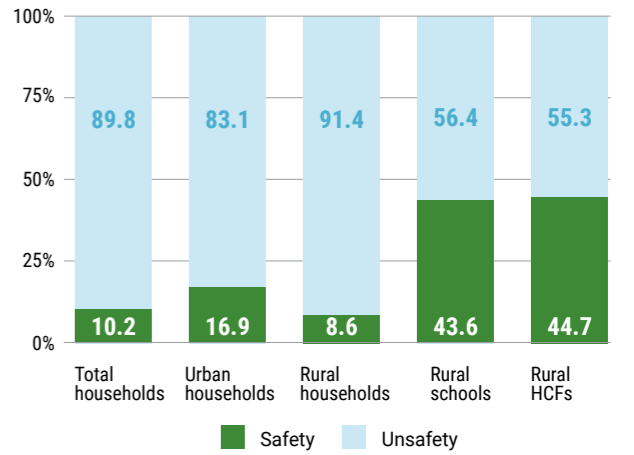
**100 agricultural advisors trained**

in topics related to climate change, with the goal to transfer this knowledge to the farmers. In partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and other stakeholders, the UN contributed to the sustainable conservation of the ‘Buša cattle’ breed, an autochthonous cattle currently facing extinction.



To tackle the problem of food waste UNDP developed a platform for food surplus donation, based on blockchain technology, in partnership with retailer Delhaize, enabling humanitarian organizations to retrieve declassified fruits and vegetables and distribute them to those in need. More than 300 tons of donations were received in the period March–August 2021.

In collaboration with the national health authorities the first national survey covering the entire sanitation chain was carried out in 2021, helping progress towards harmonized indicators and methods to ensure safe management of on-site sanitation systems. Key results of the survey are pictured in figure below.



▲ Quality of sanitation management across the country

Outcome 1.3: Equitable economic and employment opportunities are promoted through innovation

Local development strategies 75%

In 2021, UN agencies continued to support Serbia's Local Self-Government Units in elaborating local development and mid-term plans, pursuant to the requirements of the Planning System Law. The European Support to Municipal Development Programme (EU PRO) provided technical assistance for institutional planning capacity and supported competitiveness and social cohesion through public calls for businesses and business support organizations. Support was provided for R&D for health-related projects, such as the creation of a Science and Technology Park, expansion of the Faculty of Electronic Engineering in Niš and reconstruction of the Tiršova Children Clinic in Belgrade, to improve the attractiveness of Serbia as an investment destination.

**In partnership with the Public Investment Management Office (PIMO), the UN:**

- contributed to deploying SDG-centric investments in innovation and infrastructure in four municipalities (Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad and Zemun), through the practice of 'loan indemnification'; and
- facilitated access for municipalities to blended finance from the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), European Investment Bank (EIB) and Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) funds, totaling

\$

\$26

million in 2021,

- for retrofitting of public buildings, Research and Development and health care, among others. This project aims to reach a total of 40 municipalities.



▲ The first digitalized farm at Belegiš village - a green oasis on the field crop farm of Nikola Lončar, the first farmer in Serbia to digitize the fields where he grows vegetables for sale.

Circularity & Science, technology and innovation 88% 100%

To enhance the employability of specific workers, including youth, the UN launched several initiatives, as follows:

- Free, inclusive and market-relevant digital training programmes to increase Information Technology (IT) skills and empower citizens to participate in the digital ecosystem:
- 235 people trained

15 including 15 PwD
- Public calls for micro SMEs, business support organisations and LSGs for implementation of vocational training activities (UNOPS);
  - Support to LSGs for provision of vocational training in accordance with local employment action plans that directly generated employment for 47 out of 99 people who completed the programme;
  - Support to women entrepreneurs in the tourism and hospitality sectors and creative industries provided through capacity-building activities (UNDP; total, 30 beneficiaries);
  - To engage women in the STEM public debate;
  - To develop more technical documentation on green construction and circular economy principles (UNDP).

Meanwhile, to further strengthen the regulatory reform, drafting of the Law on Organized Industrial Zones was facilitated, with emphasis on regulating and facilitating Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) as capital investments. Serbia's investment promotion plan and establishment of the Belt and Road Institute were supported. A pilot study (UNEP methodology) revealed that Belgrade's communal waste has values at the upper end of European average values.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, sustainable connectivity was enhanced, including by facilitating the adoption of the National Connectivity Report by all stakeholders, connecting the National Customs System with the eTIR International System and ensuring seamless electronic data interchange for contactless, paperless and seamless border-crossing operations along digital transport corridors and at border crossings, reducing the need for physical inspection of papers, goods and vehicles.

10 Households currently generate ca. 165,000 tons of waste (108.1 kg per capita per year: 28 kg edible; 80 kg inedible).

SME competitiveness was enhanced through the following:

- Development of a) guidelines and best practices for micro and SMEs to further their resilience and progress towards a circular economy (UNECE, in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce), and b) a set of recommendations for businesses and policymakers (UNDRR).

800 SMEs resulting in

585 new jobs in

203 beneficiary enterprises including

255 women

and additional benefits to communities from corporate-social responsibility (CSR) activities implemented by the beneficiaries.

Business support benefitting

600 enterprises

through the standardisation and certification of processes, products and services (UNOPS), procurement of equipment (made available for use by more than 130 enterprises), and training and mentoring

- Support and on-the-job training for women entrepreneurs organized on the basis of an assessment of the level and characteristics of women's entrepreneurial activity (UN Women).
- Support for the activities of agri-food exporters aiming to penetrate or increase exports to non-traditional markets (FAO).
- Support to the digital innovation sector through evidence-based country-specific recommendations following a national digital innovation profile (ITU).

Decent employment 75%

The UN's primary objective in the area of employment in Serbia is to expand the decent work framework in terms of scope and reach. ILO modelled the potential impact of alternative policy options for introduction of progressive labour income taxation, an important area of reform in view of the expected benefits in the formalization of employment. A new mobile application was developed for the Serbian Trade Union to facilitate the reporting of violations of labour rights in the country. Assistance was extended to the Forestry Trade Union of Serbia for its strategic planning exercise, the Serbian Association of Employers for an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Enterprises with analysis, and the Agency for Amicable Settlement of Labour Disputes with capacity building.

A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed by UNHCR Serbia, the National Employment Service (NES) and the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations (SCRM) in July 2021, provided grounds for enhanced opportunities for economic inclusion and self-reliance of refugees and asylum seekers in the country by giving them access to NES trainings and employment measures.

Integration of young refugees and asylum seekers in the labour market was promoted with a specially designed employment scheme (UNDP, UNHCR and UNV), while young Roma were enabled to volunteer in local institutions including Social Work

Centres and LSGs. Some 55 refugee households (98 persons) were supported in 2021 through cash-based interventions (CBI), and more than 140 refugees received assistance in entering the labour market (UNHCR).

Key challenges

- While the climate change agenda is progressing from a legislation point of view, the country still needs to develop and structure an ambitious political vision which can be communicated to citizens, rally the energy, commitment and investments from multiple stakeholders.
- Inter-sectoral coordination is critical on the multiple aspects of the green transformation, particularly the management of carbon emissions, energy transition, pollution, disaster risks, nature based solutions and social impacts of the transition. Such coordination will help structuring and optimizing the multiple interventions.
- Effective public consultations platforms and tools, along with the willingness and capacity to move from an emergency response mode to a prevention approach, and the opportunity to share best practices remain 3 of the greater challenges at local level for local self-governments.

## PRIORITY 2: WELL-BEING, SOCIAL EQUITY AND THE HUMAN POTENTIAL ARE AT THE HEART OF SYSTEMS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES

**UN Agencies:** WHO, OHCHR, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNODC, UNOPS, UN Women, IOM



EU Accession Clusters 2,3



**National priorities:**

Health, Early Childhood Development; Education; Work with Youth, Population Dynamics; Labour and Employment; Digitalization



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### Outcome 2.1: Universal and inclusive access to quality health, social and protection services is improved

#### Universal health coverage

87%

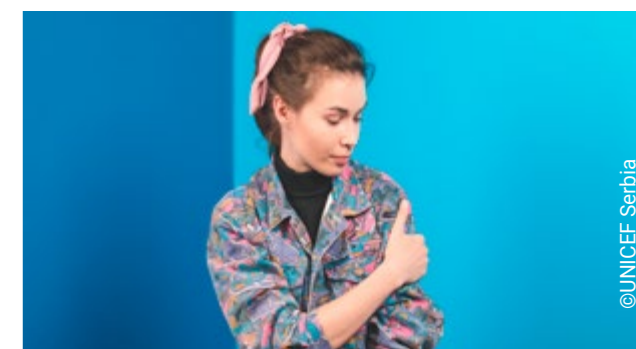
Efforts to fight COVID-19 remained at the forefront of our joint work in the first half of the year. Despite **the rapid availability of vaccines made through government procurement and the multiplication of public vaccination centres and mobile vaccination services, resistance to vaccination remained strong among segments of the population. The UN expanded its COVID-19 interventions related to infrastructure, digitalization, procurement, provision of human resources and outreach activities to specific communities, for enhanced prevention and control of the virus. More information on the COVID response is included on page 5.**

**Population mental health** worsened markedly during the pandemic, with increased prevalence of anxiety and depression fed by fear, losses and isolation. Within their respective mandate, UN agencies extended the availability, accessibility and quality of psycho-social and mental health services, including via phone app. and online counselling, public awareness campaigns and technical support provided to specialised clinics. It was a genuine leap forward to witness persons in need of these services feeling and being less stigmatised, and more inclined to reach out for help. Following the success of the **youth mental health awareness-raising campaign** that reached one million people, a Mental Health and Psycho-social Support (MHPSS) platform was launched providing reliable information for young people, parents and teachers, and enabling free anonymous psychological support. Prevention of drug use, violence and crime among young people was addressed through implementation of family skills programmes in the education sector. **Strengthening the quality of, and access to, primary health-care providers for marginalized groups** remained a priority as we build the health of the future. A **joint nationwide campaign** was organized (reaching half a million people) to address decreasing coverage of routine immunization among children, while measles and rubella elimination measures were reinforced. Support to the continuity and quality of maternal and child health and nutrition services was prioritized, with focus on the most vulnerable, and introduction of innovative means of accessing services. Young children with disabilities are often overlooked in mainstream programmes and services designed to ensure child development. Recognising that early childhood provides an important window of opportunity to prepare the foundations for life-long good health and learning, UNICEF expanded the integration of health, education and social care at the community level, with a strong focus on children with developmental difficulties and disabilities, and their families, additionally using the opportunities to strengthen the

role of fathers in reshaping the traditional gender roles. The capacities of neonatal intensive care units to provide life-saving family-oriented services to premature and sick children were strengthened in Kragujevac Neonatal Centre and the Vojvodina Institute for Health Care of Children and Youth in Novi Sad.

