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# SERBIA 2030

## DOES SERBIA GOVERN ITS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?



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# 2030

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# Summary

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a global framework aimed at achieving universal goals, including poverty eradication, reducing inequality and taking action to combat climate change and its consequences, all of which are particularly important for Serbia. The sustainable development goals are universal, they are goals set by all countries, and Serbia has committed itself to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The report analyses the changes over the past year concerning public policy framework, institutional framework and progress monitoring and reporting mechanisms, as well as progress in nationalization of targets defined by the non-state sector. The report builds on previous reports of the "SDGs For All" Platform prepared in 2020 – "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda" and "Serbia in 2030: Development Priorities – the non-state Sector Report".

## Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia – where do we stand?

In the previous year the necessary progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda has not been made. Key processes, such as adoption of the National Development Plan with priority goals and nationalization of goals based on a society-wide dialogue have not yet been implemented, although almost half the time has passed since the period envisaged for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The current situation regarding the institutional framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is very unfavourable. In 2015 the Government established the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which was

later abolished with the establishment of the new Government of the Republic of Serbia in October 2020. At the time of drafting this report, the group has not been established, and stakeholder representatives are still insufficiently involved in the 2030 Agenda implementation processes.

Although certain processes relevant to implementation of the 2030 Agenda have been initiated or implemented, including the mapping of sustainable development goals against the existing planning documents and putting in place progress monitoring and reporting system, the 2030 Agenda is not given enough space and importance in public discourse. The Agenda was not mentioned in the Prime Minister's Exposition, and the latest Government Work Programme does not include processes, delegated by ministries and government bodies, relevant for the management, coordination and implementation of the Agenda.

The analysis shows that further work is needed on integration of the sustainable development goals into public policies, further improvement of the legal framework, and establishment of institutional mechanisms and progress monitoring mechanisms. Compared to the previous year, progress has been recorded for certain goals while for others, there has been a setback with the expiration of existing planned documents or the adoption of new ones that are not appropriate. The current implementation framework for most goals has only been partially established or is not functional at all, and significant challenges have been identified in achieving the nationalized targets defined by the non-state sector. The assessment of the situation with regard to nationalized targets was performed using defined progress monitoring indicators. A more recent data for some indicators are not available.

and for those where data are available, there is a significant deviation in values for most targets.

## What are the next steps?

A key recommendation and a priority at this time, as it was in the previous report, is the adoption of the National Development Plan of Serbia with priority SDGs, adapted to the national context and developed in cooperation with all stakeholders. The Development Plan is the basis for initiating and implementing other processes important for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for the improvement of the framework for achieving individual SDGs.

This report indicates that it is important to position the 2030 Agenda as a priority process in managing and implementing sustainable development, which should entail the establishment of an institutional framework, with a clear division of responsibilities and a strategic approach to its implementation. We are already halfway through the implementation period of the 2030 Agenda, which shows the urgency of providing the necessary preconditions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and progress towards achieving development goals, through cooperation between the public and private sectors, academia, civil society and citizens.

# Introduction

Building on the legacy of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, a new global development agenda was launched, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It was adopted on 25th September 2015 and it rests on three main pillars:

1. Social – Eradicate poverty,
2. Environmental – Protect the planet, and
3. Economic – Ensure prosperity for all.

The central transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda is Leave No One Behind (LNOB). The 2030 Agenda includes **17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets**, resulting from over two years of global public consultations, in which the citizens of Serbia were also included. The Republic of Serbia has committed itself to engage in the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Given the importance of this process, the important question is how committed is Serbia to this process and what progress has been made in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The latest Progress Report on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the Republic of Serbia presents the progress in the implementation of SDGs in 2020, for 83 indicators, which are based on the data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and other data producers (Babovic, 2020). Progress was not monitored relative to country-specific targets, as they were not defined, but in relation to the trend of change over the period for which data are available. According to the report, it was possible to perform trend calculation for 15 sustainable development goals (except for SDGs 13 and 14, for which no

data were available at the time) and 76 targets. Of the total number of targets for which trend calculation was possible, it was estimated that 8 targets were achieved, a significant progress was made for 36 targets, moderate progress for 10 targets, moderate movement away was recorded for 6 targets, and significant movement away is noted in 14 targets. The trend for two targets was inconsistent (progress was recorded in one (sub) indicator, and movement away from the goal on the other).

Information on Serbia's progress in achieving SDGs by 2030 is also available in international reports. The monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context (EU), prepared on the basis of the Eurostat methodology (Eurostat, 2021), contains data for Serbia for certain indicators. According to the findings of the report of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung (Sachs et al., 2021), Serbia ranked 34 out of 165 UN member states. According to the assessment results of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Institute for European Environmental Policy (Lafortune et al., 2021), Serbia ranked 31 out of 34 European countries in terms of progress in achieving SDGs. It was assessed that out of 17 SDGs, there are not enough data for three SDGs (2, 10 and 14), and for SDGs 1, 8 and 17 Serbia is on the right track to achieve them, noting that there are still significant challenges. For SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 16 it was concluded that moderate progress was made but insufficient to achieve them, also noting existing challenges (for goals 4 and 16 it is stated that there are major challenges). For other goals, it is assessed that no progress was made (6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 15).

Recognizing the importance of the 2030 Agenda and the monitoring of progress towards achie-

ving SDGs, two reports were prepared within the Sustainable Development for All Platform in 2020 – “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda” and “Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the non-state sector report”. The first report gives an overview of the readiness to achieve SDGs through the analysis of policy documents, legal and institutional framework and mechanisms for progress monitoring. The aim of the second report was to propose key development priorities, based on the 2030 Agenda, towards which Serbia should strive in order to provide better life for its citizens, and to illustrate how the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development goals can be used to formulate national development priorities and policies.

The previous assessment of readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was conducted based on the data collected as of September 2020. In this report, which builds on our previous analysis, we asked the question of what happened in the following year? Have there been changes in public policies and the legal or institutional framework that would lead

to progress in terms of readiness to achieve the goals? Have mechanisms for progress monitoring and reporting been improved?

In addition to answering these questions, we sought to assess progress on nationalized targets defined by the non-governmental sector. Each target contains progress monitoring indicators, as well as indicators with values that, if achieved, would be considered a success. The previous report on development priorities assessed the situation with regard to these targets, so now the question arises whether there have been changes between the two reporting periods. How much progress was made so far in achieving the goals and what should be done to get closer to achieving the goals set for 2030?

The data for this report were collected as of October 2021. The report is intended to serve representatives of the public and private sectors, academia, civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as citizens who want to gain insight into Serbia's current readiness to achieve sustainable development goals, the progress made in certain priority areas and the steps that will follow.

# Methodology

The report was prepared through a three stage process:

## 1. Initial analysis of public policy documents and relevant data

Public policy documents and relevant data were analysed in the preparation of this report. The reporting period is September 2020 to October 2021.

The first part of the report is the analysis of processes at the national level that support the achievement of sustainable development goals. These are based on guidelines and manuals published by international organizations and research institutions, which describe processes that are important to ensure preparedness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (including the alignment of national planning documents and legal framework with sustainable development goals, the establishment of institutional and coordination mechanisms, as well as progress monitoring and reporting systems).

The second part of the report was prepared as the analysis of the framework for implementation of each Sustainable Development Goals. The starting point for the analysis was the UN RIA methodology (*Rapid Integration Assessment – RIA*) and the Guidance for auditing preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals.

The third part of the report was prepared based on the most recent data related to the indicators set for each nationalized target defined by the non-governmental sector.

## 2. Consultations with stakeholder representatives

The initial report was prepared based on the analysis of public policy documents and relevant data, and forwarded for comments to stakeholder representatives. The aim of this part of the report preparation was to give stakeholder representatives an opportunity to share their experiences and, based on their expertise, give suggestions on whether all relevant documents have been analysed, share data sources useful for analysis with researchers, as well as to give their opinion on the findings. The consultations involved independent experts, public and private sector representatives, academia and CSOs.

## 3. Preparation of the Final report

The initial report was revised in accordance with comments and suggestions from stakeholder representatives. In addition to the revised analyses, the final report also contains the findings of analyses of national-level processes that support the implementation of sustainable development goals.

# Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia – where do we stand?

The following text presents the research findings and consists of three parts.



The first part discusses the progress in relation to the processes at national level relevant for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



The second part contains 16 chapters, each analysing the frameworks for implementation of individual sustainable development goals.



The third part gives an overview of the progress in 8 priority areas (22 targets).

# I

# PLANNING DOCUMENTS, INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS AND PROGRESS MONITORING AND REPORTING ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The following part presents the findings of the evaluation of preconditions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This part of the report is focused on changes in the process of alignment of national planning documents with sustainable development goals, implementation of the 2030 Agenda, institutional and coordination mechanisms, progress monitoring and reporting, against the findings of the previous report. Recommendations are presented at the end of this chapter.

# Alignment of planning documents with the 2030 Agenda

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires adaptation of the sustainable development goals to the national context and defining development priorities (“nationalization of goals”) and relevant targets at the national level, to ensure they reflect the identified priorities. It is important that these processes are implemented with the involvement of stakeholder representatives. One of the first steps is to map sustainable development goals against the existing planning documents, in order to determine which goals are covered by national planning documents and which are not.

One of the processes that has been carried out in Serbia so far is the analysis of the extent to which the existing planning documents are in line with the 2030 Agenda. In 2018, the Public Policy Secretariat of the Republic of Serbia (PPS) prepared an analysis of coverage of each SDG by the current strategic framework in Serbia. The analysis was updated in November 2020 in relation to active public policy documents (PPS, 2020).

The mapping of Serbia’s strategic framework against the SDGs was done using elements of the RIA methodology, and based on the analysis conclusions were made regarding areas that are not adequately covered by the strategic framework. The main conclusion of the 2018 analysis was that the total coverage of SDGs and targets by the strategic framework is 62%. An important note for the interpretation of this percentage is that it was obtained taking into account goal 14, which is not covered by the strategic framework at all, as well as targets that are not relevant for the Republic of Serbia or are covered by international

agreements but not by the national strategic framework. The analysis from November 2020 has shown a somewhat higher coverage of SDGs and targets by the strategic framework (65.2%). Both reports show that SDGs related to environmental protection and climate change are least covered. The report states that monitoring progress in the implementation of SDGs should “guide the deve-

„Targets are defined as aspirational and global, with each Government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances. Each Government will also decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies.“

## Agenda 2030

lopment agenda of the Republic of Serbia, which should be formulated by hierarchically highest development documents, in accordance with the Law on the Planning System” (Development Plan, Investment Plan and Spatial Plan).

The Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia (Article 6) prescribes the adoption of the Development Plan as the hierarchically highest, long-term development planning document of the Republic of Serbia, which should contain priority development goals of Serbia and its regions, including guidelines for their implementation for at least ten years. The drafting of the Development Plan should take into account its compliance with the guidelines, goals and tasks arising from international commitments,

and the drafting process should be seen as an opportunity to align the process with the 2030 Agenda. The Development Plan is accompanied by the Investment Plan, which is drafted in line with the priority development goals for at least seven years. This document contains plans for public investments in areas of public interest. The third key development planning document is the Spatial Plan, which should also be aligned with the Development Plan.

The Government was supposed to submit the draft Development Plan to the National Assembly for consideration by January 1, 2020 at the latest (Article 53, paragraph 1), but this has not yet been done, without any clear reason or explanation. A recently adopted Programme for Improving Public Policy Management and Regulatory Reform recognizes delays in the implementation of the Law on the Planning System as a problem related to development planning at the state level, particularly the fact that the Development Plan, as an overarching strategic document that defines long-term development directions, was not prepared. The Development Plan, the Investment Plan, and the Spatial Plan are the basis for determining priority goals that are reflected in all other planning documents. The Law on the Planning System does not provide for sanctions in case of non-implementation of the obligations provided by it, which could have affected the delays.

Setting up starting points and a roadmap is cited as the first step in the preparation of the Development Plan under the Programme for Improving Public Policy Management and Regulatory Reform, along with a comprehensive consultative process in order to initiate a broader social dialogue. The Programme mentions the 2030 Agenda as a possibility of using external support for development planning. Under the Action Plan 2021-2025 it is planned to conduct an analysis of Serbia's development potentials, international economic trends and commitments

as a basis for the preparation of the Development Plan roadmap. It is planned that the preparatory procedure for the Development Plan will be adopted by 2022.

Despite the fact that certain steps in development of this document have been realized, competencies have been conferred and deadlines have been established, a point of concern is that it was not explicitly foreseen that the Development Plan will be adopted by 2025. If the set deadlines are followed, the question is whether this document will be adopted before expiration of half of the period allotted for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which calls into question the progress in achieving the goals.

At the local level, the Law on the Planning System envisages adoption of development plans at the level of local government units (LGUs). These are a long-term development planning documents, adopted by the LGU Assembly for at least seven years, at the proposal of the competent LGU executive body. In the guidelines for the preparation of local development plans, the PPS recommended that they include the 2030 Agenda. So far, only a small number of local authorities have adopted Development Plans, although the deadline expired on January 1, 2021. In addition to inadequate capacities of local self-governments for the implementation of this process, another obstacle is the fact that the Development Plan has not been adopted at the national level, which would facilitate planning at the local level. The planning process should go from the global, to the national, to the local level. Since the National Development Plan has not been adopted, there is a reverse process of adoption of local development plans, which are aligned with the 2030 Agenda at the global level, but which are not in line with the national development goals because they have not been set. Once the National Development Plan is adopted, additional resources will be needed to align the already adopted local plans.

The Spatial Plan is also a development planning document and is currently in the drafting phase. Draft Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2035 was submitted for public review from April 5 to May 5, 2021 (Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, 2021) and civil society organizations submitted numerous comments and remarks (Belgrade Open School, 2021). Several deficiencies were noted in terms of transparency of the process and citizen participation. A key deficiency that was mentioned was the lack of citizen involvement in defining development priorities in the drafting phase of the Plan content (before public review or preliminary public review). Another point of concern was the time allowed for public review, which was 30 days, due to the unwillingness of the officials to allow more time than the legal minimum for public participation, regardless of the volume and complexity of the document. Also, the public review was scheduled during the period that included state and religious holidays and no public presentation of the Plan was held. One general objection to the Plan content concerned the basis on which development priorities were made, since the Development Plan of the Republic of Serbia was not adopted. Specifically, it was said that it is unclear as to why the Draft mentions the national millennium development goals, given that they have ceased to be a reference development framework and have been replaced by SDGs. The 2030 Agenda is mentioned in the Draft Spatial Plan, but only as one of the relevant international documents on which the Draft or individual goals are based.

Also, within the context of the 2030 Agenda it was mentioned that the Sustainable Development Strategy is in the drafting stage (Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, 2021). One of the tasks of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was "to propose the process for adopting the national sustainable development strategy and the method of financing" (paragraph 2, item 3 of the Decision on the Establishment of the Inter-

Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda). During the meeting with a group of CSOs in March 2021, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia announced the preparation and adoption of the Sustainable Development Strategy (National Convention on the European Union, 2021). However, given the importance of establishing development priorities with which all other planning documents will be aligned by means of a broad social dialogue, there is a question of expediency of adoption of the Sustainable Development Strategy, a document lower in the hierarchy from the Development Plan. The Law on the Planning System was passed in April 2018, which prescribes the adoption of the Development Plan.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development for the period from 2009 to 2017 was valid in the previous reporting period, including the Action Plan that was adopted somewhat later. It is not known whether any evaluation was performed after its completion, which is certainly necessary for creating a new planning document that concerns sustainable development.

Serbia's commitments under the EU accession process and the 2030 Agenda are complementary. The EU document "Next steps for a sustainable European future" confirmed that EU will include SDGs in all its policies and initiatives (European Commission, 2016). The Voluntary National Report of the Republic of Serbia on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda recognizes that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through the achievement of SDGs is inseparable from the EU accession process (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2019). In addition to being mapped against to the national strategic framework, the analysis of the PPS states that SDGs were also mapped against the thematic clusters of the negotiating chapters in the Serbia's EU accession process. One of the competencies of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda was to prepare a proposal for adopting

a national strategy for sustainable development which will "align the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the conditions that the Republic of Serbia must meet in order to fulfil other international obligations and successfully complete the negotiations with the European Union" (paragraph 2, item 3 of the Decision on the Establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda).

However, with the cessation of operation of the Working Group and the failure to draft the Development Plan in accordance with the Law

on the Planning System, no further progress has been made in the coordination of these processes.

The lack of progress in this area should be seen relative to the failure to give legitimacy to the 2030 Agenda and clearly communicate its importance through operational documents of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. The 2030 Agenda was not represented in the Government Programme from October 2020, and the Government's Work Plan for 2021 did not include activities directly related to its implementation.

## Establishing institutional and coordination mechanisms for the achievement of the sustainable development goals

Establishing institutional and coordination mechanisms is considered an important issue, given the complexity of the 2030 Agenda, but it was accepted to establish and adjust the institutional framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to the national context. Guidelines and recommendations often emphasize the need for cooperation with the civil sector and other stakeholder representatives,<sup>1</sup> who should actively participate in the process of setting up and monitoring the achievement of SDGs. Also, vertical coordination is seen as extremely important, as much of the responsibility for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda lies at the local level. The issue of division of responsibilities at different levels of government is very important for the consistency of its implementation. It is estimated that about 65% of the 2030 Agenda targets could not be fully achieved without the input of regional and

local authorities (it is estimated that about 70% of the EU acquis is implemented at the local level) (Prorok et al., 2019).

The current situation regarding the institutional framework and coordination mechanism for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia is very unfavourable. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda was established by the decision of the Government passed on December 30, 2015. The working group consisted of 27 members, representatives of ministries, offices, commissariats and coordination bodies, PPS, SORS and the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU). However, the Inter-Ministerial Working Group was disbanded after the establishment of the new Government of the Republic of Serbia in October 2020, without a clear reason and explanation.

<sup>1</sup> Stakeholders are bodies and organizations, natural and legal persons with interestes related to public policy measures (Law on the Planning System, art. 2).

One of the tasks of the now disbanded Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was to propose the process of adopting a national strategy for sustainable development, and to consolidate the views and coordinate the activities of all relevant ministries in relation to the 2030 Agenda. Other tasks also included cooperation with competent ministries in monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to propose the basis for statistical monitoring of goals and targets. It was also entrusted with reporting tasks: to prepare periodic reports on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and continuously inform the UN Resident Coordinator in the Republic of Serbia and the UN system on the results of the Working Group and the implementation of goals and targets. Prof. dr. Slavica Đukić Dejanović was appointed the president of the Working Group. She is currently serving as a special advisor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia for the 2030 Agenda. Stakeholders and the public may advocate for a new Inter-Ministerial Working Group at the time of election of the new government, following the early parliamentary elections scheduled for April 3, 2022.

The working group was not the only body established to carry out tasks related to the sustainable development goals. Namely, with the support of the Government of Switzerland and the UN Development Program, a Focus Group of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia was established for development of controlling mechanisms for the SDG implementation process. The role of the Focus Group was to provide supervision and support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia, to control work and activities of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (while it existed), to prepare laws governing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, ensure that adequate or additional funds for the achievement of SDGs are allocated from the adopted budget, and raising awareness

of the importance of the 2030 Agenda among members of the National Assembly.

According to the official data about the work of the Focus Group, the group met in 2021 in January and November. At the meeting in January 2021, it was concluded that in the coming period a request should be sent to the Committee on Administrative, Budgetary, Mandate and Immunity Issues to adopt a proposal that future draft acts adopted by the National Assembly must contain a review of the impact analysis regarding the 2030 Agenda, as well as to initiate the adoption of the Declaration on SDGs in the National Assembly (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, 2021a). The importance of positioning the implementation of SDGs at the level of local self-governments, cooperation with secondary schools and faculties and promotion of the 2030 Agenda were also mentioned. However, information is not available on whether some of the proposed activities have been implemented. According to the information published on the official website, at the meeting in November 2021, only the draft Resolution on Commitment to Achieving Sustainable Development Goals was discussed (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, 2021b).

In addition to these two bodies, the Voluntary National Report (p. 16) states that an independent oversight hub has been established, consisting of the Protector of Citizens / Ombudsman of Serbia, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection and State Audit Institution. Information on the work of this body is not publicly available. The role of the State Audit Institution was discussed in more detail at meetings held in 2019 and 2020, but there is no information on whether this institution has taken over responsibilities related to the sustainable development goals (State Audit Institution 2019; 2020).

Certain ministries have been charged with the tasks related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, such as the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, where a special advisor on sustainable development deals with this issue. In addition, the Ministry of Finance is an indispensable institution when it comes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and achievement of SDGs. However, there is no information on the Ministry's website about whether and in what way this ministry deals with the 2030 Agenda and whose competence it is.

An additional problem in the assessment of the institutional framework is that information on institutions, working groups and bodies charged with the responsibilities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is not consolidated and publicly available in one place.

Non-state actors have not been directly involved in the official institutional bodies who work on achieving SDGs. There were no representatives of civil society and other non-state actors in the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation

of the 2030 Agenda (while it existed). Despite being one of the main principles on which the 2030 Agenda is based, establishing cooperation with stakeholder representatives is not listed as one of the tasks of the Working Group. At constitutive session it was stated that the Working Group will be open, but that was not implemented.

It was agreed that the responsibility for coherent implementation of the 2030 Agenda also exists at the local level and that activities in this regard should be continued. The Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM, 2019) and CSOs dealing with the localization of SDGs have launched several projects linking the SDGs and setting priorities at the local level with local planning documents. PPS guidelines for the preparation of local government development plans related to SDGs (Radoirović et al., 2020) were published, as well as guidelines for providing support to local government units (Belgrade Open School, 2019) in monitoring the implementation of SDGs in the field of environmental protection, nature protection and climate change at the local level.

## Establishing progress monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the implementation of the sustainable development goals

A set of 231 indicators was globally adopted in 2017, creating the basis for progress monitoring in the achievement of SDGs at the local, national, regional and global level. However, the countries themselves have a great responsibility in establishing a system for progress monitoring, where one of the important processes is the establishment of competencies in terms of progress monitoring and reporting on the implementation of SDGs.

Given a wide range of topics covered by the 2030 Agenda, it is recommended to involve different stakeholder representatives in the monitoring and reporting process. In addition to SORS, the process of monitoring and finding solutions to the challenges identified during reporting should also involve representatives of ministries and other government agencies, as well as representatives from the private sector and civil society.

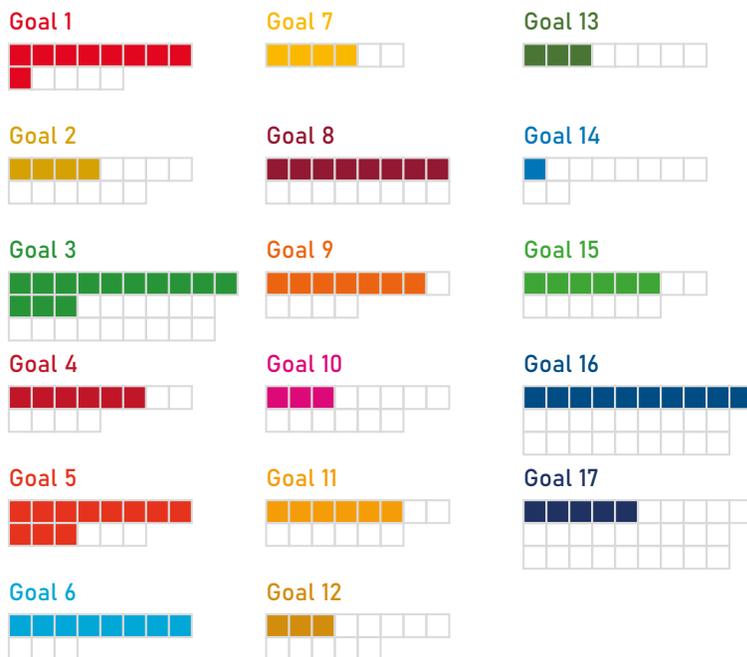
As mentioned earlier, the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda had several responsibilities directly related to progress monitoring and reporting on SDGs. The Working Group has prepared Voluntary National Report of the Republic of Serbia on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which was presented at the meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2019 at the UN headquarters in New York. The Voluntary National Report of the Republic of Serbia included a Statistical Annex with selected indicators.

Regarding monitoring mechanisms, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals, Socio-Economic Indicators and Justice Statistics operates within the SORS, which organizes, prepares and updates data for the DevInfo database, and monitors, prepares and implements methodological recommendations necessary for the

preparation, downloading, and publishing of data on the SDG indicators (SORS, 2021). Various activities have been carried out with the aim of assessing existing national statistics against the global set of indicators. Workshops were held aimed at data improvement and increasing the number of indicators, recognizing that the quality, availability and disaggregation of data are important in this process. During 2021, two workshops were held dedicated to the environmental SDG indicators. The DevInfo profile and the Portal for reporting on the SDG indicators have been created (<http://sdg.indikator.rs/>).

According to the portal data from December 2021, out of 247 global indicators, data are available for 107 (or 43%). In the previous report this number was 76 (or 31%). For certain SDGs there are sources available for a number of indicators, while for other goals only a small number of indicators are available (Chart 1).

**Chart 1.** SDG indicators available in the Republic of Serbia (indicators with available data are marked in colour; grey boxes show indicators for which no data are available)



There are other dilemmas as to whether all indicators are applicable to Serbia (e.g., some indicators refer to the categories of countries to which Serbia does not belong, such as the category "underdeveloped countries"). Also, without determining the applicability of global targets and establishing target values in relation to national circumstances, it is not always clear how to interpret the available data. When reporting on the goals, it would be useful to include data related to the indicators used by the EU to monitor the achievement of SDGs.

Regarding the availability of indicators to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level, not enough resources have been invested for their establishment. There are currently only a few initiatives to establish indicators that could be used at the local level, which is why additional resources are needed.

Stakeholder representatives must be more actively involved in progress monitoring and reporting processes, as illustrated by the following examples. Civil society organizations were consulted in the process of preparing the Voluntary National Report, but only 21 organizations responded, even though many of them are working on the 2030 Agenda. The SORS workshops held in the previous reporting period, dedicated to the monitoring and increasing the number of available indicators, no public invitations were sent to CSOs or members of the academia.

In December 2020, SORS published the Progress report on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the Republic of Serbia. Progress monitoring in this report is based

on the SORS data and other data producers, using the Eurostat methodology, which is also used in the European Union. It must be noted that Serbia does not have defined nationally specific goals i.e. quantitative measures that should be achieved within a defined time frame. The measurement was not performed in relation to the quantitatively defined goal, but the progress is monitored in relation to the initial year for which data are available, measuring the degree to which the change has moved in a positive or negative direction. Unlike the Eurostat report, where progress is monitored in the long and short term, this report mainly monitors progress in the short term, due to the availability of data.

The manner of preparation of this report once again indicates that it is important to define nationally specific goals. Due to the fact that progress is assessed, without giving an assessment of the situation, it may seem that the change in a positive direction is assessed positively, despite the fact that the value of the indicator may indicate that the situation calls for concern (for example, a lower percentage of young people who are neither in school nor working is assessed positively, although this rate is still extremely high). Also, the report does not clearly indicate for which indicators data are not available, due to which no conclusions can be drawn.

In the previous period, two additional reports were prepared: "Progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goals / SDGs among the young people in Serbia" and "Progress in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals among the population of Roma settlements in Serbia."

In addition to official institutions certain CSOs have also reported on SDGs.<sup>2</sup> A conglomerate of CSOs that meet as the National Convention on the European Union has established an

Intersectoral Working Group on Sustainable Development, which is involved in the preparation of the National Report on the implementation of SDGs.

## Recommendations

### 1. Recommendations regarding the positioning of the 2030 Agenda as a priority process in development management and implementation

After the parliamentary elections, it is necessary to:

- » include the 2030 Agenda in the Exposition of the new Prime Minister of the RS;
- » clearly define the competence for management, coordination and implementation of the 2030 Agenda through the Law on Ministries;
- » include the processes important for the management, coordination and implementation of the 2030 Agenda, delegated by ministries and RS Government bodies, in the annual Government Programme.

### 2. Recommendations regarding the alignment of planning documents and legal framework with the 2030 Agenda

- » Prioritize the adoption of the Development plan of the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the Law on the Planning System, which contains priority development goals.
- » Conduct social dialogue when adopting the Development plan, which includes defining development priorities and nationalizing sustainable development goals based on a broad consultative process.
- » It is necessary to adopt the Development plan, not the Sustainable Development Strategy, which is a lower-level document and less binding than the Development plan. The adoption of the Development plan is a legal obligation, and the deadline for adoption was January 1, 2020.

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2 Including the following publications: Serbia Sustainable Development Issues: A Baseline Review (<https://ceves.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Serbia-Sustainable-Development-Issues-FINAL-updated.pdf>); Serbia's sustainable development: How we are doing? ([https://ceves.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Brochure\\_Serbias-Sustainable-Development-How-are-we-doing.pdf](https://ceves.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Brochure_Serbias-Sustainable-Development-How-are-we-doing.pdf)); brochure „Living in the European Serbia: Mapping of the SDGs within the EU integration framework”, (<https://ceves.org.rs/living-in-the-european-serbia-mapping-of-the-sdgs-within-the-eu-integration-framework/?lang=SR>); Shadow Report on the implementation of SDGs in Serbia (<https://www.activity4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ASRZS-ShadowReport-2019.pdf>), reports of the Platform „Sustainable Development for All” during 2020. – „Serbia 2030 – Readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda” and „Serbia 2030 – Development priorities – Report of the non-state sector”.

- » The Investment plan and Spatial plan should be adopted after the Development plan, in accordance with the set priority development goals (which is the sequence prescribed by the Law on the Planning System). The process of adoption of these documents must be transparent and must allow wide public participation.

### 3. Recommendations regarding the establishment of institutional and coordination mechanisms for the implementation of sustainable development goals

- » The Government of the Republic of Serbia should without delay establish a new Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which would support intersectoral collaboration and coordination, which is crucial given the multi-sectoral nature of the 2030 Agenda.
- » Create operational plan of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with guidelines for achieving goals, distribution of competencies, and cooperation with stakeholder representatives, in order to ensure better horizontal (between different sectors) and vertical coordination (national and local level).
- » One of the tasks of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should be to establish cooperation with stakeholder representatives in various activities, to enable all stakeholders to participate in the Working Group meetings and consult them on the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda implementation, and to enable them to participate in the preparation of periodic reports.
- » Make available information on the work of the Independent Oversight Hub and the Focus Group of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia for development of control mechanisms for the process of implementation and over sight of implementation of SDGs.
- » Publish consolidated information on all institutions, working groups and other bodies responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the official websites of the Government and competent institutions.
- » Acts on internal organization and systematization of jobs of each ministry should include a sector, department or employee with official competences related to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

### 4. Recommendations regarding the establishment of progress monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the implementation of sustainable development goals

- » The report on the progress in achieving SDGs by 2030 in the Republic of Serbia should be supplemented by distance-to-target value assessment and the effectiveness of related public policy measures, in cooperation with relevant institutions, working groups and other bodies. It should clearly indicate for which indicators data are not available and for which no conclusions can be drawn. Given the perceived importance of linking the process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda with the EU accession process, the report should include indicators from the Eurostat database.

- » Indicators that have been assessed as not applicable in Serbia should be specifically marked on the internet portal with the SDG indicators.
- » Publish invitation for participation of stakeholder representatives when organizing workshops and other activities related to the SDG indicators.
- » Enable broad public participation in the adoption of the next voluntary national report. Stakeholders should be in a position to provide information, comments and attachments to the draft report, and influence its content.
- » Given the importance of monitoring the situation concerning vulnerable groups and the central promise of the 2030 Agenda – *Leave no one behind*, continue the good practice of publishing progress reports on the achievement of SDGs among members of certain vulnerable groups.

## II

# ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR EACH SDG

The following section gives an overview of the implementation framework for each SDG, with the exception of goal 17, which has not been addressed in this report. Each chapter dedicated to goals gives a summary of the main findings of the previous report on Serbia's capacity to achieve a given goal, an overview of key changes in the previous year (from September 2020 to October 2021), a review of progress relative to the recommendations from the previous report, and recommendations for the upcoming period.



Goal 1:

# NO POVERTY



## End poverty in all its forms everywhere

### TARGETS

**Target 1.1** By 2030 eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.

**Target 1.2** By 2030 reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty (according to national definitions of poverty).

**Target 1.3** Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

**Target 1.4** By 2030 ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.

## TARGETS

**Target 1.5** By 2030 build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

**Target 1.a** Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions.

**Target 1.b** Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.

During the reporting period no specific recommendation from the previous report on readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was adopted. Also, no significant national document related to SDG 1 (except the Law on Social Cards) was adopted. The ERP still does not have a redistributive element that would redirect budget funds to the most vulnerable segments of the population. The ESRP expired at the end of 2020, and no similar document was adopted in its place. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue has been established in the meantime. The new ministry's responsibilities include the issues of social status and discrimination against members of national minorities and other vulnerable groups such as women and the LGBT population. The Ministry sought to establish communication with the civil sector through a series of public social dialogues in order to harmonize positions and come to an agreement regarding further steps on addressing the issue of ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups. Apart from defining binding action measures, the cross-sectoral cooperation towards the progress in achieving SDG 1 has not gone far.

There were no significant changes in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework, except for the establishment of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. As this Ministry was not directly involved with the issue of poverty of vulnerable social groups in the previous period, this issue is not a part of their Work programme in the following period. The level of cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination is still inadequate, primarily the relation between executive bodies in charge of economic and social policy issues.

# An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

The previous report pointed out that Serbia is considered a country with one of the highest at-risk-of-poverty rates in Europe. It was assessed that a large number of informally employed persons do not have access to social security and protection, and that poor and economically vulnerable persons were disproportionately exposed to the impact of natural disasters and socio-economic crises. The COVID-19 pandemic particularly affected the poor, especially the Roma population living in informal settlements, which was brought to the brink of starvation due to inadequate support. Over the past decade there is a constant decline in social welfare expenditures (from 21.6% in 2008 to 19.4% in 2018), which at that time was about nine percentage points below the EU average (target 1.3). Despite the fact that one of the key goals of the Employment and Social Policy Reform Program by 2020 (ESRP) was to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty (which is an indicator of relative poverty – target 1.2), the conclusion is that no national goal includes the reduction of absolute poverty (target 1.1). There is a noted inefficiency and inadequate focus of the social protection mechanism under conditions of considerable differences in the economic status of persons of different ages, genders, ethnicities etc.

Access to basic services for all citizens is undermined, as it was assessed that relevant strategies (in the field of energy, banking, transport, digital services, financial markets and water supply) do not include issues of inclusion of poor and socially excluded persons (target 1.4). A conclusion is that there are no national documents related

to the protection and rescue in emergency situations/extreme events (target 1.5), or poverty eradication (target 1.b). The previous report pointed out that the problem is that the Sustainable Development Strategy has not been adopted. The National Social Housing Strategy, relevant for achieving SDG 1, has also long since expired.

It is assessed that the legal framework for the first goal is partially established. This was concluded bearing in mind that the legally defined restrictions for welfare eligibility, or the amount of social assistance, are insufficient for decent living conditions and getting out of the poverty zone (Law on Social Protection). Also, the laws concerning employment and housing do not sufficiently protect the most economically vulnerable people. It was pointed out that the legal framework, in addition to not being fully in line with SDGs, does not meet the standards and obligations arising from domestic and international public policies.

Institutional and coordination mechanisms for SDG 1 are assessed as inadequate. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs is most relevant for the implementation of this goal, although certain competencies are shared with other ministries (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, and Ministry of Interior). The conclusion is, however, that inter-ministerial coordination is inadequate, in terms of care for the most socially and economically deprived. The report points out that there is an insufficient number of employees who would work on the social protection strategy,

because there are 260,000 social welfare beneficiaries, and that much more living in absolute poverty who did not exercise the right to social welfare. It was assessed that it is not possible to identify mechanisms and agreements that could be specifically related to poverty reduction, or to identify shortcomings when it comes to ensuring participation in defining and adopting national documents.

The report concluded that mechanisms to monitor progress in areas relevant to SDG 1 were partially in place. Some planning documents provided for targets that could be linked to SDG 1, but it was assessed that the progress and reporting mechanisms were not adequately developed. It was stated that, although the SORS monitors a number of indicators that are relevant in this context, there is room to add more adequate indicators.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

In the observed period there has not been a serious progress in public policies related to SDG 1. Almost no new national document related to poverty reduction and social protection has been adopted. The employment and social policy reform programs under the EU accession process (ESRP) expired in 2020 and have not been replaced by a new document that would focus on similar problems and priorities. In addition to the issue of employment, the ESRP was a key national document for addressing the issues in the field of social protection and social policy, and there is a large gap and lack of strategic and operational direction for addressing poverty in Serbia. The ESRP relied on the Europe 2020 Strategy, which was more socially oriented than the Green Agreement for Europe, which is a new EU development document. However, the lack of a document that builds on the ESRP can have extremely negative consequences on the most economically and socially vulnerable persons in Serbia.

At the time of this report, the Social Protection Strategy was in the drafting stage and envisages that by the end of 2025 the number of men, women and children living in poverty will be

reduced by 25%. It also envisages a 25% increase in public expenditures aimed at social protection services under the jurisdiction of LGU and reduction of social exclusion. Target values are significantly below SDG 1 targets, which states that by 2030 the number of children, women and men living in any form of poverty should be reduced by at least half (target 1.2). Also, LGU increasing the allocation by 25% would not even remotely solve the problem of underfunded welfare assistance i.e., the coverage of vulnerable population (target 1.3). The Strategy for Gender Equality emphasizes the poverty of certain segments of the population, such as Roma women and older women, as a limiting factor affecting access to basic health services.

The Economic Reform Program (ERP) for the period from 2021 to 2023, adopted in January 2021, does not have a defined redistributive function. One of the areas of structural reforms envisaged by the program is Social Protection and Inclusion, including health care. The document provides specific data confirming a high poverty risk and highlights vulnerable groups that are particularly vulnerable in this regard, as well as social protection expenditures that are 3

to 4 times lower than the EU average. Also, the share of public expenditure on social protection and transfers has a steady downward trend (14.5% of gross domestic product [GDP] compared to 16.5% in 2015). Most of these funds are related to pension spending, while expenditures for social assistance amount to only 3.1% of GDP, which is insufficient to increase the coverage of social welfare beneficiaries. The introduction of an integrated system of social cards, which implies linking social protection institutions, is mentioned as a possible solution that would simplify the process of receiving social welfare funds (through eGovernment). However, the document does not specify more specific measures to increase the number of social welfare beneficiaries i.e. allocation of funds (target 1.3). The procurement of the Social Welfare Protection and Automation System has not yet been completed. The new Law on Social Cards was adopted at the end of February 2021 and will be in force as of March 2022. This law refers to the goals, purpose and content of data collected on social welfare beneficiaries and their relatives. It enables the collection of a large amount of personal data of each social assistance beneficiary, noting that the created databases will be used in accordance with the legislation on personal data protection. Although it is stated that the main idea behind the adoption of this law is poverty eradication and better social protection, it is not clear as to how the data will be used and how it will improve the coverage and quality of social protection, i.e. the achievement of SDG 1.

Also, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue has been established. The competencies of the Ministry entail protection and promotion of human and minority rights, general issues regarding the position of national minorities, gender equality and anti-discrimination policy, and legal and institutional empowerment and cooperation with CSOs. According to the Ministry's Work programme, poverty reduction issues are not within its competences and the Work programme does not mention any issues related to poverty reduction.

There are currently 13 indicators that monitor the achievement of SDG 1, nine of which are available on the portal. The number of indicators monitored through the national-level documents has not been increased (it has been decreased actually, since documents such as the ESRP have expired). There is a particular problem with monitoring progress of SDG target 1.1 (where available indicator that could be relevant cannot be identified), and SDG target 1.2 (data available only within the Survey on Income and Living Conditions [SILC Survey]). There is still room to increase the number of relevant indicators using Eurostat and other databases (Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, for example), as noted in the previous report. Adoption of national documents that have previously expired or are proposed in this report would significantly improve the monitoring progress towards the implementation of various aspects of SDG 1.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Adopt poverty reduction strategy to cover target 1.1.	✘	The poverty reduction strategy was not adopted in the observed period.
Adopt a new ESRP with target value of the indicator related to the reduction of population at risk of poverty in accordance with target 1.2.	✘	The new ESRP has not been adopted.
Adopt a new social protection strategy and a new National Program to Combat Shadow Economy, with indicators disaggregated by gender and identify all relevant population groups in accordance with target 1.3.	✘	The social protection strategy is in the draft stage. The National Program to Combat Shadow Economy for the period from 2021 to 2025 has also not been adopted (the beginning of the drafting stage of the Program was officially announced in May 2021).
Improve strategic framework to cover the target 1.4 by revisiting the Energy Sector Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia until 2025 with projections until 2030, the Water Management Strategy on the Territory of the Republic of Serbia until 2034 and the Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2014 – 2024, and adopt a new information society development strategy and a new national strategy for social housing / housing strategy.	✘	No revision or adoption of the mentioned strategies has been carried out.
Adopt a new national strategy for protection and rescue in emergency situations / strategy for disaster risk reduction and emergency management, to include target 1.5.	✘	The national strategy for disaster risk reduction and emergency management has not been adopted yet.
Adopt a new national sustainable development strategy to enable public policies to cover target 1.b.	✘	The national strategy for sustainable development has not been adopted, and the National Development Plan has not been drafted.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Amend the Law on Social Protection to remove restrictive conditions that prevent people living in poverty from exercising their right to financial social assistance.	✘	The proposed amendments to the Law on Social Protection have not been made.
Amend the Law on Labour in order to prescribe the reasons for the introduction of a minimum wage by the employer.	✘	The proposed amendments to the Labour Law have not been made.
Amend the Law on Housing and Building Maintenance to allow people who own other dwellings and have sufficient funds to provide other accommodation to exercise the right to appropriate accommodation in the eviction procedure.	✘	The proposed amendments to the Law on Housing and Building Maintenance have not been made.
Provide budgetary allocation of the Republic for the implementation of measures envisaged by the ESRP related to better adequacy of financial social assistance, as well as for additional staff in social protection institutions at the national, provincial and local levels.	✘	The new ESRP has not been adopted and, therefore, the budget of the Republic of Serbia has not been improved in the context of improved adequacy of financial and social assistance, including employment of additional staff in social welfare institutions.
Establish a coordination body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for poverty reduction, chaired by the Prime Minister.	✘	The proposed coordinating body has not been established.
Resume the Platform for Monitoring the Implementation of the ERA and ESRP in cooperation with the National Convention on the European Union.	✘	The monitoring platform is not operational.
Revise all strategic documents to ensure measurability of objectives by indicators with initial and target values, disaggregated in accordance with relevant targets.	✘	The strategic documents have not been amended in the proposed context.
Competent institutions to publish reports on the implementation of strategic documents.	✘	No new reports on the implementation of strategic documents from the competent institutions are available.

 Adopted; 
  Partially adopted; 
  Not adopted

# Recommendations for the upcoming period

The recommendations largely coincide with the recommendations of the previous report, given that they are still relevant and none have been adopted so far.

1. Adopt a poverty reduction strategy covering all relevant aspects of SDG 1.
2. Adopt a new ESRP that will include target value of the indicator related to the reduction of population at risk of poverty.
3. Establish the Coordination Body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for Poverty Reduction, chaired by the Prime Minister of Serbia.
4. Adopt a new national strategy for protection and rescue in emergencies / strategy for disaster risk reduction and emergency management, which would reduce the pronounced exposure and vulnerability of the poor in extreme climatic events and other economic, social and / or environmental disasters.
5. Allocate budget funds of the Republic for the implementation of measures envisaged by the ESRP related to better adequacy of financial social assistance, as well as for additional staff in institutions of social protection at the national, provincial, and local levels.
6. Amend the Law on Social Protection in order to remove restrictive conditions in order to increase the number of beneficiaries of social assistance.
7. Restart the work of the ERP Monitoring Platform (and ESRP) in cooperation with the National Convention on the European Union.

Goal 2:

# ZERO HUNGER



## End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

### TARGETS

**Target 2.1** By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.

**Target 2.2** By 2030 end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

**Target 2.3** By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

## TARGETS

**Target 2.4** By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.

**Target 2.5** By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.

**Target 2.a** Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.

**Target 2.b** Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round.

**Target 2.c** Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.

In the reporting period no new planning document was adopted to improve the achievement of SDG 2, except for the ERP, which aims at appropriate targets within the two envisaged reforms. The legal framework has been improved with the adoption of the Law on the Social Cards and the Law on Regulation of the Agriculture Products Market. The Draft Law amending the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development could further improve the achievement of certain SDG 2 targets. The Law amending the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children did not include the recommendations of the previous 2030 Agenda Preparedness Report, which refer to the restrictions that prevent the exercise of the right to parental and child benefits.

In institutional, organizational, and administrative terms, there has been no tangible progress, both in the context of establishing new bodies and cross-sectoral cooperation necessary to achieve SDG 2.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

In the previous report, the SDG 2 was particularly concerned with child malnutrition (which is above average in the Roma population), as well as with the discrepancy between the amount and scope of social benefits and child poverty in Serbia. It was concluded that public policies in Serbia only partially cover SDG 2. The assessment was that targets 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4 are partially covered by national targets, while targets 2.3 and 2.c are completely omitted. An example was given that there are no goals on the national level that cover the food market, which is a multifaceted issue in the context of providing food for all children and citizens of Serbia. It was pointed out that important public documents are missing, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the National Plan for the Protection of Children and similar documents that would contribute to the achievement of this goal.

The analysis of the legal framework considered certain limitations for achieving SDGs, which primarily referred to the eligibility conditions for exercising the right to child allowance prescribed by the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children. The noted limitation was that the Law on the Rights of the Child and the Protector of the Rights of the Child, which could contribute to the achievement of targets 2.1 and 2.2, has not been adopted.

It was assessed that the institutional and coordination mechanisms for SDG 2 are not adequate because there are no specific mechanisms and agreements in place directly related to the eradication of hunger and all forms of malnutrition. Noted exceptions are the Coordination Body for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in Republic of Serbia for the period 2016-2025 and the Council on the Rights of the Child of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in charge of the issues relevant to SDG 2. It was noticed that there is a significant space for improving cooperation with the civil sector both in the phase of preparation as well as adoption of adequate national documents, and in terms of implementation of specific activities that would address hunger eradication for vulnerable groups.

The conclusion is that the mechanisms for progress monitoring under SDG 2 are partially developed. It is stated that some planning documents define indicators that can be related to SDG 2 (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5), but that progress measurement and reporting systems have not been established. It was noted that it is necessary to improve the process of collection, processing and publishing indicators that would monitor the progress for SDG 2.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

The long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a sharp rise in prices of basic foodstuffs during 2021 especially affect the most vulnerable segments of the population, so we can expect an increase in the prevalence of malnutrition in the analysed and forthcoming period.

In the observed period, almost no new planning documents (except ERP) that could be related to hunger eradication were adopted. Economic Reform Program 2021-2023 includes Structural reform measure 4, which refers to the land consolidation process. The program makes a direct relation between this reform and the achievement of the SDG, which refers to the targets 2.3, 2.4 and 2.a. The land consolidation process was slowed down by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new law on land consolidation is in the preparation phase. About four million euros are planned for the improvement of the ERP land consolidation process by the end of 2023. Structural reform 5 entitled "Improvement of the financial support system for agriculture through digitalization and process automation" is also linked to the target 2.a (increase investment in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and advisory services, technology development). About two million euros are planned for this reform by the end of 2023.

The legal framework was improved to some extent. The Law on Social Cards envisages an increase and better targeting of social welfare beneficiaries, and the electronic database planned by the law could be linked to the improvement of the basic living conditions of the most vulnerable segment of the population. Law on Regulation of the Agriculture Products Market sub-goal 2.c, i.e. sets the framework for ensuring

proper functioning of the food market, as well as improved access to information on these markets, in order to limit extreme instability of food prices.

The Law on amendments to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children did not improve the solutions related restrictive conditions that prevent the exercise of the right to parental and child benefits. The Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development harmonizes regulations with the Acquis Communautaire, so that the funds provided by the IPARD program (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in the Field of Rural Development) can be fully utilized. The proposed amendments to the Law improve the food quality and safety standards, and additionally regulate the work of agricultural farms, which will in the future affect the position of small food producers who need development funds to start and improve their activities. This may partially affect targets 2.3 and 2.4, although the lack of planning documents, i.e. progress monitoring and reporting systems, makes the achievement of SDG 2 uncertain.

Institutional mechanisms related to SDG 2 have not been improved in the previous period. No new national body has been established to address hunger eradication and availability of food for all. Systematic strengthening of capacities of the existing institutions is not visible, nor the improvement of cooperation with the civil sector. The newly established Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue is responsible for the care and anti-discrimination against the most vulnerable, and for the strengthening capacities of CSOs dealing with these issues.

However, the mandate of this ministry does not directly address issues related to the achievement of SDG 2.

Four of the fourteen SDG 2 indicators listed within the given data source are officially monitored and published on the SORS portal. Although the number of indicators listed on the SORS portal is increasing, over-reliance on external

sources (Food and Agriculture Organization) and periodic measurements (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)) prevents timely access to relevant data that could be used to address these important issues in timely fashion. Linking the SORS database with the indicators listed in the planning documents could improve the monitoring and reporting on the progress made in achieving SDG 2.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Revise the strategic framework in order to establish public policies to end hunger and cover target 2.1.	✗	No conclusion can be made that the strategic framework has been improved with the aim of establishing public policies to end hunger and cover the target 2.1.
Adopt a new national action plan for children and expand the scope of the strategic framework to define measures to end all forms of malnutrition in children under 5 years of age in accordance with target 2.2.	✗	A new national action plan for children has not been adopted.
Define adequate indicators for national planning documents related to SDGs, which would enable SDG progress monitoring, data collection methodology and data collection dynamics in responsible institutions.	✗	In the observed period, no progress was recorded regarding the given recommendation.
Revise the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2014–2024 to adequately cover targets 2.3 and 2.4.	✓	Although the Law on Amendments to the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development was adopted, which is the starting point for revising the Strategy, the mentioned strategy is still not substantially improved, in accordance with the recommendation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Revise the Consumer Protection Strategy for the Period 2019-2024 to cover target 2.c.	✘	The consumer protection strategy has not been revised in line with the recommendation.
Amend the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children in order to remove restrictive conditions that prevent the exercise of the right to parental and child benefits.	✎	Amendments to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children were adopted, increasing the coverage for pregnant women and mothers as beneficiaries of the right to benefits, by defining the lower limit for maternity compensations. However, there are still restrictive conditions that prevent the exercise of the right to parental and child benefits.
Adopt a Law on Rights of the Child and the Protector of the Rights of the Child.	✘	The Law on the Rights of the Child and the Protector of the Rights of the Child is still in the drafting stage.
Engage additional health mediators.	✘	No additional health mediators have been employed.
Revise all strategic documents to ensure measurability of their objectives through indicators, including initial and target values and data disaggregation in accordance with the relevant targets.	✎	Although the number of indicators related to SDG 2 is increasing, the measurability of goals and targets has not been significantly improved, in line with the recommendation.
Publish reports on the implementation of strategic documents by the competent institutions.	✘	No perceived progress has been made in line with this recommendation.

 Adopted; 
  Partially adopted; 
  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Adopt a new national action plan for children and expand the scope of the strategic framework to determine measures to end all forms of malnutrition of children under the age of 5 years.
2. Revise the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2014-2024, to direct the national document at doubling agricultural productivity and income of small-scale food producers, in particular women. The development of sustainable and climate-resilient food production systems should also be one of the goals. This document should link the stability of food production with the eradication of hunger in Serbia.
3. Amend the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children in order to remove restrictive conditions that prevent the exercise of the right to parental and child benefits, which would reduce the existential threat of malnutrition of children and families with children.
4. Adopt a strategy to reduce poverty, within which one of the goals should be to eradicate hunger in Serbia.
5. Adopt the Law on the Rights of the Child and the Protector of the Rights of the Child.



Goal 3:

# GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



## Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

### TARGETS

**Target 3.1** By 2030 reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births

**Target 3.2** By 2030 end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births

**Target 3.3** By 2030 end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases

**Target 3.4** By 2030 reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being

## TARGETS

**Target 3.5** Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol

**Target 3.6** By 2020 halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents

**Target 3.7** By 2030 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes

**Target 3.8** Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

**Target 3.9** By 2030 substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals, and air, water and soil pollution and contamination

**Target 3.a** Strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate

**Target 3.b** Support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and non-communicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries, provide access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to use to the full the provisions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect public health, and, in particular, provide access to medicines for all

**Target 3.c** Substantially increase health financing, and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States

**Target 3.d** Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks

In the reporting period, several planning documents and laws relevant for SDG 3 were adopted. These entail the Strategy for Gender Equality for the period from 2021 to 2030 and the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for Improving the Status of Persons with Disabilities 2020-2024. Other important pieces of legislation are the Law on Amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases and the Law on Gender Equality. The adopted documents eliminate to a lesser degree the previously identified shortcomings within the strategic and legal framework for the implementation of SDG 3. The new documents mainly referred to the targets 3.4, 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9, but no progress was made in achieving other targets.

There have been minor changes in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework, but there is a risk that cross-sectoral cooperation will be permanently jeopardized, given the health hazards stemming from air, water and land pollution due to economic investments and activities. This is especially true of cooperation between government bodies and the civil sector, or the general public. There is room to improve the definition, collection and monitoring of indicators related to SDG 3. Practically, no specific recommendations from the previous report on the readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda have been adopted in the past year.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

According to the findings from the previous report, Serbia is at the bottom of the list of European countries when it comes to a number of health aspects and health prevention. The assessment is that SDG 3 is partially included in public policies through national goals, while universal health coverage is not clearly highlighted as a goal in the analysed documents. The finding of the analysis is that current national documents only partially cover targets 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.a and 3.b, bearing in mind that the target values and monitoring mechanisms have not been defined. The conclusion is that the strategic framework for achieving SDG 3 is only partially established. The following documents were analysed: Public Health Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2018–2026, Program for improving cancer control in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020–2022, Programme on mental health protection in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2019–2026, and the Strategy for the Encouragement of Childbirth. It was emphasized that the lack of a new Employment Program and Social Policy Reforms means that no guidelines for the adoption of new planning documents in this area were prepared (such as the health workforce development plan).

The report stated that the legal framework for SDG 3 is partially in place. The main objection concerned the delays in regulations related to the position of healthcare mediators, adoption of laws and strategies related to the protection of the population from exposure to tobacco smoke, and adoption of health workforce development plan. The main health care-related legislation analysed in this report includes: the Law on Health Care and the Law on the Protection of the Population from Exposure to Tobacco Smoke.

Institutional and coordination mechanisms related to SDG 3 were assessed as inadequate. The competent institutions for achieving this goal are: the Ministry of Health, Institute for Public Health “Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut”, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), as well as the Cabinet of the Minister without Portfolio in charge of Demography and Population Policy. One of the conclusions of the report was that there are no interdepartmental coordination mechanisms and agreements in place, directly related to the improvement of public health, although this role was occasionally assumed by: the Coordination Body for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in Republic of Serbia for the period

2016-2025, the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, and the Joint Body for the Support to Social Inclusion, Performance and Coordination of Monitoring the Performance of Inter-Sectorial Committees (ISC) for the assessment of the need for additional educational, medical and social support for children. The report points out that public debates on these issues are rarely held.

Progress monitoring mechanisms under SDG 3 have been assessed as underdeveloped. It

was stated that within the planning documents, indicators related to the targets 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.a and 3.b are available, but are mostly inadequately formulated in terms of their measurability and lacking initial and target values. In relation to the indicators available on the SORS portal, it was stated that the Eurostat database provides an additional set of data that would complement the monitoring of the achievement of SDG 3 targets.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

During the observed period, there were no significant changes in public policies related to SDG 3. The Economic Reform Program for the period 2021-2023 encompasses the area entitled "Social protection and inclusion, including health care", which contains reform 24: digital transformation of the health care system with the aim of improving the availability and quality of health services (target 3.8). It is planned to invest four and a half million euros per year in health care digitalization over a three-year period. The current ERP does not cover other aspects of the population health improvement, nor there are targets in place that could be linked to SDG 3.

The Strategy for Gender Equality for the period from 2021 to 2030, under the specific objective 3 – establish affordable and comprehensive health care and provide social security (target 3.8), includes measure 3.1: "improving the availability and quality of health care without discrimination, including programs for early prevention in sexual and reproductive health, breast cancer, cervical cancer, as well as raising awareness of modern forms of contraception and improving approaches to family planning". There are several

indicators for monitoring progress given under the specific objective and the mentioned measure. Initial and target values are available only for the indicators "Gender Equality Index in the Domain of Health" and "Coverage of Women Over 15 with Gynaecological Preventive Exams" (target 3.7), but the target values are significantly below those set by the 2030 Agenda. It is envisaged that in 2030 about 60 % of women are covered with gynaecological preventive services, and target 3.7 aims at universal coverage of the population under sexual and reproductive health care services.

The Action Plan for National Strategy for Improvement of Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2024, in the period from 2021 to 2022, contains a specific goal 3: systematic introduction of the perspective of disability in the adoption, implementation and monitoring of public policy, which includes the measure: "improving the availability and quality of health care and establishing a new legislative framework for the protection and improvement of mental health of persons with disabilities" (target 3.8).



## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Revise The Strategy of the Public Health of the Republic of Serbia 2018–2026 to adequately cover targets 3.4, 3.8, 3.9 and 3.d.	✘	The mentioned strategy was not revised in accordance with the recommendations.
Revise the Birth Promotion Strategy and adopt a new national strategy for gender equality to adequately cover target 3.7.	✓	The Birth Promotion Strategy has not been revised in line with the recommendations. A new RDS for the period from 2021 to 2030 was adopted, which covers the target 3.7.
Amend the Law on Health Care to regulate the position of health mediators to incorporate them into the national health care system.	✘	The Law on Health Care has not been revised in line with the recommendation.
Amend the Law on Protection of the Population from Exposure to Tobacco Smoke in order to comply with Directive 2014/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States concerning the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco and related products and repealing Directive 2001/37/EC, in particular as regards the labelling and packaging of tobacco products.	✘	Amendments to the said law have not been made in accordance with the recommendation.
Transpose the directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare into national legislation.	✘	This directive has not been transposed into national legislation.
Adopt a Medical Staff Development Plan.	✘	A new health care workforce development plan has not been adopted.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Secure state budget allocations to employ additional number of nurses and midwives.	✘	There are no new budget allocations for these purposes.
Regularly hold public debates on draft regulations and public policy documents, in accordance with legal obligations of the competent proponents.	✓	A public debate on the LGE was held, but a public debate on the Gender Equality Strategy was not. The public debate was also not held in the process of adoption of the ERA, amendments to the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases, and proposals for Amendments to the Law on Integrated Prevention and Control of Environmental Pollution. The public debate on the proposal for the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Improving the Status of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia was carried out from November 30 to December 20, 2020.
Revise all strategy documents to ensure measurability of their objectives through indicators, including initial and target values and data disaggregation in accordance with the relevant targets.	✘	The strategy papers have not been revised in line with the recommendation.
Publish reports on the implementation of strategy documents by the competent institutions.	✘	Reporting on the implementation of strategy documents has not been made more transparent in the previous period.

 Adopted; 
  Partially adopted; 
  Not adopted

# Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Revise the Public Health Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2018–2026 to adequately cover targets related to: reduction of deaths from non-communicable diseases, universal coverage by health care, reduction of deaths and diseases from hazardous chemicals, that is pollution and contamination of air, water and soil, as well as universal availability of medicines and vaccine.
2. Revise the Birth Promotion Strategy, where one of the goals will be universal access to services related to sexual and reproductive health care.
3. Amend the Law on Health Care to regulate the position of health mediators to incorporate them into the national health care system.
4. Amend the Law on Protection of the Population from Exposure to Tobacco Smoke in order to comply with Directive 2014/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States concerning the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco and related products and repealing Directive no. 2001/37/EC, in particular as regards the labelling and packaging of tobacco products.
5. Adopt a Health Workforce Development Plan.
6. Secure state budget allocations to employ additional number of nurses and midwives.

Goal 4:

# QUALITY EDUCATION



## Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

### TARGETS

**Target 4.1** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

**Target 4.2** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

**Target 4.3** By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

**Target 4.4** By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

## TARGETS

**Target 4.5** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

**Target 4.6** By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

**Target 4.7** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

**Target 4.a** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

**Target 4.b** By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

**Target 4.c** By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

The Strategy for the development of Education in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 (SEDS) was adopted in 2021, along with the Action Plan for the period from 2021 to 2023 for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Education by 2030 in the Republic of Serbia. Most target values planned for 2030 are far below those set for the targets under SDG 4. Unlike the previous strategic document, which fully covered seven and partially one target, SEDS only partially covers these targets. The structure and content of this document are such that the document does not meet the basic criteria of adequate planning, and is not harmonized with certain provisions of the Law on the Planning System. Data on education financing, which is one of the most important instruments for the implementation of the education strategy and education development, are omitted both in the SEDS and the Action Plan. There were no significant changes in legislation, institutional framework or progress monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the achievement of SDG 4 in the previous period.

## An overview of key results of the previous report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda"

In the previous reporting period, the basic strategic document that represents the framework for the development of education in Serbia and the achievement of SDG 4 was the Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia by 2020. In addition to that document, several public policy documents also partially cover issues concerning education, mainly issues of education related to certain population groups. The SDG 4 was fully covered by the national goals for seven targets and partially for target 4.7.

Although a comprehensive legal framework for SDG 4 has been established, it has been found that it is not fully in line with strategic commitments, and that unlike the strategic framework, the legislative framework does not enable full achievement of all targets under SDG 4.

Despite the fact that the strategic framework clearly defines the institutional, coordination and cooperation mechanisms, it was not possible to assess the functionality of the planned mechanisms due to the lack of data. Human resources required for the implementation of SDG 4, expressed as the student-teacher ratio, were appropriate for the primary and secondary education subsystem.

SDG 4 implementation monitoring was partially enabled by the existing mechanisms. The strategic framework contained indicators that could be used to monitor the achievement of targets, but systems for progress measuring and reporting were not fully established. Out of 11 global indicators for monitoring the implementation of SDG 4, five were available on the SORS portal.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

SEDS and the Action Plan for the period from 2021 to 2023 for the implementation of SEDS were adopted in 2021. SEDS sets two general goals that are identical in content:

1. better quality of teaching and learning, fairness and accessibility of pre-university education and stronger educational function of educational institutions;

2. improved accessibility, quality, relevance and equity of higher education.

Despite the ex-post analysis of the previous strategic document and identified deviations from the target values, and no explanation for the deviations, it is unclear based on which problems exactly the general objectives are defined. In other words, there is a lack of explanation of what different education subsystems in pre-university and university education have

in common in order to be covered by the same general goal. There is no doubt that quality, relevance, coverage and efficiency are key educational goals (which were the general goals of the Strategy until 2020), but specific goals and measures to achieve each of them will depend on the present state in parts of the education system. SEDS ignores the complexity and specifics of the parts that make up the education system in the Republic of Serbia, both in terms of conditions and purpose of their existence, as well as the functions they have within the entire education system and environment. The consequence of disregarding diversity is reflected in the large number of impact indicators for each of the general objectives (28 indicators for the first and 12 for the second general objective). The subsystem of adult education is placed under the pre-university education system, even though it includes different forms and levels (from primary to higher) education. The general objective for pre-university education includes the special objective 1.9<sup>3</sup> which lists higher education institutions and institutions of high school student standard. The very process of defining objectives neglected the functions of different subsystems<sup>4</sup> that determine necessary interventions to increase the quality, relevance, coverage and efficiency of each subsystem. The shortcomings of this approach are reflected in the fact that in the outcomes of 45 indicators for nine specific objectives within the first general

objective, preschool education is not mentioned in any of the indicators.

SEDS is not in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Planning System as it does not specify the cause-and-effect relationships between general and specific objectives and measures that should contribute to the achievement of these objectives. It lacks the initial and target values for indicators both at the level of specific objectives and the level of measures, and analysis of the effects of measures on the budget.<sup>5</sup> The Action Plan for the implementation of SEDS does not specify the necessary funds for the implementation of measures, nor the sources of financing.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of the quality of education, which is mentioned in several targets under SDG 4 for all levels of education (primary and secondary in 4.1, pre-school in 4.2 and secondary vocational and higher in 4.3), SEDS only partially covers these targets, unlike the previous strategy which had covered these targets completely. The quality of education is mentioned in the general objectives, and several specific objectives relate to the quality of education (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6 and 2.1). There are 15 indicators defined under the first general objective related to the quality of education, and most of them (12) are related to student achievements in international testing, and three refer to the achievements in

3 Specific objective 1.9: improved infrastructure and network of institutions in pre-university education, higher education and institutions of pupil and student standards (SEDS, p. 79).

4 The previous strategic document lists the functions of each of the education subsystems. To illustrate, we list the functions of the three subsystems of the pre-university education as defined in the previous strategy. The main function of the system of social care and upbringing and education of pre-school children (ECCPUE) is to create conditions for high-quality life, especially (but not exclusively) in out-of-family environments and for full and harmonious development, education and socialisation of children in accordance with the needs of each child, and in the spirit of modern conceptions of children's rights; 2) The function of primary education is to provide basic literacy to students in all areas important for modern day living, to help them develop functional knowledge, skills, motivation for learning, views and values necessary for establishing national and cultural identity and to develop their basic cultural needs and habits, which will enable them to pursue further education, lifelong learning and an active and constructive existence in the contemporary society; 3) The function of general and artistic secondary education is to prepare students well for the continuation of their education at higher levels and to create the basis for the formation of future intellectual and cultural elite of the country.

5 The Law on the Planning System, „Official Gazette of the RS“, no. 30/2018, art. 13.

6 Ibid. art. 19.

final exams. All quality indicators refer to primary education, with inconsistencies in terms of target values.<sup>7</sup> No quality indicators have been defined for the second general objective, even though improvement of the quality of higher education is stated in the general objective. Measures that represent the manner to increase the quality of education are not measures (ways to achieve special objectives) but objectives. Judging from the description of specific objectives, it can be concluded that quality improvement is seen as setting standards (assessment of students, teachers and institutions; establishing a system for accreditation of programs and institutions), without considering the application of standards. Improvement of the quality of education programmes comes down to the introduction of education standards without recognizing the importance of the functionality and relevance of those programmes. Two specific objectives (1.5 and 1.6) deal with the quality of teacher staff (initial education and training), and the description of these objectives and defined indicators<sup>8</sup> shows the lack of focus on training for the application of learning / teaching concepts and the achievement of objectives and standards. The quality of the teaching and learning process (learning-oriented teaching / learning methods, quality free

textbooks and instructional materials, assistive technology, information and communication technologies, etc.), and the provision of quality working and learning conditions, especially in disadvantaged environments and schools, is not the focus of SEDS. In order to improve the effects of primary education<sup>9</sup> and achieve the set target values, it is not enough to set standards of student achievement, but it is necessary to ensure all aspects of quality education.

SEDS states: "One of the most important goals of the Education Development Strategy in Serbia until 2020, related to increasing public funding for education, from the current 4.5% (data from 2012) to 6% of gross domestic product has not been achieved. On the contrary, according to the 2018 data, this percentage has dropped (3.1% in 2018, and 4% in 2019)" (p. 41). Despite recognizing the problem of low public funding for education, SEDS does not envisage higher public funding for education that could provide and improve resources and conditions that lead to increased quality of education. Serbia allocates the least funds for education, expressed as a percentage of GDP and per student<sup>10</sup>, compared to the EU countries. SEDS does not provide an estimate of the necessary funds, and based on the one

7 For example, the plan is to increase the number of average points on PISA tests from 442.3 to 471.6 while reducing functional illiteracy from 38.6% to 18.6%. In order to achieve the target value of 18.6%, the number of average points should be close to 500. On the other hand, the target values for final exam scores are very low (11.5 mathematics, 13.5 Serbian / mother tongue, 13.5 combined test), which is inconsistent with the planned values for functional literacy.

8 Indicators for specific objective 1.5: increase the number of accredited study programs for teacher education according to revised standards for assessing the quality of study programs and increase the number of trainees who have completed the internship period based on the new concept of induction and with the support of trained mentors. Indicators for specific objective 1.6: the published Catalogue of continued professional development is harmonized with the new concept of education employee training; increase the percentage of educational institutions that apply horizontal learning; increase the number of employees in educational institutions who have acquired higher academic titles.

9 All quality indicators for student achievement refer to primary school achievement.

10 In 2018, 3.1% of GDP was allocated for education in Serbia (according to SORS data, p. 41), while the only country in the EU that spends less than Serbia was Romania, with 2.8% of GDP (Eurostat, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/educ\\_uoe\\_fine06/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/educ_uoe_fine06/default/table?lang=en)). Allocations per student in 2017 at all levels of education were lower compared to almost all EU countries and far below the average allocation in the EU-27: ECCPUE EUR 115.9 (EU – EUR 5,880.4), in primary education EUR 1,208 (EU – EUR 6,269.4), in secondary education EUR 1,240.8 (EU – EUR 7,449.2) and in higher education EUR 1,687.7 (EU – EUR 9,572.2). Data source: Eurostat, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDUC\\_UOE\\_FINE09\\_\\_custom\\_1644665/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDUC_UOE_FINE09__custom_1644665/default/table?lang=en).

reference related to finances,<sup>11</sup> a conclusion is drawn that no changes will take place, which calls into question the achievement of all objectives (especially those related to quality) set in this document. This approach indicates that the new strategic document is not development-oriented.

The relevance of education (in relation to the target 4.4 – increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship) is mentioned in the general objectives and one specific objective (2.2 – improved relevance of higher education at the national and international level). One measure can be related to the relevance of adult education (1.8.1 – encouraging dialogue and developing social partnership). Other subsystems of education are not considered in terms of relevance, for several reasons. First, relevance is understood very narrowly – as a link between vocational education and employers or the labour market, and not as harmonizing the structures of the education system with the immediate and developmental needs of individuals, economic, social, cultural, research, educational, public, administrative and other systems (SEDS 2012). Despite the fact that SEDS mission statement mentions development of the individual and society, the set goals and measures do not create a link with the overall development of society (economic, cultural, scientific, and social). Secondly, as already mentioned, SEDS does not recognize the complexity of the education system, but divides it into pre-university and higher education. In this way, it neglects the functions of each education subsystem, and the relevance of education derives precisely from these functions. Thirdly, since the specifics of each education subsystem have not been re-

cognized, links between subsystems are missing, and the absence of such a systematic approach has consequences for both quality and relevance. For example, the previous strategic document recognized the secondary general and artistic education as having a central role in raising the percentage of the population with higher education in the Republic of Serbia and in forming the country's intellectual and cultural elite, which is a key factor in society's development. One of the strategic goals was to increase the coverage of general secondary education, so that by 2020 at least 39% of students enrolls general and art secondary school, bringing Serbia closer to the standard of developed countries where 40% to 50% of all students in four-year secondary schools attend grammar schools. This goal was not achieved, and according to the latest data, 29.1% of students attend general and artistic secondary schools (26.7% general and 2.4% artistic) (SEDS, p. 25). Impact indicator data and the observed outcome indicators, SEDS has abandoned this strategic commitment.