Another major initiative by the Ministry of Health to rebuild and extend four tertiary-level clinical centres providing highly specialised services in Belgrade, Kragujevac and Niš, and the Vojvodina clinic in Novi Sad was launched in 2020 with UNOPS support, and construction is almost complete.

Under this cooperation framework, and within the regional health strategy, the UN will extensively promote a healthy lifestyle for all, across generations and social groups. Research either started or was completed in six areas, aiming to **Support evidence-based policy and legislative development, in strengthening health system and promoting healthy lifestyles**, including 1) dietary salt consumption, important for cardiovascular disease prevention, 2) an investment case on tobacco control, 3) financial protection and out-of-pocket expenditures for health services, 4) a public expenditure review and primary health capacity assessment, 5) research into the impact of COVID-19 on reproductive health, and 6) research into infertility and availability of assisted reproductive technologies. Prevention work was undertaken to tackle risk factors and strengthen prevention and early detection of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and to participate in regional and global networks related to the prevention, treatment and palliative care of cervical cancer.



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▲ Mental health awareness-raising campaign - #FromMyAngle is creatively oriented towards young individuals, aged 16 – 24.

#### Innovative social care services

92%

Benefits and shortfalls of existing social policies and practices became more evident during the pandemic, revealing both historical and new drivers of exclusion. The UN supported revision of the legal and policy frameworks, as well as multiple institutional mechanisms to plan and deliver more equitable and quality social protection services with a focus on marginalised communities. We worked on data and the digitalization of services, and actual provision of social services through partners and infrastructure.

Examples of such work include i) support to safe housing, access to health, protection and social services for Roma women, children and older people in several municipalities in Serbia (UNFPA), ii) assessment of the effectiveness of the current legislative framework and professional practices of the centres for social work in implementation of active employment measures for beneficiaries of Financial Social Assistance (UNFPA), iii) multi-sectoral cooperation in prevention and protection of children from violence (VAC) through upgrading the General VAC Protocol, with

**28,378 individuals**  
benefitting from support from the upgraded National Child Help Line (UNFPA),

iv) improvement of the foster-care system to ensure sustained quality family-based alternatives and to re-invigorate the national de-institutionalization process for small children (UNICEF), v) modernization of the system of social protection facilities for accommodation of adults and older persons (UNFPA), and vi) construction of social housing (UNOPS). We continued to advocate for social protection systems to become more closely aligned with labour markets and for employment policies to be strengthened so that they help address inequalities and promote more inclusive growth. This is an intrinsic objective of the LNOB toolbox for the legislative framework developed with OHCHR (see page 14).

Finally, we pushed forward the transformative programme on engaged fatherhood and balanced parenting, with the enrolment of more

**300 men in five cities**  
and municipalities and in online space,

increasing understanding of the relationship between prevailing gender norms, current parenthood models and gender inequality.

**A total of 2,265 individuals**  
**1,366 women**

have benefitted from local social protection services, including home care, establishment of sensory rooms, respite care and weekend accommodation, counselling and socio-therapeutic services, as a result of the strengthened capacities of staff in 30 LSGs for evidence-based implementation of the new Law on Social Cards. Mechanisms for monitoring the scope, quality and effectiveness of social protection systems are established in 51 municipalities.

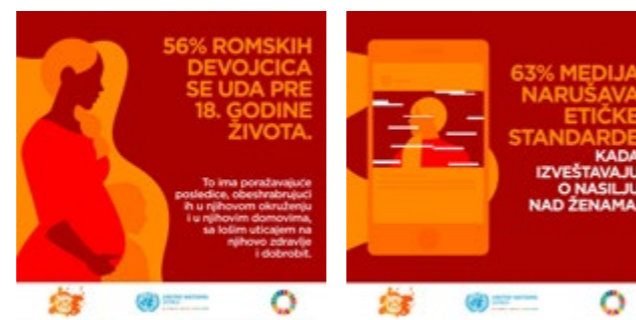
Through social housing, with UN support to implementation of social inclusion policies,

**421 of the most vulnerable families**  
from 19 municipalities benefitted from improved living conditions, and active inclusion measures were provided for 1,507 family members.

**Gender-sensitive services for victims of violence and abuse** **86%**

Gender-Based Violence, the most pervasive form of human rights violation, remains a challenge in Serbia, particularly for women and girls, and was exacerbated in the wake of the pandemic. Combatting violence requires a multi-sectoral approach focusing on awareness raising, prevention and protection, support to survivors, and prosecution of the perpetrators.

**The national strategy for combatting GBV, VAW and domestic violence was adopted in 2021**, with inputs from mandate-based UN agencies. It is aligned with the Istanbul Convention, the Convention for Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and provisions of domestic law. The SIDA-funded joint programme with UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women is an illustration of convergence between agencies on topics such as preventing and ending child marriage and breaking transgenerational violent family models.



▲ 16 Days of Activism social media campaign

We supported multiple awareness-raising activities and campaigns, reaching more than five million people, through 'Youth Against Violence Coalition', '16 Days of Activism against GBV', 'Orange the World', 'Tiče me se' (It IS my business) and 'Don't stand by. React!', targeting men.

Other activities included i) the full functioning of four 24/7 Centres for Victims of Sexual Violence in Kikinda, Novi Sad, Sremska Mitrovica and Zrenjanin, providing combined medical examination, forensic material gathering and psycho-social support, ii) continuous training of health professionals in GBV and assistance to victims, iii) access to services for women with hearing impairment, with equipment for all 66 basic courts

to expand access to justice for women survivors of violence, iv) an SOS app. for violence reporting in Serbian, Romani and English, launched and adapted for use by women with disabilities, v) establishment and capacity building of the group Journalists against Violence, contributing to less sensationalist and more informative reporting on the issue, and vi) provision of GBV protection services for asylum seekers, refugees and members of the LGBTI community, vii) 15,427 women from rural areas across the country are informed on available measures and actors responsible for protection from violence and gender-based discrimination. (UN Women, UNDP, UNHCR).

**Outcome 2.2: Skills, education and capabilities are enhanced to ensure equitable outcomes for all**

**Formal education** **100%**

The radical upheaval of the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic brought into the open the remaining structural gaps in making quality education accessible to all. The **National Education Policy Framework** was strengthened with adoption of the new Education Strategy 2030 and Action Plan, developed with UNICEF technical assistance around inclusive education, quality of education and early learning.

Within the overall reform of the pre-school education system supported by UNICEF and the World Bank, capacities of

**9,500 pre-school professionals**

working in public and private pre-school institutions were strengthened for implementation of the new curriculum.

The partnership between the Ministry of Education, UN and the EU during the COVID response led to system-level interventions and the establishment of a new national platform 'My school'. Remedial mechanisms, such as Education Technology Libraries, were established in

**30 schools**

**4,100 children**

benefitted from additional learning and psycho-social support.

All 215 teaching assistants in the education system are now equipped with laptops to provide learning support to children

from vulnerable backgrounds, 900 teachers have been trained in improving pedagogical and digital competences, and 140 school psychologists and teachers have been trained in providing psycho-social support. Meanwhile, 70 percent of refugee and migrant children accommodated in reception centres are enrolled in primary school and received learning support.

Capacities of

**1,505 professional**

associates were improved to strengthen students' health literacy and encourage in them a responsible attitude towards health (in cooperation with the Institute for Education Improvement).

Serbia acceded to the Council of Europe's project European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR), enabling refugees to obtain a document to access tertiary education and the labour market. With UNHCR's support, for the first-time young refugees from outside the region, were enrolled in university of Belgrade, while 200 refugee and internally displaced children and youths were supported to enrol and remain in school. A World Heritage in Young Hands Educational Resource Kit was developed as a user-friendly tool for capacity building of teachers and students to incorporate World Heritage into the curriculum of elementary schools in Serbia through curricular and extra-curricular activities.

**Informal education and life skills** **67%**


The UN supported the development of employability, participation and decision-making skills in youth, improvement of digital skills in the older population, and health literacy, life skills, and capacity for intergenerational cooperation among various population groups. The normative framework related to employability was revised by development of the key policy documents related to internship and volunteering, and 10,000 youth were empowered to influence decision-making processes at all levels through the U-Report platform.

At least 200 young people, mainly girls, improved their capacities and leadership skills in areas related to intergenerational cooperation, health promotion, comprehensive sexuality education, peacebuilding, gender equality and prevention of GBV, while at least 1,000 young people participated in youth-led related activities.

Dialogue for the Future, implemented by UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP and their counterparts, provided a **unique space for constructive dialogue, cross-border cooperation and promotion of cultural diversity**. It also addressed the exponential influence of social media, which influence the thinking processes

and behaviour of young people, propagating opinions rather than scientific facts and fuelling polarization. The programme allowed sustained engagement in media literacy by teachers and students across the country.

## Women and girls' empowerment

45% 

With the passing of the Law on Gender Equality in May 2021, we intensified our focus, resources and coordination on implementing the country's legislative framework and promoting evidence-based strategies, in all spheres of social, economic and political rights. However, implementation is challenging, and we need to work on social bias and prejudices while tackling system inefficiencies and expand capacities to close the gaps on equal pay, education for girls in specific communities, better recognition of care work, and more.

While gender parity was achieved in 2020 in the government cabinet, with 38 percent of elected members of the national Parliament being female, women continue to be under-represented in decision-making bodies at the local level, in the private sector and in many processes that shape our lives, our workplaces and our safety.