Since the SEDS period of validity coincides with the period of validity of the 2030 Agenda, it is possible to compare the alignment of targets set in the new strategic document against those in the 2030 Agenda and assess the alignment of the national education goals with the targets set under SDG 4. The targeted values for general objectives related to the coverage of pre-school education will not lead to all girls and boys having access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-school education by 2030 in order to be ready for primary education (target 4.2). It is planned that the coverage under early childhood care and pre-school upbringing and education by 2030 comes to 67%, which is a negligible increase compared to 2019, when

11 „The planned funds for the implementation of measures and activities, stated in the AP, will not affect public revenues and public expenditures in the medium and long term. It is expected that the funds from the budget of the Republic of Serbia planned for the implementation of activities stated in the AP for 2021, as well as projections for 2022 and 2023, will be within the planned limits set by the Ministry of Finance for all budget users“. (SEDS, p. 99)

the coverage was 62.5%.<sup>12</sup> Target values for the coverage of children from six months to three years (38%) and children from three to five and a half years (75%) are far below the coverage of these two age groups in most EU countries in 2020. In addition, there are no indicators that point to a strategic commitment to increase the coverage of children under ECCPUE who need such incentives the most (Ivić et al., 2021), and these are children from families with low socio-economic status (poor, low level of education, families from rural areas and Roma children), which are least covered by the ECCPUE.<sup>13</sup> As far as primary and secondary education (in relation to the target 4.1), the planned coverage in 2030 for the for primary education is 98.7% and secondary education 93%, while, similarly to the ECCPUE, data on the planned coverage of children from vulnerable groups are missing, where coverage is the lowest.<sup>14</sup> With regard to the coverage of higher education (in relation to the target 4.3), target values have been set for the indicator "percentage of persons ages 19 to 30 covered by tertiary education", which is not an indicator of the coverage by higher education in official statistics, so the stated initial value (25.5% in 2019) does not correspond to the coverage by higher education of 54.7% in 2019.<sup>15</sup> In the higher education subsystem, as in other subsystems, the coverage of members of vulnerable groups is not listed as an indicator. SEDS states a targeted 5% increase in the number of students from vulnerable social groups who complete undergraduate, master and doctoral studies, but with no starting values. As far as adult education, SEDS envisages 7% coverage by adult education

in 2030, which is the same target value as in the previous strategic document for 2020, which is far from the rate of participation in adult education and training in all EU countries.

The absence of most indicators related to the participation of vulnerable groups at all levels of education, as well as the lack of gender-sensitive indicators, leads to the conclusion that SEDS does not recognize target 4.5 (eliminate gender inequality in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations) as a national educational objective. Although SEDS defines two specific objectives related to access to education – improved accessibility, equity and openness of pre-university education and training (1.4) and improved accessibility and coverage by higher education (2.3), no specific measures have been defined to contribute to these objectives. None of the indicators for pre-university education refer to the participation of members of vulnerable groups, and no measures for the specific objective of improved conditions for lifelong learning (1.9) deal with the problem of low participation of adults in education, but rather with the recognition of prior learning and increasing the number of adult education programs.

In the previous period, there were no significant changes in legislation, institutional framework, progress monitoring and reporting mechanisms for on the achievement of SDG 4.

12 SEDS states that the initial value for coverage in 2020 was 57.38%, but according to the SORS the coverage in the school year 2019/2020 school year was 63% (SORS, 2021, p. 123).

13 According to MICS data on the percentage of children ages 3 to 6 attending early childhood education, the coverage of children from other settlements is 45.9%, the coverage of children whose mothers have lower education is 17.3%, the coverage of children from the poorest families is 10, 5%, while the coverage of children from Roma settlements is only 7.4%. Data source: SORS and UNICEF, 2019, p. 279 and 281.

14 For children from Roma settlements, the coverage rate is not stated, but the following indicators are listed: primary school completion rate, transition rate to secondary school and secondary school completion rate. The same indicators are given for students with disabilities (SEDS, pp. 55–56).

15 SORS, 2021, p. 123.

In the previous year one indicator was added for monitoring achievement of SDG 4, 4.1.2 – completion rate (first cycle of primary education,

second cycle of primary education, secondary education), so out of 12 indicators monitored globally, six are now available on the SORS portal.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>The existing SEDS should be used when developing a new education strategy, as a good model for establishing national education objectives that correspond to the SDG 4 targets.</p>		<p>The new SEDS does not build on the previous one, and its structure and content represent a deviation from the previous one. Most of the targets planned for 2030 are far below those set for targets under SDG 4. Unlike the Education Development Strategy in Serbia until 2020, which fully covered seven and partially one target, the new SEDS only partially covers these targets.</p>
<p>Provide resources (financial, material and human) to enable the implementation of strategic commitments in all education subsystems, as well as effective functioning of coordination mechanisms.</p>		<p>SEDS plans to increase funds for education, but the first action plan for the implementation of the strategy prescribes that "allocations for education will be within the prescribed limits." The plan for 2022 is to reduce education budget by one billion dinars.</p>
<p>Amend the Law on Preschool Education and Training in order to provide free preschool education and allow all children access to quality early childhood development.</p>		<p>There were no changes to the Law on Preschool Education, and SEDS 2030 does not provide for free preschool education. According to the SORS (DevInfo database), in 2020, parents of 57.9% children had to pay the full price, 14.7 % paid a discount price, and 27.4% did not pay the costs of preschool education.</p>

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Amend the Law on Secondary Education and Training to make the secondary education compulsory, which will enable the achievement of target 4.1 that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.	✘	The Law on Secondary Education was not amended. SEDS states that changes to the Constitution are needed to introduce compulsory secondary education, but this is not planned until 2030.
Amend the Law on Secondary Education by abolishing the discriminatory provision in Article 63a which prevents students of three-year secondary schools from taking vocational matriculation exams or general matriculation exams for a period of two years, preventing them from passing to higher education, and achievement of the target 4.3 on equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.	✘	No amendments to the Law on Secondary Education were passed in relation to Article 63a.
Review the criteria for supporting students from vulnerable groups and provide adequate financial resources to eliminate discrimination and injustice in education.	✘	There were no changes to the criteria. AP for SEDS 2030 envisaged the activity 1.4.1.5 – develop new criteria for awarding scholarships that weigh the socio-economic status with a higher coefficient in relation to the achievement criterion (amendments to the law on student standards).
Regularly hold public debates on draft regulations and public policy documents, in accordance with the legal obligations of the competent proponents.	✔	The discussion on SEDS and the action plan was held in the period from February 9 to March 10, 2021. The Report on the conducted public discussion was published.
Align the education data collection and processing systems of SORS and MESTD).	✘	The two systems were not harmonized. The establishment of the Unified Education Information System in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is planned under the 2023 Action plan.

✔ Adopted;    ✘ Partially adopted;    ✘ Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

- 1.** Initiate SEDS revision process so that the target values are in line with the values set in the 2030 Agenda for Quality Education.
- 2.** After harmonizing the target values with the values set in the Agenda 2030 in the field of quality education, redesign the existing general and specific objectives and formulate concrete measures that will lead to the achievement of the set values.
- 3.** Increase public funding for education by providing resources and improving conditions leading to increased quality of education.
- 4.** Make amendments to the relevant laws that will: provide free preschool education; introduce compulsory secondary education; delete the discriminatory provision in Article 63a which prevents students of three-year high schools from taking the vocational matriculation or general matriculation exam for a period of two years.

Goal 5:

# GENDER EQUALITY



## Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

### TARGETS

**Target 5.1** End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

**Target 5.2** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

**Target 5.3** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

**Target 5.4** Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

**Target 5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

## TARGETS

**Target 5.6** Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

**Target 5.a** Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

**Target 5.b** Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

**Target 5.c** Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

Two laws and two strategies in the field of gender equality and anti-discrimination were adopted in 2021: the Law on Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, the Law on Gender Equality, the National Strategy for preventing and combating gender-based violence against women and domestic violence for the period 2021 to 2025, as well as the Gender Equality Strategy for the period from 2021 to 2030. The Gender Equality Strategy partially covers five of the eight targets under the SDG 5, which is less compared to the previous document. The formulation of targets and set target values are far below the level envisaged by the 2030 Agenda under SDG 5.

With the adoption of the new Law on Ministries, the area of gender equality and anti-discrimination was placed under the competence of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, which initiated changes in the legal and strategic framework. The human resources in the Sector for Anti-Discrimination Policy and Gender Equality within the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue are insufficient to fulfil all obligations undertaken by this Ministry under the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

The key strategic document for achieving gender equality was the National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period from 2016 to 2020. The analysis showed that SDG 5 was partially covered by the strategic framework for seven targets, while target 5b, which refers to enhancing the use of innovative technologies, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women, was not included in any strategic objective.

The legal framework for achieving gender equality has been partially established. There have been several years of delays in aligning legislation with the Acquis in the areas of non-discrimination and gender equality.

Despite the establishment of institutional and coordination mechanisms for gender equality at the national level, coordination of their work has been improved. National and local gender equality mechanisms did not have sufficient capacity, with limited coordination between national and local gender equality mechanisms and unclear competencies of coordination mechanisms.

Progress monitoring and reporting mechanisms under SDG 5 were assessed as non-functional. Despite the obligation of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality to report annually on implemented activities from the Action Plan, such reports have not been prepared. Out of 14 global indicators for monitoring the implementation of SDG 5, ten were available on the SORS portal.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

Key changes were noted in the field of gender equality in the previous period, related to the strategic and legislative framework and institutional and coordination mechanisms.

Two laws and two strategies in the field of gender equality and anti-discrimination were adopted in 2021: the Law on Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, the Law on Gender Equality, the National Strategy for preventing and combating gender-based violence against women and domestic violence for the period

2021 to 2025, as well as Gender Equality Strategy for the period from 2021 to 2030 (GES).

Since the period of validity of the GES coincides with the period of validity of the 2030 Agenda, it is possible to compare the alignment of target values in the SRR against those in the Agenda and assess the state's commitment to achieving gender equality. The general objective of overcoming the gender gap and achieving gender equality as a precondition for the development of society and improving the daily lives of wo-

men and men, girls and boys should be realized through four specific objectives:

1. reduce gender gap in the economy, science and education as a prerequisite and incentive for socio-economic development of society;
2. provide equal opportunities for the realization and protection of human rights as a precondition for development and a secure society;
3. establish accessible and comprehensive health care and social security;
4. establish a complete and functional system for creating and implementing gender-responsive public policies and budgets.

Compared to the previous strategic document, which partially covered seven of the eight targets applicable to the Republic of Serbia, the analysis of specific objectives, target values and measures shows that the new GES covers five targets. Like the previous document, the new GES does not cover target 5.b – enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.<sup>16</sup> The objectives and measures also do not cover target 5.3 – eliminate

all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, and target 5.a – undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, which were partially covered by the previous strategy.

Indicator target values for the general and specific objectives in 2030, expressed through the values of the gender equality index (total and by domains), are far below the values that indicate the achievement of SDG 5.<sup>17</sup> The stated target value in 2030 for the general objective indicator – gender equality index – is 80,<sup>18</sup> which does not indicate the commitment to achieve gender equality, but rather the commitment to reduce gender inequalities. Compared to 2018, the implementation of measures over a ten-year period should lead to an increase in the index value by 2030, in the domains of labour by two points (from 69.4 to 71.4), finance by 21.9 points (from 59.7 to 81.6), knowledge by 4 points (from 56 to 60), time by 16.2 points (from 48.7 to 64.9) and health by 6.7 points (from 84.1 to 87.8). As concerns the domain of power, it is planned to reduce the index by 6.5 points (from 46.5 to 40) (leading to higher inequality), although the new Law on Gender Equality (LGE)<sup>19</sup> introduced an obligation for public authorities and employers to

16 The GES states that the Digital Skills Development Strategy 2020 – 2024 aims to introduce special programs for the development of advanced digital skills for young women, women from rural areas and other vulnerable groups, especially in areas with higher unemployment rate or greater digital gender gap. However, the Digital Skills Development Strategy does not contain gender-sensitive indicators, nor do any of the measures address the gender gap in digital skills. There is no activity dealing with the introduction of special programs for the development of advanced digital skills for young women, but it is stated that "special programs for the development of advanced digital skills for young women may be launched, especially in areas with higher unemployment rate or high digital gender gap".

17 A number of material errors were made concerning the initial values: the gender equality index for 2018 is stated as the initial value for the aggregate index in the domains of money and health, while the values from the 2016 index are stated for the domains of work, knowledge and power. Incorrect data are given for the domain related to time – 65.7 (index for the domain of time is the same for all three years and amounts to 48.7). Data source for gender equality index values: SeCons (2021), p. 10.

18 The value of the gender equality index is incorrectly calculated. Target values for 2030 of the index by domains listed as indicators of specific objectives (work 71.4; money 81.6; knowledge 60; time 64.9; power 40; health 87.8), give the index value 63.2. The index was calculated as a geometric mean with different weights for domains in accordance with the methodology of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2017, p. 17).

19 Law on Gender Equality, Art. 10

ensure balanced gender representation in administrative and supervisory bodies and positions, which, if applied, will lead to an increase in the index value in the domain related to power. The target value in 2030 for the satellite domain of violence was set as a reduction of the rate of all forms of violence against women over 15 years of age by 20%,<sup>20</sup> despite the fact that a measure was formulated to eliminate all forms of violence (measure 2.3).

The analysis of the objectives and target values set in the GES compared to the targets under SDG 5 shows that the aspirations of the GES are far from those set in the 2030 Agenda for achieving gender equality (end all forms of discrimination, eliminate all forms of violence, ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights). The GES did just set unambitious target values, but plans only partial achievement of the set objectives.<sup>21</sup>

LGE was adopted in May 2021 and compared to the previous law, includes areas that were not previously recognized as important for gender equality, namely: science and technological development; information and communication technologies and information society; defence and security; traffic; energy; environmental protection; access to goods and services. Significant innovations in the LGE relate to the principle of equal opportunities, special measures and instruments and responsibilities for their implementation, which are more closely defined for each area, gender balance in governing bodies and positions, and prescribes sanctions for vio-

lations of obligations, which were not prescribed by the previous law (Pajvančić, 2021).

Regarding the participation in the preparation of the LGE and GES, the level of involvement of CSOs varies. Consultations were conducted during the drafting of both documents. Public hearing was held during the drafting of the LGE, but was not held during the drafting of the GES. Civil society organizations state that most of the proposals in the public debate on LGE were not accepted, most often without providing any explanation, which is contrary to Articles 34 and 36 of the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia (Bjeloš et al., 2021). In addition, one proposal was amended after the public debate, which was the reason why the Coalition PrEUgovor proposed amendments to the provisions of Article 58 and Article 77 of the Draft LGE, which prescribe financial resources for organizing and conducting specialized services for the victims of violence. The Coalition stated that these provisions are discriminatory, contrary to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and the ratified Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (PrEUgovor, 2021).

With the adoption of the new Law on Ministries, the area of gender equality and anti-discrimination was transferred to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, which in the previous period carried out activities to change the legal and strategic framework related to SDG 5. The institutional framework is thoroughly elaborated in the LGE, i.e. bodies responsible for gender equality established in the government authorities at all levels, unlike the previous legal solution which prescribed the establishment of

20 In 2030, the prevalence rate of physical and / or sexual violence would be 13.6%, the prevalence rate of sexual harassment 33.6%, and the prevalence rate of persecution 8.8%. Data source for violence prevalence rates: SeCons (2021), p. 51.

21 "Option 2 includes gradual and partial fulfilment of the general objective and complete fulfilment of more than half of the specific objectives of the strategy, and implies continuity in their fulfilment and consistency of results during the entire period of implementation of the Strategy, with accompanying APs." (Gender Equality Strategy, 2021, p. 117)

gender equality mechanisms in LGUs. Having in mind the multisectoral nature of this area, mutual cooperation of the competent bodies is regulated, including coordination of their activities on the horizontal and vertical levels, as a precondition for efficient actions on the promotion of gender equality. The operation of gender equality mechanisms in practice will depend on the preparation and adoption of decisions on gender equality mechanisms, their selection, competencies, work and coordination activities, as well as election of members of these bodies (Pajvančić, 2021). It is also extremely important to provide human and financial resources for the functioning of these bodies. The GES did not recognize the importance of the financial aspect for the functioning of gender equality mechanisms, as seen under special objective 4, which states that by 2030 less than half (45%) of gender equality mechanisms will be funded from the budget at all government levels.

Human resources in the Sector for anti-discrimination policy and gender equality within the

Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue are inadequate to fulfil all obligations of the Ministry under the LGE and the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination. Namely, the competent sector that covers anti-discrimination policy and gender equality has only seven employees (assistant minister, five civil servants and one deputy).<sup>22</sup> Inadequate capacities of most local and main national mechanisms (Gender Equality Coordination Body), as well as inconsistent institutional mechanisms with conflicting mandates or conflicts of interest, had an adverse effect on the implementation of the previous strategy (Babović and Vuković, 2021).

The number of indicators that monitor the achievement of SDG 5 in the previous year was increased by one, so that out of 14 indicators monitored globally, 11 are now available on the SORS portal. Indicator 5.6.1 was added – proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>Improve the strategic planning process in the field of gender equality, taking into account the recommendations of the evaluation of the Action Plan for the implementation of NGES in order to ensure full coverage of targets under SDG 5.</p>	<p>✘</p>	<p>The new GES covers five of the eight targets under SDG 5, which is a lower coverage compared to the previous document. Target definitions and set values are far below the level envisaged by the 2030 Agenda under SDG 5.</p>

22 Data source: Information on the work of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, November 2021, p. 6.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Align legislation in the field of prevention of discrimination and gender equality with the acquis adopted under the Negotiating chapter 23.		The LGE and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination were adopted in 2021. The Law on Same-Sex Unions has not been adopted.
Define the manner of operation of coordination of mechanisms for gender equality at the national level.		The LGE regulates the manner of coordination of gender equality mechanisms at the national level in Articles 59-61.
Remove restrictions on coordination between national and local gender equality mechanisms by establishing clear competencies for coordination mechanisms.		Article 63 of the LGE regulates the manner of coordination between national and local gender equality mechanisms. To determine clear competencies, it is necessary to adopt decisions on gender equality mechanisms, their selection, competencies, manner of work and coordination of activities, as well as election of members of these bodies.
When drafting a new strategic document, ensure the measurability of goals through indicators that will contain the initial and target value, disaggregated in accordance with the relevant targets and in relation to individual vulnerable groups.		Initial and target values are given for general and specific objectives. Target values are not disaggregated in relation to individual vulnerable groups. Initial and target values have not been defined for result indicators.
Regularly publish reports on the implementation of strategic documents by the competent institutions.		The Coordination Body for Gender Equality has not prepared a report on the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2016 to 2020.

 Adopted;  Partially adopted;  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

- 1.** Initiate the GES revision process so that the target values are in line with the values set in the 2030 Agenda for Gender Equality.
- 2.** After aligning the target values with the values set in the 2030 Agenda for Gender Equality, redesign the existing and introduce new measures that will lead to the achievement of the set values.
- 3.** Ensure conditions for the practical implementation of the LGE through the adoption of bylaws, adequate human and financial resources for training of all actors involved in the implementation of the LGE, as well as adoption of documents that will ensure effective functioning of gender equality bodies at all levels and their effective coordination.

Goal 6:

# CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



## Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

### TARGETS

**Target 6.1** By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all

**Target 6.2** By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

**Target 6.3** By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally.

**Target 6.4** By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity

## TARGETS

**Target 6.5** By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate

**Target 6.6** By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

**Target 6.a** By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water – and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies

**Target 6.b** Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

Only one planning document in the field of water management was adopted in the reporting period – Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy for the period 2021 to 2023. This plan has enabled the implementation of the Strategy through the adoption of special goals, measures, activities and indicators. The plan does not address all shortcomings related to the achievement of the SDG 6 and monitoring indicators relevant to this goal. Limited progress has been regarding achievement of SDG 6 and overall alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

No significant progress has been made in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework for water management. Administrative capacities for this complex area remain very low, which affects the speed and quality of implementation of prescribed measures and activities. Some progress has been made in establishing a National Water Conference, which should ensure greater participation by the public and other sectors in water management.

Progress monitoring mechanisms for SDG 6 are relatively well developed, with data for six targets available in the national database. In the previous period, some progress has been made in developing the monitoring mechanism, through the improvement of the data that allow the monitoring of targets 6.2 and 6.3.

# An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

Serbia is relatively rich in water resources with about 24 million m<sup>3</sup> of water per 1,000 inhabitants. However, there are inequalities in the availability of water throughout the country in terms of quantity and quality. Last year's report provided an estimate that most of the drinking water comes from groundwater, about 63%. The quality of drinking water in most cities was assessed as adequate, except in Vojvodina, where the quality of water was assessed poor on average, and in some cities it did not meet the minimum health requirements.

The percentage of the population with connection to the water supply system in Serbia is below the European average, and in the previous reporting period it was around 87%. The report states that the density of the water supply network also differs geographically, so it is denser in Vojvodina and Belgrade compared to the southern parts of the country. The condition of the water supply network was assessed as unfavourable, and losses in the network were estimated at about 35% of the abstracted water.

Another unfavourable fact pointed out in the report was that the price of water in Serbia is extremely low, far below the average price of water in the EU. It was also pointed out that the price of water often cannot cover the costs of abstraction, purification and distribution, which leads to the fact that water supply utility organizations operate at a loss and cannot regularly maintain and improve processing and delivery capacities.

The report concluded that integrated water management was supported by strategic and legal documents, adding that it was not sufficiently implemented in practice. The division of competencies over management, use, quality control and water protection between the water management, health and environmental sectors was highlighted as a particular challenge.

Extremely low wastewater treatment rates have been identified as one of the key problems in water management. The proportion of the population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment is below 10%, while this proportion is much higher in EU countries. According to the European Environment Agency (2020), in the EU-27 about 69% of the population is connected to tertiary wastewater treatment systems and 13% to secondary wastewater treatment systems. Such poor condition is a consequence of a decades-long neglect and the lack of investment in the construction of water treatment plants. Over the last few years, the construction of such plants has been intensified, but given the large deficiencies, the pace of construction is still very low.

The strategic and legal framework for water management was previously established by the Water management strategy of the territory of the Republic of Serbia until 2034 and the Law on Waters. It was also assessed that water protection is partially regulated through the Law on Environmental Protection.

In the previous report it was assessed that the institutional and coordination mechanisms for achieving SDG 6 are primarily related to the

Water Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, but that certain capacities and competencies also lie with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Health.

Progress monitoring under SDG 6 is partly enabled through standardized and regular monitoring of several indicators for which data are collected at national or local level. In the previous

reporting period, it was possible to monitor four of the eight global targets and six of the 11 global indicators at the national level. The indicators referred to the public water supply coverage, the public sewerage network coverage, the proportion of the population connected to a wastewater treatment facility, water use efficiency, and the amount of development assistance directed towards water supply and sanitation.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

During the reporting period, there were no significant changes in public policies regarding water management and use.

The main change is the adoption of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy on the territory of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2023, making the Strategy adopted in 2017 operative. The plan defines specific objectives, measures and activities for their achievement, indicators for monitoring implementation, sources of funding, competent institutions and deadlines for the implementation of activities.

The specific objectives of the Action Plan that are relevant for achieving SDG 6 are:

1. Increase public water supply coverage;
2. Reduce proportion of unbilled water in public water supply systems;
3. Improve the area of water protection from pollution;

4. Reduce pollution input from concentrated pollution sources;
5. Improve institutional framework in the water sector.

The plan does not eliminate all the shortcomings relevant for the achievement of SDG 6. First of all, an evident link with the 2030 Agenda goals has not been made, so the national goals remain significantly less ambitious compared to the global goals. The Action plan did not compensate for the lack of specific measures to protect aquatic ecosystems, improve water recycling and increase the participation of local communities in water use and protection. The strategic framework still does not specify the mechanisms and competencies for monitoring indicators at the national level.

In the previous period, there were no significant changes in the legal framework in the field of water management and protection. In July 2021, the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the National Assembly adopted the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Waters. However, at the request of CSOs the proposal was withdrawn

and returned for re-draft because, contrary to regulations, public participation was restricted in the process of its adoption. The proposal also contained harmful provisions related to the reduction of transparency and public control related to the lease of water land. Such changes could also have an adverse effect on the progress towards SDG 6, as they could further jeopardize water supply, increase water pollution and disrupt aquatic ecosystems.

The water management plan is still in the drafting stage and there is no official information on the progress. This document should include a wide range of measures to achieve sustainable water management and protection in the entire Danube basin in Serbia. The plan should also include elements directly related to SDG 6, such as the identification of pollution sensitive areas, guidelines for the water quality monitoring, identification of water bodies for water supply, setting specific objectives for the protection of surface and groundwater and measures to achieve them.

The Plan for extraction of river sediments for the period over the next two years is also being prepared. This plan specifies the locations and permitted quantities for the extraction of river sediments, in order to reduce negative impacts on water and related ecosystems.

In the previous period, there were no significant changes in the institutional framework regarding water management and protection. The National Water Conference was established in accordance with the Law on Waters, with the main goal to ensure public influence in water management.

Some progress was noted related to progress monitoring mechanism for SDG 6. Data for monitoring target 6.2 have been added to the national SORS database (2021). Indicator 6.3.2 has also been added, which monitors the proportion of water bodies that meet good ecological status. Progress is currently monitored for six targets: 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6a and 6.b, via 7 indicators (6.2.1, 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.4.1, 6.4.2, 6.a.1 and 6.b.1).

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Define goals related to access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for all population in the national planning documents, that are equally ambitious as the target values specified in the 2030 Agenda, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.	✘	In the Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy objectives are set in a general and declarative manner in terms of increasing water availability to the population, but without specific links with the 2030 Agenda target values, and does not highlight vulnerable groups. The defined indicators do not reflect the needs of different population groups.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Public policy framework should ensure that water-related ecosystems are protected and restored, and define goals related to water recycling and reuse that ensure participation of local communities in water and sanitation management.		The Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy did not set specific goals and measures related to ecosystem protection, water recycling and participation of the local community.
Improve the legal framework in the area of water management planning, flood risk management planning, as well as water quality monitoring, to ensure compliance with the EU acquis.		In the previous period, no significant changes were made related to the legal framework.
Develop capacity and consolidate public institutions for water management. Enhance cross-sectoral cooperation in this area, particularly between the water management and environmental protection sectors.		In the previous period, no improvement was made regarding water sector capacity, but the National Water Conference was established, which should improve cross-sectoral cooperation.
Define indicators to monitor integrated water resource management, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, achieve international cooperation in water management and sanitation-related activities, along with the participation of local communities in water management and sanitation, and ensure appropriate data collection.		The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Water Management Strategy defines an indicator related to the integration of water areas into spatial plans, but indicators for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems, participation of local communities in water management, etc. are still missing.
Improve the framework of monitoring water management indicators in the national planning documents, through clearly defined initial values of indicators and regular progress reporting on indicators.		The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Water Management Strategy defines the indicators and their initial values. Reporting on collected data is not defined.



Adopted;



Partially adopted;



Not adopted

# Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. The national planning documents should define ambitious goals concerning access to drinking water and sanitary and hygienic living conditions to meet the defined target values of the 2030 Agenda, and especially emphasize the needs of women, children and vulnerable groups in this area.
2. Ensure the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems within the public policy framework, define goals that would ensure water recycling and reuse, and enable participation of the local community in water and sanitation management.
3. Improve the legislative framework in the field of water management, flood risk management and water quality monitoring, in line with EU legislation.
4. Increase and strengthen the capacity of institutions in the field of water management. Improve cross-sectoral cooperation in this area, especially between the departments of water management and environmental protection.
5. Define indicators in the national planning documents for monitoring all objectives and measures that are relevant to SDG 6 and link them with global indicators.
6. Adopt a water management plan and a water pollution prevention plan as soon as possible.
7. Clearly link national objectives with SDG 6 and its targets in the strategic framework for water management.
8. Action plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy should precisely define a specific goal related to higher coverage of the population with access to public water supply systems and link it with the goals of the 2030 Agenda.
9. The next action plan should define the manner and dynamics of reporting on indicators for monitoring plan implementation.



Goal 7:

# AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



Ensure access to affordable,  
reliable, sustainable and  
modern energy for all

## TARGETS

**Target 7.1** By the end of 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

**Target 7.2** By the end of 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix

**Target 7.3** By the end of 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency

**Target 7.a** By the end of 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology

## TARGETS

**Target 7.b** By the end of 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States

Significant regulatory reforms in the field of energy policy were implemented within the reporting period. The most significant improvement of the legal framework, directly related to the SDG7 is reflected in the adoption of the new Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources and the Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy, in lieu of the 2013 Law on Energy Efficiency. The Law on Amendments to the Law on Energy, which serves as an umbrella document in this policy area was adopted as a part of this regulatory reform. Strategic framework reforms have also been initiated, with the drafting of the Energy Development Strategy and the new National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030.

Institutional and coordination mechanisms for the implementation of public policies in the field of energy have been improved. The most important innovations include the announced establishment of directorates for financing and promoting energy efficiency and the launch of the National coalition for energy poverty reduction. Cooperation with the civil sector has also been improved through their involvement in the work of the National coalition for energy poverty reduction and working groups in charge of preparing planning documents.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

The strategic framework in the field of energy enabled only a partial achievement of most SDG 7 targets, specifically targets 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 and 7.a. Target 7.b was identified as an exception in this regard, and was seen as sufficiently integrated in the relevant planning documents. The 2015 Energy Development Strategy until 2025, with projections until 2030, and the related Decree on determining the program for the implementation of the energy development strategy for

the period from 2017 to 2023, adopted 2016, serve as umbrella documents in the country's energy policy strategic framework. Other documents whose importance was underlined include the Spatial Plan from 2010 to 2020, the National Renewable Energy Action Plan from 2013, with a validity period until 2020, and the National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods from 2012, for which the action plan was never prepared.

The legal framework established in the field of energy provided a framework for achieving all targets within SDG 7. In addition to the Energy Law, as a central document in this area, the importance of the Law on Energy Efficiency and a number of relevant regulations, such as the one on energy endangered customers, was also emphasized. The Law on ratification of Stabilization and Association Agreement and, in particular, the Law on the ratification of the Treaty Establishing the Energy Community are recognized as crucial for the integration of Serbia's energy market with regional markets and the EU market.

Institutional and coordination mechanisms for the implementation of public policies relevant for the achievement of SDG 7 were assessed as extremely complex. The Ministry of Mining and Energy is undoubtedly the most relevant for this segment, the relevance of the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure (MCTI) was also recognized in terms of the target 7.b, concerning the development of infrastructure for modern and sustainable energy supply. Other relevant ministries are the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) and the Ministry of Finance. In order to implement the activities defined by

the Decree of the Program for the Realization of the Energy Sector Development Strategy, other institutions were identified, such as the Energy Agency of the Republic of Serbia, public enterprises such as the Public Enterprise Electric Power Industry of Serbia (PE EPS), Elektromreža Srbije, PUC Belgrade district heating, local heating plants, and companies like Naftna industrija Srbije (NIS).

Progress monitoring and reporting mechanisms that are directly related to SDG 7 were primarily defined by the Decree of the Program for the Realization of the Energy Sector Development Strategy. However, a number of shortcomings have been identified in this document, such as inadequately defined monitoring indicators, undefined links between individual activities and strategic objectives, and failure to appoint institutions responsible for the implementation and monitoring. In the previous reporting period, the SORS monitored and published data for two indicators related to the target 7.1 and one indicator related to the target 7.3. Additional data based on which it was possible to monitor SDG 7 in Serbia are available in the Bertelsmann Foundation database and the Eurostat database.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

In November 2020, the Republic of Serbia was one of the signatories of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which paved the way for the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. With the signing of the Sofia Declaration, the countries of the Western Balkans have committed themselves to support the efforts of the EU member states in achieving climate neutrality by 2050, which is now prescribed by the European Climate

Law. In addition, and directly related to the implementation of SDG 7, the countries expressed their commitment towards defining targets for 2030 in the field of climate and energy, alignment with the EU Emissions Trading System, improving energy efficiency in all sectors, increasing the share of renewable energy etc. (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2020). The adoption of the Action Plan for the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans is expected in October 2021.

Significant reforms were initiated in 2021 within the planning framework of the Republic of Serbia in the fields of climate and energy. The drafting of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) officially started, with the support of the EU, in April of 2021. The Law on Energy provides the legal basis for the adoption of the NECP. Like other signatories to the Treaty establishing the Energy Community, the Republic of Serbia was not obliged to adopt this document, bearing in mind that it did not become part of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community by the Ministerial Council of, but by means of the Recommendation 2018/01 / EnC-MC, which is a lower-level document. Today, the Republic of Serbia is at the very back as the last signatory of the Treaty Establishing the Energy Community in the Western Balkans, which has formally entered the process of drafting the NECP. The plan will finally define the goals of the Republic of Serbia for 2030 in terms of increasing energy efficiency, the share of renewable energy in the energy mix, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to NECP, an agreement was signed in July 2021 between the Ministry of Mining and Energy and the Nikola Tesla Institute of Electrical Engineering for the preparation of the Energy Sector Development Strategy until 2040 with projections until 2050, as well as the Energy Sector Development Strategy Implementation Programme, after which the drafting process has started (Ministry of Mining and Energy, 2021a). The process of drafting of the NECP and Energy Sector Development Strategy and its Implementation Program has been significantly improved, and CSOs are participating in the working groups of the Ministry of Mining and Energy in charge of drafting these documents. Due to the absence of the Action Plan for Energy Efficiency, the Republic of Serbia has not had a document since 2018 for the planning of activities in the field of improvement of energy efficiency that could contribute to the achievement of the target 7.3. After years of delay, the fourth action plan for energy efficiency was finally adopted in

August 2021, but with a validity period only until the end of 2021. At the same time, the public was not informed about it. From the aspect of planning activities, due to its very short term of validity, the document remains irrelevant.

The planning framework for the achievement of SDG 7 in Serbia is still incomplete due to the lack of relevant development planning documents at the national level, which is prescribed by the Law on the Planning System. This is primarily the Development Plan of the Republic of Serbia, the highest long-term development planning document of the Republic of Serbia and the accompanying Spatial Plan, aligned with it. Adoption of these (complementary) development documents is crucial for future planning of the country's energy sector, especially in terms of energy transition and decarbonisation. In the absence of the National Development Plan, MCTI has started the process of drafting a new spatial plan for the period from 2021 to 2035. In addition to gross and illegal omissions made by the Ministry during the public hearing, the solutions are very problematic in terms of achievement of the target 7.2. Namely, the draft document envisages the continuation of lignite exploitation and the construction of six new thermal power plants with an installed capacity of 3.3 GW, including Kolubara B Thermal Power Plant (MCTI, 2021). Such solutions are in gross conflict with the provisions of the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda, as well as the state's intentions to significantly increase the share of renewable energy in the energy mix.

The legal framework was improved in the reporting period, primarily with regard to the target 7.3, which refers to increasing the rate of improvement in energy efficiency, and the previously mentioned target 7.2, which requires an increase in the share of renewable energy in the energy mix. In April 2021, four laws in the field of mining and energy were adopted. These are two new laws, the Law on Energy Efficiency

and Rational Use of Energy and the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources, as well as amendments to two other laws, the Law on Energy and the Law on Mining and Geological Explorations. The new Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy has taken over almost all relevant aspects of the Law on Efficient Use of Energy from 2013, but also introduced significant innovations in this area, establishing the Directorate for Financing and Encouraging Energy Efficiency and Plans for energy rehabilitation of central government buildings (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, 2021). Despite positive innovations brought by two new laws, the practice of passing a package of laws regulating an entire area of public policy in just one day is worrying in the procedural sense, because it limits public debate, especially in the absence of political pluralism in the National Assembly. Therefore, the opportunity was missed for many social groups to get involved in the development of these documents and potentially improve their content, which would contribute to the achievement of SDG 7. Regarding relevant bylaws, in August 2021 the Decree on criteria, conditions and manner of calculation of receivables and liabilities between prosumers and suppliers. By regulating these relations, citizens are enabled to actively participate in the electricity production and trade from renewable sources, which contributes to the achievement of the target 7.2.

The adoption of the Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy enabled the improvement of institutional and coordination mechanisms for the implementation of SDG 7. As previously mentioned, this law established the Directorate for Financing and Encouraging Energy Efficiency to replace the previous Budget Fund for Energy Efficiency. As a body within the Ministry of Mining and Energy, this institution will primarily deal with the allocation of financial incentives for increasing energy efficiency in buildings and incentives for micro-generation and small cogeneration units,

as well as raising awareness of the general importance of energy efficiency (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, 2021). The work of this institution will ensure rationalization of energy consumption in the public and private sector, which will contribute to the achievement of the target 7.3. The Government of Serbia adopted a decision on establishing, the decision of established the National coalition for energy poverty reduction, in order to expand access to economically acceptable and modern energy services, increase the efficiency of households and further protect socially vulnerable groups. Its role will be to bring together relevant stakeholders in a meaningful and coordinated action to reduce and end energy poverty, in line with the target 7.1, which calls for ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services (Ministry of Mining and Energy, 2021b).

A slight progress has been made in relation to the monitoring mechanisms for the achievement of SDG 7. The SORS (2021) has published data on the proportion of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption, which are available for the period from 2010 to 2019. This was the first time the SORS has established the monitoring of the target 7.2. The data that is now being published by the SORS has already been collected and submitted to the Ministry of Mining and Energy by Eurostat, in whose database these data were previously available. In addition to the total proportion of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption, data on the proportion in individual sectors of electricity, transport, and the heating and cooling sector are also available. As announced, the data for 2019 on the proportion of the population with access to electricity have been published, for the first time since the publication of data for 2014. This indicator is the basic indicator of progress under the target 7.1. The SORS currently monitors four indicators cumulatively within SDG 7. Progress monitoring for targets 7.a and 7.b has not yet been established.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>Make unified political decisions on decarbonizing the economy and increasing the share of renewable energy in the country's energy mix; Initiate the process of developing planning documents in order to adequately address these decisions and related assumed international obligations.</p>	<p>✘</p>	<p>Decisions on decarbonization and the time needed for (fair) energy transition are lacking. It is necessary to adopt them and, in accordance with the provisions of the Sofia Declaration, include them in the NECP and the Energy Development Strategy.</p>
<p>Adopt a new National Energy Efficiency Action Plan and set ambitious goals to reduce energy intensity of the economy.</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>The Fourth Energy Efficiency Action Plan of the Republic of Serbia was adopted in August 2021. This was done without public knowledge, and the document itself was adopted with a validity period until the end of 2021.</p>
<p>Define strategic goals to promote investment in clean energy research and development and production of energy from renewable sources.</p>	<p>✘</p>	<p>Strategic goals in this area have not yet been defined. Planning documents in the field of energy are currently being drafted, and could include strategic goals. As concerns research development and production of energy from renewable sources, it is important to note that the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources introduces incentives for early development technologies that use new renewable sources, such as renewable hydrogen.</p>
<p>Improve the contents of the Energy Sector Development Strategy to ensure effective system of monitoring progress towards strategic goals in the field of energy.</p>	<p>✘</p>	<p>Instead of revising it, a new energy strategy is currently drafted, including related implementation program.</p>

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Enhance existing mechanisms for monitoring progress towards strategic goals defined in the national planning documents.		The Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources defines the process of monitoring and reporting on the share of energy from renewable sources. However, this recommendation primarily refers to the existence of the energy development strategy and related implementation program, and new versions of these documents are currently being prepared.

 Adopted;  Partially adopted;  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Adopt the energy development strategy, program for the implementation of the energy development strategy and the NECP, to provide adequate planning framework for the decarbonisation and energy transition to renewable energy sources;
2. Adopt the energy development strategy and program for the implementation of the energy development strategy that will provide better conditions for the progress monitoring and reporting process within the defined strategic priorities in the field of energy.



Goal 8:

# DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



**Promote sustained,  
inclusive and sustainable  
economic growth, full and  
productive employment  
and decent work for all**

## TARGETS

**Target 8.1** Sustain per capita economic growth according to national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries

**Target 8.2** Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors

**Target 8.3** Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small – and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

## TARGETS

**Target 8.4** Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead

**Target 8.5** By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

**Target 8.6** By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

**Target 8.7** Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

**Target 8.8** Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

**Target 8.9** By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

**Target 8.10** Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all

**Target 8.a** Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries

**Target 8.b** By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization

Several strategic documents important for the achievement of SDG 8 were adopted in the reporting period. The most important document in this area is the ERP for the period 2021-2023. In addition to the ERP, strategies and related action plans in the areas of employment, science and technology development, industrial policy, fiscal policy, smart specialization and state ownership and management of economic entities have been adopted. However, the mentioned documents did not manage to eliminate the previously observed shortcomings and it seems that the main

emphasis is still on economic growth and higher employment, while the issue of quality of work environment, or decent work, is still inadequately regulated. When it comes to legislation, although there has been some progress towards improving the dignity of work, the conclusion is that the focus is still primarily on economic growth.

There have been no significant changes or progress in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework in the previous period, and problems related to non-transparency (e.g. in the functioning of the Council for Economic Development) or inefficiency (such as the Social and Economic Council) still remain.

## An overview of key results of the previous report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda"

The previous report concluded that SDG 8 of the 2030 Agenda is only partially covered by national strategic planning documents, since key documents in this area have not been adopted. For example, it was assessed that, despite provisions of Article 5 of the Law on the Planning System, Serbia has neither a development plan nor an investment plan in place, which would facilitate nationalization and prioritization of goals in this area. On the other hand, the strategic planning framework was adopted primarily where there is an obligation to the EU, which means that the ERP for the period from 2011 to 2022 was a key planning document in the field of SDG 8, which includes the largest number of targets. The report also highlighted other public policies, which include programs, strategies, action plans and supporting documents in the areas of employment and social policy, fiscal policy, industrial policy, smart specialization, combating shadow economy, scientific and technological development, decent work, tourism

development and youth policy. However, given the absence of the above umbrella strategies and plans, it is estimated that the goals in all documents are set in a rudimentary manner, i.e. as a mere achievement of certain values of economic and employment growth, while the *quality of that growth* and the issue of *decent work* are not adequately addressed.

It was also pointed out that not all targets in this area are fully integrated into the strategic framework. For example, out of 10 relevant targets,<sup>23</sup> it is estimated that only four (targets 8.1, 8.3, 8.6 and 8.10) are adequately regulated, while all others are only partially regulated.

The previous report also pointed out that the legal framework for SDG 8 has only been partially established, such as the fact that far more has been achieved in the field of economic growth than in the achievement of full employment and improving the level of decent work. For example,

23 SDG 8 has a total of 12 targets, but the analysis in the previous 2030 Agenda Preparedness Report estimated that targets 8.7 (eradicate forced labour, child labour, recruitment and use of child soldiers and human trafficking) and 8.a. (trade aid and support for developing countries and especially least developed countries) and 8.b. (By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization) are not applicable to Serbia.

the amendments to the Personal Income Tax Law and the Law on Mandatory Social Insurance Contributions have slightly reduced the fiscal burden of lower aimed at improving living standards and preserving jobs for this category of workers. However, this measure did not improve the dignity of work, given that monthly minimum wage still does not match the minimal consumer basket for a four-member household. The 2014 Labour Law (LL) reformed the labour market towards greater flexibility, significantly reducing job security, and certain solutions (such as the "informal verbal agreement") even distanced the Serbian legislative framework from the relevant EU directives.

Regarding the institutional and coordination mechanisms for achieving SDG 8, the report concluded that existing resources are inadequate and that the work of existing bodies is insufficiently transparent. Most competencies are entrusted to the Ministry of Economy, followed by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans' Affairs and Social Affairs. In addition to these ministries, the National Employment Service (NES), the Council for Economic Development and the Social and Economic Council (SEC) played an important role.

One of the key problems is the fact that allocations for active employment policy (ALP) measures are too low. In 2019, these allocations amounted to only 0.07% of GDP, while the average for OECD countries was 0.37% (OECD, 2021). When it comes to small and medium enterprises, state support to this sector is very fragmented and insufficient to achieve adequate results. For example, in 2018 the average amount of state aid for the purchase of new equipment per company was only 20,000 euros, which is a modest amount for any kind of noticeable improvement in the technological competitiveness of a company (CEVES, 2019).

The NES has operational responsibilities regarding implementation of employment policies and

keeping employment records. However, the lack of capacity of this service is evident, primarily the lack of staff. For example, the OECD report states that the average number of cases per employee (employment counsellors) was as high as 827, which is far above the EU average, where the number is between 100 and 350 (OECD, 2021).

With the establishment of the Council for Economic Development, which consists of members of the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry of Economy has in fact been stripped of a large number of authorities related to economic growth and development. The main challenge, however, lies in the fact that the work of this body was assessed as non-transparent. For example, Article 26 of the Law on Investments stipulates that the Council submits a report on its work to the Government once a year, which is published on the Government's website. That report, or minutes of Council meetings have never been published. The Council does not even have its own website, which is a major problem as it is a body that plays a key role in decisions concerning economic development.

The SEC is a body that deals with the issue of decent work through social dialogue between the state, employers and worker representatives. However, as the European Commission (EC) points out in its report for Serbia, social dialogue has proved to be very weak in practice, due to low level of involvement of relevant social partners, among other things (European Commission, 2020). According to the report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Council's operations are impeded by the extremely low budget and low level of technical capacity. Also, providing only very short deadlines for discussion and proposals on key laws have made the whole process of social dialogue meaningless (ILO, 2017). The Social and Economic Council was often unable to reach any agreement on its sessions, so

the final decision on important issues (such as the minimum wage) was made by the Government.

It was assessed that there are no mechanisms and agreements that explicitly refer to the improvement of decent work, which is the essence of this goal, and that the executive authorities do not deal explicitly with this issue.

Progress monitoring mechanisms for the achievement of SDG 8 were assessed as underdeveloped. The NES monitors only eight of the 17 indicators listed in the report as relevant to SDG 8. The main challenge was the fact that Serbia has not yet nationalized this SDG, which means that these indicators are not adapted to the Serbian context. The second problem,

which stems from the first problem, is that the indicators are too general and do not reflect specific segments of economic growth and decent work. For example, when it comes to decent work, the indicators monitored by the targets 8.5 (8.5.1 and 8.5.2) include only the difference in earnings per hour, based on gender, age and disability, or unemployment rate, on the same basis. This shows that not all aspects of decent work, as defined by the ILO<sup>24</sup>, have been taken into account. Also, concerning target 8.10, the number of bank branches and ATMs per 100,000 inhabitants, as well as the share of the adult population with a bank account, simply cannot measure actual access to finance, especially for vulnerable groups.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

As concerns the public policies, the emphasis is still on economic growth and employment growth, as it was in the previous period, while the issue of productive employment or decent work are still inadequately regulated. The most significant change related to public policy concerns the adoption of the new ERP for the period 2021-2023, which has brought several changes compared to the ERP 2020-2022. In the segment Agriculture, Industry and Services, a new structural reform was added – SR 7: "Boosting industrial competitiveness", which includes digitalization of business models of industrial production, increasing the volume of investments in industry and improving the technological structure of exports. Also, the segment Business Environment and the Fight

Against Gray Economy, in addition to administrative procedures for the economy, provides a list of administrative procedures for citizens, as well as optimization and digitalization of those procedures. SR 11 was added within the same segment: "Introduction of a new fiscalization model and transition to electronic invoicing" as well as SR 13: "Improvement of spatial development management in the Republic of Serbia through establishment of e-space digital platform".

In the field of Employment and Labour Market, SR 20 was dropped: "Improving national employment policy in line with good practice and EU standards", with the explanation that activities within this reform have been mostly fulfilled and their implementation has become part of regular

24 In 2008, the ILO presented the Framework for Measuring Decent Work at the 18th International Conference of Labor Statisticians, which includes ten measurable indicators of decent work 1) employment opportunities; 2)adequate earnings and productive work; 3)decent working time; 4) combining work, 5) family and personal life; 6) work that should be abolished; 7) stability and security of work; 8) equal opportunity and treatment in employment; 9) safe work environment; 10) social security.

activities of competent institutions. However, the EC report for Serbia for 2021 mentions very limited progress in terms of alignment with the EU standards in this area, and last year's EC recommendations are valid for this year as well. For example, although already reduced in 2020, budget allocations for ALMP measures (Active Labour Market Policy) were reduced again in 2021 (European Commission, 2021).

Other strategic documents that were adopted include the new Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2026 and related action plan for the period until 2023, Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development for the period from 2021 to 2025, Strategy of Industrial Policy from 2021 to 2030 and related action plan, Fiscal Strategy for 2021, and Action Plan for the period 2021 to 2022 for the implementation of the Smart Specialization Strategy 2020–2027.

The issue of extremely low allocations for ALMP measures has not been solved with the adoption of the Employment Strategy for the period 2021–2026. Employment policies in this document are not considered at all in the context of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. In addition, the Strategy does not have clear links with the education policy and there are no indicators or measures for decent work. There are also no measures in place to remove barriers to women's inclusion in the labour market, and targets for activity and employment rates have been set too low. The strategy did not envisage measures to strengthen social dialogue, and finally, there are no measures to motivate employees to register with the NES more often.

Industrial Policy Strategy 2021–2030 and related action plan for the period 2021–2023 represent an adequate planning framework in this area. The strategy emphasizes the transition from the current model of competitiveness based on low labour costs to competitiveness based on knowledge, while the action plan concretizes these plans by defining effective measures. However,

there is an impression that not much has been done to achieve the set goals.

The analysis of the strategy of Scientific and Technological Development for the period 2021–2025, conducted by NALED, indicates that Strategy is primarily focused on the scientific and academic community, while the planned activities are less related to economy (NALED, 2021). The issue of priorities set in this strategy is also problematic. For example, the Strategy largely emphasizes the commitment to the development of artificial intelligence (it is questionable whether Serbia has the necessary capacities), while it does not pay enough attention to the problem of young and promising scientists leaving Serbia or potential solutions to that problem. Although the Strategy recognizes global problems and their significance, it fails to sufficiently elaborate on the challenges facing science in Serbia.

The Strategy of State Ownership and Management of Business Entities Owned by the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2027 was adopted for the first time in 2021. The strategy envisages the establishment of a centralized management system for economic entities, in which the Ministry of Economy performs a centralized ownership function, except in cases when there are obligations undertaken by international acts. The goal of the Strategy is to reform economic entities through sustainable and efficient management, increase the benefits of state ownership for the state and citizens, and protect general state interests.

In September 2021, after the session of the Social and Economic Council at which no agreement was reached with the unions, the Government decided that the minimum wage in the Republic of Serbia starting from 2022 will be 35,012 dinars, which is still lower than the minimum consumer basket (39,000). The National Program for Countering the Shadow Economy has expired,

and in May 2021, work began on a new program for the period from 2021 to 2025. Also, the Strategy for Supporting the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness for the period from 2015 to 2020 has expired, and a new one has not been adopted yet, nor are there any indications that this will happen soon.

In 2021, the Law on Amendments to the Law on Personal Income Tax and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Contributions for Compulsory Social Insurance were adopted. The amendments introduce a relatively favourable tax treatment of income of the so-called freelancers for income generated from 2015 to the end of 2021, while parts of the changes will apply from 2022, which will allow freelancers to change their status in a timely manner. However, the status of workers on the Internet has not been regulated yet, considering that the working group for drafting the Law on Flexible Forms of Work has not been formed, despite the announcement that the law will enter into force on January 1, 2022. Amendments to the Law on Financial Support for Families with Children were adopted in 2021, which now prescribes that the salary compensation during maternity leave cannot be less than the average salary. This solution is a step in the right direction, given that it reduces gender disparities in the labour market and generally promotes the quality of work.

Law on Electronic Invoicing was also adopted this year, with the main goal to facilitate the operation of economic entities, and improve transparency and legal security in business. The law will be adopted in phases, with separate deadlines for the public and private sectors. In addition, the public debate on the draft Law on Work Engagement due to Increased Workload has recently ended, which means that its adoption could be expected as early as November 2021. However, unions and some labour law experts believe that the new regulation disenfranchises

workers, prevents them from legal protection and introduces (through a back-door) employment of foreigners without an employment contract (Večernje novosti, 2021). Therefore, although there has been some progress towards improving the dignity of jobs, it can be concluded that the emphasis is still primarily on economic growth.

When it comes to mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has so far adopted three aid packages for the economy and citizens in the total amount of 953 billion RSD, or approximately 8 billion EUR. These measures are important not only from the point of view of financial assistance, but also in terms of related conditions that have a favourable effect on economic growth and employment. For example, by applying for financial assistance, employers may not reduce the number of employees by more than 10 percent before the expiration of three months from the payment of the last direct benefit, and cannot pay dividends. However, one of the main objections to previous aid packages is that they were largely indiscriminate, i.e., even those who did not need it also received it, while certain sectors (e.g., catering and tourism) as well as socially disadvantaged citizens should have received higher aid amounts. In addition, greater selectivity in the allocation of aid packages would have significantly contributed to reducing inequality (SDG 10), which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, because vulnerable populations (such as those engaged in informal work) were even more vulnerable.

In the previous period, there have been no significant changes in the institutional framework regarding economic growth and decent work. No new bodies have been established, and the capacities of existing bodies have not been noticeably strengthened.

The total number of indicators that monitor the fulfilment of SDG 8 is still 8, which is the same as the last year.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>Adopt the National Recovery Plan in line with current European policies, taking into account all aspects and targets of SDG 8.</p>		<p>The National Recovery Plan has not been adopted, and plans to achieve SDG 8 are not explicitly mentioned in either the Employment Strategy or the Industrial Policy Strategy.</p>
<p>Use target 8.1, determined by the current ERP, as a starting point for planning public policies in the field of economic development, productive employment and decent work, i.e., for planning.</p>		<p>The main strategic documents in this area identify target 8.1 as essential. Supporting economic growth is included in the vision of the Industrial Strategy 2021-2030. Fiscal Strategy for 2021 mentions recovery of the economy and its growth as the main goals. In the Employment Strategy 2021-2026 Serbia's economic growth is singled out as a key macroeconomic indicator crucial for sustainable increase in living standards.</p>
<p>Promote the importance of employment, with a focus on productive employment and decent work standards in national strategic documents, primarily in the ERP, National Employment Strategy for the period 2016-2025, Action plan for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 and the like.</p>		<p>Productive employment and decent work are mentioned in the ERP only in the context of achieving SDG 8. In the National Employment Strategy for 2021-2026, decent work stands as a general objective, but is measured exclusively as the proportion of vulnerable employment (15+). Strategy also mentions productive employment as a desired change, but not as one of the goals, and there are no indicators to measure it. On the other hand, the first special goal of this strategy is the growth of quality employment, which is measured, among other things, by indicators of informal employment rate, employment by type of work (indefinite, fixed, seasonal) and at-risk-of-poverty rate. A new Action Plan for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy for the period from 2021 has not been published yet.</p>

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>Adopt a new National Employment Strategy that prioritises targets that refer to decent work, employment in small – and medium-sized enterprises by encouraging innovation, reducing the number of young people who are not employed nor in education or training, and by protecting labour rights (8.5, 8.3, 8.6 and 8.8).</p>		<p>In the Employment Strategy 2021–2026, employment in small and medium-sized enterprises and the protection of labour rights are not highlighted as goals, nor are their progress measured by specific indicators. Within the specific objective 2 – improving the position of the unemployed in the labour market, it is envisaged that the NEET rate (15–29) will be reduced from 18.9% in 2019 to 12.8% by 2026. Decent work is one of the general goals, but it is measured only as a proportion of vulnerable employment.</p>
<p>Adopt a new ESRP that will focus on the improvement of standards of decent work, i.e., achievement of targets that refer to decent and productive work, improvement of the position of young people who are not employed nor in education or training, i.e., protection of labour rights (8.5, 8.6 and 8.8).</p>		<p>The new ESRP has not been adopted yet.</p>
<p>Adopt a ten-year Sustainable Production and Consumption Programme, in accordance with target 8.4.</p>		<p>The programme has not been adopted.</p>
<p>Urgently ratify Article 27 of the Revised European Social Charter on the Rights of Workers with Family Obligations, i.e., the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.</p>		<p>Serbia fully ratified the European Social Charter in 2009. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families has not yet been ratified.</p>
<p>Improve compliance with the standards of decent work through amendments to the Labour Law and the Law on Agency Employment.</p>		<p>The mentioned laws have not been amended.</p>
<p>Adopt the Sustainable Tourism Development Programme of the Republic of Serbia, which is in line with target 8.9 and the current Tourism Development Strategy.</p>		<p>The programme has not been adopted.</p>

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>Improve the framework for monitoring SDG 8, according to defined targets, using indicators from Eurostat databases, ILO, national institutions (National Bank of Serbia – NBS) and other relevant organisations.</p>		<p>In the past year, the number of monitored indicators has not increased, and existing indicators have not been improved. Apart from the SORS, NBS and MICS databases, no other source for indicators has been introduced.</p>

 Adopted; 
  Partially adopted; 
  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Adopt a national recovery (and reconstruction) plan as adopted by all EU member states,<sup>25</sup> which should be in line with the previously adopted Development Plan and Investment Plan;
2. Adopt a new ESRP, with focus on improving the standards of decent work, i.e., achieving targets related to decent and productive work, improving the position of NEET, and protection of labour rights (8.5, 8.6 and 8.8);
3. Adopt a ten-year program of sustainable production and consumption, in accordance with target 8.4. That way the program would contain goals regarding more efficient consumption and production of resources, as well as the separation of economic growth from environmental degradation;
4. Improve the recognition of standards of decent work by amending the Labour Law and the Law on Agency Employment;
5. Adopt the program of sustainable tourism development of the Republic of Serbia, which is in accordance with target 8.9 and the current Tourism Development Strategy. In this way, the goal would clearly concern promotion of sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local production;
6. Improve the monitoring framework for SDG 8, according to the defined targets, using indicators from Eurostat and ILO databases, as well as databases of national institutions (NBS), and other relevant organizations;

<sup>25</sup> The European Commission has prepared assistance package for each of the member states, through the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism. The condition for receiving assistance is that each member state prepares its own recovery and resilience plan. For example, Serbia's neighbouring Croatia adopted the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026, which was approved by the EC in July 2021.

- 7.** Amend the Labour Law so that cities in Serbia are allowed to define their own minimum wages, in accordance with the level of living standards, where the minimum wage at the city level cannot be lower than the national level;
- 8.** Adopt an amendment to the Law on Personal Income Tax in accordance with the recommendations of the Fiscal Council, to increase the nominal tax rate from 10% to 20%, with an increase in the non-taxable part from 18,300 to 40,000 dinars. This would reduce the tax burden on the lowest wages, which would have a positive impact on tax morale in society, which would also strengthen efforts to combat the shadow economy;
- 9.** Amend the LL in order to abolish work on Sundays except for the HORECA sector (catering and hotel sector), in accordance with the practice of developed European countries. This reform would have a positive impact on the improvement of job dignity;
- 10.** Improve the SDG 8 monitoring framework by increasing the number of monitored targets, and by adapting other targets to the Serbian context;
- 11.** Adequately regulate the system of work practices in Serbia by introducing changes in the Labour Law. It is necessary to form a single record of work practices, determine minimum standards of quality of practices and legally regulate the obligation of employers to pay interns, and not less than the minimum wage;
- 12.** Target 8.5, i.e., full and productive employment, decent work and equal pay for work of equal value for all categories of the population, should be the starting point when formulating strategic documents in the field of economic development. First of all, it is necessary to develop special indicators for monitoring this target that would be adjusted to the context of the Serbian labour market;
- 13.** Introduce amendments to the Labour Law in order to adequately regulate work from home and to provide better protection for workers;
- 14.** Adopt a new Strategy to support SME development, entrepreneurship and competitiveness;



Goal 9:

# INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



## Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

### TARGETS

**Target 9.1** Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all

**Target 9.2** Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries

**Target 9.3** Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets

**Target 9.4** By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities

## TARGETS

**Target 9.5** Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries, including, by 2030, encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending

**Target 9.a** Facilitate sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in developing countries through enhanced financial, technological and technical support to African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

**Target 9.b** Support domestic technology development, research and innovation in developing countries, including by ensuring a conducive policy environment for, inter alia, industrial diversification and value addition to commodities

**Target 9.c** Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020

Two strategic documents important for the achievement of SDG 9 were adopted in the reporting period:

- » Action Plan for the implementation of the Smart Specialization Strategy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2027, for the period from 2021 to 2022 (adopted on 15 April 2021);
- » Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy of industrial policy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2030, for the period from 2021 to 2023 (adopted on 8 April 2021).

As concerns the legal framework, the Law on Climate Change (adopted on March 18, 2021) was adopted last year. The implementation of this law is expected to establish a system for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a cost-effective way (relevant to achieving target 9.4). Two more laws were passed in April 2021: the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources and the Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy. This has established conditions for the use and encouragement of innovative technologies, transition to greater use of clean technologies, more efficient use of energy industry, etc. (relevant for reaching target 9.4).

There have been no significant changes and progress in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework in the previous period. It is evident that there is no coordination between the competent ministries in the process of designing and implementing strategies in the field of technological development and innovation. In addition, the lack of a system for monitoring the implementation and evaluation of strategic policies at the system level is one of the key reasons for the inefficient innovation system and underdeveloped infrastructure in the Republic of Serbia.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda “

Industry, innovation and infrastructure represent a complex domain under the jurisdiction of several line ministries of the Republic of Serbia: Ministry of Economy, MESTD, MCTI, Ministry of Environmental Protection, and partly Ministry of Mining and Energy.

The Ministry of Economy has maintained continuity in the implementation of industrial policy, and after the expiration of the previous industrial strategy (period 2011-2020), a new strategic document for the period 2021-2030 was adopted, which contains comprehensive reform steps in industrial development and permeates much economic activity, with a focus on the manufacturing industry. The Strategy of industrial policy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2030 is a key strategic document for achieving targets 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4.

Another important strategic document is the Strategy of Supporting the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises, Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness for the period from 2015 to 2020. This strategic document expired at the end of 2020, and a new one was not adopted. This strategy is important for achieving target 9.3.

Serbia has made the least progress in achieving target 9.1. Six years have passed since the expiration of the previous Strategy of railway, road, inland waterway, air and intermodal transport development in the Republic of Serbia, 2008 – 2015. A new strategy has not been adopted yet. In September 2020, MCTI announced a competition for hiring a consultant for the preparation of a

new national transport strategy for the period from 2022 to 2030. The goal of the strategy is to contribute to the development of an expanded, improved and safer transport network, which will contribute to the improvement in all areas of transport services, attract investment in underdeveloped areas, balanced regional development, more investments in innovation, etc. This document will cover all modes of transport (road, rail, air, water and multimodal transport). The adoption and implementation of this strategy would significantly contribute to the achievement of target 9.1.

MESTD has started the implementation of two strategies aimed at achieving target 9.5: the Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2025 and the Smart Specialization Strategy of the Republic of Serbia from 2020 to 2027.

The legal framework in the field of economy (Company Law), research and innovation (Law on Science and Research, Law on Innovation Activity) is adequately defined. According to the latest Progress Report on Serbia for 2021, the legal framework in the field of road, rail, river and air transport is relatively well defined and in line with the main principles of the EU. However, there are no special laws on combined transport.

Progress monitoring mechanisms for SDG 9 are well developed. In the previous reporting period, it was possible to monitor seven of the 12 indicators at the national level.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

As concerns the legal framework, a very important and long-awaited Law on Climate Change has been adopted (March 18, 2021). The implementation of this law is expected to establish a system for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a cost-effective manner. In the long run, it is expected to contribute to greater competitiveness of the economy and the achievement of target 9.4. With the adoption of this law, Serbia has confirmed its commitment to further economic growth based on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. However, concrete changes and full implementation of the Law on Climate Change can be expected only with the adoption of a relevant strategy, action plan and program for adaptation to changing climate conditions.

In April 2021, the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources was passed, which has created conditions for the use and encouragement of innovative technologies using renewable energy sources, transition to greater use of clean technologies and other options, such as market premium. The Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy was also passed in April 2021, which additionally regulates the conditions for efficient use of energy and energy sources. The implementation of these two laws is expected to introduce policy instruments that will affect progress in achieving target 9.4.

The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans is a new strategic document adopted by the EC, which aims to effect transition from the traditional model to a sustainable economy in accordance with the European Green Plan (EC 2020). At the EU-Western Balkans Summit, held on October 6, 2021, Serbia signed the Action Plan

for the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. By doing this, Serbia has committed itself to implement measures in the field of prevention of climate change and pollution, energy development, transport and the circular economy, which will contribute to achieving target 9.4.

In addition, amendments to the Law on Navigation and Ports on Inland Waters were adopted, which further regulate the river traffic in the Republic of Serbia and contribute to the achievement of target 9.1.

MESTD is in the process of drafting a new law on innovation. The public debate lasted from October 8 to 28, 2021. The new law on innovation activity is expected to contribute to target 9.5 through additional alignment and improvement in this area. In particular, the law regulates activities of entities operating in the national innovation system, the competencies of the Innovation Fund, financing of innovation activities and economic incentives, as well as the register of entities of the national innovation system.

Two very important strategic documents have been adopted in the past year:

Action Plan for the implementation of the Smart Specialization Strategy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2027, for the period from 2021 to 2022 (adopted on 15 April 2021);

Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy of industrial policy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2030, for the period from 2021 to 2023 (adopted on 8 April 2021).

With the adoption of the Smart Specialization Strategy Action Plan, the Government of the Republic of Serbia has adopted a number of instruments that will contribute to the future economic development based on innovation, research and development, and cooperation between the players in the quadruple helix. The implementation of the Industrial Policy Action Plan is expected to raise Serbia's industry competitiveness.

The number of indicators that monitor the achievement of SDG 9 in the previous year was increased by two. In addition to the five previ-

ously defined indicators: 9.2.1 – Manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP and per capita; 9.2.2 – Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment; 9.5.1 – Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP; 9.5.2 – Researchers (in full-time equivalent) per million inhabitants; 9.c.1 – Proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology, in the previous year, the national base was supplemented by two more indicators: 9.1.2 – Passenger and freight volumes, by mode of transport, and 9.4.1 – CO2 emission per unit of value added.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Adopt the Strategy of Railway, Road, Inland Waterway, Air and Intermodal Transport Development for the next period, after the expiration of the current Strategy, whose planning period expires in 2020.	✘	The strategy has not been adopted. The National Transport Strategy from 2022 to 2030 is in the drafting stage. However, there is no information on the current status of this strategy.
Adopt the Strategy for Support of Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness for the period following the end of 2020.	✘	The strategy has not been adopted nor is it in the drafting process.
Increase efforts to reform the railway system, primarily in terms of organisation and relations between public enterprises that manage this segment, as well as operators. Particular emphasis should be placed on reforms in terms of strengthening administrative capacities, in compliance with the guidelines provided through the latest Progress Report for Serbia, published by the European Commission.	✓	The latest EC Progress Report on Serbia (2021) points out that reforms are under way and that the operational and financial sustainability of operators has improved. However, it is noted that human resources management should be improved.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Increase efforts to improve plans for the management and maintenance of public rail and road networks.	✗	The last Regulation on internal operation in railway traffic was adopted in 2019.
Make further efforts to improve safety on public road through the improvement of administrative and analytical capacities.	✗	No new strategy has been adopted to define measures to improve safety on public roads. The previous strategy has expired.
Improve the prioritisation of public infrastructure construction planning in terms of achieving higher value for invested public funds.		No data available.
Make further efforts to provide sources of liquidity for small and medium-sized enterprises, both by encouraging lending through the traditional banking sector and by working on institutional solutions for the development of non-banking financial institutions and sectors.	✓	At the end of October 2021, the Strategy for Capital Market Development in the period from 2021 to 2026 was adopted. One of the goals of the Strategy is to reduce the dependence of small and medium enterprises on bank financing and state subsidies.
Make further efforts to increase public spending on research and development and provide additional support for more intensive networking of the business and academic research community.	✓	Public spending on research and development increased in 2020 compared to 2019. However, business sector expenditures remained unchanged. In addition to the existing measures, no additional efforts are visible to connect the business and academic communities.
Improve the relevance of SDG 9 indicators that are currently monitored within the set of SORS indicators of sustainable development	✗	The relevance of existing indicators has not improved in the previous period.
Improve the monitoring framework for SDG 9 according to defined targets, using indicators from Eurostat databases and other relevant organisations.	✓	In the previous year, the national base was supplemented by two more indicators: » Passenger and freight volumes, by mode of transport; » CO2 emission per unit of value added



Adopted;



Partially adopted;



Not adopted

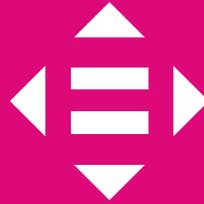
## Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Complete the indicators for progress monitoring in the achievement of SDG 9. In particular, supplement the data for monitoring targets 9.3, and consider supplementing the indicators for other targets;
2. Adopt a new Strategy to support the development of small and medium enterprises, entrepreneurship and competitiveness;
3. Adopt a Strategy for the Development of Intelligent Transport Systems;
4. Adopt the National Transport Strategy for the period from 2022 to 2030.;
5. Create specific strategic documents (strategy, action plan, policy instruments), with specific measures and instruments, in the field of adaptation to climate changes in order to achieve full implementation of the new Law on Climate Change;
6. Introduce new measures and policy instruments in strategic documents to effect full implementation of the Law on Renewable Energy Sources and the Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy;
7. Improve the process of implementation of strategies and action plans through the introduction of a transparent system for monitoring and evaluation of public policies. The recommendation applies to all ministries responsible for achieving SDG 9;



Goal 10:

# REDUCED INEQUALITIES



## Reduce inequality within and among countries

### TARGETS

**Target 10.1** By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average

**Target 10.2** By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

**Target 10.3** Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard

**Target 10.4** Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

**Target 10.5** Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations

## TARGETS

**Target 10.6** Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions

**Target 10.7** Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

**Target 10.a** Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements

**Target 10.b** Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes

**Target 10.c** By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent

During the reporting period, several strategic documents were adopted towards the achievement of SDG 10. However, key strategic documents in this area, such as the ESRP and the National Economic Recovery Plan, have not yet been adopted and there are no indications that this will happen in the near future. As concerns legislation, changes in the field of inequality are generally positive (amendments to the laws related to discrimination, financial support to families with children, pension and disability insurance, as well as the new Law on Gender Equality), but it should be noted that the area of social maps is still not adequately regulated.

There have been no significant changes and progress in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework in the previous period, i.e., there is still no institution explicitly responsible for inequality issues, and problems related to inadequate transparency (SEC) and redistribution (Fiscal Council) have not been addressed.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

The previous report assessed that national strategic planning documents do not cover SDG 10 of the 2030 Agenda, given that there are no specific strategic documents aimed at addressing inequality, and that greater focus is placed on poverty and social inclusion. For example, redistribution of income aimed at reducing inequality is not in the focus of public policies. The main planning document in this area is the 2016 ESRP, which is in fact the only document that specifically addresses issues of inequality of income, consumption and access to basic social services (relevant to targets 10.1 and 10.4). The report points out that the national economic recovery (and resilience) plan, like the one adopted by all EU members,<sup>26</sup> which would be aligned with the previously adopted Development Plan and Investment Plan, has not yet been adopted. Member states have used this plan to address the reduction of inequalities in access to health, education, social protection and inequalities in the labour market, among other things. Other public documents in this area include strategies, action plans and programs dealing with economic (and social) reforms, social inclusion of Roma, improving the position of persons with

disabilities and reintegration of returnees. Other public policies related to economic development and employment, which directly affect the reduction of inequalities, are discussed in detail within SDG 8. Also, gender, education and other aspects of inequality are analysed within other goals of sustainable development, which more specifically deal with these topics.