Meanwhile, only thirteen percent of mayors (22 out of 169) are women. One of the key objectives of the Network of Women Mayors and Presidents of Municipalities set up by UNDP is to share best practices on gender equality and strengthen empowerment and advancement of professional skills. The network signed the Charter of Women's Solidarity, committing the 22 female leaders to cooperate and act jointly to advance gender equality principles in their LSGs and in the country in general, irrespective of political party affiliation. In parallel, we continued to maintain gender equality standards across the local administration work, a critical step for **advancing gender equality and enabling equal opportunities at the local level**.

Through SWISSPRO–UNOPS support a total of 31 LSGs (re) established local Gender Equality Mechanisms (GEMs), eleven for the first time. A total of 28 LSGs adopted the EU Charter, and all 31 developed a Local Action Plan (LAP) on Gender Equality.

**31** LSGs established local gender equality mechanisms

**28** LSGs adopted the EU Charter

**31** LSGs developed a Local Action Plan on Gender Equality

and further implementation of the plans in accordance with the needs defined at the local level is now enabled. Local Women Councillors' Networks (LWCNs) have been formally established in 27 LSGs, and wider networks have been created in order to prepare LAPs, initiatives at the local level and more activity of

women councillor networks in the process of advocating for GE matters in local assemblies




the first-of-its-kind **Leadership Academy for Women with Disabilities**, with increased knowledge of disability and gender-based discrimination, and of management and leadership skills.

Adolescent girls from seven municipalities were empowered to develop their leadership skills and increase their engagement in their communities by implementing innovative ideas and raising awareness of the challenges that young people, particularly girls, face every day, from mental to reproductive health, healthy life habits, sexual harassment and GBV.

Women scholars and scientists were empowered and their role and position in the scientific domain affirmed through UN support to the Institute of Ethnography of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts.

## Outcome 2.3: Mobility and demographic transition become vectors for positive change and prosperity for all people

## Evidence-based population policies

92% 

UNFPA and UNDP continued their joint work on analysing demographic change to address current population trends, by (i) elaborating the De-population Portfolio, a dynamic set of interconnected measures, with the aim of bringing government and a large number of partners to work together on population dynamics issues, and (ii) developing the National Human Development Report (NHDR) to increase understanding of current population trends and their effects on the development of Serbia. The work on the De-population Portfolio was presented at the Regional High Level Ministerial Conference on Demographic Resilience convened by UNFPA ECARO and partners in Sofia, Bulgaria, inspiring participants with a valuable instrument that could help shape the demographic future of their own countries and the region, as well as Serbia. Meanwhile, the 2021 Census, postponed until 2022, will now be accessible in the languages of national minorities.

IOM worked with migration stakeholders in five local communities on the development of local migration plans in municipalities that address migration priorities, ultimately aimed at obtaining benefits for communities through a development oriented approach.

## Mobility of skills, knowledge and capacities

100% 

UNDP and UNFPA focused jointly their efforts on the challenge of de-population. As a result, a proposed innovation portfolio on de-population has been designed. Ongoing interventions directly related to the De-population Portfolio include support to the establishment of the Returning Point as a vehicle for diaspora engagement, work with digital nomads through exploration of new forms of migration, work with alternatives close to real-time big data sources (mobile, satellite, social networks data) for information gathering and interventions, and regional and country-based research into the Future of work.

Through cooperation with the Returning Point programme for circular migration, which aims to position itself as a bridge between society at home and abroad, UNDP established new partnerships with diaspora organizations and individuals. A platform for Serbian repatriates to find all relevant information and job possibilities has been provided and 35 published episodes have garnered a total of 59,800 views.


IOM worked with municipalities of Ivanjica, Prokuplje and Knjazevac was focused on labour market integration and skills development of youth, returnees and minority groups to mitigate the negative effects of internal migration through internships, work placement training, language and computer skills, business development training, basic training in employment and self-employment.

## 207 returnees

and minority group trained on labour market integration and skills development in Ivanjica, Prokuplje and Knjaževac

Through participation in the Akelius project supported by UNICEF, which provided learning support to children who attend school while staying in Serbia, parents and children agreed that children improved their wellbeing, motivation and competences. Their knowledge of English, Serbian and Mathematics improved the most, followed by progress in Geography, Biology and Physics.

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

75% 

The pandemic took a disproportionate toll on older people, exposing multiple vulnerabilities that need urgent attention. The United Nations 2021–2030 Decade of Healthy Ageing frames the impact of an aging population upon health systems, labour and financial markets, and the demands for goods and services, including education, housing, long-term care, social protection and information. In that context, the UN in Serbia supported cross-sector collaboration among national and lo-

cal institutions, businesses and the voluntary sector to develop innovative solutions for economic and social benefits, breaking stereotypes and promoting extensive inter-generational approaches, shaping and valorising new skills in the care industry. We worked extensively with the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in putting together a Special Report on Discrimination against Older People in Serbia. We also worked with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and the Commissioner for Equality in convening a National Dialogue on Ageing and Ageism, which generated a Call to Action against Ageism in Serbia. These efforts lay the foundations for actions over the next 5–10 years. Focus was given in promoting digital literacy of older persons and improving their access to services as well as in supporting Government international reporting obligations related to ageing. This work was done in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs and with the Red Cross of Serbia.

IOM partnered with eleven CSOs to support local migration governance by promoting awareness, cooperation and social cohesion in local communities, through information campaigns, peer activities, support to volunteering and promotion of sustainable solutions, as well as educational and cultural projects.

## Key challenges

- The majority of professionals in the health, social welfare and education sectors have been subjected to increased workloads due to continual redistribution of COVID-related duties, increased absence rates from burnout or sickness and new working modalities. Hybrid modes of delivery of services of education, social welfare, mental health and early interventions, among others, have become the new norm. Not everyone has the same opportunity to adjust and embrace, digital services are creating new divides and challenges of distance, lack of knowledge and isolation, and institutions have yet to adapt fully to provide effective e-Services.
- Changing attitudes, prejudices and practices vis-à-vis social norms will require a lot more attention across sectors, targeting both the wider public audience, as well as professionals and decision makers.
- While there is commitment to ensure equity, vulnerable groups tend to face multi-dimensional disadvantages that require sustained efforts beyond the immediate crisis recovery.
- Sustainable financing for social and specialized services providers at national and local levels remains a challenge.
- Implementation of national legislative framework should be further supported and monitored.

## PRIORITY 3: BUILDING TRUST AND MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH THE RULE OF LAW, RIGHTS AND DUTIES AGENDA

**UN Agencies:** IOM, OHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, UNOPS, UNEP, UN Women, WHO



1 3 5 10 13 16 17



EU Accession Clusters 1,3

10 23 24



**National priorities:**

Innovation, Digitalization, Regional and Trans-border/Transboundary Cooperation

**Outcome 3.1: All people, especially the more vulnerable, benefit from the realization of human rights, gender equality, social cohesion, and enhanced rule of law in line with international commitments**

In 2021, human rights served as a critical point of intersection in all relevant areas of life: social protection, freedoms, inequalities and recovery from the pandemic. A vast normative activity was achieved in Serbia that enhanced the legislative and strategic protection and guarantees of human rights, in line with international standards. Implementation of this normative agenda and gender equality, along with adjustments for specific rights or marginalized groups, are now much needed to ensure compliance of the actions with the law. The UNCT remained dedicated, under the human rights standards and the spirit of the Leave No One Behind principle, to improving participation in decision making and equal access to rights.

### Polymaking and implementation 72%

As a fundamental part to core UN standards and to the EU accession process, the key polymaking documents adopted include the following:

- **The Gender Equality Law**, fully aligned with CEDAW recommendations and EU Acquis Chapters 23 and 24;
- **The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination**, which underwent essential amendments and recognizes broader discrimination grounds and specific grave forms of discrimination pertinent to Serbia and foresees an improved monitoring mechanism;
- **The National Strategy for Gender Equality, and the National Strategy for Combating Gender-Based Violence, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**; key areas of the strategy include prevention, prosecution, protection and support to victims and survivors, and integrated public policies, including the establishment and improvement of general and specialized support services (e.g. SOS helplines, safe houses, free legal aid);
- **The First Action Plan to the National Disability Strategy**, adopted to operationalize standards enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- **The First Law on Same-Sex Unions**, drafted and widely consulted, and which foresees a shift in equality of the LGBT community, once it is passed in Parliament;
- Amendments to the **Law on Asylum** and the **Law on Foreigners**, which advanced the standards and procedures

around refugee status and protection, asylum processes and social integration;

- The first **National Human Rights Strategy 2022–2030**, prepared by the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and the UN for the baseline and consultations around it, as the most relevant and far-reaching systemic policy on human rights implementation, protection and promotion;
- Preparation of the harmonization of the Criminal Code through building the capacities of 100 justice practitioners on the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

The **Law on Free Legal Aid** of 2018 mandates LSGs the duty of providing free legal aid to specific groups at risk. However, citizens often lack adequate information or access to this service. To overcome this gap, OHCHR facilitated the development of a guide for people on how to exercise their right to free legal aid, as well as a guide for local authorities on how to provide this service in accordance with the law.

With the support of UN Women, the Government of Serbia was selected as a commitment maker with policy commitments to the Action Coalition on Women's Leadership and Women's Movement at the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) in Paris. Serbia participated at the 65th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) with the support of the civil society representatives at CSW.

UNOPS supported thirteen LSGs to enhance sustainability of the provision of free legal services to vulnerable groups, resulting in better support provision of 61 percent in the targeted municipalities.