The conclusion is that not all targets in this area have been fully integrated into the strategic framework. For example, out of a total of five relevant<sup>27</sup> targets, only one (10.1) was assessed as adequately regulated, two (10.2 and 10.3) as unregulated, and two (10.4 and 10.7) as partially regulated.

The report also states that the legal framework for SDG 10 is only partially established, given that some legal solutions not only fail to reduce inequality but, on the contrary, additionally increase inequalities on various grounds. The Law on Social Protection, for example, does not adequately cover certain aspects of inequality and poverty, as the number of social benefits is below the absolute poverty line, while the

26 Through the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, the European Commission has prepared an assistance package for each member state. The condition for receiving assistance is that each member state prepares its own recovery and resilience plan. For example, Serbia's neighbouring Croatia has adopted the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026, which was approved by the EC in July 2021.

27 SDG 10 has a total of 10 targets, but the analysis in the previous 2030 Agenda Preparedness Report estimated that targets 10.5 (Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions), 10.6 (enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions), 10.a (Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries), 10.b (Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries) and 10.c (reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent) are not applicable in the case of Serbia.

mechanism itself in some cases discourages formal employment (Medić and Anić, 2021).<sup>28</sup> In addition, households with able-bodied members cannot receive social benefits for more than nine months during a calendar year, which has also discouraged the exercise of social assistance rights. The two-decade-old Law on Income Tax deviates greatly from European standards and cannot meet the changed economic circumstances and social needs in Serbia. According to the Fiscal Council, the main shortcomings of the income tax system in Serbia are: 1) simple structure – a large number of different effective tax rates; 2) violation of the principle of tax fairness due to the wide scope of flat-rate taxation and inconsistent calculation of health contributions; and 3) impaired tax progressivity, because the amount of non-taxable amount in Serbia is relatively low, as well as the lack of benefits for dependent family members (Fiscal Council, 2021).

As concerns the institutional and coordination mechanisms for achieving SDG 10, the existing resources for achieving this goal are not adequate and there are no mechanisms specifically related to reducing inequality. According to the Law on Ministries, no institution at this level is explicitly responsible for the issues of inequality. It should be noted that the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs is partly responsible for these issues, and that, in operational terms, the SEC has taken over some of the competencies of the Ministry of

Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs. In addition to these bodies, issues of inequality are also addressed by the Fiscal Council, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, as well as SIPRU. The work of the SES has been assessed as insufficiently transparent, given the lack of formal annual work reports. The Fiscal Council, as an independent state body in the field of fiscal policy, should make recommendations related to redistributive policies, but so far redistribution has not been the focus of work of this body. In 2017, the former Commissioner for Gender Equality, as an independent state body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, launched the “Equality Code” initiative aimed at developing anti-discrimination policy for employers in Serbia, and so far, the work of this body could be assessed as relatively positive. Finally, the basic competence of SIPRU is to strengthen the Government’s capacity to develop social inclusion policies, and to coordinate and monitor their implementation (SIPRU, n.d.).

The previous report states that the framework for monitoring the achievement of SDG 10 is present only for a small number of indicators. For example, the SEC monitors only three of the fourteen indicators related to the areas and targets of SDG 10: 10.1, 10.3 and 10.4. However, the monitoring of these three indicators is also inadequate: the SEC website shows World Bank 2011 data for indicator 10.1, and indicator 10.3 is linked to a specific source.

28 Although it is not forbidden to be formally employed and receive social assistance, an individual who wants to receive assistance must have income below 8,508 dinars per month.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

In terms of public policy documents, key strategic documents in this area have not yet been adopted. The new ESRP, a key document in this area, has not yet been adopted and there are no indications that it will be adopted any time soon. The same applies to the national recovery plan. The ERP for 2021 was adopted, but apart from the statement that there are pronounced inequalities (income, gender, access to health care), measures or activities for addressing them are not mentioned. The new fiscal strategy does not even mention the word inequality. In addition, the Strategy for the Reintegration of Returnees under the Readmission Agreement has expired and a new one has not yet been adopted.

The GES for the period from 2021 to 2030 was adopted in 2021. Strategy makes references to the 2030 Agenda in several places, which is a positive thing, but the commitment to its realization is only declarative and is not mentioned in the set goals, measures or target values. For example, for the Strategy's general objective target indicator – "bridging the gender gap and achieving gender equality as a prerequisite for the development of society and improving the daily lives of women and men, girls and boys", the value of the Gender Equality Index is set to increase from 58 in 2021 to 80 in 2030. This target value shows that it is not a matter of overcoming the gender gap, but of a mere reduction, which is not in line with SDG 5. A more detailed analysis of the Gender Equality Strategy is given in the section dealing with SDG 5 – Gender Equality.

In 2021, the Action Plan for the period from 2021 to 2022 for the implementation of the Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities

in the RS was adopted, which does not mention the 2030 Agenda or sustainable development. Action plan for the period 2021-2023 for the implementation of the Economic Migration Strategy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021-2027 defines activities that should contribute to the prevention of brain drain, and at the same time attract quality professionals from the diaspora. It is positive that activities related to specific SDGs and the negotiation chapters in the Serbia's EU accession process have been defined for each measure.

The three packages of economic assistance prepared by the Government of Serbia to help the economy and citizens fight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, could have been an opportunity to reduce the inequalities caused by the pandemic.<sup>29</sup> However, the aid was largely indiscriminate, and the money was given to those who did not need it, while the more socially vulnerable citizens could have gotten more financial assistance. For example, parents with three or more children who are considered the most vulnerable have received the same amount of money as any other household with only two adult members. Therefore, the Government could have achieved the same effect towards reducing inequality at significantly lower costs or could have achieved a far better effect with the same amount (Medić and Anić, 2021).

Changes in the legislation in the field of inequality can be regarded as generally positive, but it should be noted that the area of social cards is still not adequately regulated. Among the novelties in this area are the Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, and most articles concern amendments to the penal

29 Total amount of the assistance package was 953 billion dinars or close to 8 billion euros.

provisions, which brings this law in line with the Law on Misdemeanours. In addition, the law introduces new forms of discrimination: sexual and gender-based harassment, incitement to discrimination and segregation. In addition, the amendments expand the list of personal characteristics on which discrimination may be based, such as gender, gender characteristics and income levels.

In 2021, a proposal for amendments to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children was adopted. The most relevant provision of this proposal is that the full monthly amount of salary compensation during maternity leave cannot be less than the minimum salary. This legal provision can be assessed as a step in the right direction, given that it reduces gender differences in the labour market and consequently the level of inequality in society. However, the new law does not completely remove old provisions concerning child care leave, which are contrary to the International Convention on Maternal Protection (Euronews, 2021).

Amendments to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance were adopted In June 2021, which has permanently solved the problem faced by people who were forced to opt for early old-age pension, which includes so-called penalties, i.e. reductions in pension calculation.<sup>30</sup> Amendments to the Law determine the amount of early old-age pension for these persons in the same way as the amount of old-age pension (therefore, there is no "penalty"), which positively contributes to reducing discrimination and inequality in society.

In addition, the new LGE was also adopted in 2021, introduction certain ambitious innovations, primarily in the field of labour relations. When it comes to prohibition of discrimination with sexual connotations, a new legal term – sexual blackmail

– has been added to the list of illegal behaviours. In addition, the law specifically prohibits gender inequality during pregnancy or maternity leave (e.g., leave for these reasons cannot be the basis for denying the right to professional development and promotion and obtaining a higher title, or transfer to a higher executive job position). The new law also requires gender balance in management and oversight bodies and public authorities, employers, political parties and trade unions, as well as the use of gender-sensitive language, and the responsibility for the implementation lies with public authorities and employers. In addition, fines for violations in this area by employers have increased.

Finally, the long-awaited Law on the Social Cards was adopted in 2021. The most important novelty refers to the establishment of a central register of data on beneficiaries of social benefits (Social Card), which will be formed from the existing databases of all social protection institutions at the local and national level. This will enable digitalization of a part of the social protection system, which will eliminate bureaucracy, speed up procedures and increase the efficiency of centres for social work. However, the problem is that the new law applies only to users who are already registered in a database, but not to those who are vulnerable and have not previously applied for assistance. For this reason, one of the key problems in this area remains unresolved (Grbić, 2021).

In the previous period, there have been no significant changes in institutional framework regarding inequality. No new bodies have been formed, and the capacities of the existing bodies have not been noticeably enhanced.

The number of indicators that monitor the achievement of SDG 10 is still three, which is the same as in the previous year.

30 These are persons who were included in the Government social program for resolving redundancies and who, due to amendments to this law from 2014 (which changed the conditions for exercising the right to old-age pension and introduced early old-age pension) lost the right to old-age pension.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Adopt the National Economic Recovery Plan in compliance with current European policies, which takes into account all relevant targets of SDG10 (10.1, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.7).	✘	The National Economic Recovery Plan has not been adopted.
Adopt as soon as possible a new ESRP that takes into account, as a matter of priority, all relevant aspects of reducing inequality, including inequalities in income, consumption and access to basic social services.	✘	The new ESRP has not been adopted.
Improve revenue redistribution through amended solutions within the Fiscal Strategy, starting from 2021.	✘	Redistribution is not mentioned in the Fiscal Strategy for 2021.
Improve income redistribution through amendments to the Law on Individual Income Tax by introducing solutions for progressive taxation and increasing the basis of the non-taxable part of earnings.	✓	The base of non-taxable amount for salary tax was slightly increased from 16,300 to 18,300 dinars per month, but no progressive taxation was introduced.
Align goals and indicators for monitoring goals with targets and sustainable development indicators within the policies that address inequality issues (ESRP, Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025, Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities, National Youth Strategy 2015-2025, ERP, and alike).	✓	The objectives and indicators are aligned with targets and indicators of sustainable development only for the 2021-2023 Action Plan for the implementation of Strategy on Economic Migration, and only partially for the Gender Equality Strategy from 2021 to 2030.
Amend the Law on Social Welfare to reduce the number of people living below the nationally defined absolute poverty line by increasing the benefit for households without income and providing assistance to households with income (at least up to the level of the nationally defined absolute poverty line).	✘	The law has not been changed.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Clearly identify the institution responsible for inequality issues.	✘	The institution is not specified.
Explicitly state the distribution and redistribution policy as the responsibility of the MF by making amendments to the Law on Ministries.	✘	The law has not been changed.
Improve the anti-discrimination policy through programmes and initiatives of certain institutions and ministries (primarily the MLEVSP, the Commissioner for the Promotion of Gender Equality and the SEC).	✘	There were no new developments in this direction.
Increase the relevance of SDG 10 indicators that are currently monitored within the set of SORS indicators of sustainable development.	✘	Nothing has been done on this issue.
Improve the monitoring framework for SDG 10 according to defined targets using indicators from Eurostat databases and other relevant organisations.	✘	Data sources on the SORS website for progress monitoring of indicators have not changed.

 Adopted; 
  Partially adopted; 
  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Adopt National Economic Recovery Plan, in line with current European policies, which takes into account all relevant targets of SDG 10 (10.1, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.7);
2. Adopt a new ESRP as soon as possible, which takes into account, as a priority, all relevant aspects of reducing inequalities, including inequalities in income, consumption and access to basic social services;
3. Improve the redistribution of revenues by amending the Fiscal Strategy;

4. Improve the redistribution of income by amending the Law on Personal Income Tax, by introducing solutions for progressive taxation and increasing the basis of the non-taxable part of income;
5. Align objectives and indicators for monitoring objectives with targets and indicators of sustainable development, in the framework of policies that highlight inequality (ESRP, Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia from 2016 to 2025, Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities, National Strategy for Youth from 2015 to 2025, ERP and others);
6. Amend the Law on Social Protection to reduce the number of persons living below the nationally defined absolute poverty line, by increasing benefits for households without income and providing assistance to households with incomes (at least to the level of the nationally defined absolute poverty line);
7. Clearly identify the institution responsible for inequality issues;
8. Amendments to the Law on Ministries should explicitly state that the distribution and redistribution policy is the competence of the Ministry of Finance;
9. Improve anti-discrimination policy through programs and initiatives of individual institutions and ministries (primarily the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, the Commissioner for the Promotion of Gender Equality and the SEC).
10. Improve the relevance of indicators for SDG 10 that are currently monitored within the set of SORS indicators of sustainable development;
11. Improve the SDG 10 monitoring framework, according to the defined targets, using indicators from Eurostat databases and other relevant organizations;
12. Adopt the proposals prepared by Arandarenko, Krstić, and Žarković Rakić, by which the existing system of taxation that separately monitors income from labour and capital would be abandoned in favour of a tax that would combine income from labour and capital income, taxed at a progressive tax rate from 10% to 30%;
13. Introduce an inheritance tax modelled on such tax in developed European countries with a non-taxable part up to a certain amount (for example, half a million euros) and progressive rates that would go up to 50%;
14. Increase the coverage of pre-school education, especially in rural areas, in order to reduce inequalities in education in the long run;
15. Make the child allowance universal following the example of Croatia and Slovenia;
16. Introduce social pensions for senior citizens who are not beneficiaries of regular old-age pensions.



Goal 11:

# SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



## Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

### TARGETS

**Target 11.1** By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

**Target 11.2** By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

**Target 11.3** By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

**Target 11.4** Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

## TARGETS

**Target 11.5** By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations

**Target 11.6** By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

**Target 11.7** By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

**Target 11.a** Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, per-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning

**Target 11.b** By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

**Target 11.c** Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials

In the reporting period, one strategic document relevant for achieving SDG 11 was adopted – Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Sustainable Urban Planning until 2030 for the period 2021-2022, which covers all areas under Goal 11. In addition, the Strategic priorities for the development of culture from 2021 to 2025 were also adopted, which may indicate that in the future more attention will be paid to culture.

In the context of the legal framework, several laws relevant to transport, culture and environmental protection have been adopted, but they generally do not affect the current level of adequacy of the legal framework for meeting SDG 11. The main changes pertain to the laws related to climate change, energy efficiency and investing in renewable energy sources. One of the proclaimed goals of these laws is to reduce air pollution, that is to improve the quality of life, which refers to target 11.6.

There have been no significant changes in the institutional, administrative and organizational sense, except for the announced capacity increase within the MCTI and the establishment of the National Climate Change Council. There is an obvious lack of capacity within the Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), which has 58 employees out of 82 envisaged by the systematization (SEPA, 2021).

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

The report “Serbia 2030 – Preparedness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda” (Report) showed that Serbia has a partially adequate strategic framework for achieving SDG 11. Two targets, 11.3 and 11.4, were adequately covered by the respective strategies, while targets 11.1, 11.6 and 11.7 were not, given that the strategies for the first two are either based on mostly outdated data or have expired, while target 11.7 is not explicitly treated in the strategies or planning documents. The most significant room for improvement was observed in areas where certain steps have already been taken, in the sense that there were strategies in place with measurable and adequate target values and adequate support for the achievement of specific target, but their planning period has expired (target 11.2), or the methodology used did not correspond to the SDG system because the strategy was adopted in 2011 (11.5). The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia, which is an umbrella document for spatial planning, defines strategic commitments in all areas important for the country’s development, is also important for fulfilling this goal, but has not yet been adopted.

The report states that the legislative framework largely establishes the legal framework for SDG 11. The law regulates the areas of housing, housing management, housing construction, traffic safety, preservation of culture and environmental protection, disaster risk reduction and emergency management, air quality, waste flow management and safe access to public green areas.

The report noted that the institutional and coordination mechanisms for achieving SDG 11 are established in the form of relevant ministries and other administrative bodies. Most of the competencies are within the scope of the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Ministry of Environmental Protection. As for the relevant administrative bodies, these include Cultural Monument Protection Institute, The Public Investment Management Office, SEPA and the Agency for Traffic Safety. There are other public bodies responsible for some of the areas within this goal, such as the Auto-Moto Association of Serbia and Roads of Serbia, but also local PUCs such as PUC “Stan” in Novi Sad and PUC “Belgrade Metro and Train” in Belgrade. While it can be said that MCTI, as one of the larger ministries, has an adequate number of employees, authors estimate that the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Ministry of Environmental Protection do not have proportional capacities for the assumed competencies, which is why they need to be expanded.

While the legal and institutional framework was assessed as adequate for achieving SDG 11, the same did not apply for the mechanisms for monitoring progress and reporting. Measurement instruments were very poorly established. At the time of writing of that report, the SORS monitored only one of the 10 targets and one of the 15 indicators.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

As concerns the public policies in the context of SDG 11, the most significant development is the adoption of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Sustainable Urban Development until 2030 for the period 2021-2022. (MCTI, 2021). This document directly refers to urbanization and target 11.3, through special objectives and packages of measures and also digs into areas related to other targets. Solving housing needs of all citizens (target 11.1) is, among other things, one of the special objectives of this plan. Regulation of accessibility, transport and urban mobility (target 11.2) is one of the packages of measures, including regulation of cultural heritage and culture (target 11.4). Establishing risk and accident response system in urban settlements (11.5) and improvement of air quality, restriction of motor vehicle traffic, elimination of landfills and remediation of existing landfills (11.6) are also listed as measures within the plan, while the share of green areas (11.7) is mentioned as one of the control parameters in urban practice. The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia has still not been adopted. The preparation of this document was accompanied by criticism from the public regarding insufficient transparency of the process (Radio Free Europe, 2021), the disproportionately short time for public hearing, given the importance of the document,<sup>31</sup> and that the commitments for the mining and energy sector in the draft Document were in conflict with the signed international agreements in the field of environmental protection (RERI, 2021). MCTI published the Report on Public Hearing on October 1, with all remarks and comments included, and the preparation of a revised Draft Spatial Plan is expected. National Housing Strategy for

the period 2020-2030 it is still in a draft form, and sets four objectives: 1. facilitated access to adequate housing for persons who cannot solve their housing needs with own funds; 2. efficient management of residential buildings; 3. rehabilitation and improvement of informal settlements; and 4. improving institutional and other necessary capacities. Also, the text mentions the 2030 Agenda and, in particular, SDG 11. Based on the prescribed objectives, a conclusion is that, if adopted, this strategy will adequately address the achievement of target 11.1. In the context of transport and target 11.2, the General Regulation Plan of Rail Systems in Belgrade (Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade, 2021) was recently adopted, which is the basis for the development of a sustainable transport system – railway, metro and tram. This plan met numerous criticisms from professional circles, including the Faculty of Civil Engineering, University of Belgrade, as well as CSOs. The criticism was directed at the fact that key hubs such as the Prokop Railway Station, Clinical Centre of Serbia, and territory of New Belgrade were bypassed in the plans for the first metro line. Certain developments have also been noticed in the area of culture, such as the adoption of the Strategic priorities for the development of culture from 2021 to 2025 at the beginning of 2021. These include twenty strategic priorities defined by the Ministry of Culture and Information, and the main pillars of development relate to the culture budget, preservation of cultural and historical heritage and decentralization of cultural production in Serbia. One of the goals is to strengthen cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),

31 The public was open for 30 days (from April 5 to May 5, 2021), which is the legal minimum.

and “to register more of our cultural treasures” on the World Heritage List as well as ensure its protection. Also, by the Decision of the National Assembly on designating old and rare library materials as cultural assets of great importance from April 2021, 720 old manuscripts and printed books created between the 15th to the 19th century received the highest categorization in terms of protection. Finally, the National Air Protection Program (MEP, 2021) is in the drafting stage, which will be relevant for the achievement of target 11.6. The program will be based on three pillars – (reducing pollutant emissions, improving air quality and reducing the impact of air pollution on human health), along with the introduction of measures to monitor, control, prevent and reduce air pollution.

Regarding the legal framework, in the context of SDG 11, there have been changes in the areas of transport, culture and climate change, air protection and energy, relevant to targets 11.2, 11.4 and 11.6. In the context of target 11.2, the Law on the Subway and the City Railway was adopted in April 2021, which enables the construction of subways in the capital – from the process of land acquisition, to issuing the necessary permits and speeding up public procurement procedures.

Amendments to the Law on Culture regulate the election, composition and mandate of the National Council for Culture and the quota for gender representation in this body. The Law on Museum Activity was passed, which enables the establishment of museums by legal entities, foreign and domestic.<sup>32</sup>

Several legislative innovations have been noted in the context of target 11.6. The Law on Air Protection has been amended by omission of

parts of provisions related to climate change due to the adoption of the Law on Climate Change, which regulates this area in detail. In April 2021, the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources was adopted, which should contribute to higher investments in renewable energy sources (RES) and increase the share of energy from RES. The Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy was also passed, aimed to, among other things, reduce the impact of the energy sector on the environment and climate change. In October 2021, the Law on Protection from Noise Pollution in the Environment was adopted, aligned with European regulations, aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens.

The review of planning and legal documents in force suggests that they are largely in line with the 2030 Agenda and that the objectives, priorities, measures and activities set out in these documents should contribute to the achievement of SDG 11 and related targets, especially in the areas relevant for Serbia. As far as documents with direct references to the 2030 Agenda and / or SDG 11 are concerned, there are only two – the Action plan for the implementation of the Sustainable urban development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia until 2030, and the Draft National Housing Strategy from 2020 to 2030.

As concerns institutional changes in the previous year, it was announced that capacities of the MCTI will be enhanced, and the National Council on Climate Change was re-established as a working body of the Serbian Government. There were also personnel changes in SEPA. The National Sustainable Urban Development Strategy until 2030 and related Action Plan for the period 2021-2022 envisage setting up an implementation structure to monitor the implementa-

32 The draft law originally envisaged the possibility for a foreign-owned private museum to determine measures for the protection of museum material, as well as granting the Serbian Orthodox Church Museum the status of parent museum for “liturgical materials and liturgical objects”. The adopted version removed the mentioned provisions by limiting the activities for a foreign-owned museum, and omitting the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church completely.

tion of the strategy through the establishment of the National Council for Urban Development and special units (sectors) within the MCTI. According to the findings of the authors, these bodies have not yet been formed, and it is uncertain whether they will be established and or if they will be able to carry out the assigned responsibilities, given that they should monitor dozens of systems in complex areas (Križanić-Pavlović, 2021). The National Council on Climate Change was established as an advisory body to the Government tasked with reducing the impact of climate change, composed of representatives of ministries, representatives of the scientific and professional public and civil society, and a representative of the Commissioner for Equality. In addition, there have been personnel and changes in the systematization of SEPA, and some indications show that these were caused by political factors – one of the long-term employees in the Agency was replaced, and the other was fired and re-hired by court decision. The reasons for these personnel changes are disagreements with the authorities' decisions to change the air quality assessment criteria without the experts' approval and settling for sharing photographs revealing the info tables in the Agency and the contract for their production.

The number of indicators has been increased from one to six in the previous year (SORS, 2021). In addition to indicator 11.6.1, which was monitored in previous years (Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed in controlled facilities out of total municipal waste generated, by cities), the following indicators were added to the national database:

- » 11.5.1 Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population. The source of the data is the designated national contact in the SENDAI Monitoring Framework (2020), and there are data available from 2005;
- » 11.5.2 Direct economic loss attributed to disasters in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP). Within this indicator, three data were added: 11.5.2a, 11.5.2b and 11.5.2c. The source of data for indicator 11.5.2a is the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, and for indicators 11.5.2b and 11.5.2c the source is the designated national contact in the SENDAI Monitoring Framework (2020). Data from 2005 are available for all three indicators;
- » 11.6.2 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g., PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>) in cities (population weighted). The source of data is the World Health Organization, and data have been available since 2011;
- » 11.b.1 Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030;
- » 11.b.2 Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies. The source of data for indicators 11.b.1 and 11.b.2 is the designated national contact in the SENDAI Monitoring Framework, and the data for 2017 and 2018 are presented.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>Adopt a new National Strategy for Social Housing, whose planning period has expired.</p>	<p>✘</p>	<p>The National Housing Strategy is still available only in draft form. There are indications that the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Housing Strategy (KOMS, 2021) is in the drafting stage.</p>
<p>Adopt a new road traffic strategy for the Republic of Serbia, whose planning period expired in 2020.</p>	<p>✘</p>	<p>The EC Report for Serbia for 2021 states that Serbia should adopt the planned new national transport strategy 2022-2030, including an action plan. Also, there are information that MCTI has sought a consultant to develop this strategy, which is financed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), but so far there is no information on its development (Pluton Logistics, 2020).</p>
<p>Adopt a new National Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situation, i.e., link it more explicitly with the framework of sustainable development goals.</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>A new national strategy for protection and rescue in emergency situations has not been adopted. Certain measures related to protection and rescue in emergency situations are defined in the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Sustainable Urban Development until 2030 for the period 2021-2022.</p>
<p>Adopt a new Waste Management Strategy 2019-2024 for which, to our knowledge, there is no information on the adoption plan.</p>	<p>✘</p>	<p>The strategy has not yet been adopted, despite being in the procedure since 2019. The Waste Management Program with the National Waste Management Plan for the period 2021-2024, which should be the main document for waste management planning, is in the drafting process. The proposal for this program went through an extended public hearing until October 8, 2021, due to criticism for the lack of transparency in the drafting process and organization of the public hearing (Balkan Green Energy News, 2021).</p>

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Contribute to strengthening administrative and analytical capacities, especially within the MEP and SEPA.	✘	According to the information obtained by the authors, there are no details regarding the improvement of capacities of the MEP and SEPA. In support of the claim that capacities still need improvement is the recommendation by the EC in the Report for Serbia 2021, which stated that adequate personnel capacities should be provided to the Environmental Protection Agency.
Strengthen efforts to transform inadequate waste and improve activities in the field of waste collection, transport and separation, as well as a complete transition to the principles of circular economy, wherever possible.	✘	There are no data on improvements in waste collection, transport and separation. The construction of eight modern regional waste management centres is announced, for which 100 million euros have been provided by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The first planned RWMC is "Kolubara-Kalenić" near Ub, which should include 11 local self-governments (Energy Portal, 2021).
Implement the Paris Agreement, according to the suggestions resulting from the Progress Report for Serbia prepared by the European Commission.	🟡	The EC Report for Serbia 2021 states that the update of the Nationally Determined Contribution of the Republic of Serbia to the Paris Climate Agreement is slowly making progress.
Make further efforts in the transition to the green economy and continue to increase the portion of renewable energy.	🟡	The Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources (Law on the Use of RES) was adopted in April 2021, which should contribute higher production of electricity from renewable energy sources. It was assessed that the Law partially brought national legislation closer to the EU directives, but further alignment is proposed through amendments to the law in the construction sector, amendments to the Law on the use of RES and adoption of bylaws on the Law on the Use of RES in the segment related to transport and sustainable criteria for biofuels. The main recommendation from the EC is to launch renewable energy auction as early as 2021. The percentage of electricity generation from wind energy has increased from 2.39% in 2019 to 2.70% in 2020, but fell from all other renewable energy sources.
Improve the relevance of indicators for SDG 11 that are currently monitored within the set of SORS indicators of sustainable development.	✘	Indicator 11.6.1, which was also monitored during the last reporting period, was not additionally improved in the previous year.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Improve the monitoring framework for SDG 11, according to defined targets using indicators from Eurostat databases and other relevant organisations.		The number of indicators monitored by national statistics was increased from one to six.

 Adopted;  Partially adopted;  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Adopt the National Housing Strategy 2020-2030 that will address key challenges in Serbia in this area, such as the housing affordability, especially for vulnerable groups such as youth and Roma, illegal construction and informal settlements;
2. Adopt a new national transport strategy 2022-2030, including an action plan that would contribute to the expansion, improvement and greater security of transport networks in Serbia, contribute to the improvement of transport services, enable new investments in less developed regions with positive effect on the quality of life, and encourage innovation and improved relations with neighbouring countries;
3. Adopt a new strategic document in the field of waste management, which will include municipal waste management and waste prevention;
4. Contribute to the strengthening of administrative and analytical capacities, especially within the MEP and SEPA;
5. Build the announced eight modern regional waste management centres;
6. Implement the Paris Agreement according to the suggestions arising from the EC progress report on Serbia;
7. Make further efforts in the transition to green economy and continue to increase the share of renewable energy production, involving the state, economy and CSOs.
8. Improve the monitoring framework for SDG 11, according to the defined targets, using indicators from Eurostat databases and other relevant organizations.



Goal 12:

# RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



## Ensure stable consumption and production patterns

### TARGETS

**Target 12.1** Implement the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries

**Target 12.2** By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources

**Target 12.3** By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses

**Target 12.4** By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimise their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

## TARGETS

**Target 12.5** By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse

**Target 12.6** Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle

**Target 12.7** Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities

**Target 12.8** By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature

**Target 12.a** Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production

**Target 12.b** Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

**Target 12.c** Rationalise inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities.

Sustainable production is the production that uses less resources for the same value of economic production, while sustainable consumption reduces the need for excessive consumption of resources. Sustainable production and consumption aim to "do more and better with less".

The ever-increasing amounts of waste clearly indicate the need for sustainable business that will be based on the systematic avoidance of waste generation or disposal. Besides the industrial waste, food waste, which is an organic material, also has a negative impact on the environment.

A linear economy, based on the principle of "produce, consume and throw away", which is unsustainable in the long run, is still dominant in Serbia. To meet SDG 12, which is based on sustainable production and consumption, Serbia needs to shift its traditional linear production towards sustainable circular production.

In the reporting period, certain bylaws were adopted that may be important for the implementation of sustainable production and consumption for the waste management segment. The development of a National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods, as well as the adoption of a national waste management strategy, would pave the path towards the implementation of SDG 12.

There have been no significant changes and progress in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework in the previous period. SDG 12 is a complex goal and its achievement requires cross-sectoral cooperation between various ministries, and there has been no progress in this regard in this reporting period.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

According to the previous report, public policies in Serbia that define the areas of waste management, sustainable use of natural resources, public procurement, and sustainable agriculture are very complex. These are distributed over several sectors, among which the most important are environmental protection, mining, agriculture, education and tourism. The strategic framework that was set to achieve SDG 12 has either expired or is being drafted. Formally speaking, the most important documents for the implementation of SDG 12 include:

- » National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, which has expired and was not operational due to the fact that the Action Plan for this document has not been prepared;
- » Waste Management Strategy, which has expired in 2019.

Through the twinning project “EU support for the development of a strategic framework in the field of waste management”, the following planning documents have been prepared at the

national level: Draft Waste Management Strategy and Waste Prevention Program.

At the time of preparation of the Report, the strategic documents that are crucial for the implementation of SDG 12 had already expired or were in draft form, and still unavailable to the public. Some of the targets have not been adequately integrated into strategic documents, such as target 12.3 – By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses; target 12.6 – Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle; target 12.7 – Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities; target 12.8 – By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature; and target 12.b – Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable

tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.

The legal framework for SDG 12 was assessed as being partially defined, and that the laws that define areas of waste management, chemicals, environmental protection, and standardization (group of standards related to the environment), public procurement, sustainable tourism and education on sustainable developments provide a basis for achieving certain targets of SDG 12. The shortcomings of the legal framework for SDG 12 include the lack of defined tools and ways to achieve sustainable tourism, as well as the lack of defined penalty provisions and accountability for the failure to prepare the missing strategic documents defined by law.

Last year's report assessed that, due to the complexity of SDG 12, it was necessary to improve institutional and coordination mechanisms by increasing the cooperation between several ministries. It was assessed that the competencies of ministries and other government bodies are not well defined in the planning documents. Competences for achieving SDG 12 are divided between the MEP, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, the Ministry of Mining and Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Public Procurement Office.

Mechanisms for progress monitoring under SDG 12 were poorly developed. SORS provided data for three of the 13 indicators defined by the 2030 Agenda to monitor progress towards SDG 12.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

During the reporting period, there were not many changes in public policies governing the area of SDG 12.

National Waste Management Strategy with the National Waste Management Plan for the period 2020–2025, and the National Waste Prevention Program for the period 2020–2025 were drafted with the support of the EU, but these documents have not been officially adopted. One of the reasons is the previous inconsistency of the Law on Waste Management with the Law on the Planning System, which is the reason the Law on Amendments to the Law on Waste Management is currently being drafted, which envisages the adoption of the Waste Management Program instead of the National Strategy. In September 2021, the Waste Management Program in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2024 was prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Planning System of

the Republic of Serbia and related bylaws. One important change that this program is expected to bring, important for achieving SDG 12, is the transition from the concept of regional sanitary landfills to the concept of regional recycling centres. This will prescribe mandatory sorting of waste at the place of origin, which is the first and the most important step in sustainable waste management.

The Law on Renewable Energy Sources was adopted in 2021. One of the goals of this law is reduction in the usage of fossil fuels and increasing the use of renewable energy sources, aimed at environmental protection. The implementation of this goal will facilitate progress in the achievement of the SDG 12 targets.

Based on the Law on Waste Management, the Minister of Environmental Protection amended two important regulations:

- » Rulebook on the form of a daily record and annual waste report with the filling in instructions;
- » Rulebook on Categories, Testing and Classification of Waste.

These regulations are important for SDG 12 because they regulate the records of waste, characterization and categories of waste, which is the first step in responsible waste management. With data on the waste category and characteristics in place, including waste quantities, it is possible to assess whether the waste can be recycled or not. In order to manage waste sustainably, it is primarily important to know the waste quantities and characteristics.

There were no significant changes at the institutional level during the reporting period

regarding the implementation of SDG 12. SDG 12 is complex and requires work on developing and strengthening capacities in the areas of waste management, safe chemical use, natural resources management and renewable energy sources.

Progress monitoring mechanisms and reporting on the achievement of SDG 12 were improved during the reporting period. SORS (2021) has published data for two more indicators related to this goal, specifically indicator 12.1.1 (Number of countries with sustainable consumption and production (SCP) national action plans or SCP mainstreamed as a priority or a target into national policies), which monitors the achievement of target 12.1, and indicator for achieving targets 12.5 – 12.5.1 (National recycling rate, tons of material recycled).

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Develop a new Sustainable Development Strategy and accompanying action plan with developed indicators that are uniform, relevant and harmonised with UN and EU indicators to ensure the achievement of target 12.1. Involve representatives of the civil sector in the working group for the development of this Strategy.	✘	The national development plan has not been prepared yet.
Revise the National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods, as the main strategic document for the implementation of target 12.2, in a manner that includes a circular economy, green public procurement and energy efficiency.	✘	The National Strategy of Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods has not been revised.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>The new Waste Management Strategy should recognise the need to create a composting island to respond to target 12.3.</p>		<p>The Draft Waste Management Strategy defines recycling yards at the municipal level, where green waste will also be collected. The strategy shows the composting process. Small composting plants are planned next to recycling islands in rural areas, while combined simple composting facilities for more than one municipality can be introduced in urban municipalities.</p>
<p>Introduce the circular economy principle into relevant strategic documents and regulations at the national level, in accordance with the EU economic policy in which the circular economy is recognised as one of the key mechanisms for developing economic growth and increasing human well-being, and preventing excessive consumption of non-renewable natural resources.</p>		<p>The Draft Waste Management Strategy defines the circular economy only as a good tool, and not as a principle and key mechanism for developing economic growth and increasing human well-being, and for preventing excessive consumption of non-renewable natural resources.</p>
<p>Establish a system for monitoring hazardous chemicals and replacing the use of hazardous chemicals with less hazardous ones. Establish local registers of pollution sources with legal obligations to collect data.</p>		<p>Laws and bylaws related to chemicals management have not been changed in the period covered by this report.</p>
<p>In addition to the new Waste Management Strategy, develop an action plan for municipal waste management and a waste management prevention plan to adequately respond to target 12.6.</p>		<p>The public policy document (strategy / program) in the field of waste management is still in draft form. The twinning project “EU Support to the Development of a Strategic Framework in the Field of Waste Management” envisages a set of economic measures for municipal solid waste management instruments.</p>
<p>Develop tools and indicators for monitoring sustainable tourism that are necessary for the implementation of target 12. b.</p>		<p>The Law on Tourism has not been amended.</p>

 Adopted;  Partially adopted;  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Revise the National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods, as one of the basic strategic documents for SDG 12, to include circular economy, green public procurement and energy efficiency;
2. In the new Waste Management Program, emphasize the need to form a composting island;
3. Introduce the principle of circular economy into relevant strategic documents and regulations at the national level, in line with EU economic policy, in which the circular economy is recognized as one of the key mechanisms for developing economic growth and increasing human well-being and preventing excessive consumption of non-renewable natural resources;
4. Establish a system for monitoring hazardous chemicals and replacing the use of hazardous chemicals with those less hazardous. Establish local registers of pollutant sources with legal obligation of data collection;
5. Along with the new Waste Management Program, develop an Action Plan for Municipal Waste Management and a Waste Prevention Plan;
6. Develop tools and indicators for monitoring sustainable tourism through public policies related to tourism;
7. Work on strengthening the capacity of employees working in the civil service in environmental protection and inspection through additional training at the state, provincial and local levels, and in the sector of inspection for monitoring and inspection of waste producers, as well as waste management facilities;
8. Align the Law on Waste Management and the Law on Packaging and Packaging Waste with EU directives on waste;
9. Due to the complexity of SDG 12, it is necessary to establish a cross-sectoral body with members from the MEP, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, the Ministry of Mining and Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Public Procurement Office, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and the civil sector, aimed at cooperation and coordination in achieving this goal.