A total of **3,517** beneficiaries from various vulnerable groups,



**897** Roma



**886** elderly



**275** PwD

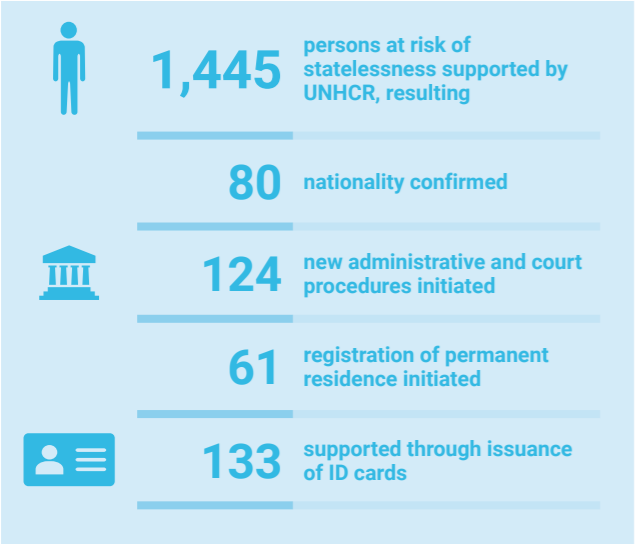


**778** unemployed

accessed their rights and entitlements through this initiative.



▲ IBE LONG campaign, for eradication of statelessness



The UN lawyers service was crucial for more than 4,000 persons who received legal counselling and assistance, and another 10,000 persons who received general or asylum counselling in the framework of continued efforts to provide **free legal aid to asylum seekers** and to profile new arrivals in Serbia in terms of their specific needs, appropriate referrals and targeted assistance. UN project lawyers represented 188 asylum seekers over their procedures in 2021.

**Discrimination** against older women, Roma women and women with disabilities is, in some cases, difficult to prove. To improve the existing capacities of women CSOs to use experimental methods prescribed by the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, UN Women launched six situation tests with the initiative ‘Test it if you tasted it’, resulting in concrete recommendations on the more diligent use of mechanisms for protection against discrimination.

A total of 15 towns in Serbia now have operational multi-sectoral juvenile offenders teams and 31 MoUs signed with service providers, to increase the benefits of improved quality of diversionary measures and alternative sanctions for **juveniles in conflict with the law**. Through an in-depth training of 429 professionals in partnership with the Judicial Academy, the UN

supported the integration of the best interest of the child and child participation in civil proceedings, as well as better protection from secondary victimization.

**Oversight and independent bodies** 100%

The new **Law on the Ombudsman** was adopted with new functions in line with UN standards, including ‘the position of a special body that protects, promotes and advances the rights of children’ and of the independent monitoring mechanism over the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. The ombudsman office serves as the national human rights institution and attended the first training on mainstreaming SDGs in their monitoring, as well as on improving economic and social rights monitoring. The UN team supported the **National Mechanism for Reporting** and Follow-Up to **UN Human Rights Recommendations**, through open participatory exchange with civil society, Parliament, the judiciary and the national human rights institutions. Engagement with UN human rights mechanisms included the **UPR of the Human Rights Council, CE-DAW, UN Convention against Torture, monitoring by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, and other special procedures.

The capacities of independent bodies and CSOs were strengthened to monitor implementation of the rule of law and report on human rights violations with regard to **rights of the child**. A Child Rights Impact Assessment on COVID-19-related measures on children, a report on the status of children and their discrimination in Serbia presented to the National Assembly, and child rights CSOs monitoring of the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child are some of the results from the support provided.

The UN supported the development and launch of the first Annual Report on Youth Rights, created in a consultative and participatory manner with diverse groups of young people. An Annual Report on Gender Equality and Women’s Rights was also supported, following the structure of CEDAW.



▲ The winner of UNHCR Nansen award 2021 Nikola Kovačević, lawyer from Belgrade.

**Home affairs** 76%

Jurisdictions in the Western Balkans, including Serbia, have adopted a regional Anti-Corruption and Illicit Finance Roadmap, with three shared priorities and goals agreed upon (UNODC).

Jointly with the Ministry of Defence, the UN strengthened gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment in the security sector in line with the UN SCR 1325 (UN Women).

Support to the Ministry of Interior, facilitated by the UN, significantly improved the conditions for 3,811 detainees (3,447 men and 364 women) following reconstruction of 63 detention premises (UNOPS).

**Outcome 3.2: All people benefit from effective governance and meaningful civic engagement**

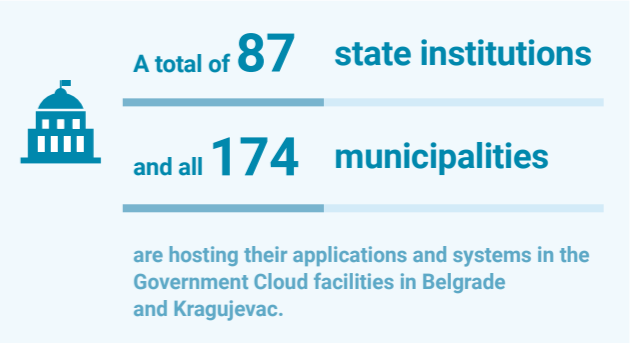
**Governance systems** 100%

The UN extensively supported the **national digitalization agenda** in multiple sectors by enabling government to move from institution-focused to user-focused service design and delivery, leading to more streamlined, secure, easier to use and inclusive e-Services. An updated overview of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Accessibility and Digital Inclusion, and a comprehensive vision of ICT accessibility policies and strategies, were implemented as a result of a UN assessment of digital accessibility policies in Serbia. Government was equipped with a set of good practices and recommendations for national policymakers and stakeholders for ensuring that the inclusiveness perspective is included in key domains such as e-Government, education, employment and emergency communications to ensure well-managed preparedness in the event of a pandemic or other emergencies.

Through partnership with the Office for IT and e-Government, the **e-Government Support Centre** added three more COVID-19-related services to its menu so that 20 different services are currently available to citizens and businesses, and three innovative trainings were developed (Introduction to design thinking, Data officer training and Introduction to the industrial revolution, with 1,981 civil servants completing the courses).

The UN continued multiple joint efforts to produce, share and use data effectively and intelligently, towards improved targeting and prioritization. The UN was the key partner in establishing the **Government’s Data Centre**, which obtained International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001 and ISO 27001

certificates in 2021 and was established as a legal entity as a Data Cloud Technology Limited Company. Capabilities to operate government information technology equipment at scale were also supported.



Meanwhile, 16 cities were visited via Digital Expedition, with educational programmes for all age groups covering e-Government, digital safety and security, and digital and media literacy. For the first time such an initiative reached smaller towns in Serbia, allowing direct contact between citizens and experts from the digital ecosystem.

At the local level, UNOPS ensured **better e-Services** in 51 LSGs. The intervention included support to an additional 42 LSGs for data opening that published their budgets in a machine-readable format on the Open Data Portal and on the Open Budget Portal.

Gender Responsive Budgeting touches many sectors, including infrastructure, services and the financing of CSOs. With the support of UN Women, the Ministry of Finance adopted an Annual Plan for Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and GRB was introduced in 71 institutions at the national and provincial levels, out of 86 in total (83%).

At the local level, 47 LSGs introduced the Plan for a gradual introduction of GRB with budgetary programmes and contributed to an improvement in understanding of programme budgeting, greater transparency and the importance of establishing GRB, aligned with the requirement for a full implementation of GRB in local budgets by 2024. The UN supported ten LSGs in developing Public Budget Portals and improving the budget decision-making processes based upon evidence. In parallel, 15 journalists from seven CSOs were trained to better understand public finance, resulting in the publishing of more than 60 stories on how public funds are being spent at the local level (UNOPS).

UN support to the Statistical Office of Serbia resulted in increased availability of environment-related indicators in the National Statistical Office database ([link](#)), where data for 8 indicators were published in 2021. “Indicator passports” have been prepared for additional set of indicators to support further data acquisition, verification and reporting in the national SDG database.



▲ The citizens of Novi Pazar were introduced to new electronic services

### Civic engagement and representation

67%



The UN team supported a wider space for meaningful participation of civil society in several policy-development processes and public discussions, advocating for a more strategic and effective voice of civil society. This includes consultations on sensitive issues such as freedom of media and expression, minority rights, independence of the judiciary, reconciliation and, more recently, environmental issues. Eight public hearings and more than ten consultations of informal groups were organized with participation of CSOs to advance civic participation with Parliament and the local assemblies.

The UN partnered with the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in developing a tool for mainstreaming the principle of LNOB, including women and girls from marginalized groups, into all legal and strategic documents of the Republic. The instrument, or analytical tool, provides clear guidelines for implementation of the LNOB commitment at all stages of planning and development.



▲ UN team in Serbia kicks off 16 Days of Activism against GBV

LSGs started adapting local regulations in preparation for the introduction of more transparent procedures for funding and monitoring CSO projects, including those in the public interest. Twenty-seven LSGs institutionalized a model of transparent and project-based funding in 2021, thus establishing a better condition for participatory local development. Of these, eight achieved full sustainability through continued funding from the local budgets of five LSGs (UNDP and UNOPS).

### Regional and transborder cooperation

89%



In line with the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (TIP), Especially Women and Children, the UN strengthened the country's capacity to address TIP through multi-disciplinary Regional Expert Group Meetings. The establishment of the joint airport inter-agency units composed of Air Cargo Control Units (ACCUs) and Joint Airport Interdiction Task Forces (JAITFs) was facilitated to enhance border control, contributing to the capacity building of customs and border police officers at Belgrade International Airport in countering all forms of trafficking and smuggling whilst aiming to reduce harm from Organised Crime (UNODC).

Three media outlets in Serbia benefitted from the regional initiative for capacity development of such outlets in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and Turkey. The UN also supported cross-border cooperation among youth, for trust building among SEE countries. A network of young leaders for Youth, Peace and Security was established and youth from grassroots organizations from the region were trained and supported to implement local actions addressing trust, gender stereotypes, GBV and other challenges.

The Roadmap for Health and Well-Being in the Western Balkans (2021-2025) was endorsed; it identifies shared priorities and potential synergistic actions within and across the subregion.

### Key challenges

- Limited cross-sectoral cooperation or coordination and impact of cooperation among stakeholders
- Incidents of threats against civil society and journalists amounting to human rights violations
- Insufficient policy implementation and protection in practice
- Rise in divisive narrative.