Goal 13:

# CLIMATE ACTION



## Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

### TARGETS

**Target 13.1** Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

**Target 13.2** Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

**Target 13.3** Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

**Target 13.a** Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilising jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalise the Green Climate Fund through its capitalisation as soon as possible

## TARGETS

**Target 13.b** Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalised communities

The summer of 2021 was the fifth warmest summer in Serbia since 1950, with a temperature of about 2 °C above average, and the third warmest summer in Belgrade since 1888.

Two documents have been adopted in the reporting period that are important for the area of climate change. The most important document is certainly the Law on Climate Change. However, it only partially eliminated previous shortcomings in terms of the integration of SDG 13 into national strategic and legal documents. Adoption of the Low Carbon Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021 to 2030 with projections until 2050 remains a priority activity in terms of achieving SDG 13.

There have been no significant changes and progress in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework in the previous period. Cooperation between various state institutions relevant for the achievement of SDG 13, as well as between state institutions and CSOs is still inadequate.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

In the previous report on Serbia's readiness to implement the 2030 Agenda, published in 2020, it was stated that policies related to action to combat climate change and its consequences in Serbia were complex and divided into several sectors, the most important being education, water management, agriculture, urbanism, construction, infrastructure, forestry, nature protection and energy.

The 2020 report states that the strategic framework for achieving SDG 13 is only partially set,

and that key documents are missing, such as the Low Carbon Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021 to 2030 with projections until 2050, with related action plan. Parts of targets 13.1, 13.2 and 13.3 were partially covered and aligned with public policies through the Energy Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia until 2025 with projections until 2030, the National Strategy for Protection and Rescue emergency, the National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, the Water Management Strategy on the territory of

the Republic of Serbia until 2034, the National Youth Strategy for the period from 2015 to 2025, as well as the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia from 2010 to 2020. Target 13.a was not covered by any national targets, given that national planning documents did not provide for the financing of the Global Green Climate Fund, while target 13.b was assessed as inapplicable in the context of Serbia.

It was also stated that in 2017, the Law on Ratification of the Paris Agreement was adopted, by which the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia ratified the Paris Agreement, i.e., the global agreement for combating climate change. Serbia has thus committed itself to contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions at the global level in the future.

The report states that the institutional and coordination mechanisms for SDG 13 are mostly within the competence of the MEP, but that the

competences related to climate change overlap with the Ministry of Mining and Energy and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management. Competences for climate change are often divided between two or more ministries, leading to difficulties in the implementation of strategic and legislative documents due to inadequate coordination. Another problem that was mentioned was the lack of adequate capacities of the mentioned ministries and bodies within these ministries.

The 2020 report also states that the mechanisms for progress monitoring under SDG 13 are poorly developed. Only one of the eight indicators defined in the 2030 Agenda was monitored and made public. There were data that could be used to monitor at least a few more indicators, but the process of collection, processing and publishing aimed at monitoring progress towards SDG 13 was not organized.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

During the reporting period, there were several changes in public policies concerning SDG 13. The most significant change was the adoption of the Law on Climate Change in March 2021, and with that the legal framework in the field of climate change was completed. Together with other laws regulating the areas of environmental protection, disaster risk reduction and emergency management, air, water and land protection, the said law should be the basis of the legal framework for combating climate change. It regulates the system for limiting greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and for adapting to the changing climatic conditions, monitoring and reporting on the Low Carbon Development Strategy and

its improvement. The Law on Climate Change introduces a system for monitoring, reporting and verification of greenhouse gas emissions, but the disadvantage is that it does not contain effective mechanisms for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Also, the Law cannot be fully implemented without the adoption of bylaws, which has not been done yet.

The Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy was adopted in April 2021. Among other things, this law seeks to reduce the impact of the energy sector on the environment and climate change. Related bylaws must be adopted in order for this law to be fully operational.

In line with the obligations assumed under the Paris Agreement until the end of 2020 and the Work Plan of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for 2021, the plan for the first half of 2021 is to adopt the Low Carbon Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021 to 2030 with projections until 2050, and the Conclusion accepting the Second Biennial Update Report of the Republic of Serbia under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was provided for public review during November and December 2020. Neither of these two documents was adopted by September 31, 2021, and the adoption of the Conclusion accepting the Third National Communication of the Republic of Serbia under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is planned for December 2021. The Government of Serbia did not adopt or submit an increased ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and resilience to climate change, which is an obligation under the Paris Agreement. The conclusion is that none of the stated obligations towards the international community have been fulfilled.

In the previous period, there were no significant changes in the institutional framework for action in combating climate change and its consequences. No new bodies have been established to strengthen institutional capacities, nor have the capacities of existing relevant institutions been significantly or systematically strengthened.

During the previous year, the number of indicators that monitor the achievement of SDG 13 has been increased, and the SORS portal for monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda now shows data for all three indicators for target 13.1 (13.1.1 – number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population, 13.1.2 – number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, and 13.1.3 – proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies). SORS does not provide data for other targets (SORS, 2021).

# An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Adopt the Law on Climate Change.		The Law on Climate Change was adopted in March 2021, and that is an important step towards preparing legislation related to achieving SDG 13. However, bylaws are still lacking to make this law fully applicable.
Adopt the Low Carbon Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2030 with projections until 2050, with action plan.		The strategy has not been adopted yet, and the document was available for public review during 2020. According to the Work programme of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Low Carbon Development Strategy should be adopted in 2021.
The SORS should monitor and regularly publish indicators for SDG 13.		SORS publishes data for all indicators for target 13.1 (Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries), while progress monitoring for other targets is still lacking.
Revise all elements of legislation (laws, documents, bylaws, etc.) that are directly related to greenhouse gas emitters to include the climate change aspect.		Progress in this area is slow. The good news is that the Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy was adopted in 2021, which is a progress towards inclusion of the aspect of climate change in the field of energy.
Define and adjust the legal and institutional framework related to adaptation to climate change and integrate it into other sectors, primarily: water management, agriculture, urban planning, construction, infrastructure, forestry, nature protection and energy.		No progress has been made in this area since the previous report.

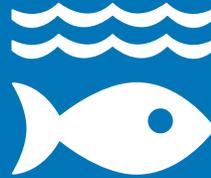
 Adopted;  Partially adopted;  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

- 1.** Adopt the Low Carbon Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2030 with projections until 2050 with action plan;
- 2.** Regularly monitor and publish data for indicators for SDG 13 on the SORS Portal on Sustainable Development Goals;
- 3.** Revise all laws and bylaws directly related to greenhouse gas emitters to include the aspect of climate change;
- 4.** Define and adjust the legal and institutional framework related to adaptation to climate change and integrate it into other sectors, primarily water management, agriculture, urban planning, construction, infrastructure, forestry, nature protection and energy.
- 5.** Mobilize existing available data and introduce monitoring of indicators that are not currently monitored, in order to facilitate better progress monitoring in achieving SDG 13. This applies in particular to data produced or collected by the MEP bodies and institutions;
- 6.** Increase human and financial capacities of ministries (number, education, expertise, and budget), their bodies and other institutions that cover the area of climate change, in order to establish better cooperation and coordination in achieving SDG 13.

Goal 14:

# LIFE BELOW WATER



## Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, sea and marine resources for sustainable development

### TARGETS

**Target 14.1** By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

**Target 14.2** By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive ocean

**Target 14.3** Minimise and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

## TARGETS

**Target 14.4** By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

**Target 14.5** By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

**Target 14.6** By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognising that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organisation fisheries subsidies negotiation

**Target 14.7** By 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

**Target 14.a** Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries

**Target 14.b** Provide access of small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

**Target 14.c** Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of "The Future We Want".

Two documents were adopted in the reporting period that can indirectly contribute to the achievement of SDG 14. These are the Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy for the period from 2021 to 2023 and the Nature Protection Program for the period from 2021 to 2023. These documents only partially and indirectly contribute to the achievement of SDG 14 in terms of water pollution reduction and protection of migratory fish species. SDG 14 is still not directly integrated into Serbia's public policies.

There are no capacities in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework to directly engage in activities related to this goal. Also, there are insufficient capacities in the sector of water and nature protection, which in a broader sense contribute to SDG 14. Mechanisms for monitoring the achievement of SDG 14 have not been developed in Serbia.

## An overview of key results of the previous report “Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

According to the findings of the report “Serbia 2030 – Preparedness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda”, the relevance of SDG 14 for Serbia is not directly recognized in public policy documents related to environmental protection and water protection. The analysis of strategic documents in the field of water management was done so as to contribute to the achievement of SDG 14 because this goal aims at pollution reduction of inland waters, which ultimately results in reduced emissions of pollutants into the seas and oceans. Also, it was assessed that the strategic framework for nature protection includes the protection of species, including migratory fish species.

The Water Management Strategy on the territory of the Republic of Serbia until 2034 has been recognized as a key strategic document which regulates the area of water protection from pollution. The strategy defines a strategic objective – conservation and achievement of good status and good ecological potential of surface water bodies and groundwater, protection of human health, preservation of wetland ecosystems, meeting the needs of legitimate water users, which contributes to achieving SDG 14. The strategy also defines operational objectives that are more directly focused on SDG 14, namely: prevention of surface and groundwater pollution, reduction of pollution from concentrated sources of pollution, limiting hydromorphological alterations of natural water bodies and achieving and maintaining good environmental potential of significantly altered water bodies.

The strategic framework for nature protection, which should include the protection of wild species, and the protection of migratory fish species, was not developed in Serbia during the preparation of the report. The National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, which includes the protection of species and sustainable use of fish stocks, has not been implemented because no action plan was prepared.

The previous report estimated that the legal framework for water and wildlife protection is relatively well defined. Laws in the field of water management and protection, and in the field of nature protection and use of fish resources, provide an adequate framework for achieving SDG 14 in terms of reduction of water pollution and protection of migratory species. Relevant laws related to water pollution prevention are the Law on Environmental Protection and the Law on Waters. These laws limit water pollution and prescribe measures to protect and improve the status of water resources. As concerns species protection, the Law on Nature Protection and related bylaws are key for regulating the issue of protected and strictly protected species. All migratory fish species (sturgeon species) have the status of strictly protected species in Serbia, and fishing and commercial use of sturgeon species is prohibited. Also, international trade in migratory fish species is regulated by the Law on Ratification of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Law on the protection and sustainable use of fish stocks also regulates the use of fish species and prescribes measures for their protection. According to this law and related bylaws,

fishing of migratory fish species is permanently prohibited on the territory of Serbia.

Strictly speaking, as noted in the previous report, institutional and coordination mechanisms for SDG 14 do not exist. As a landlocked country, Serbia does not recognize the need to provide capacities aimed at sea and ocean protection. In a broader sense, capacities aimed at water pollution protection, as well as administrative capacities aimed at protecting wild species and their habitats (nature protection) were assessed as adequate in terms of achieving SDG 14. Competences in water management and

protection are divided between the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and MEP. The protection of species and their habitats, primarily fish, was the sole responsibility of the MEP. The capacities of both ministries were assessed as inadequate for the efficient implementation of their direct competencies, which includes the capacities to achieve SDG 14.

Progress monitoring mechanisms under SDG 14 have also been assessed as undeveloped. It is stated that no SDG 14 indicator is monitored at the national level.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

In the previous period, there has not been many changes in public policies regarding water pollution prevention and protection of wild fish species.

In 2021, the Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy on the territory of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2023 was adopted. The plan defines two specific objectives that directly contribute to the reduction of water pollution:

- » Improving the field of water pollution protection;
- » Reducing pollution input from concentrated pollution sources.

Measures and activities for the achievement of these two specific objectives are mainly related to the construction of water treatment plants and reducing the emission of untreated wastewater to recipients. The action plan does not contain

special measures and activities to achieve the operational goal of limiting hydromorphological alterations. These alterations, in terms of blocking and disrupting watercourses, have a great impact on migratory fish species. The water management plan and the water protection plan against pollution, which are very important for the improvement of water quality and for reducing pollution, have still not been adopted.

The Nature Protection Program of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2023 was adopted in 2021. The program defines several objectives and measures aimed at protection of species, monitoring and prevention of illegal killing, but none of these are specific to migratory fish species.

There were no changes in other relevant sector policies.

In 2021, the Law on Amendments to the Law on Nature Protection was adopted. Most of the

amendments to the Law relate to the ecological network and related protection mechanisms (acceptability assessment), competencies in prescribing nature protection requirements, ban on the construction of small hydropower plants in protected areas and involving the public in the management of protected areas. These amendments are not relevant to achieving SDG 14.

A new law on the sustainable use of fish stocks is in the drafting stage, but no other information is available.

In the previous period, there were no significant changes in the institutional framework

concerning water protection and protection of wild species and habitats. No new bodies have been established, nor have the capacities of the existing relevant institutions been significantly or systematically strengthened. In accordance with the Law on Waters, the National Water Conference was established, which aims to ensure public influence in water management.

Progress monitoring mechanisms for SDG 14 have not been improved during the previous period. There are currently no mechanisms in Serbia to monitor global indicators for this purpose (e.g., data on the amount of floating plastic waste in rivers).

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Strengthen the monitoring capacities of institutions and engage in international ocean protection initiatives through the Convention on the Law of the Sea.	✘	In the previous period, there were no activities towards prompting institutions to engage in international initiatives for marine protection.
Improve the legal framework in the field of water protection against pollution and waste management to enable implementation of target 14.1, especially in terms of plastic waste pollution in water.	✘	The legal framework for water protection has not been changed in the previous period, and no new bylaws have been adopted.
Improve the strategic and legal framework for the protection and use of fish stocks in order to achieve effective protection of migratory fish species.	✓	The legal framework for the use of fish stocks has not been changed, although a new law is being prepared. The Nature Protection Program has been adopted, which includes the protection of fish species.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Strengthen international cooperation related to the protection of fish resources.	✘	In the previous period, there were no activities related to strengthening international cooperation in the field of fish protection.

 Adopted; 
  Partially adopted; 
  Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Strengthen the monitoring capacities of institutions and engage in international ocean protection initiatives through the Convention on the Law of the Sea;
2. Improve the legal framework in the field of water protection against pollution and waste management to enable implementation of target 14.1, especially in terms of plastic waste pollution in water;
3. Improve the strategic and legal framework for the protection and use of fish stocks in order to achieve effective protection of migratory fish species;
4. Strengthen international cooperation related to the protection of fish resources;
5. Prepare and adopt an action plan for the protection of sturgeon species;
6. Establish monitoring of floating plastic waste and waste on river banks;
7. Adopt a water management plan and a plan for water pollution prevention;
8. Include measures and activities related to the reduction of hydromorphological alterations in the new Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy.

Goal 15:

# LIFE ON LAND



**Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss**

## TARGETS

**Target 15.1** By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

**Target 15.2** By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

## TARGETS

**Target 15.3** By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world

**Target 15.4** By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development

**Target 15.5** Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

**Target 15.6 Promote** fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed

**Target 15.7** Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products

**Target 15.8** By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species

**Target 15.9** By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

**Target 15.a Mobilise** and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

**Target 15.b** Mobilise significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation

**Target 15.c Enhance** global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities

Two documents relevant for the nature protection and achieving SDG 15 were adopted in the reporting period. These are the Nature Protection Program for the period from 2021 to 2023 and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Nature Protection. These documents have only partially addressed previous shortcomings related to the nationalization of SDG 15. The development of a long-term strategic document in the field of nature protection and a thorough revision of the legal framework for nature protection remain priority activities for achieving SDG 15.

In November 2020, Serbia and other Western Balkans countries have signed the Sofia Declaration committing themselves to implementing the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

There have been no significant changes and progress in the institutional, administrative and organizational framework in the previous period, and cooperation between different state institutions relevant to achieving SDG 15, and between state institutions and CSOs is still inadequate. There has been no significant improvement in relation to the progress monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of SDG 15, except that data for the indicator related to sustainable forest management have been added to the national monitoring database for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

## An overview of key results of the previous report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda"

Public policies that define the protection of ecosystems and natural resources in Serbia are complex. They are distributed over several relevant sectors, such as the environmental protection, agriculture, forestry and water management. In the report "Serbia 2030 – Preparedness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda", the strategic framework for achieving SDG 15 was assessed as partly established, due to the lack of several key documents, such as the strategic document for biodiversity protection and conservation, and the strategic document for sustainable forest management. The report identified the National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources as a key document in this area. However, this document was operational because no action plan was not developed. It was assessed that not all targets under SDG

15 are adequately integrated into the strategic framework. This pertains to targets 15.4, 15.7, 15.8, 15.9 and 15.c, since strategic documents do not define related specific measures and objectives.

In the previous report, the legal framework was assessed as relatively well defined as the existing laws regulating nature protection, forestry, hunting and water management provide a good basis for achieving certain targets related to the protection of biodiversity. Certain shortcomings have been identified regarding the legal framework for the preservation of mountain ecosystems, fair distribution of genetic resources, control of invasive species, ecosystem services, and economic evaluation of ecosystems and directing financial resources towards protection of ecosystems and natural resources.

Institutional and coordination mechanisms for SDG 15 were assessed as relatively well established, but an obvious lack of capacity in relevant institutions was noted. Most competencies for achieving SDG 15 lie within the scope of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, followed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management with the Forest Administration and the Water Administration. In addition to these, other institutions with relevant roles in this area include the Environmental Protection Agency,

the Institute for Nature Protection of Serbia and the Provincial Institute for Nature Protection.

Mechanisms for monitoring progress under SDG 15 were assessed as poorly developed. Only four of the 12 indicators defined by the 2030 Agenda are monitored and published. There used to be data for monitoring at least several other indicators, but the process of collection, processing and publishing data on progress monitoring towards SDG was not carried out.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

In the reporting period, not many changes were made in terms of public policies concerning SDG 15. The most significant change is the adoption of the Nature Protection Program of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2023. In accordance with the Law on the Planning System, the Draft Strategy for Nature Protection of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2019 to 2025 was revised and aligned with the mentioned Program. This document still does not completely eliminate the gap stemming from the lack of a long-term and comprehensive strategic document in the field of biodiversity protection. The program sets one general objective related to the improvement of nature protection systems and biodiversity conservation and three specific objectives:

1. reducing negative impacts on biodiversity;
2. improving the management system for protected areas, ecological network and species;
3. improving public policy for nature protection and conservation of biodiversity and public participation in decision-making.

The Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy on the territory of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2023 was adopted in 2021. This document defines indicators and specific activities that contribute to nature protection. Indicators and activities are, among other things, defined by the general objective 2 – reaching and maintaining good status and good ecological potential of surface and groundwater bodies in order to protect human health, preserve marine and coastal ecosystems and meet the needs of water users. The strategy also sets a special objective to the establish and develop protected areas in accordance with the Law on Waters, but the Action Plan does not prescribe activities for this objective.

There were no changes in other relevant sectoral policies.

In 2021, the Law on Amendments to the Law on Nature Protection was adopted. Most amendments refer to the ecological network and related protection mechanisms (acceptability assessment), competencies in prescribing nature protection conditions, banning the construction

of small hydropower plants in protected areas and public involvement in the management of protected areas. The mentioned amendments have partially eliminated the identified shortcomings in the legislative framework regarding the achievement of SDG 15.

The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans is a regional strategy prepared with the aim of implementing the European Green Agreement in this region. Six countries of the Western Balkans have signed the Sofia Declaration in November 2020, committing themselves to implementing the green transition in line with EU goals. The Green Agenda contains five components, one of which is aimed at protecting biodiversity and ecosystems. Although it is a regional strategy, it is expected to have a major impact on the national nature protection policies. In September 2021, a Working Group for the implementation of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda was established and a regional action plan for the implementation of the Green Agenda is now being drafted.

In the reporting period, there were no significant changes in the institutional framework regarding conservation of nature and natural resources. No new bodies have been established, and the capacities of the existing relevant institutions have not been significantly or systematically strengthened. In accordance with the Law on Waters, the National Water Conference was established, with the main goal to ensure public influence in water management.

In the previous year the number of indicators that monitor the achievement of SDG 15 has been increased by one. In addition to indicators 15.1.1 (Forest area as a proportion of total land area), 15.a.1 and 15.b.1 (Official development assistance on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity), data have been added to the national database for indicator 15.2.1b – Progress towards sustainable forest management: forest above-ground biomass. Available data are from 2010, and data source is FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Ensure better cooperation and coordination of different sectors (nature protection, forestry, water management, energy, agriculture, transport, etc.) in drafting strategic documents concerning the protection and use of natural resources.	✘	During the drafting of the Nature Protection Program, adequate public hearing was not carried out, and there is no evidence of cooperation and coordination with other sectors during the drafting process. The program contains an objective (improved public policy for nature protection and biodiversity conservation and public participation in decision-making), which also refers to cross-sectoral cooperation. Specific measures within this objective, among other things, envisage the establishment of indicators for monitoring the impact of activities of other sectors on nature conservation. No cross-sectoral body has been established to improve cooperation.
Clearly and explicitly integrate SDG into strategic documents that are planned to be drafted in the forthcoming period. This primarily refers to the Forestry Development Programme and the Nature Protection Programme that are being drafted.	✎	The Nature Protection Programme for the period from 2021 to 2023 mentions SDGs related to the 2030 Agenda in principle, but does not provide specific links between the Programme objectives and SDG and related targets. The Programme mentions that it directly contributes to SDGs 14 and 15. Some of the defined measures directly contribute to the achievement of certain targets under SDG 15, but this is not specifically stated in the Programme.
Define appropriate indicators that would enable monitoring of SDG, data collection methodology and schedule, and defining responsible institutions.	✘	No progress has been made in The Nature Protection Programme and other documents in terms of organization of collection and monitoring of indicators for SDGs.
Future strategic documents should more adequately integrate objectives and measures for the protection of mountain areas (target 15.4).	✘	The Nature Protection Programme does not single out mountain areas as a priority in terms of protection, and no special measures have been provided for those areas.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>Future strategic documents should more adequately integrate objectives and measures for the improvement of control of use and prevention of illegal trade in protected species (target 15.7).</p>		<p>The Nature Protection Programme provides a measure directly related to this target (measure 1.1.3, combating illegal killing, capture and wildlife trade). The programme introduces activities related to strengthening the capacity of institutions and improving procedures for monitoring and combating illegal activities. It also introduces indicators related to the recording of cases of illegal activities involving protected species.</p>
<p>Future strategic documents should more adequately integrate objectives and measures for the prevention of introducing and control of invasive species (target 15.8), as well as measures for the development of alternative sources of income for the local population to prevent illegal or unsustainable use of wild species (target 15.c).</p>		<p>The Nature Protection Programme defines measure 1.1.5 – Improving the monitoring and control of invasive species. Specific activities envisaged by the Programme are related to the improvement of the legal framework for the control of invasive species and the establishment of indicators for monitoring invasive species. Target 15.c has not been integrated into the Programme.</p>
<p>Future strategic documents should more adequately integrate the principles of ecosystem services and specific measures for their performance (target 15.9).</p>		<p>The Nature Protection Programme does not set objectives or measures to integrate the principle of ecosystem services.</p>
<p>Improve the legal framework for the achievement of objectives i.e., to clearly define invasive species and control measures (target 15.8), and introduce the concept of ecosystem services in legislation dealing with natural resources (target 15.9).</p>		<p>The Law on Amendments to the Law on Nature Protection does not contain provisions that would better define the field of invasive species and ecosystem services.</p>
<p>Improve cooperation between institutions which collect data for SDG 15, in order to perform effective monitoring of indicators for certain targets.</p>		<p>In the previous period, data for another indicator were added to the national database. There is no significant shift in cooperation between institutions in monitoring SDG indicators.</p>
<p>Amend the Rulebook on the national list of indicators of environmental protection, in order to adapt the existing indicators and directly connect them to internationally defined target indicators and to develop new indicators for previously unavailable targets (e.g., targets 15.4 and 15.9).</p>		<p>The nature protection programme envisages the improvement of the national list of indicators, but the Rulebook has not been amended yet.</p>

 Adopted;  Partially adopted;  Not adopted

# Recommendations for the upcoming period

1. Ensure better cooperation and coordination of different sectors (nature protection, forestry, water management, energy, agriculture, transport, etc.) in drafting strategic documents concerning the protection and use of natural resources;
2. Clearly and explicitly integrate SDG into strategic documents related to nature protection and management of natural resources (nature protection, forestry, water management etc.);
3. Define appropriate indicators for objectives in national planning documents related to SDG, that would enable monitoring of SDGs, data collection methodology and schedule, and defining responsible institutions.
4. Future strategic documents should more adequately integrate objectives and measures for: protection of mountain areas (target 15.4);
5. prevention of introducing and control of invasive species (target 15.8), as well as development of alternative sources of income for the local population to prevent illegal or unsustainable use of wild species (target 15.c);
6. application of principles of ecosystem services (target 15.9);
7. In addition to the strategic framework, improve the legal framework for the achievement of objectives i.e., to clearly define invasive species and control measures (target 15.8), and introduce the concept of ecosystem services in legislation dealing with natural resources (target 15.9);
8. Improve cooperation between institutions which collect data for SDG 15, in order to perform effective monitoring of indicators for certain targets;
9. Amend the Rulebook on the national list of indicators of environmental protection, in order to adapt the existing indicators and directly connect them to internationally defined target indicators and to develop new indicators for previously unavailable targets (e.g., targets 15.4 and 15.9);
10. Develop a long-term strategic document that will include the area of nature protection;
11. Establish a cross-sectoral body with the aim to improve cooperation in achieving SDG 15;
12. Ensure effective involvement of CSOs in the development of strategic and legal documents.

Goal 16:

# PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



**Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels**

## TARGETS

**Target 16.1** Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

**Target 16.2** End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

## TARGETS

**Target 16.3** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.

**Target 16.4** By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised crime.

**Target 16.5** Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.

**Target 16.6** Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.

**Target 16.7** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

**Target 16.8** Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.

**Target 16.9** By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.

**Target 16.10** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

**Target 16.a** Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.

**Target 16.b** Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

Several public policy documents and regulations have been adopted in the period since the previous report. They are important for the fields covered by SDG 16 including, as the most important, the Public Administration Reform Strategy, the Action Plan for the implementation of the Open Government Partnership initiative, the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System, the Gender Equality Strategy, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Prevention of Corruption. The stated documents have only partially eliminated previous shortcomings in terms of the integration of SDG 16 into national strategic and legal documents, as stated in an overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report presented in the text below. Negligible progress has been made during the reporting period in the field of public administration reform, particularly in the field of increased transparency and accountability of institutions, as well as inclusiveness, participation and representation in decision-making.

Institutional and coordination mechanisms for SDG 16 have been partially modified with the establishment of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. In addition to the Ministry, the largest part of the responsibilities for achieving Goal 16 remains within the remit of the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government.

## An overview of key results of the previous report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda"

The national priorities stated in the public policy documents in Serbia elaborate on SDG 16 targets. Report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda" showed that certain targets are either partially covered by national strategic documents, or are the subject of several different documents, and that the strategic framework was completely lacking for some targets. The Public Administration Reform Strategy and the Action Plan for Chapter 23 were established as umbrella planning documents in this field. However, there is a number of other planning documents that are harmonised with these two key documents, such as the Action Plan for the implementation of the Open Government Partnership initiative, the Judicial Development Strategy, the e-Government Development Programme, etc. Nevertheless,

despite the large number of planning documents, it was concluded that only certain targets are fully covered with the strategic framework, such as targets 16.2, 16.3 and 16.4, while other targets are not adequately integrated, or they are not integrated at all.

According to the findings from the previous report, the legal framework for SDG 16 has been partially established. Having in mind 12 targets within this goal, which refer to different segments of the society and public administration, an entire set of laws and by-laws make up the legal framework in these fields. Although the basic principles that refer to most of the targets within Goal 16 are set in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, they are further elaborated in special laws and by-laws. Despite a large number of laws

that make up a normative framework, Serbia is still facing great challenges both in ensuring the implementation of existing regulations and in introducing new legal concepts. The normative framework is not fully harmonised with international standards and EU law, particularly in the field of transparency of the work of institutions, judicial independence, prevention of corruption and exercising citizens' rights.

The report showed that existing institutional and coordination mechanisms for achieving SDG 16 targets are partially developed and also that they are not established to achieve the SDG but to achieve objectives of a number of parallel reform processes within European integration, primarily of the implementation of the public administration reform and the implementation of activities from the Action Plan for Chapter 23. Therefore,

much of the responsibility for achieving Goal 16 remains within the remit of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, and then of some other ministries and independent state bodies such as the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, the Anti-Corruption Agency, etc.

The framework for monitoring the achievement of SDG 16 targets is based on the work of a more specialised SORS internal unit. The findings in the previous report show that a large number of indicators were well developed and adequately set in terms of targets, but that not all aspects of the targets were covered. In 2020, SORS monitored and published eight out of 23 indicators for monitoring SDG 16.

## An overview of key changes in the previous year

In 2021, state bodies continued or started with the implementation of public policy documents adopted in the previous period such as the Strategy for Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence, the Strategy for Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children and Protection of Victims, the Judicial Development Strategy, the National Strategy for the Rights of Victims and Witnesses of Crime, the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System. Also, in the process of Serbia's accession to the EU, state bodies headed by the Ministry of Justice in 2021 continued activities related to the implementation of the Action Plan for Chapter 23 and Action Plan for Chapter 24.

Additionally, the public policy framework was upgraded in the observed period with the adop-

tion of new planning documents that expired in 2020. The most significant change is the adoption of the new Public Administration Reform (PAR) Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2030, which defines the vision and objectives of public administration at the national and local level. This document is important because it is an umbrella strategic document that covers targets 16.6 – Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, and 16.7 – Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. The overall objective that needs to be achieved with the newly adopted PAR Strategy is to further improve the work of public administration and the quality of policy making in accordance with European Principles for Public Administration and to provide high quality services to citizens and corporate entities, as well

as professional public administration that will significantly contribute to economic stability and increase living standards. In addition to the overall objective, eight specific objectives have been defined, which cover various fields of public administration, i.e., planning and coordination of public policies, human resource management, provision of services, accountability and transparency, public financial management and local self-government system.<sup>33</sup> The strategic public administration reform document for the first time contains a pillar that refers to the reform of the local self-government system. The Government continued executing obligations under the Open Government Partnership initiative. For the purpose of putting the PAR Strategy into operation, the Action Plan for the implementation of the PAR Strategy in the period 2021-2025 was adopted, which contains a number of activities aimed at achieving specific objectives in the field of human resource management, provision of services and accountability and transparency in the work of state bodies. An analysis of the above stated documents indicates that the Action Plan elaborates on the activities within five to eight specific objectives envisaged by the Strategy. Therefore, in accordance with the Law on Planning System of the Republic of Serbia, and in addition to the stated documents, the Government of the Republic of Serbia additionally adopted the Programme for the Reform of the Local Self-Government System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2025 as an integral part of the PAR Strategy. The Programme elaborates on specific objective 8 of the PAR Strategy and states that the vision is to create modern, professional, efficient and responsible local self-government. Following the same model, the Government adopted the Public Financial Management Reform Programme for the period 2021-2025 as a special document, with the aim of achieving a sustainable budget

with stable public debt in relation to GDP through better financial management and control, internal audit process and linking budget planning with government policies (the overall objective of the Programme and specific objective 7 of the PAR Strategy). Finally, in order to develop the second pillar (Policy Planning and Coordination) of the PAR Strategy, the Proposal for the Programme for Improving Public Policy Management and Regulatory Reform was prepared in 2021 with the Action Plan for the period 2021-2025. A public debate about the documents ended on 15 September and the document is expected to be finalised in 2021 and then adopted at a government session. Implementation of this Programme is expected to contribute to the improvement of the quality of public policies and regulations through continuation of the regulatory reform, strengthening capacities for creating and monitoring the implementation of public policies and regulations, effective coordination of public policies and improvement of public participation in all phases of adoption and monitoring of the implementation of public policies and regulations.

Also, the new Action Plan for the implementation of the Open Government Partnership initiative in the Republic of Serbia in the period 2020-2022 was adopted at the end of 2020 (in the period immediately after the preparation of the previous report on readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda). This document envisages a number of obligations of public authority bodies regarding data opening, increased transparency and information access, and it is important for both targets 16.6 and 16.7, and target 16.10 – Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements. Also, the Action Plan for the implementation

33 Document Principles for Public Administration was created by SIGMA – a joint initiative of the OECD and EU – with the aim of defining standards for good governance and monitoring progress in candidate countries and potential candidate countries for EU membership.

of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025 was adopted in December 2020.

The new Strategy for the Development of the Information Society and Information Security in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2026 was adopted in August 2021 with the three-year Action Plan. Bearing in mind that the overall objective of the Strategy is the developed information society and e-government in the service of citizens and the economy and improved information security of citizens, public administration and the economy, this document is important in terms of several SDG 16 targets.

Also, the new National War Crimes Prosecution Strategy 2021-2026 was adopted in October 2021 with the accompanying Action Plan in order to strengthen procedural and extra-procedural mechanisms for punishing war crimes, protecting and supporting victims, discovering the fate of missing persons and building the social environment of tolerance and reconciliation.

In accordance with the revised Action Plan for Chapter 23 and measures aimed at preventing corruption in special risk areas (customs, local self-government, privatisation, public procurement and police), the Government adopted the Operational Plan for Prevention of Corruption in Special Risk Areas in September 2021, which is relevant for target 16.5. The purpose of this Operational Plan is, among other things, to bridge the period until the adoption of a new National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan, as well as to be the foundation for the development of these documents.

Finally, in terms of amendments to the policy framework, it is important to note that the new Gender Equality Strategy (GES) 2021-2030 was adopted in October 2021 with the accompanying Action Plan. The objective of this Strategy is over-

coming the gender gap and achieving gender equality as a precondition for social development and improving the daily life of women and men, girls and boys. A more detailed analysis of the Gender Equality Strategy can be found in the section covering SDG 5 – Gender Equality.

In the end, the only public policy document that expired in the observed period (since the preparation of the previous report), while a new one defining objectives and measures has not been adopted yet, is the Strategy on Accommodation Overload Reduction in the Institutes for Execution of Criminal Sanctions in the Republic of Serbia until 2020. Also, the Government of the Republic of Serbia has not yet adopted a new anti-corruption strategy and an action plan for the implementation of this strategy. No progress was made in the reporting period in fight against organised crime. Serbia has not achieved convincing results in terms of effective investigations, prosecutions and final verdicts in cases of serious and organised crime.