## Commitments to human rights, gender equality and the Leave No One Behind principle

BOX 2

- The UN in Serbia remains devoted to mainstreaming and pursuing objectives related to human rights and gender equality as among its core values and pillars and does so both internally and externally. In 2021, in addition to providing vast support and efforts aimed at advancing policies, practice and capacities that contribute to greater equality and effects of human rights in the country, the UN continued to:
  - mainstream a human rights based-approach, gender equality and women's empowerment and the LNOB principle through its programmes, internal coordination, joint projects, communication, outreach and advocacy
- nurture the principle of meaningful participation and consultation directly with CSOs and rights-holders groups, with government or in policy development
- support interaction between the UN Human Rights Mechanisms and all actors at the country level, and follow up on the recommendations addressed to Serbia
- produce topical and evidence-based analysis on human rights, gender equality and the rule of law, together with relevant partners from all sectors to increase the provision of information and guidance towards overcoming gaps and facing challenges
- provide high-level advocacy through multiple senior UN officials, most recently in the area of reconciliation, civic space, freedom of expression, PwD and older persons.



## 2.4. Support to partnerships and financing the 2030 Agenda

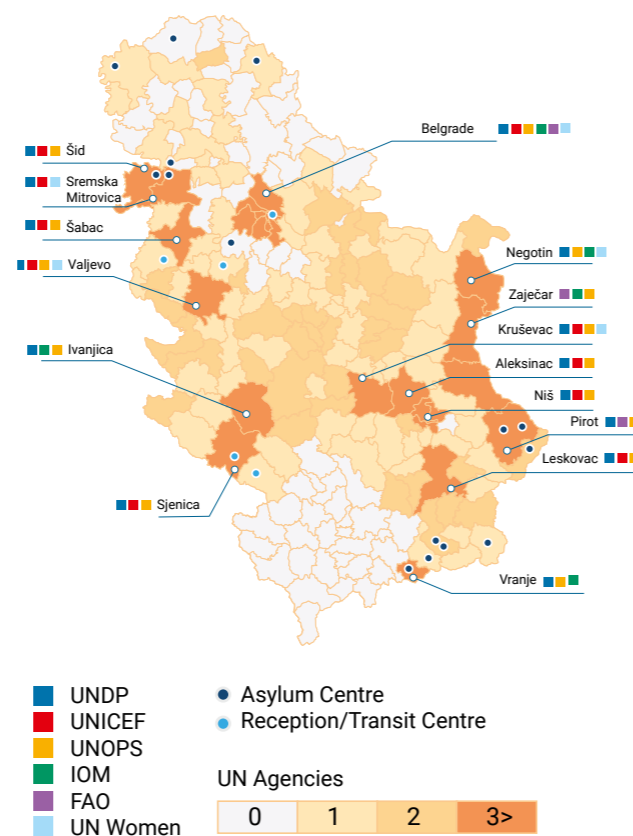
Partnership is at the core of implementation of the strategic priorities of the UN in Serbia. The organization believes that the transformative agenda will require extensive information sharing and coordination between all stakeholders, around an agreed common strategy and roadmap, while the biggest efforts and changes are yet to be defined and implemented on the ground. In the months and years to come, our joint focus should be on translating the progress in strategic and legislative changes and innovations into actionable by-laws and policy instruments, designed to ramp up the energy transition and environmental protection. Strengthening existing and building new capacities to undertake this transformation, as well as raising public awareness and commitment to support it – at the national, local and individual levels – remain prerequisites for their effective implementation.

In 2021 we consolidated, expanded and diversified multiple links and relationships with key stakeholders of Serbia's development agenda, showcasing and widening the UN knowledge, innovative and inclusive approaches, and value-based principles. Several analyses related to financing the SDGs were completed, with one financial landscape analysis undertaken here, and two analyses of the financing impact of China and of the EU on SDGs, with United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) support. These analyses review existing financing strategies, policies and institutional structures to support the implementation of Agenda 2030 in Serbia. They will serve as core foundations for a multiyear financing and for advocacy towards the government and key financing institutions. (NB: the country turned down the opportunity to have an Integrated National Financing Framework in 2020.)

### Government

The Government of Serbia is the UN's principal counterpart in implementation of the UNSDCF priorities, inclusive of COVID-19 recovery. UN agencies active in Serbia work with all levels of the government administration, namely the Prime Minister's Office, Parliament, line ministries, provincial secretariats and LSGs. The extended engagement with governmental technical institutes and independent bodies is the main platform for advancing the principled requirements of multiple international conventions and treaties. In 2021, the cooperation with government was three-fold:

- Support was provided to legislative activities, capacity building and dialogue to ensure **new legislation, policies and strategies** are in line with international standards, promote gender equality and the LNOB principle; **capacity development initiatives** for civil servants; **enhanced digital**



▲ Map with UN presence in municipalities

**lization agenda** through e-Government and National Data Centre; **knowledge exchange with regional partners** (SEE for demographic resilience; Israel for youth mental health; Italy for asylum systems; Slovenia for technology transfer; Austria on combating Violence Against Women and Girls, VAWG); and **support to national dialogue between the government and the civic sector** through the platform with the prime minister focused on critical development challenges, such as environmental protection, public health, agriculture, and with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue on policy developments.

- Support was provided to effective delivery of government financial allocations (including Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, IPA)**, through 1) enhanced public procurement through the most economically advantageous tender criteria and green procurement and innovation principles, 2) phase-out of ozone-depleting substances through the established national mechanism, 3) increased number and quality of external audit reports, along with gender audit, through the introduced audit management system, and 4)

stronger enforcement of tax policies resulting from the upgraded IT capacities of the Serbian Tax Police. Meanwhile, **alignment of government spending towards the SDGs** was ensured through enhanced energy efficiency of the second largest central government building, along with a near-zero-energy buildings approach adopted for renovation of public premises. Meanwhile, GRB continued to be a success with 71 institutions including gender perspectives in 104 (62% of all) budget programmes, and synchronizing the gender and climate financing was undertaken through the methodology for alignment of expenditures with SDG5 and SDG13.

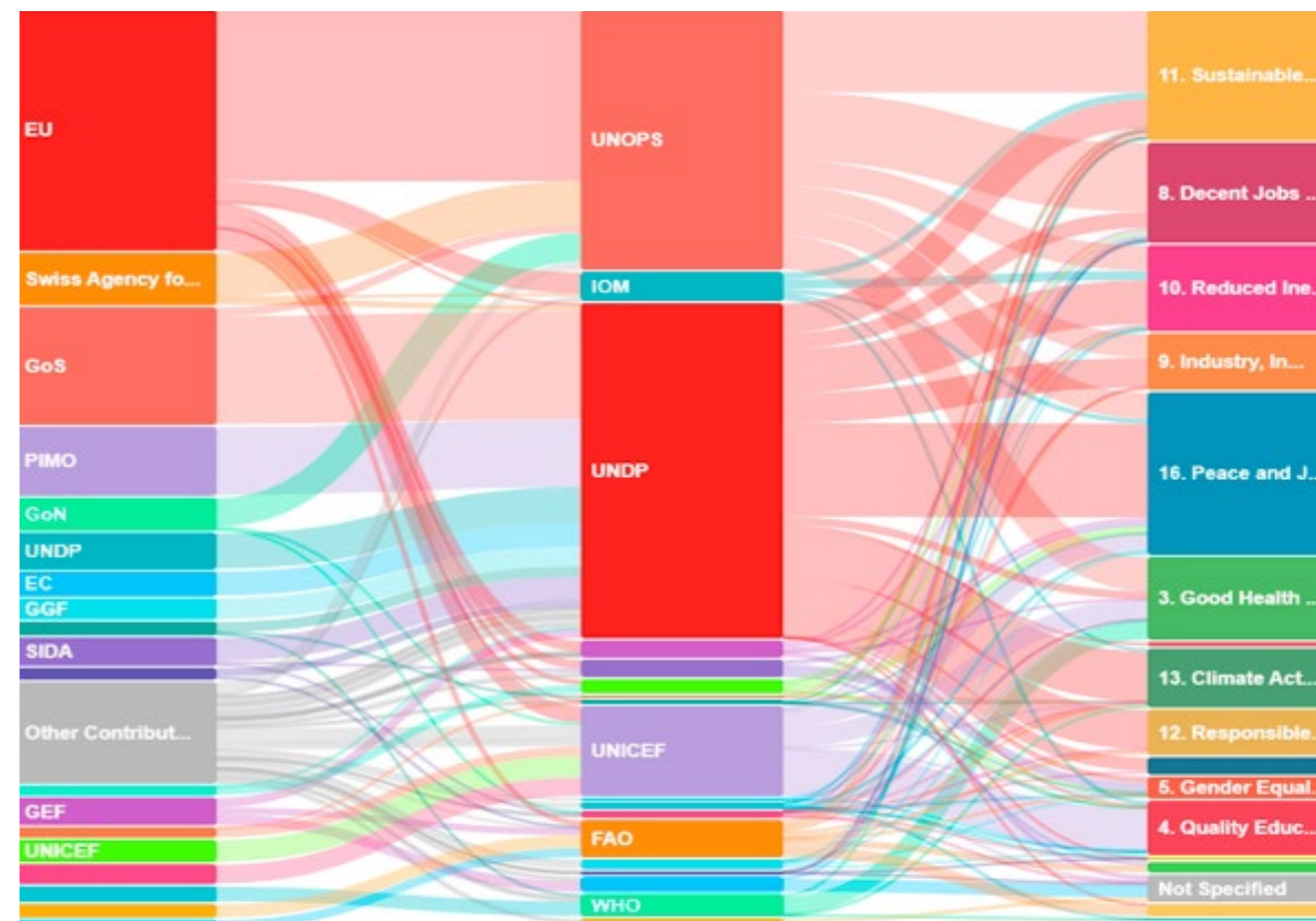
- The **government is one of the key donors of the UN system in Serbia**, particularly given the country's Upper Middle-Income status. In 2021, more than USD 44 million was agreed to support strategic priorities of UNSDCF by 2025.

### CSOs, media and academia

In 2021 the UN extended its engagement with civil society in Serbia, through both the RC office and the agencies, with the objective of deepening our understanding of the multiple dimensions of the local context, **expanding the dialogue between parties, reducing fragmentation and polarization, strengthening civil society strategic positioning and amplifying their voice** when relevant. Our focus in 2021 was on

women NGOs (open-door & other high-level engagement), human rights NGOs, youth platforms, Roma organisations and environmental NGOs. CSOs remain the UN's **core partners in reaching out to the most vulnerable**. This cooperation resulted in 1) increased monitoring and reporting on human rights from the perspective of youth, women and marginalized groups, increased participation of rights-holders groups in policymaking in the areas of human rights and gender equality, and advanced interaction between CSOs and UN human rights mechanisms, 2) strengthened digital accessibility and digital innovation ecosystem for PwD, 3) enhanced services for women in situations of violence, from accessible reporting to functional rape crises centres, 4) awareness raising on the rights of rural women and elderly women, 5) increased participation in migration governance through a 'whole of society' approach addressing negative migration narratives and promoting awareness on migrant contributions to local development, 6) legal support and integration of refugees and asylum seekers, and 7) COVID-19 immunization campaigns for Roma, youth and rural communities and 8) taking stock of the past and future action regarding Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

**Partnerships with academia** resulted in the first four non-Yugoslav refugees being enrolled in tertiary education in the faculties of Economics, Chemistry and Applied Arts in Belgrade, **while work with the media** was focused on combating violence and discrimination of women through ethical reporting on VAWG, and addressing the challenges of online disinformation.



▲ Linking Investments, Partners and the Sustainable Development Goals

## Bilateral and multilateral partners

To advance Serbia's progress towards the EU, and also the SDGs, the UN and the **EU (DEU, DG Near)** operationalized a broad number of new partnerships fully aligned with national priorities. The cooperation includes health system resilience and preparedness for emergencies, addressing socio-economic effects of COVID-19, strengthening disaster resilience in agriculture, enhancing the green transformation, advancing rule of law reforms, enhancing gender equality and supporting refugees and migrant integration, to an amount of EUR 29.7 million. New partnerships were started with the **by Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office** on the safeguarding of women and girls from violence in public spaces, and for building an open data ecosystem in Serbia, with **USAID** on the fight against COVID-19 and with **Norwegian and Swedish development partners** on projects for inclusive social, health and education services for children.

## International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and others

The UN's main objective in its partnership with IFIs is to design and implement complementary and inclusive agendas on key SDG topics such as gender equality and LNOB. This cooperation in 2021 resulted in joint endeavours in the area of environment and climate change, agriculture and social protection. The partnership with the **EIB** was crucial for initiating a vision to advance the Inclusive Green Agenda approach in Serbia. Regional partnership with **EBRD** led to improved quality standards in the sectors of agriculture, food safety and animal health, and enhanced access to climate finance for adaptation and mitigation by setting the agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors as a priority for the **Green Climate Fund**. Partnerships with the **World Bank** led to new initiatives in the area of inclusive education and digitalization in education, while domestic resources, as well as additional International Finance Institution (IFI) and private sector child-focused investments, were leveraged based on the first three sectoral Public Expenditure Reviews, in education, health and social protection.



▲ Youth Rights Talks promo visual

## Private sector and trades unions

As a partner to the UN in Serbia, the private sector **contributes resources, expertise and innovative solutions to advance Agenda 2030**. Through chambers of commerce, the Serbian chapter of the global compact and direct agreements with large companies, the UN also shares knowledge and best practices and develops local capacities on sustainable development, promotes a narrative based on opportunities on the agenda of green transformation (circular and low carbon economy and environmental protection), decent work and gender equality. Specific agencies also contribute towards the national legislation and strategies on employment, industry standards and trade facilities. Our engagement with the Global Compact chapter is shaped around the SDG Ambition programme, and the Global Compact 5-Year Enlargement Strategy, two drivers for action for like-minded companies.

Examples of project-based cooperation include 1) expanding access to STEM courses for secondary school students, and Internet access for most vulnerable children from 30 schools facing a digital divide, and improved digital literacy of older persons in partnership with mobile operators, 2) fruits and vegetables donated to beneficiaries of 60 humanitarian organizations through a digital platform for food donation, in cooperation with a large retail company in Serbia, 3) economic empowerment of refugees and asylum seekers through linking them with potential employers, and initiating the first-ever internship programme for 15 refugees with a large international company in Serbia, and 4) 25 micro SMEs (of which 10 are women-owned) from the mountain region of Valjevo that were trained in business development, access to finance and advancement of ecotourism, hospitality, food safety and gastronomy.

## Religious institutions

The visit of the Special Advisor for Prevention of Genocide provided an occasion to extend the outreach to all religious leaders. Topics for shared advocacy included transitional justice, hate speech, trust building and reconciliation.

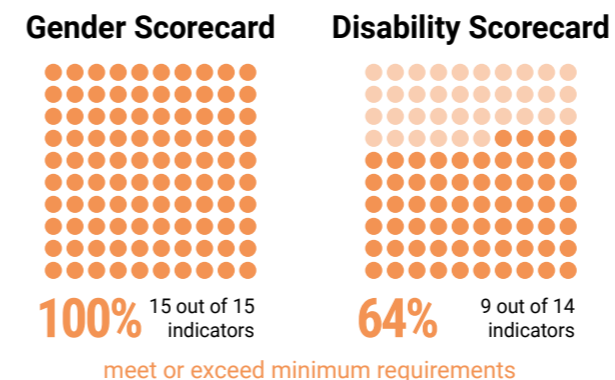


▲ Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Alice Nderitu visits religious leaders in Serbia.

## 2.5. UN system coherence, effectiveness and efficiency

### Planning and implementing together

In 2021, UN in Serbia started implementation of the new co-operation framework,<sup>11</sup> set up the foundations for increased coordination and extended compliance with the UN Mutual Accountability Framework principles. The internal governance structure was established in January 2021, with three results groups, thematic groups (Gender, Human Rights and LNOB), and sub-groups working on specific topics: air pollution, COVID vaccination, refugees and migrants. This structure allows for better coordination of activities and more strategic joint analysis. The UN team commitment to gender mainstreaming and disability work is integrated into all planning and monitoring tools, including Gender Equality and Disability Scorecards, Gender Equality markers, along with all required mechanisms for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and the Human Rights Due Diligence policy.



The number of joint initiatives in 2021 increased four-fold, in the areas of women's violence, demographics, air pollution and migration. Dialogue for the Future, a joint programme funded by the Peace-Building Fund (PBF) and implemented by UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO, was completed successfully, bringing together youth and educators across the Balkan borders around the topics of trust building, reconciliation and media literacy.<sup>12</sup> New joint initiatives planned in 2021 will be developed in 2022 around the themes of food systems, just transition and urban development, hate speech and transborder trust building, using, when relevant, UN Regional Issue-Based Coalitions, the repository of interagency knowledge derived from the UN reform.

UNCT provided joint policy advice to multiple legislative and policy changes in the areas of anti-discrimination, gender equality, violence against women and girls, same-sex unions, law on the ombudsman, strategy on de-institutionalization ([UN Thematic update #1](#)), climate change, energy and environ-

<sup>11</sup> The 2021–2025 Cooperation Framework core strategic priorities were informally approved in early 2021, and the framework endorsed formally by the Council of Ministers on 23 December 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Finalisation and approval of the new PBF project by the governments of countries and territories in the Western Balkans is expected in early 2022.

ment, urban development ([UN Thematic update #2](#)) and trafficking in persons.

Complementary to the technical support for SDGs provided by agencies in their mandated areas, the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) promoted the nationalization and reporting on Agenda 2030 with SORS, ultimately increasing the number of SDG-related indicators from 97 to 108, matching EU accession indicators, harmonizing data collection between SORS and line ministries, with a focus on indicators related to health, environment and climate change, and supported the preparation of the 2021 SDG Report for Serbia, in collaboration with SORS and GIZ.

### Operating Together

UN agencies with a presence in the field continued to consolidate their joint operations, in the areas of procurement, recruitment, finance, information and communications technology, generating a net estimated cost avoidance of USD 600,000 in 2021. The Operations team initiated the first phase of establishing a Common Back Office, to be fully effective in 2022. With regard to Greening the Blue, the main UN House in Belgrade started to upgrade its energy efficiency towards a greener building (changing of the heating system), and for Staff safety and well-being, by the end of 2021, 85 percent of UN staff had been vaccinated twice and 65 percent had received a booster, far above the national averages.

### Communicating Together

*The UN in Serbia Communication Strategy was developed in early 2021 and covers both the joint UN communication objectives and the specific actions shared between the agencies and the UN Resident Coordinator.* The communication focuses on key SDGs, joint initiatives, observance days critical to the UNSDCF and UN Day. It aims to **bring all communication and advocacy efforts under one converging and strategic umbrella, augmenting the reach to multiple audiences and covering topics from multiple perspectives**. Topics this year included Gender Equality and Fighting VAW, Environment and Climate Change, Hate Speech, Human Rights, Youth Day and Belgrade Pride week, at which the Free & Equal campaign was launched (all on [UN in Serbia website](#)).

*The UN in Serbia is a prolific contributor to, and organiser of, multiple conferences, working groups, keynote speeches, television shows, op-eds, in multiple forums and locations, including Parliament, Palace of Serbia, universities, civil society events, printed and online media, UN organized events, eco-*

conomic commission and regional offices. Such events are part of the extensive advocacy work undertaken by the Resident Coordinator and agencies representatives and staff. They provide key opportunities for high level advocacy, as well as a large audience on a wide range of topics related to Agenda 2030.

*Examples of key events in 2021 that included more than one agency include:* i) the **16 Days of Activism** campaign with joint UNCG and Serbia Government efforts that featured a series of activities, events, speeches and video messages; the highlight of the campaign – the launch of a special music video **'Equally'** (featuring a hip-hop Roma Women group) – reached more than 500,000 people on all social media channels and was widely featured in regional and UN global social media, ii) a UNDP pre-COP26 **Climate Change** event that included contributions from multiple UN agencies, iii) the **Human Rights Week**, jointly with the Ministry of Human Rights, from 3–10 December, with a series of advocacy and awareness-raising and media events targeting the rights of various rights holders, with particular focus on those furthest left behind, iv) regional launch of the first **UN Global Report on Ageism**, supported by UNFPA, v) **Decent Work and Economic Growth in Serbia** – Do They Go Hand in Hand supported by ILO, vi) UNECE Sub-Regional Workshop on land-use planning and industrial safety for South-Eastern Europe, vii) Regional Expert Group Meeting (RGEM): Addressing trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation through international cooperation – supported by UNODC, viii) UN Women regional conference **Combating sexual violence against women** – Improving the legal framework and treatment, ix) **UN Free and Equal** two-week advocacy campaign together with twelve international partners on the human rights of LGBTQI people in Serbia, focused on equality and support for adoption of the draft law on same-sex unions, and x) during **UN Day** the urgency to act together for the people and the planet was highlighted, with reflections on the solutions needed to nurture diversity, inclusiveness and solidarity, while overcoming the triple planetary crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution – as identified in the recently released Our Common Agenda report of the UN Secretary General xi) continuous communication activities of WHO during **COVID-19** pandemic that reached millions of people providing them with basic guidance on public health measures to be respected.