The SDG 16 legal framework was established only partially. Although activities on the preparation of regulations continued in 2021, important regulations emphasised in the previous report have not been adopted yet. In accordance with the Action Plan for Chapter 23, the constitutional reform of the judiciary was put on the priority agenda. However, insufficient progress was made in reaching specific solutions in 2021 and constitutional amendments have not been adopted although a consensus was reached that all actors were needed, including the Venice Commission – an expert body of the Council of Europe, which welcomed the initiative to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. Also, activities on the preparation of amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance continued in 2021 in accordance in the Revised Action Plan for Chapter 23. A public debate was organised in the first half of the year, which was followed by the preparation of a re-

port, and a Draft Law was sent to the National Assembly in early October 2021. However, it should be emphasised that the professional public in Serbia expressed concern that the proposed legal solutions reduce the acquired level of the right to access information of public importance.

On the other hand, some important regulations have been adopted. Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination were adopted in 2021 in order to ensure harmonisation with the relevant EU legislation and to ensure further institutional strengthening of protection against discrimination in accordance with the recommendations of the UN bodies for economic, social and cultural rights, as well as for human rights. Also, the LGE was adopted in 2021, which regulates the policy concept, meaning and measures for achieving and improving gender equality, types of planning acts in the field of gender equality and the manner of reporting on their implementation, the institutional framework for achieving gender equality, monitoring the implementation of the law, and other issues relevant for the achievement and promotion of gender equality. Furthermore, amendments to the Law on Prevention of Corruption were adopted in 2021 in order to meet the recommendations of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). The amendments specify the meaning of the term corruption by defining it as a relationship between the use of an official or social position or influence to gain illicit benefit for oneself or another, and it also prescribes additional conditions for the election of the Director of the Anti-Corruption Agency and extends the circle of legal entities that are obliged to report data to the Agency.

Nevertheless, the largest changes in the legal framework include the adoption of the Law on

Ministries at the end of 2020, which has a certain impact on the institutional framework. In terms of competencies in the fields relevant for SDG 16, a key innovation adopted by the Law on Ministries is the establishment of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. This Ministry assumed certain competencies from the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government concerning human and minority rights, as well as from the Ministry of Labour, Education, Veteran and Social Affairs in the field of anti-discrimination policy and gender equality. Finally, with the establishment of the new ministry, the Office for Human and Minority Rights and the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia ceased to operate. The newly established ministry, in addition to the competencies, also took over employees, equipment, funds for work, etc. from the mentioned state bodies. Thus, it may be concluded that there have been no changes in terms of capacities for the execution of responsibilities.

Progress monitoring mechanisms under Goal 16 have slightly changed. SORS monitors and publishes 10 worldwide indicators out of a total of 24. The availability of the worldwide indicators on the portal increased by two in the previous year. In addition to the eight indicators that were previously available, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia also states: the percentage of the population that feels safe to move alone in the vicinity of the place they live in (16.1.4), as well as the indicator for target 16.b which was taken from SDG 10 and refers to the percentage of the population who stated that they felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on any grounds of discrimination that is prohibited according to the international human rights law.

## An overview of progress in relation to the recommendations from the previous report

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Adopt a three-year Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System.		The 2020–2022 Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System was adopted in December 2020.
Adopt a new Public Administration Reform Strategy that defines a comprehensive process of reforming several complex administrative subsystems in order to continue the process after expiry of the Action Plan of the existing Strategy after 2020.		The Public Administration Reform Strategy for the period 2021–2030 was adopted in April 2021.
Adopt a new strategy aimed at combating violence and misconduct at sports events.		Since 2018, when the period of validity of the previous National Strategy for Combating Violence and Misconduct at Sports Events expired, there has been no strategic document in Serbia that specifically addresses this matter.
Adopt a completely new strategy or an action plan for the implementation of the Community Policing Strategy, as this Strategy is not usable since the expiry of the latest action plan.		Since 2016, when the period of validity of the latest Action Plan for the implementation of the Community Policing Strategy, which was adopted in 2013, expired, there has been no strategic document in Serbia that specifically addresses this matter.
Adopt a new strategy aimed at combating corruption, since the existing one expired in 2018.		In September 2021, the Government adopted the Operational Plan for Prevention of Corruption in Special Risk Areas in order to bridge the period until adoption of a new National Anti-Corruption Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
Adopt a new strategy aimed at combating organised crime.		The National Strategy Against Organised Crime was adopted in 2009. The Government then adopted public policy documents related to the investigation of financial crime (2015-2016) and fight against high-tech crime (2019-2023).
The Strategy for Regulatory Reform and Improving Public Policy Management System expires this year; thus, a new strategic document should be prepared.		A Proposal for the Programme for Improving Public Policy Management and Regulatory Reform and the Action Plan for the period 2021-20255 has been prepared. It is expected that it will soon be adopted at a government session.
In order to ensure the rule of law, human rights, independence of the judiciary from political influence and transparent institutions at the highest level, it is necessary to continue with the constitutional reform.		Although constitutional amendments have not been adopted yet, all initiated activities and consultations for amending the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia continued in 2021.
Also, in order to improve the efficiency of court proceedings in line with EU standards and the practice of the European Court of Human Rights, and in order to strengthen independence of judges and prosecutors, a set of judicial laws should be harmonised with the Constitution (laws on the organisation of courts, judges, public prosecution, High Judicial Council, State Prosecution Council, Judicial Academy, etc.).		Harmonisation of judicial laws will be possible only after the adoption of constitutional amendments.
In order to improve the rights of persons in criminal proceedings, it is necessary to amend the Criminal Procedure Code in order to harmonise with many EU directives previously mentioned in the document.		The Criminal Procedure Code was not amended in 2021.
In order to conduct harmonisation with EU law and international standards in the field of corruption prevention, amendments to the Law on Financing Political Activities should increase the level of transparency when financing parties.		Although in 2021 the issue of free elections, electoral conditions and other relevant topics, including the financing of political parties was the focus of an inter-party dialogue in Serbia, mediated by the EU, the Law on Financing Political Activities was not amended until October 2021.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>Complete the process of amending the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, making sure not to reduce the acquired rights to access information of public importance.</p>		<p>The Government approved the Draft Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance and sent it to the National Assembly in early October 2021, but the Law has not been adopted yet.</p>
<p>Adopt a by-law based on the Law on Organisation and Competence of State Authorities in Suppression of Organised Crime, Terrorism and Corruption in order to regulate official communication between the police and the public prosecutor's office in cases of organised crime and corruption.</p>		<p>Article 16 of the Law on Organisation and Competence of State Authorities in Suppression of Organised Crime, Terrorism and Corruption stipulates that time limit, the mode of action and the mode of official communication of the special departments of higher public prosecutor's offices and the organisational unit competent for the suppression of corruption shall be regulated by the act which shall be jointly adopted by the minister competent for judiciary tasks and the minister competent for internal affairs. Although the time limit for adopting this act expired in 2018, it has not been adopted yet.</p>
<p>Adopt amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination in order to fully harmonise with the EU acquis, in particular in terms of the scope of exceptions to the principle of equal treatment, the definition of indirect discrimination and the obligation to provide reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities.</p>		<p>Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination were adopted in 2021. The amendments were initiated, among other things, to harmonise the provisions of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination with Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, and Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. However, the amendments do not adequately regulate indirect discrimination, although the Explanatory Statement of the Law sent by the Government to the National Assembly states that the UN Human Rights Committee pointed to this need in its Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Republic of Serbia on Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 2016 and 2017.</p>
<p>In order to strengthen systemic and institutional mechanisms for responding to all forms of violence against children, it is necessary to make amendments to the Family Law so that it contains an explicit prohibition of corporal punishment.</p>		<p>The Family law was not amended in 2021.</p>

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT	STATUS	COMMENT
<p>In the end, there is a need for additional measures, including the improvement of by-laws, to ensure that children whose parents do not have identity documents are entered at birth at registry books in accordance with Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that children born as stateless in the country have immediate access to citizenship.</p>		<p>The Law on Registry Books, as well as the Instructions on Keeping Registry Books and Forms of Registry Books, were not amended in 2021.</p>
<p>Train public administration employees in adequate application of the provisions of the Law on State Administration and the Law on Planning System related to transparent and inclusive creation of policies and regulations.</p>		<p>In 2021, the National Academy of Public Administration conducted training for civil servants and LGU employees in the field of public policy.</p>
<p>The Anti-Corruption Agency, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and the Commissioner for Information and Personal Data Protection should be involved in the work of the Interdepartmental Working Group for the Implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</p>		<p>The decision on the establishment of the Interdepartmental Working Group for the Implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was not amended in the period until October 2021.</p>
<p>Revise the framework of indicators for monitoring progress towards the achievement of SDG 16 by replacing inadequate indicators or adding new ones to the existing framework, in line with the findings presented in this document.</p>		<p>The SORS added two new indicators under SDG 16, namely the percentage of the population that feels safe to move alone around the place where they live (16.1.4) and the percentage of the population that stated that they felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on any grounds of discrimination prohibited under the law on international human rights (16.b, same as for SDG 10.3)</p>



Adopted;



Partially adopted;



Not adopted

## Recommendations for the upcoming period

No new recommendations have been identified in this reporting period. It is necessary to finish implementation of initiated recommendations in the upcoming period. However, it is also necessary to implement the remaining recommendations stated in the previous report, which are presented in the previous part of this document..

# III

## ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

The following part of the text will provide an overview of the progress of eight priority development units, which contain targets taken from the 2030 Agenda that were nationalised in order to adjust to the development context of Serbia. The targets contain progress monitoring indicators, as well as indicators with values whose achievement would be considered a success. Priority development units, targets and indicators are based on consultations with experts and stakeholders, quantitative analyses, literature review and the use of prioritisation tools.

- » Healthy life and health care for all
- » Dignity for all Serbian citizens
- » Reaching European level of democracy, rule of law and institutional quality
- » Competitive economy and productive job
- » Skills for sustainable and smart development and the future of labour
- » Responsible and efficient use of natural resources
- » Clean and resilient local communities
- » Safeguarding natural and cultural heritage

The chapter for each of the priority areas contains an introduction, progress assessment in terms of indicators set in the period since the publication of the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" and recommendations for the upcoming period.

# Overview of priority development units, targets, indicators and their status

NATIONALISED PRIORITY TARGETS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	STATUS
<b>HEALTHY LIFE AND HEALTH CARE FOR ALL</b>		
Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all (nationalised target 3.8)	Reduce the percentage of the population assessing their health status as poor and very poor from 15.7% to 9%	The percentage of the population assessing their health status as poor or very poor decreased from 15.7% in 2019 to 13.2% in 2020.
	Reduce the percentage of the population reporting unmet need for medical care because it was too expensive, too far away or they were on the waiting list, or could not set aside enough time, from 6.5% to 2.5%	The percentage of the population reporting unmet need for medical care because it was too expensive, too far away or they were on the waiting list, or could not set aside enough time, decreased from 4.8% in 2019 to 3.8% in 2020.
	Reduce the share of private health care expenditures ("out-of-pocket") from 41% to 20%	The share of private health care expenditures was 38.31% in 2018 (data for 2019 and 2020 are not available).
<b>DIGNITY FOR ALL SERBIAN CITIZENS</b>		
Reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions (1.2)	Reduce the number of persons at risk of poverty by minimum 50%	The percentage of people at risk of poverty is 21.7% in 2020 (compared to 26.7% in 2015).
	Increase the share of net income of financial social welfare beneficiaries at-risk of poverty line to 100%	Social assistance for a family of three with one child, or for a family of four with two children is 39.9% of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold in 2021.

NATIONALISED PRIORITY TARGETS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	STATUS
Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable (1.3)	Increase the share of the population covered by the social protection system by 100%	The share of social protection beneficiaries in the total population is 10.2% in 2020 (compared to 9.5% in 2015).
	Reduce the share of informal employment in total employment to 10%	The share of informal employment in total employment is 10.2% in 2020.
End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere (5.1)	Total elimination of gender gap in employment rates from 13.9 percentage points to 0 percentage points	The gender gap in employment rates is 14 percentage points in 2020 (compared to 13.9 in 2019).
Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family (5.4)	Total elimination of gender gap in wages between men and women from 9.6% to 0%	New data not available.
	Reduce the inactivity rate due to dependent care to 6%	The inactivity rate of women due to dependent care and family reasons is 27.2% in 2020 (compared to 27.8% in 2019).
Progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average (10.1)	Reduce the rate of severe material deprivation of the poorest 40% of citizens from 28% to 10%, in line with the European average	In the previous period, the rate of severe material deprivation of the bottom 40% of the population (first and second quintiles) slightly decreased from 29.1% in 2019 to 28.1% in 2020.
	Reduce the percentage of the poorest 40% of citizens assessing their health condition as poor from 17.7% to 10%, in line with the European average.	The percentage of the bottom 40% of the population assessing their health status as poor decreased from 17.8% in 2019 to 16.5% in 2020.

NATIONALISED PRIORITY TARGETS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	STATUS
<b>REACHING EUROPEAN LEVEL OF DEMOCRACY, RULE OF LAW AND QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (SDG 16)	Evaluation of the 2021 Annual Report of the European Commission	Regarding political criteria, it was estimated that Serbia has made limited progress.
	The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)	According to the results of almost all indicators, Serbia regressed to a certain extent in 2020 compared to 2019.
	Freedom House assessment of the status of freedoms and democracy for 2021	Serbia has retained the status of a partially free country with a total score of 64/100 (down from 66/100 compared to 2020), as well as the status of a transitional or hybrid regime with a score of 48/100 (down from 49/100).
	World Justice Project Rule of Law Index	In overall, Serbia's score for 2021 is lower than the previous one (from 0.50 to 0.49), although, in the overall ranking, Serbia advanced by one place (81 <sup>st</sup> out of 139 countries)
	Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2020	Serbia currently ranks 94 <sup>th</sup> due to a slight decline in the overall score from 39 to 38.
<b>COMPETITIVE ECONOMY AND PRODUCTIVE JOB</b>		
Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation (8.3)	Achieve employment rate of 75% (age group 20-64) with a median wage enabling buying an average market basket	The employment rate for the age group 20-64 increased from 63.1% in the second quarter of 2020 to 66% in the same quarter of 2021.

NATIONALISED PRIORITY TARGETS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	STATUS
<p>Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (8.5)</p>	<p>Increase total labour productivity by 50% and increase labour productivity in the manufacturing industry by minimum 50%</p>	<p>Total labour productivity in Serbia in 2020 amounted to RSD 1,410,378 (EUR 11,967), which is a decrease by 1% compared to the previous year. In terms of the manufacturing industry, labour productivity in 2020 amounted to RSD 1,287,264 (EUR 10,922), which is an increase of 0.2% compared to 2019.</p>
	<p>By 2022, reach the share of private investments in GDP of minimum 20%, and public of minimum 5% of GDP</p>	<p>According to the latest available data (2018), public investments amounted to 4.98% of GDP and private investment reached only 12.8% of GDP.</p>
<p>Enhance investments in scientific, research and development, upgrade technological capabilities and encourage investments, particularly in the private sector (9.5)</p>	<p>Double investments in research and development and achieve the level of 1.8% of GDP, of which private sector accounts for 2/3</p>	<p>The share of total expenditures on research and development in GDP was 0.91% in 2020, which represents insignificant increase compared to 2019 (0.89%), but also a decrease compared to 2018 (0.92%). Private investment sectors remained unchanged.</p>
	<p>Achieve real labour productivity growth of 50% and reach the productivity level of 22,500 EUR per employee</p>	<p>In 2020, there was a 1% drop in productivity. It should be borne in mind that the coronavirus pandemic is one of the key causes of a decline in productivity in 2020, which implies that this year is not particularly relevant for the analysis.</p>
	<p>Raise the export share of high-tech products and knowledge-intensive services to 20% of total exports</p>	<p>According to the latest available data, the total export share of high-tech products in total exports of the Republic of Serbia (excluding services) amounted to 1.9% (2018). The export share of high-tech products has been declining since 2012 (2.6%).</p>

NATIONALISED PRIORITY TARGETS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	STATUS
<b>SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND SMART DEVELOPMENT AND THE FUTURE OF LABOUR</b>		
Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes (4.1)	Reduce the share of students failing to achieve basic literacy to 8% in reading, mathematics and science (baseline value 37.7% for reading and science, and 39.7% for mathematics)	New data not available.
Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (4.4)	Increase the parity index for vulnerable students to a value ranging between 0.9 and 1 (baseline value 0.62 for reading and 0.60 for mathematics)	New data not available.
	Reduce the 15–29 youth NEET to 8% (baseline 19%)	The NEET rate is 20% in 2020 (compared to 19% in 2019).
<b>RESPONSIBLE AND EFFICIENT USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES</b>		
Upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes (9.4)	Reduce CO <sub>2</sub> emission per 1 EUR of gross value added (GVA) by 50%, namely reach the level of about 0.6 kg of CO <sub>2</sub> per GVA unit, while at the same time maintaining or increasing the share of the manufacturing industry in GVA	Data on CO <sub>2</sub> emission per unit of value added are not available for the previous year. According to the latest available data, in 2018 there was an increase in CO <sub>2</sub> emission from the fuel combustion process in the manufacturing industry compared to 2017.
	Reduce the share of electricity generated from solid fossil fuels by 20%, namely reach the level of about 50%, which is approximately the current level in North Macedonia and the Czech Republic	The share of solid fossil fuels in electricity generation did not decrease. Moreover, the total share of coal in electricity generation increased by 1.4% in 2020.

NATIONALISED PRIORITY TARGETS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	STATUS
Increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the energy mix (7.2)	Reach the level of 27% of total final energy consumption from renewable sources at the national level	According to the latest published data for 2019 (21.4%), the Republic of Serbia recorded a slight increase compared to data for 2018 (20.3%) in terms of the share of renewable energy in total final consumption.
	Reach the level of 10% of total final energy consumption from renewable sources in the transport sector at the national level	In 2019, the share of renewable energy in total final consumption in the transport sector was 1.14%, which is the lowest value since 2010.
Double energy efficiency (7.3)	Significantly reduce the level of final energy consumption at the national level	According to the latest data from 2019, the amount of final energy consumption for 2019 was 8.36 Mtoe (compared to 8.08 in 2015).
	Achieve the energy intensity level of 5 MJ/USD	Country's energy intensity decreased from 6.2 MJ/USD in 2010 to 5.3 MJ/USD in 2018
Achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources (12.2)	Achieve resource productivity with a target value of 0.7 EUR/kg by 2030	New data not available.
<b>CLEAN AND RESILIENT LOCAL COMMUNITIES</b>		
By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all (6.1)	Percentage of the population using drinking water from adequately managed public systems (from the public water supply system) should be 100%	The percentage of the population connected to public water supply systems was 86.7% of households in 2020 (compared to 85.6% in 2019).
	Adequate water supply – the percentage of adequacy of drinking water samples in national monitoring should be 100%	In 2020, drinking water was physically and chemically adequate 83.5% (81.9% in 2019), and microbiologically 94.6% (93.7% in 2019).

NATIONALISED PRIORITY TARGETS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	STATUS
<p>Improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally (6.3)</p>	<p>Increase the percentage of treated wastewater</p>	<p>According to data from 2020, 18.1% of wastewater was treated (in 2019, 15.6% of municipal wastewater was treated).</p>
	<p>Percentage of water bodies with good quality status should be 100% of identified water bodies at national level that reach good environmental status, in accordance with the provisions of the EU Water Framework Directive</p>	<p>New data not available.</p>
<p>Reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management (11.6)</p>	<p>By 2024, reach 100% coverage of the RS population with municipal waste collection services (in accordance with the Draft Waste Management Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2019-2024)</p>	<p>The coverage of the RS population with municipal waste collection services remained at approximately the same level as in 2020 (86.4%) compared to 2019 (86.2%), and at a lower level compared to 2018 (87.2%).</p>
	<p>Reduce PM2.5 emission by 22% by 2030 in line with Directive 2016/2284/EU (NEC Directive)</p>	<p>There are no data on reduced PM2.5 emission in the Republic of Serbia in the previous year.</p>
<p>Substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse (12.5)</p>	<p>By 2029, achieve the packaging waste recycling/reuse level of 53%</p>	<p>The amount of recycled waste in 2020 was 343,000 tons of recycled material, which is an increase compared to the previous year (334,000).</p>
<p>Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters (13.1)</p>	<p>Reduce the number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population</p>	<p>The number of people directly affected by disasters per 100,000 inhabitants in 2016 was 677, whereas in 2019 it was 23.</p>
	<p>By the end of 2030, all local self-governments have adopted and implemented disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies</p>	<p>New data not available.</p>

NATIONALISED PRIORITY TARGETS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	STATUS
<b>SAFEGUARDING NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE</b>		
Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage (11.4)	Increase the area under one form of nature conservation regime to 20% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia	In the previous period, there was no increase of the area under one of the forms of natural area protection, thus, there is still 7.66% of the territory of Serbia under protection.
	Ensure conditions for including at least one more site from the proposed (tentative) national list to the UNESCO list	No site in Serbia was included on the UNESCO list in the previous year, thus, there are still five of them. There are still 11 sites on the proposed (tentative) national list.
Take urgent and significant actions to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity (15.5)	Protected areas managed according to the Law on Nature Conservation account for minimum 20% of the total territory of the Republic of Serbia	No significant progress has been made in the previous period in increasing protected areas, which make 7.66% of the total area.
	All protected areas in Serbia correspond to the IUCN classification of protected areas, in line with their ranking	Amendments to the Law on Nature Conservation did not include provisions on the categorisation of protected areas.

# Priority area 1: HEALTHY LIFE AND HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

It is necessary to significantly strengthen the general capacity of the health care system, thus, it is crucial in the upcoming period to adopt public policy documents and regulations in order to achieve universal health coverage, access to

quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all, in accordance with target 3.8.

## **Nationalised target 3.8: Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all**

The essential health care coverage of the population in Serbia is relatively high (97.2% in 2016). However, poverty, distance from health care institutions, infrastructural inaccessibility and the inadequate quality of health services prevent a significant number of citizens from exercising their right to health care.

The capacities of the health system and access to health services were additionally endangered during and after the long-lasting COVID-19 pandemic, because large resources (human, physical and other) were allocated to fight with this illness. The regularity of preventive examinations has been reduced and it is not uncommon for the population to be deprived of health services, including emergency medical interventions, due to entry of certain health care institutions into the covid system or due to the unavailability of doctors who have been re-allocated to help fight the infection.

Target 3.8 is covered by various planning documents and the legal framework. Compared to other SDG 3 targets, it is most often mentioned in newly adopted planning documents and laws (ERP for the period 2021–2023, GES for the period 2021–2030, the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2024; LGE). However, the recommendations provided in the report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda" and report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" related to target 3.8 have not been adopted.

In order to achieve nationalised target 3.8, it is very important to know the consequences of the developed and newly adopted strategic-legal and institutional framework when it comes to the actual access to and quality of services, or satisfaction of health care beneficiaries.

## Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving target 3.8 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

- I. Reduce the percentage of the population assessing their health status as poor and very poor from 15,7% to 9,9%;
- II. Reduce the percentage of the population reporting unmet needs for medical care because it was too expensive, too far away or they were on the waiting list, or could not set aside enough time, from 6,5% to 2,5%;
- III. Reduce the share of private health expenditures ("out-of-pocket") from 41% to 20%.

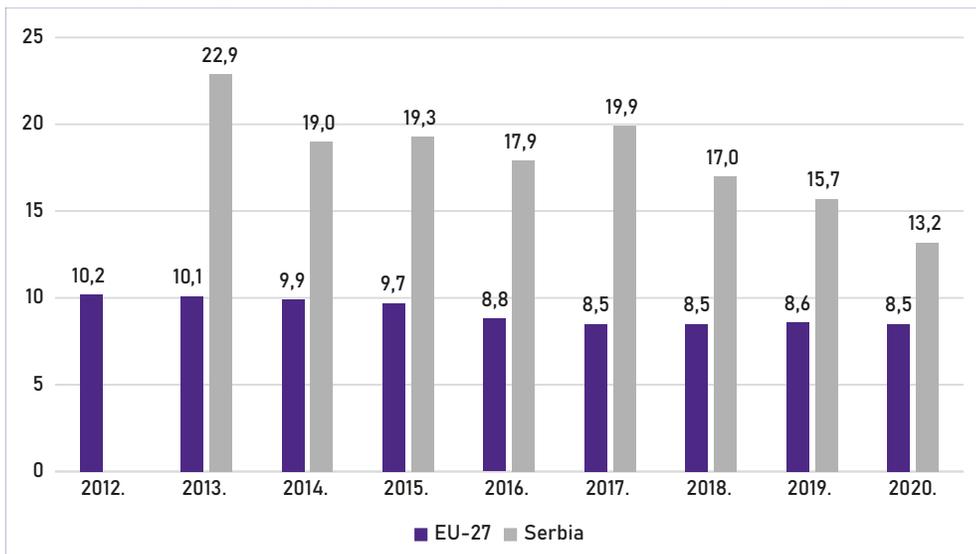
They represent measures of success, which are also specific results that would be achieved by

2030 if Serbia implemented necessary reforms. The following text provides an overview of the indicators, taking into account the latest data.

### I. A decrease may be noticed in the percentage of the population assessing their health status as poor and very poor.

The specific indicator may be directly linked to the quality of life of the population of one state. It is considered that, the larger the number of people who believe that their health is poor or extremely poor, the worse and more inadequate access to health services there is in one state. What should be taken into account here is insufficiently available health prevention, or unhealthy habits of the population in terms of vital life activities (diet, sports, use of alcohol and narcotics, daily exposure to stress, etc.).

**Chart 1** The percentage of the population assessing their health status as poor or very poor



Source: Eurostat

In the period from 2013 to 2020, based on the Eurostat database, it may be concluded that the percentage of the population assessing their health status as poor or very poor is continuo-

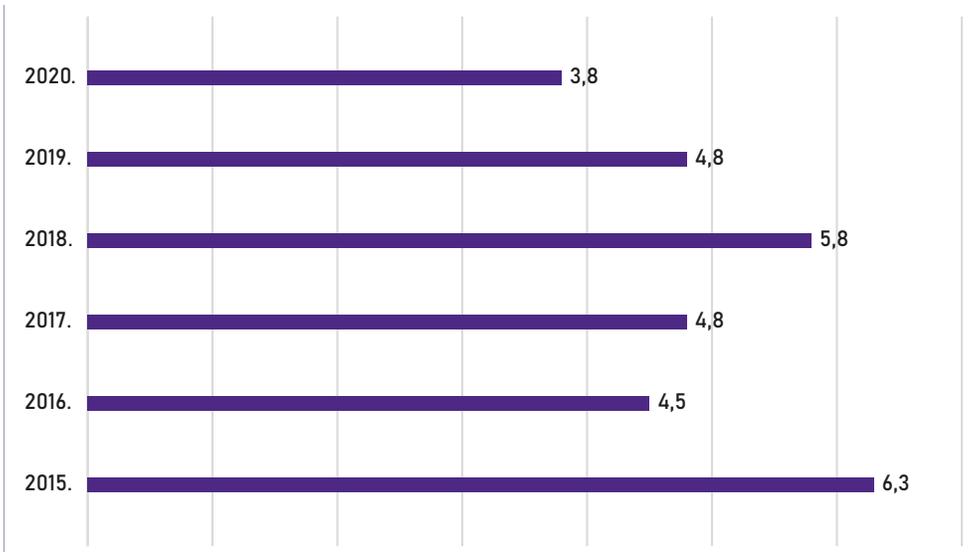
ously decreasing (from 22,9% in 2013 to 13,2% in 2020). The percentage is still significantly higher than the EU-27 average, even though the gap is gradually reducing. The reduction was noticed

in 2020, although this year was the year of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when essential health services became significantly less accessible due to the mobilisation of physical capacities and human resources in health care for the purpose of dealing with the consequences of and combating the infectious disease. Further monitoring of this indicator for nationalised target 3.8 is extremely important for the assessment of the health prevention quality and the availability and adequacy of health conditions, which directly affects living conditions and life expectancy of the population.

**II. A decrease may be noticed in the percentage of the population reporting unmet needs for medical care because it was too expensive, too far away or they were on the waiting list or could not set aside enough time.**

According to Eurostat, the percentage of the population reporting unmet needs for medical care due to the stated reasons amounted to 3,8% in 2020. Based on the data from the observed period, it may be concluded that the percentage of the population dissatisfied with inadequate access to health services is approaching the target value of 2,5%. It is necessary to monitor data in the upcoming period to see whether the overload of the health system due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected the value of this indicator in 2021 and in subsequent years.

**Chart 2** The percentage of the population reporting unmet needs for medical care in Serbia



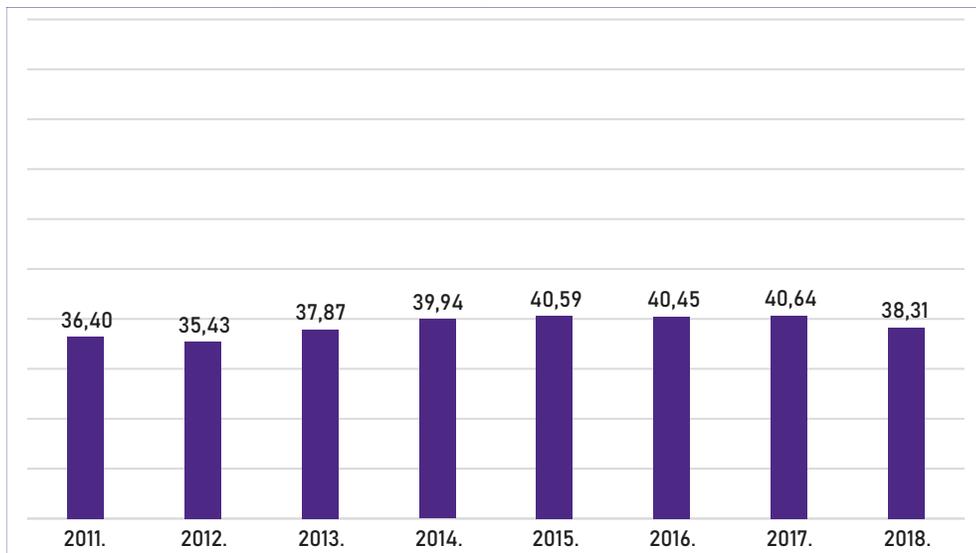
Source: Eurostat

### III. Private health care expenditures did not decrease.

Having in mind the high percentage of essential health care coverage of the population, the "out-of-pocket" allocation of funds for health care shows that the health system does not adequately meet the needs of its beneficiaries. The willingness of citizens to pay extra for the services that are already covered by health

insurance indicates insufficient access to and obstacles in using specific services. According to the World Bank data, the world average value of this indicator is 18.12% in 2018, whereas in Serbia, it is two times or more higher in the observed period. This percentage may be affected by the percentage of health care coverage of the population, which varies from country to country and is extremely high in Serbia.

**Chart 3** The percentage of private health care expenditures in Serbia



Source: World Bank

Based on the available data, there is no indication of a declining trend in private health care expenditures. Although data for 2019 and 2020 are unavailable, there is an assumption that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the overload of the health system in Serbia, these expenditures significantly increased in 2020 and 2021. For this reason, it is important to say that this indicator will

be monitored in the future and that additional investment in access to public health services and general capacities of the health system will contribute to reduced out-of-pocket health care expenditures. This would point to the improved access to health services for all, which is in accordance with the basic concepts of the 2030 Agenda.

## Conclusion

If we look at the values of indicators for nationalised target 3.8, the situation in the health care sector is still significantly worse than in the EU countries. However, general conclusions are mixed. The value of the first indicator shows a decreasing trend, the value of the second indicator shows an improvement, whereas the value of the third indicator for nationalised target 3.8 is relatively stable.

Specific indicators indicate the quality and general access to health services through perceived health condition of the population, obstacles to the use of health services and private health care expenditures. The basic approach in modern health systems is the patient in the centre of attention, therefore, we should continue monitoring

these indicators as basic indicators of universal access to health services in Serbian society.

Investment in the Serbian health system needs to be further improved, particularly in terms of hiring an additional number of doctors, nurses and midwives. It is also important to invest in modern medical devices and equipment so that the waiting lists for diagnostic examinations would not be long. That way, citizens could use already paid public health services. Access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all is also an area that needs to be further invested in at the national level, to reduce payments by the population (especially floors) for necessary medicines and preventive protection.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 3.8:

- » Adopt a new Employment and Social Reform Programme, in which one of the objectives will be to increase access to health care;
- » Revise the Public Health Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2018–2026 in order to envisage introduction of universal health care coverage, access to quality essential health care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all;
- » Adopt amendments to the Law on Health Care in order to regulate the position of health mediators as employees in the health system;
- » Allocate funds in the RS budget for the employment of an additional number of doctors, nurses and midwives;
- » Adopt the Medical Staff Development Plan, introduce the centralised health information and communication system, educate managers in health institutions in human resource management and crisis management skills;
- » Build additional research capacities to monitor the second indicator in national statistics (percentage of the population that did not meet their health care needs because it was too expensive, too far away or they were on the waiting list or could not set aside enough time).

The recommendations largely coincide with the recommendations of the previous report, bearing in mind that they are still relevant and that none of them has been adopted so far.

## Priority area 2: DIGNITY FOR ALL SERBIAN CITIZENS

The Resolution of the UN General Assembly, adopted in September 2015, on passing the 2030 Agenda, contains a promise of the UN member states that no one will be left behind in reaching the goals of the 2030 Agenda (*Leave no one behind* concept). For this reason, it is extremely important to implement public policy measures that contribute to the reduction of the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions

(target 1.2), implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors (target 1.3), end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere and recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work (targets 5.1 and 5.4) and progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average (target 10.1).

### Nationalised target 1.2: By the end of 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions (according to national poverty definitions)

Serbia is at the very bottom of the list of European countries in terms of the number of the poor and the at-risk-of-poverty rate, which was relatively stable over the past few years. The at-risk-of-poverty rate amounted to 21.7% in 2020, which is 1.5 percentage points lower than in 2018 and 2019. The at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rate was also lower than in the previous period at 29.8% in 2020 (31.7% in 2019). Despite the seemingly improved situation, the consequences of COVID-19 intensively affected economically and socially most vulnerable people, whereas some segments of the poor were brought to the verge of starvation.

Insufficient and declining allocation of funds from the budget for the social protection policy, limited number of employees at social protection institutions, insufficient coverage of beneficiaries and poor focus of social assistance on the most vulnerable groups of the population are some of the main challenges that Serbia is facing today. The insufficient amount of social assistance for

getting out of the poverty zone should also be mentioned, as well as the multiple vulnerability of certain segments of the population such as: children, Roma women, the elderly (especially women), persons with disabilities and the unemployed.

The conclusions of the report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda" point to significant problems in the field of strategic and legal framework, challenges in the field of institutional framework for achieving target 1.2, as well as insufficient adequate monitoring of and reporting on the level of poverty in Serbia. Special problems are: the lack of a new Employment and Social Reform Programme, lack of the Poverty Reduction Strategy in the Republic of Serbia, inadequacy of certain measures within the Law on Social Protection related to social assistance restrictions, and insufficient allocations from the budget of the Republic of Serbia (both for social assistance beneficiaries

and for the employment of new employees at social welfare institutions).

Considering the pronounced multidimensional aspect of the problem and consequences of

poverty, significant improvement of inter-ministerial cooperation of state bodies, as well as state cooperation with the civil sector, is considered to be crucial for progress in reducing poverty in Serbia and achieving target 1.2.

## Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving target 1.2 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

- I. Reduce the number of people at risk of poverty by minimum 50%;
- II. Increase the share of net income of financial social assistance beneficiaries at the risk of poverty to 100%.