A series of Thematic Updates was developed and distributed to a wide range of stakeholders. The updates intend to inform our programming, share comprehensive data and complex information with the wider development community in a fast-changing context and jointly advocate towards our national and local counterparts. The thematic updates are fact-based, reflect the current state-of-affairs on specific issues and highlight progresses, gaps and challenges. They help deepen the understanding of critical and contemporary topics, shape and plan evidence-based sustainable solutions to critical long-term challenges in Serbia, and are drafted by RCO, with inputs from relevant agencies.

In 2021, *we expanded the practice of Open-Door discussions with selected civil society*, and where relevant, government counterparts. This year, jointly with UN women representatives, we focused on all topics related to Gender. The open-door meetings, organized at UN House, with a hybrid option, intended to provide a safe space for multiple stakeholders to express views on progress and remaining gaps, challenges and concerns, on any matter for which advocacy may benefit. *We continued our direct advocacy towards UN member states*, to encourage and strengthen joint positions on all matters related to sustainable development and the SDGs, on trust building and the green agenda. UN agencies' efforts on gender are captured in bi-annual **Gender Brief** publication produced by the UNCT Gender Thematic Group.

As a result, UNCT achieved:

▲ **7% increase**

in number of achieved media hits

▲ **18% increase**

in number of followers on social media channels (IG, Twitter)

▲ **19% increase**

increase in number of people reached on certain topics (LGBTQI, GBV, air pollution)

### Highlights

The campaign featured a song, **Ravnopravno** (Equal), by a Roma girl band **Pretty Loud**, in Serbian and Romani. The song puts a spotlight on the various forms of violence faced by women at different ages.



▲ Music video "Equally" by Roma women band Pretty Loud



▲ Belgrade joins the Orange the World in 16 Days campaign



NL Netherlands UNITED NATIONS SERBIA #EY 3A TE BE



▲ Awareness raising activities with partner organizations around World Environment and Bicycle days



▲ Love Rules - campaign in support of draft law on same sex unions (UN Free & Equal Campaign)

**476,140 people**

were reached on social media channels

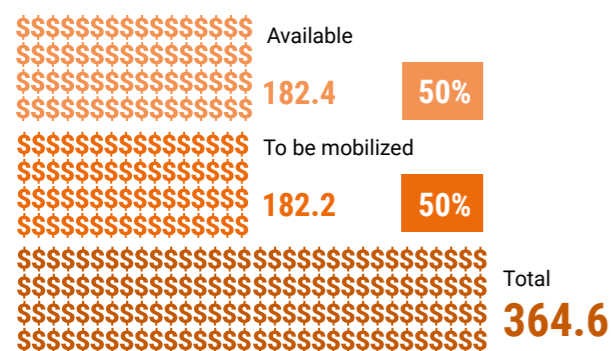
During the seven-day campaign around World Bicycle Day and World Environment Day, the UN reached more than 200,000 people through various channels on the urgent need to address the triple planetary crises and promote sustainable urban transport, climate action, ecosystem restoration and individual responsibility in climate action.

## 2.6. Evaluations and lessons learned

Evaluation of the UN Development Partnership Framework 2016–2020 took place in 2019, with a number of findings and recommendations issued for the UN Team in Serbia to strengthen programming and results. In 2020–2021, we followed up on more than 80 percent of the recommendations, primarily through preparation of the Cooperation Framework, a revamped management architecture, increased coherence and complementarity through the extension of joint work and advocacy, increased internal capacities in cross-cutting areas, development of a predictable funding framework, and strengthening of the partnership with non-funding institutions. The remainder of recommendations, mostly related to impact and sustainability principles, are considered through the annual joint workplan and monitoring and evaluation framework to be developed in 2022.

## 2.7. Financial overview and resources mobilization

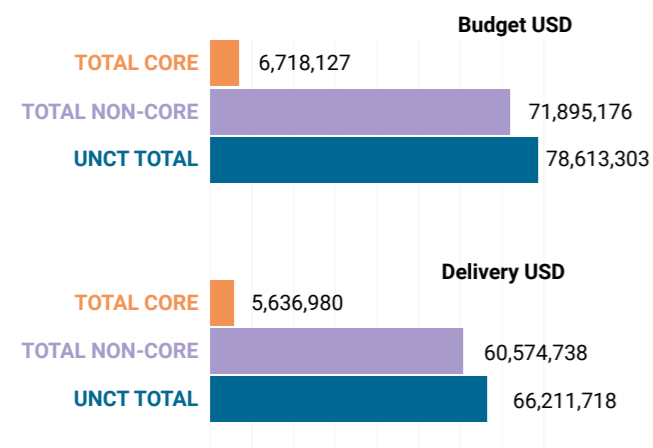
The Multi-Year Funding Framework for the UNSDCF requires a budget of USD 365 million (2021-2025), of which half (USD 182 million) was secured in 2021. A Joint Resource Mobilisation Strategy will be developed in 2022, aiming to enhance more focused engagements with donors in line with the UN reform, along with better alignment with partner priorities and agendas. The UN in Serbia expects to strengthen financing of SDGs, either through the UN, through its government partners, or through other financing platforms provided by the development banks and the private sector.



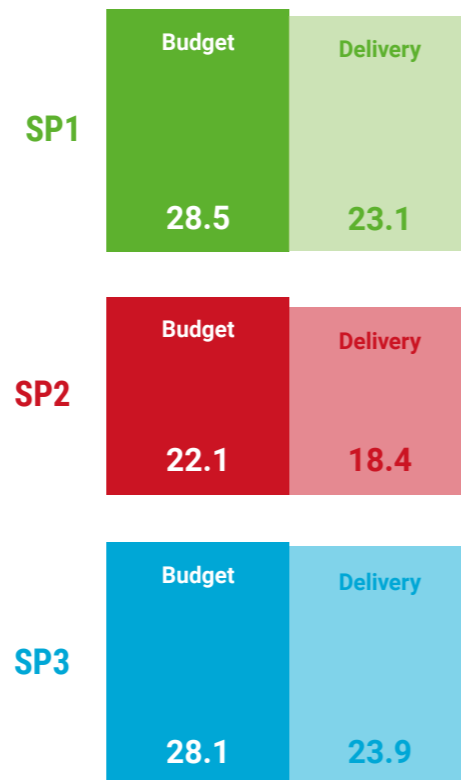
▲ Total UNSDCF funding requirements (in USD million)

In 2021, a budget of USD 78.6 million was planned across the three strategic priorities of the Cooperation Framework). The delivery rate was 84 percent (USD 66.2 million). Priority 1 accounted for 34.8 percent, Priority 2 for 29.3 percent, Priority 3 for 35.9 percent in total delivery. Eighteen UN agencies<sup>13</sup> delivered services.

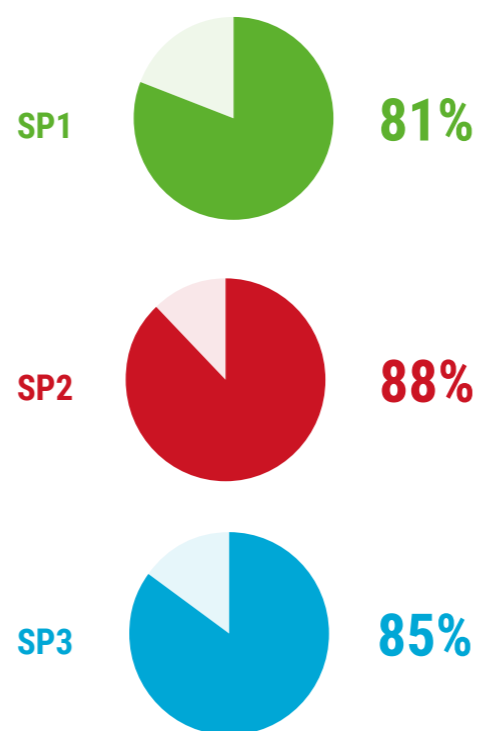
13 18 out of 20 agencies, signatories of the UNSDCF.



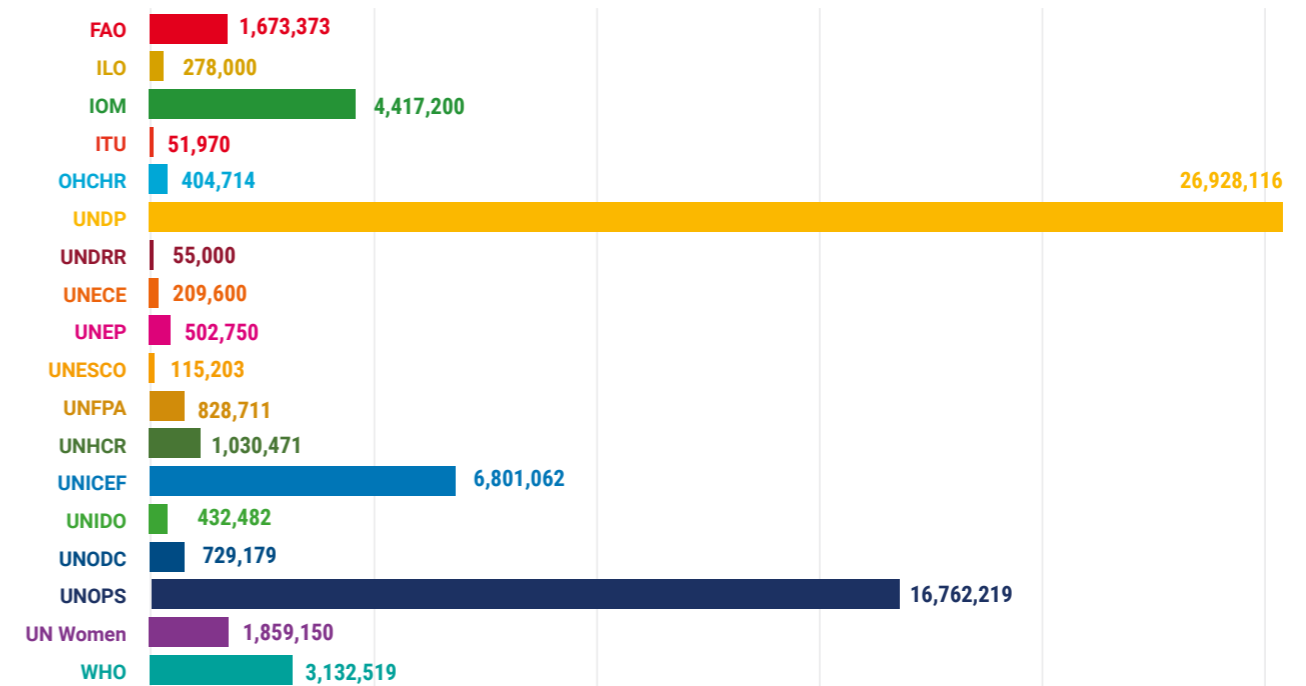
▲ Total budget (core & non-core) vs. delivery (core & non-core)



▲ Total budget and delivery for SP (in USD million)



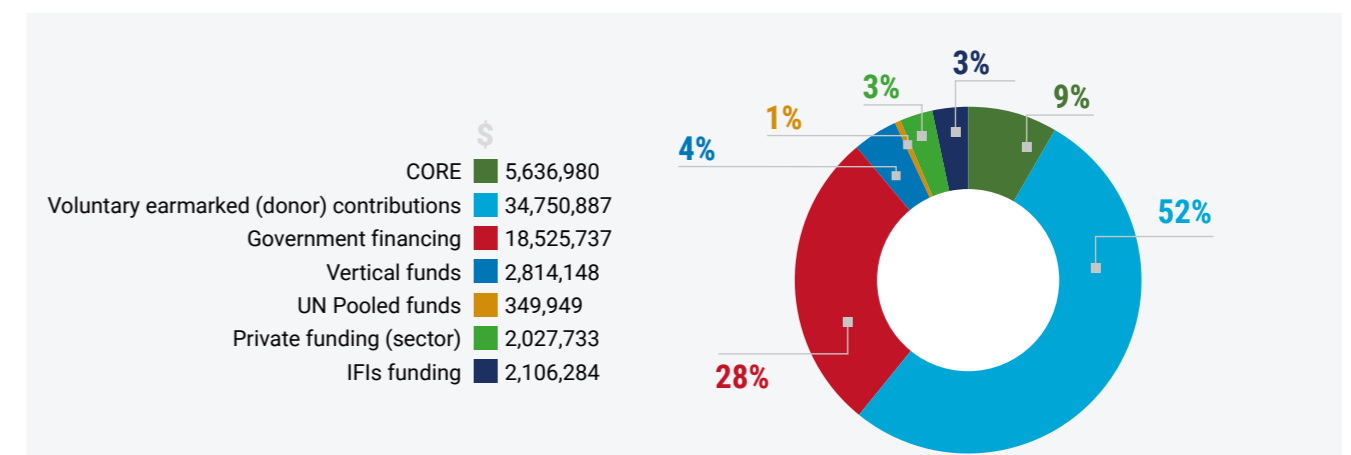
▲ Budget delivery for strategic priority in percentage



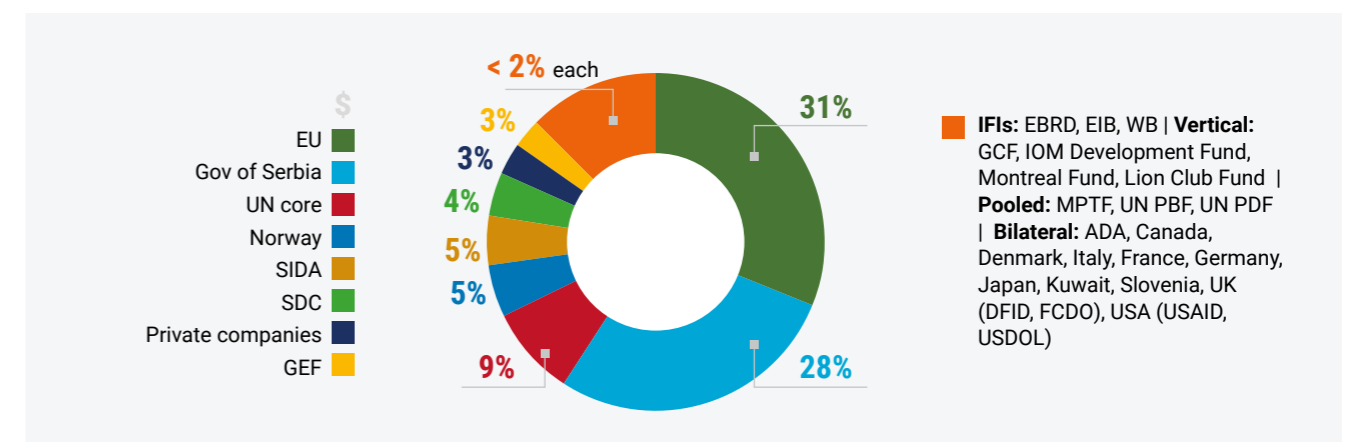
▲ UN Agencies' budget delivery (in USD)

The diverse sources of financing were accessed in 2021. Some 52 percent of the funding came from locally raised earmarked donor contribution. The EU was the largest single donor accounting for 31.1 percent, followed by the Government

of Serbia with 28 percent. UN Core resources accounted for 8.5 percent, pool and thematic funds, 4.7 percent, while IFIs and private funding accounted for 3.1 percent and 3 percent, respectively.



▲ Delivery by funding source



▲ Delivery by donor

## Chapter 3: Into the Future – 2022 and beyond

# 3

**T**oday, we define our ambitions towards sustainability as the capacity of humanity to coexist in harmony with Earth and with each other. Moving towards that goal involves deep transformation in societal structures and individual lifestyles, reduction of our environmental footprints, a more effective built environment with renewable energy and sustainable cities, as well as expansion of the circular economy. We will continue and strive to build a society that nurtures the values of peace, solidarity, inclusiveness and shared responsibility between citizens and states: a society that embraces the full scope of human rights as its core functioning mechanism, throughout its evolution.

**Going back is not the way forward.** The way forward requires a bold vision to fast track the transformation at all levels of society and the economy. The biggest constraint in such transformation is not of a technological nor financial nature; it is instead grounded in the inherent resistance to change, in each of us, in society, in institutions. But the response to COVID-19 has shown that when faced with a massive crisis, humanity can change everything very quickly! Therefore, some of the ideas that the UN will support in 2022 follow below.

**Health is an investment not a cost.** We learned from this pandemic the imperative to collectively place health at the core of each country governance as an investment in the future. While we will continue our efforts to support the COVID vaccination campaign, expand health treatment capacities and equitable access to all communities, **we must place a greater focus on prevention** by addressing critical environmental factors such as air pollution, investing in innovation and primary health care, promoting and supporting healthy lifestyles, and curtailing tobacco use, for a healthier society and a reduced burden on the economy. **This will require the commitment of multiple stakeholders beyond the health sector, including families, food producers and distributors, schools and the private sector.**

**The Future of Work is evolving quickly.** While the digitalization of workplace accelerates, we do not want inequalities to widen through employment. Most importantly, there are many economic and social sectors that require real people in their place of work, farmers, artisans, construction workers, engineers and tourism service providers, including, and not least, in the informal sector. These are not jobs just from the past; they are also jobs of the future, and they will benefit from frontier technology. These jobs need to be valued, including through the formal and informal education system, and we must retain all such skills

in country. The UN will continue to advocate for a wider inclusion of workers under the decent job framework, closing of the gender gap and more rights for informal workers. We will also focus on young people to be prepared for the challenges that lie ahead and to manage uncertainties.

**Our relationship with the planet will change.** The Green Agenda is coming into action with EU support and large public and private investments. The year 2022 is the time to shape the full vision of the green transformation, to build the capacities to implement the vision urgently, to make it happen and to communicate it. This is a key priority for the UN family: we have tested methodologies on the just transition in coal mining regions with social partners, we are already working on air pollution and energy efficiency, on energy poverty, on circular economy and on sustainable food systems. This is the greatest opportunity to rally the people, the private sector, the state, civil society. Let us breathe into that agenda, exhale business as usual and shift the narrative on economic prosperity as a pathway into the future. We call for all public and private investments in trade and infrastructure to fully support and accelerate the objectives of the Green Agenda.

**System efficiencies, transparency and building trust are the grounding principles for good governance and rule of law: the backbone to a society striving on social cohesion and a solid social contract.** This is another strategic priority of action for the UN in the years to come: strengthening equitable social protection systems, inclusive education system and prevention of GBV, promoting inter-generational solidarity, and tackling system inefficiencies, in other words, **placing people at the centre of planning and action.** We will continue to fight misinformation by promoting a common, empirically backed consensus around facts, science and knowledge. We will advocate for a strong, safe and fair civic and media space, and will fight hate and divisive speech.

The common thread in these points is the desire of the UN to fight inequalities, leave no one behind and strengthen the prevalence of human rights, democracy and gender equality, while embracing the value of the common good. We call for an expansion of inclusive and meaningful national listening consultations and dialogues, so all citizens have a say in envisioning their country's future and making Serbia a flagship model of sustainability. As we are again engulfed in the throes of another brutal conflict, we call for nurturing of Peace and Solidarity, and the fundamental values of the UN Charter.

## Annex A:

Progress against CF results framework ([link](#))



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