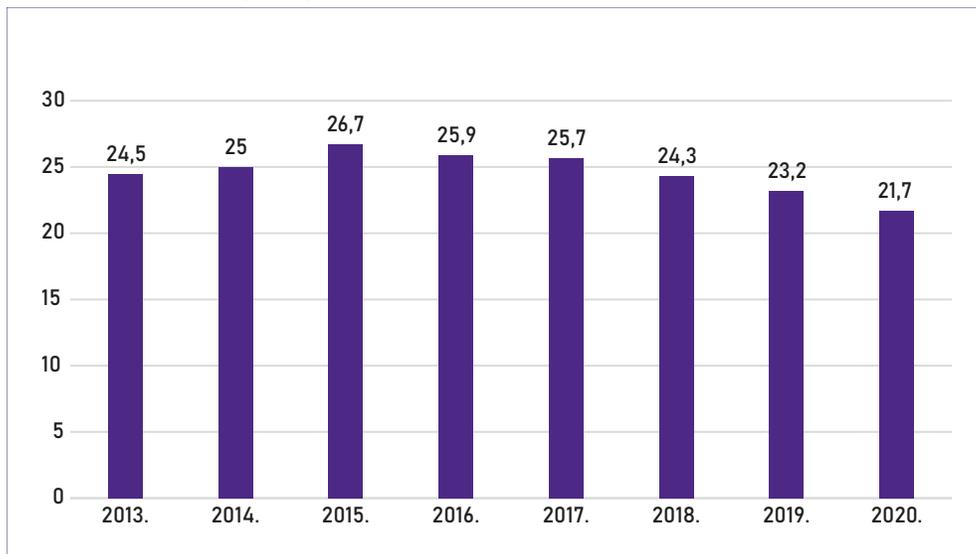
They represent measures of success, which are also specific results that would be achieved by 2030 if Serbia implemented necessary reforms.

The following text provides an overview of the indicators, taking into account the latest data.

### **I. Relative progress has been made in the previous period in terms of reducing the number of people living at risk of poverty.**

According to the poverty risk rate, Serbia is at the very bottom of the list of European countries with 23.2% in 2019. Although 2020 data show a relative reduction of the at-risk-of-poverty rate (21.7%, SORS) (Chart 4), the ESRP target for 2020 is 18%, which makes a significant difference.

**Chart 4** The at-risk-of-poverty rate in Serbia



Source: SORS

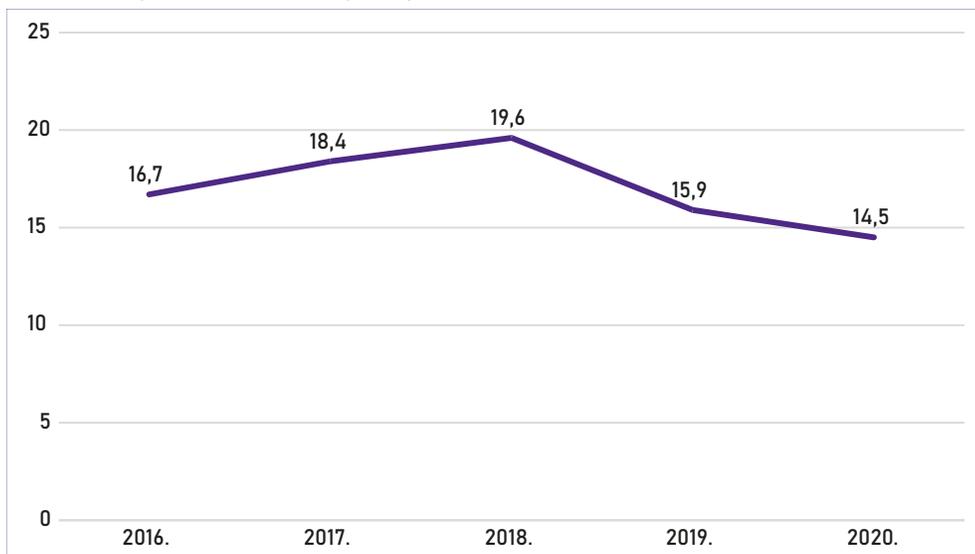
According to the SORS report, mostly people under the age of 18 (24.2%), as well as people aged 18 to 24 (23.6%) are affected by the risk

of poverty in 2020, which shows the extreme economic and social vulnerability of children and young people in Serbia. Families with three or

more children (37.2%) and households with one person over 65 (37.1%) are also at special risk. A total of 7.8% of employees are at risk of poverty in 2020, which represents a decrease compared

to 2019 (9.2%, Eurostat). The persistent at-risk-of-poverty rate was also in decline in the last two years (Chart 5).

**Chart 5** The persistent at-risk-of-poverty rate



Source: SORS

However, 7.3% or about half a million citizens of Serbia live in absolute poverty (with less than RSD 12,286 per month). Twice a smaller percentage of citizens receive social assistance (3.7%). The Draft Social Protection Strategy envisages that, by the end of 2025, the number of men, women and children living in poverty will be reduced by 25%. The strategy envisages a 25% increase in public expenditures on social protection services under the responsibility of LGUs and for the reduction of social exclusion. Having in mind that the Social Protection Strategy has been in the drafting phase for more than two years, there is no argument that conclusions on future progress can be drawn from this document.

## **II. No progress has been made in increasing the share of net income of financial social assistance beneficiaries at the risk of poverty.**

According to the latest data, the poverty risk threshold for a one-member household is RSD 22,000, for a family with one child under 14 it is RSD 39,600, and the poverty risk threshold for a family of four with two children is RSD 46,200 (SORS, 2020). The social assistance beneficiary in 2021 receives RSD 8,781, while the financial assistance for each next adult person in the family is RSD 4,391 and for children RSD 2,634. Social assistance for a family of three with one child, or a family of four with two children is only 39.9% of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is extremely far from the set objective and represents a deterioration compared to the previous period.

It can be concluded that this aspect of the nationalised target does not show progress and that obtaining social assistance does not help citizens break the "vicious circle" of poverty. Given the low

coverage and low amount of social assistance, 25% growth of public expenditures on social protection services will not be enough to reach nationalised target 1.2.

## Conclusion

Some progress has been made in the previous period in achieving target 1.2, primarily in terms of statistics (at-risk-of-poverty rate, permanent at-risk-of-poverty rate and at-risk-of-poverty rate for employees). However, about half a million citizens of Serbia currently live in absolute poverty and twice less than this number uses social assistance. The amount of social assistance is still far below the risk-of-poverty threshold. There is no officially adopted planning document that

guarantees an increase in social benefits in the upcoming period.

Recommendations are aimed at adopting planning documents that will comprehensively strive to eradicate poverty in Serbia. Special attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups of the population, which include: children and young people up to 24 years of age, Roma women, persons with disabilities (primarily women), the unemployed and the elderly without a pension.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 1.2:

- » Adopt a new ESRP that will include the target value of the indicator that refers to the double reduction of the number of persons in any form of poverty;
- » Adopt the Poverty Reduction Strategy that will be aimed at reducing the absolute poverty rate (with defining baseline and target values for 2030);
- » Revise the ERP that will envisage additional funds for enhancing social protection;
- » Adopt the Social Protection Strategy that will include the target values of nationalised target 1.2, or that will at least reduce by half the number of men, women and children of all ages living in any form of poverty (according to national definitions of poverty);
- » The SORS should annually monitor the indicator of the number of persons living in absolute poverty or the absolute poverty rate in the field Income and Living Conditions;
- » Create an indicator of the ratio between the amount of social assistance and the at-risk-of-poverty threshold and monitor it on an annual basis.

## Nationalised target 1.3: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

In the context of access to social protection, it is pointed out that only 3.7% of the population in Serbia are social assistance beneficiaries, whereas twice as many people live in absolute poverty unable to meet their basic needs (7.3%, or about half a million people). In addition to the limited number of social assistance beneficiaries, the amount of these social benefits is also insufficient. In situations where social assistance is the only source of income in the family, it is still 40% lower than the level of income that is the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Youth, Roma women, persons with disabilities, the elderly and the unemployed are particularly at risk.

If public expenditures on social protection are viewed as a GDP share, a steady decline in the allocation of funds for these purposes may be noticed in Serbia in the last decade. In 2021, envisaged allocation of funds in the budget of the Republic of Serbia for social protection makes 23.92% of GDP, which is significantly more than in 2018, when the rate was 19.4% of GDP, although the value is significantly below the EU-27 average, which in 2019 amounted to 26.9%. According to Eurostat assessments, these allocations of funds increased between 4 and 28 percentage points in 2020 (depending on the EU member

state) due to remediation of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social assistance in Serbia is obtained by half the number of people living in absolute poverty (3.7% compared to 7.3%). Particularly important problems are: lack of the focused strategic framework for combating poverty, lack of human resources in the social protection system, insufficient involvement of the poor and the vulnerable in social protection programmes and potentially inadequate targeting of socially and economically most vulnerable persons in Serbia.

The state at this moment primarily invests in the development of software solutions and databases that will enable creation of social cards. The use of information technologies should increase the coverage of social assistance beneficiaries and direct funds to the most vulnerable. The most relevant here is the Law on Social Cards and the ERP for the period 2021–2023. Having in mind that no additional funds were allocated for social protection and strengthening human resources and other capacities of the institutions dealing with these issues, no significant results can be expected in this field without specific activities in the development of the strategic framework, additional investments and operational activities.

### Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving target 1.3 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

- » Increase the share of the population covered by the social protection system by 100%;
- » Reduce the share of informal employment in total employment to 10%.

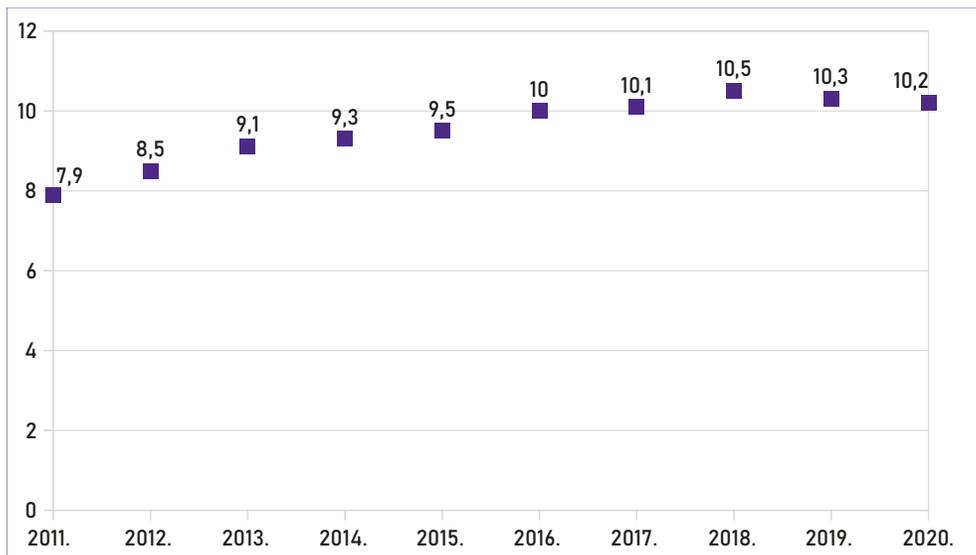
#### **I. There has been no increase in the share of the population covered by the social protection system in the previous period.**

The share of social protection beneficiaries in the total population has been relatively stable in the period from 2016 and amounts to about 10 percentage. Having in mind that with the indicator for nationalised target 1.3 this number is

expected to double, it is necessary to substantially increase investments in the social protection policy in Serbia. Current investments in the digital infrastructure and social cards development can improve the targeting of the most vulne-

rable population, however, they cannot affect the growth of the number of social protection beneficiaries unless budget allocations in this field significantly increase.

**Chart 6** The share of social protection beneficiaries in the total population in Serbia



Source: SORS

One should have in mind that the growth of the number of social protection beneficiaries should inevitably be accompanied by an increased number of employees at social protection institutions. Thus, assuming that the amount of social assistance will not increase in the upcoming period, it is necessary to almost double budget allocations for social protection. This would be possible with the development of a clear redistributive function of the economic, and especially fiscal policy in Serbia, which would collect additional budgetary resources for helping the most vulnerable.

## **II. The share of informal employment in Serbia has sharply reduced as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

According to the results of the Labour Force Survey, the informal employment rate in Serbia

was 18.7% in 2019. Having in mind the new methodology that has been used since 2020 (i.e., since the report published in 2021), the data for 2020 are not comparable. However, as a consequence of extreme economic instability and the crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the informal employment rate was officially reduced to 10.2% (by about 68,000 employees in the informal sector), which is close to the target value, however, it does not show a real improvement of the indicator. Due to the value chain disruption and the current liquidity crisis, employers first laid off informally employed workers, which particularly emphasises the economic and social vulnerability of this group of employed persons.

The previously long-term stable trend of the high level of employment in the informal sector shows that this rate could increase drastically once the economic consequences of the COVID-19

pandemic have been mitigated. Amendments to the Labour Law, which would contain formal employment incentives, as well as tighter inspections, could help prevent this rate from rising again. Special attention should be paid to the sectors with the highest informal employment rate (agriculture and construction). The target

number of informally employed persons in 2026 amounts to 398.033 in the text of the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021–2026, which is significantly above the value envisaged by nationalised target 1.3. In this sense, target values of the indicators stated in the text of the Employment Strategy should be revised.

## Conclusion

No significant progress has been made in the previous reporting period in terms of achieving target 1.3. Based on the strategic and legal framework adopted in the previous period (Law on Social Cards and ERP 2021–2023), there is a tendency to contribute to the improvement of the coverage of the poor with social benefits by digitalising the database of potential and current social assistance beneficiaries. However, without significant budget expenditure on social assistance and employment of civil servants, who would provide assistance to the economically and socially most vulnerable, there is no sustainable prospect of reducing poverty in Serbia.

The very fact that there is no valid ESRP currently, that is, a poverty reduction strategy, brings us to the conclusion that there are no determi-

ned efforts to address this challenge. Current activities of decision-makers in Serbia directed towards achieving SDG 3, specifically target 1.3, are not in line with the basic principles of the 2030 Agenda ("respect for human rights" and "leave no one behind").

In order to improve the position of the vulnerable segments of the population in Serbia, it is necessary to take urgent actions in improving the strategic and legal framework, which refer to adopting new strategic documents and making changes to the existing ones. It is necessary to establish inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral cooperation in order to create space for a dialogue and the smooth flow of information on the opinions of the public and experts, or on the needs of the most vulnerable.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 1.3:

- » Adopt a new ESRP that will include the target value of the indicator that refers to the increased coverage of social assistance beneficiaries in line with target 1.3;
- » Adopt a Poverty Reduction Strategy that will be aimed at promoting the national social protection system and specific indicators (with defining baseline and target values for 2030);
- » Amend the Law on Social Protection to eliminate restrictive conditions, which would increase the number of social assistance beneficiaries;
- » Revise the target value of the number of the informally employed in the Employment Strategy in order to harmonise it with the target value of nationalised target 1.3;

- » Ensure funds in the budget of the Republic of Serbia for executing measures envisaged by the ESRP that refer to the increased adequacy of financial and social assistance, and for employing additional employees in social protection institutions and institutes at the national, provincial and local level;
- » Develop and strengthen the redistributive function of the economic and fiscal policy through specific measures covered by relevant documents (ERP, Fiscal Strategy and the Law on Budget of the Republic of Serbia).

## Nationalised target 5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

## Nationalised target 5.4 Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family

A precondition for achieving sustainable development in Serbia is the achievement of full gender equality, since the causes and main drivers of sustainable development and gender equality are interlinked. Elimination of all forms of discrimination (target 5.1) and valuing unpaid work and care (target 5.4) would contribute to the self-development of women and men in accordance with their overall potential, and thus their well-being and the quality of life. The achievement of these targets would have a significant impact on the position of marginalised and multiply discriminated groups of women and girls (persons with disabilities, Roma women, younger and elderly women, women in rural areas, etc.).

The values of the latest Gender Equality Index show that Serbia is seriously lagging behind most European countries. The empowerment of women and the achievement of gender equality depend on balanced participation of men and women in the labour market and care economy. Therefore, the immediate social and economic goal both for an individual and society as a whole is to eliminate differences in employment of men and women and valuing their work, while at the same time reaching productive and decent employment both for men and women.

## Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving targets 5.1 and 5.4 in 2030 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

I. Total elimination of gender gap in employment rates from 13.9% to 0%;

II. Total elimination of gender gap in wages between men and women from 9.6% to 0%;

III. Reduce the inactivity rate due to dependent care to 6%.

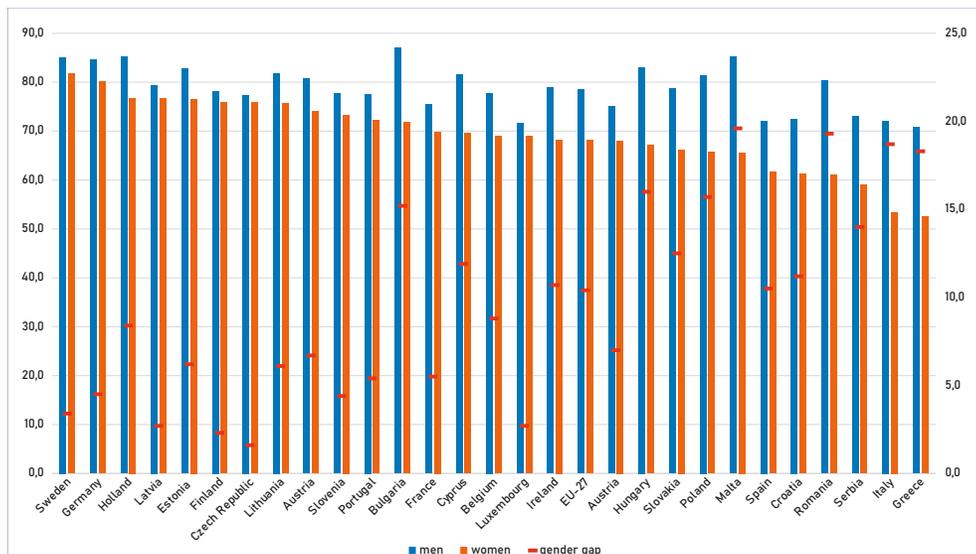
The following text provides an overview of stated indicators, taking into account the latest data.

**I. There was no reduction in gender gap in employment rates in 2020 compared to 2019. Rather, it remained at the same level as in 2019 (14 and 13.9 percentage points, respectively).**

Compared to EU countries (Chart 7), Serbia maintains the same position as in the previous

year: greater gender gap is registered in seven countries (Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Italy, Greece and Malta). Compared to the EU countries, lower employment rates for men in 2020 were registered in Italy, Croatia, Spain and Greece, and lower employment rates for women only in Greece and Italy.

**Chart 7** Employment rates for men and women aged 20–64 and employment gender gap in 2020



Source: Eurostat, author's presentation

**II. Progress in the reduction of the gender gap in wages between men and women cannot be estimated,**

as the data source is the Wage Structure Survey, which was conducted in 2018, and which is conducted every four years.

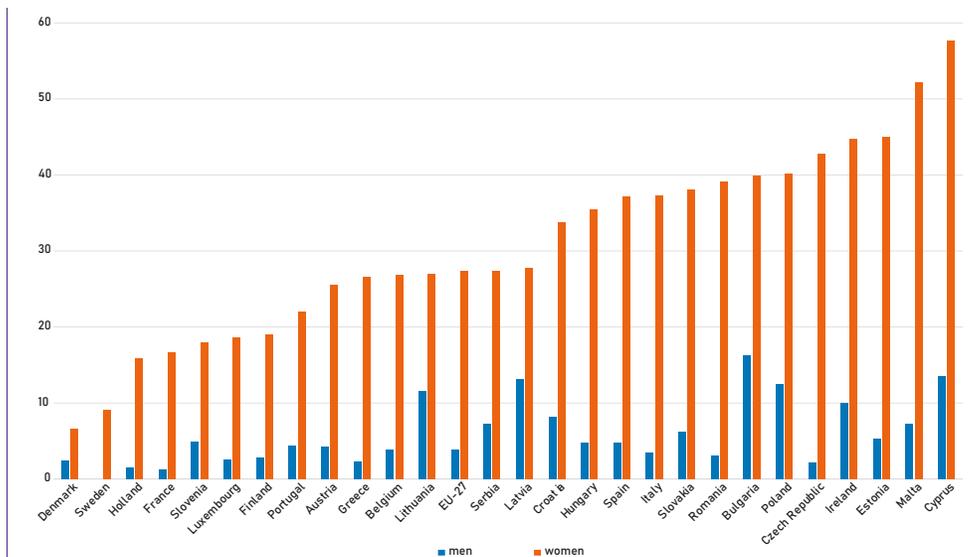
**III. Reasons for absence from the labour market in 2020 did not change, compared to 2019.**

The main reason for staying out of labour force among women in the age group 20–64 was care for people with disabilities and children/family and personal reasons (27.2%), whereas the largest

number of men stated their own illness or disability as the reason (25.9%). In Serbia, 7.3% of men are inactive due to dependent care or for family reasons, which is a decrease of 1.2 percentage points compared to the previous year.

A study of the economic value of unpaid care work in Serbia (UN Women, 2020) showed that unpaid care work amounted to 21.5% of Serbia's GDP if the monetary value were awarded for work hours, i.e., EUR 9.2 billion. The value of unpaid care work performed by women makes 14.9% of GDP, i.e., EUR 6.4 billion, whereas men's contribution makes 6.6% of GDP, i.e., EUR 2.8 billion.

**Chart 8** Inactivity rates due to dependent care and for family reasons of the population aged 20–64 (as % of the population that stays out of labour force) per gender in 2020



Source: Eurostat, author's presentation

In terms of harmonisation of legislation in the field of discrimination prevention and gender equality with international standards for equality and non-discrimination and the EU *acquis* under negotiating chapters 19 and 23, changes took place in 2021. The LGE and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination were adopted.

The Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2021–2030 was adopted in October. In the new strategic document, target values of the indicators of the overall objective and special objectives for 2030 expressed through the values of the Gender Equality Index (total and per domains) are far below the values that would indicate the end of all forms of discrimination. Although the evaluation of the previous strategy (Babović and Vuković, 2021) provided clear recommendations for discrimination elimination (e.g. measures for monitoring and sanctioning discrimination in job advertisements; more effective measures for submitting appeals for discrimination in the selection and employment process which will

protect the women who submitted them; more effective inspection that will solve problems of informal employment and violation of social rights based on work and at work) and redistribution of unpaid work (e.g. introduce a national satellite account that will follow the economic value added by unpaid domestic work or introduction of stronger provisions in laws, such as non-transferable leave for fathers in the first months after the birth of a child), they have not found a place in the new strategy.

New sectoral policies also do not support the achievement of target values set for the two priority objectives in the field of gender equality. Thus, the Employment Strategy for the period 2021–2026 envisages an increase in gender gap in employment and activity rates (Bradaš, 2021). The Education Strategy in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 sets the target value for covering children from six months to three years with the pre-school education in 2030 at only 38%, while the planned coverage of children aged three to five and a half is 67%.

## Conclusion

The values of indicators that refer to the share of men and women in the labour market and care economy in 2020 point to the maintenance of gender inequalities compared to the previous reporting period. If this trend continues, Serbia will not achieve its target values for targets 5.1 and 5.4 by 2030.

Adoption of the LGE represents harmonisation with international equality standards. On the other hand, the Gender Equality Strategy sets target values far below the value that would indicate the end of discrimination in 2030.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 5.1 and target 5.4:

- » Ensure implementation of the LGE in practice through: urgent adoption of by-laws; adoption of decisions on gender equality mechanisms, manner of their selection, competencies, manner of work and manner of coordination of activities and election of members of these bodies; ensuring human and financial resources for the functioning of gender equality mechanisms in their full capacity; harmonisation of regulations and accompanying acts with the LGE; organising training for all those who participate in the implementation of the LGE;
- » Conduct an audit of the Gender Equality Strategy in terms of target values that need to be adjusted to the values set in the 2030 Agenda for gender equality; redesign existing and introduce new measures for establishing a clear cause-and-effect relationship between measures and specific objectives.

## Nationalised target 10.1: By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average

According to all inequality indicators, Serbia is one of the countries with the greatest social disparities in Europe. When it comes to income inequality, despite recent improvements, the Gini coefficient<sup>34</sup> for Serbia was 33.3 points in 2019, which is one of the highest in Europe (the EU average was 30.2 points) (Medić and Anić, 2021). In addition, on the labour market, which

is often identified as the most important<sup>35</sup> indicator of inequality, Serbia is seriously lagging behind the EU countries. The labour market in Serbia is also characterised by extremely large regional differences, considering the extremely large differences in average net wages between municipalities with the highest and lowest wage. Finally, Serbia is also a "champion" in terms of

34 The Gini coefficient measures inequality in the total population of a country. In theory, it may range between 0 (perfect equality) and 100 (when one citizen receives the entire income). In practice, the Gini coefficient mostly ranges between 20 (e.g. the socialist economy during the 1980s) and 60 (underdeveloped African countries) (Medić and Anić, 2021).

35 First of all, because outcomes and indicators on the labour market such as employment, unemployment, activity, inactivity and wage distribution are directly related to the levels of inequality in society (Medić and Anić, 2021).

inequalities in access to health and education (Ibid, 2021).

No significant progress has been made in terms of the indicators for achieving target 10.1. First of all, there was only a slight decrease in the rate of severe material deprivation of the bottom 40% of the population, as well as the percentage of

the bottom 40% of the population assessing their health as poor. In addition, the most important strategic and planning documents in this field have not been adopted, and new legislative acts have only partially affected the future reduction of inequalities in the financial status and access to health care.

## Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving target 10.1 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

- I. Reduced rate of severe material deprivation of the bottom 40% of the population from 28% to 10%, in line with the European average;<sup>36</sup>
- II. Reduced percentage of the bottom 40% of the population assessing their health status as poor from 17.7% to 10%, in line with the European average.

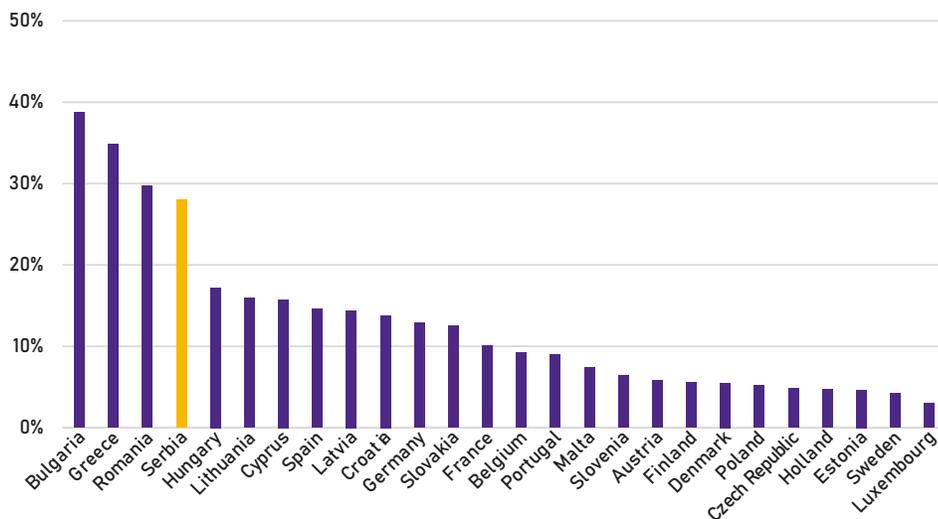
### **I. In the previous period, there was only a slight decrease in the rate of severe material deprivation<sup>37</sup> of the bottom 40% of the population (first and second quintiles) from 29.1% in 2019 to 28.1% in 2020 (Eurostat).**

This is unexpected considering that 2020 was marked with the crisis caused by the COVID-19

pandemic which, as a rule, would have a negative impact on the poor, and thus on the level of equality in society. On the other hand, if we look at the data for other European countries, according to the same source, we can see that in almost all countries, the rate of severe material deprivation for the first two quintiles dropped. It should also be noted that Serbia's neighbouring country Croatia has more than twice less (13.8%) the percentage of people (within bottom 40%) who cannot meet their basic needs. Furthermore, if we analyse the data for Serbia for only the first quintile, i.e., the bottom 10% of the population, we can see that the rate of severe material deprivation increased slightly (by 0.6 percentage points), which means that the crisis hit the poorest population the most.

36 A correction was made to this indicator in the Eurostat data since there is a difference of 1 p.p. for this indicator compared to more recent data.

37 The severe material deprivation rate, as defined by Eurostat, is the rate of people who are unable to afford at least four of the following nine things: 1) a meal with meat or fish every second day (or their vegetarian substitute); 2) unexpected financial cost; 3) a one-week holiday away from home, at least once a year; 4) avoidance of delays in payment of expenses or repayment of loans due to financial difficulties; 5) adequate heating of the apartment; 6) possession of a car; 7) possession of a telephone (fixed or mobile); 8) possession of a color TV; 9) possession of a washing machine.

**Chart 9** The rate of severe material deprivation – the bottom 40% of the population

Source: Eurostat

If we analyse the gender and age structure of severe material deprivation, we will notice that the differences between age groups and genders are not drastic. For example, the rate of severe material deprivation for the total population in 2020 was 13.5% (14.6% in 2019). For young people under 18, this rate was 12.3% in the same year, which is a significant decrease compared to the last year, when it was 16.2%. Elderly people above 65 years of age have an almost unchanged rate of 15.1% (15.4% in 2019). When it comes to the gender structure of severe material deprivation, it fell by approximately 1 percentage points for both sexes, thus, in 2020 it was 13% for men and 14% for women.

The most significant strategic and planning documents aimed at reducing the material deprivation rate of the poorest have not been adopted. The valid ESRP, as the main document in this field, was published in 2016, in which material deprivation is not recognised as a problem nor

does it exist as a measurable indicator. An additional problem is that the new ESRP has not been adopted yet and there are no indications that this will happen any time soon. The same applies to the national recovery (and renovation) plan adopted by all EU member states.<sup>38</sup> The ERP for 2021 was adopted, however, except for the statement about the existing condition that there are severe inequalities (in income, gender, access to health care), nowhere do they mention measures or activities that would address the stated challenges. In addition, the new Fiscal Strategy for 2021 does not mention terms such as inequality or material deprivation.

In order to fight the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has adopted three packages of assistance so far for the economy and citizens of the Republic of Serbia in the total amount of RSD 953 billion, that is, approximately EUR 8 billion. The programme included direct assistance to employers (for

38 Through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Commission prepared the assistance package for each of the member states. The condition for receiving assistance is that each member state prepares their own recovery and resilience plan. For example, Serbia's neighbouring country Croatia adopted the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026, which was approved by the EC in July 2021.

preserving jobs) and direct assistance to adult citizens. In addition to impact employment (SDG 8) and poverty reduction (SDG 1), this was an opportunity to reduce the inequality (SDG 10) caused by the pandemic. However, the assistance package was largely indiscriminate, i.e., money was also given to the citizens who obviously did not need it, while more socially vulnerable citizens could have received more help. For example, vulnerable categories of the population – such as those engaged in informal works – were the most vulnerable,<sup>39</sup> but their position was not recognised or differentiated from other categories of the population. In addition, parents with three or more children are considered the most vulnerable and they received the same amount of money as any other household with two adult members. Therefore, the Government could either have created the same effect in reducing inequality at significantly lower costs or it could have achieved a far better effect by using the same amount (Medić and Anić, 2021).

New legislative acts partially affected future reduction of inequality; however, many challenges have remained unaddressed. In 2021, a proposal to amend the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children was adopted, whose most important solution is that the full monthly maternity allowance, i.e., maternity pay, cannot be less than the minimum pay determined on the day when this right started to be exercised. In addition, these amendments repeal the provision that required from mothers of children with disabilities to choose between the maternity allowance and the allowance to which their child is entitled. In addition, the rights of insured female farmers will be equal to the rights exercised by other women who have recently given birth in Serbia. These amendments to the law will undoubtedly reduce the material deprivation rate among women in Serbia. However,

the new law did not completely remove the old provisions regarding child care leave, which are contrary to the International Maternity Protection Convention. As stated by the Association "Moms Rule", there is still no minimum allowance for the child care period and this period is longer than maternity leave (Euronews, 2021). In addition, the law still does not recognise the right to parental allowance for the fifth child.

In that sense, the initiative "Women Entrepreneurs Are Also Moms" is also important, which was launched at the end of 2021 by the Association "Moms Rule" and the Digital Community, which aims to point out the discriminatory position of women entrepreneurs and equate it with the position of employed women in terms of the right to maternity and child care leave. Specifically, the initiative advocates that women entrepreneurs, who temporarily do not cancel performance of their activity during maternity leave should be entitled to the full amount of maternity allowance, as well as to the fair calculation of the allowance in order to have their contributions for compulsory social insurance during maternity and child care leave paid (Danas, 2021).

The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Law on Amendments to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance in June 2021. The main contribution of this law is a permanent solution to the problem faced by persons who were included in the social programme of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for dealing with redundancies, who at the time of accepting the social programme, lacked up to five or two years to obtain the right to pension. The problem is that, after accepting the social programme, amendments to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance from 2014 followed, which changed conditions for exercising the right to old-age pension and introduced early

39 According to a CEVES survey, a decline in the informal employment rate in late March and mid-April (while cerfew was in force) was up to 80% compared to normal levels (Udovički and Medić, 2021).

old-age pension. This resulted in raising the age limit for obtaining the right to old-age pension for both sexes (65 years of age for men, or gradually raising the age limit for women to 65) and introducing early old-age pension, as well as in permanent reduction of early old-age pension for each month of early retirement before the age of 65 (so-called penalties) (Predojević, 2021).

Therefore, the stated persons did not fulfil the prescribed condition for exercising the right to old-age pension and they were forced to opt for early old-age pension, which includes so-called penalties. The proposed amendments to the law permanently solve this problem by determining the amount of early old-age pension in the same manner as the amount of old-age pension (that is, without penalties) for those insured persons who were beneficiaries of the right to special monetary allowance, i.e. beneficiaries of monetary allowance before the commencement of the application of amendments to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance in accordance with the above mentioned Government Decision (Ibid, 2021).

In the end, the long-expected Law on Social Cards was adopted in 2021 in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. The most important novelty in the law refers to the establishment of a central register of data on social assistance beneficiaries, which will be created from the already existing databases. Until now, every social protection institution, at the local or national level, had internal data on social assistance beneficiaries. This law envisages their linking into the centralised, electronic register called "Social Card". In this manner, part of the social protection system will be digitalised, which will eliminate bureaucracy, accelerate procedures and increase efficiency of centres for social work (Grbić, 2021).

However, the problem is that the new law refers only to those beneficiaries who are already registered in institutions existing databases and not to those who are vulnerable, but did not previously apply for assistance. They remained invisible to the system under this law, which left one of the key problems in this field unresolved. This is particularly important if we take into consideration the fact that one million and eight hundred thousand people in Serbia are at risk of poverty, half a million cannot meet their essential living needs, and only 260,000 people receive social assistance (Ibid, 2021). Another problem is assistance inadequacy, that is, the fact that already existing assistance is insufficient for meeting basic needs (Ibid, 2021).

The third problem concerns the potential threat to citizens' privacy. One of the main reasons for adopting this law is to solve the problem of abuse of social assistance where an individual receives assistance from several bodies, or receives assistance on no grounds. Accordingly, the new centralised database will contain individual's personal data, data on income and real estate, data on whether they are already receiving some form of assistance or are in the application process, as well as data on "related persons" who are family relatives, an ex-spouse, a non-marital partner and former non-marital partner. The law goes so far as to envisage collection and processing of data on national affiliation, which directly violates the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Ibid, 2021).

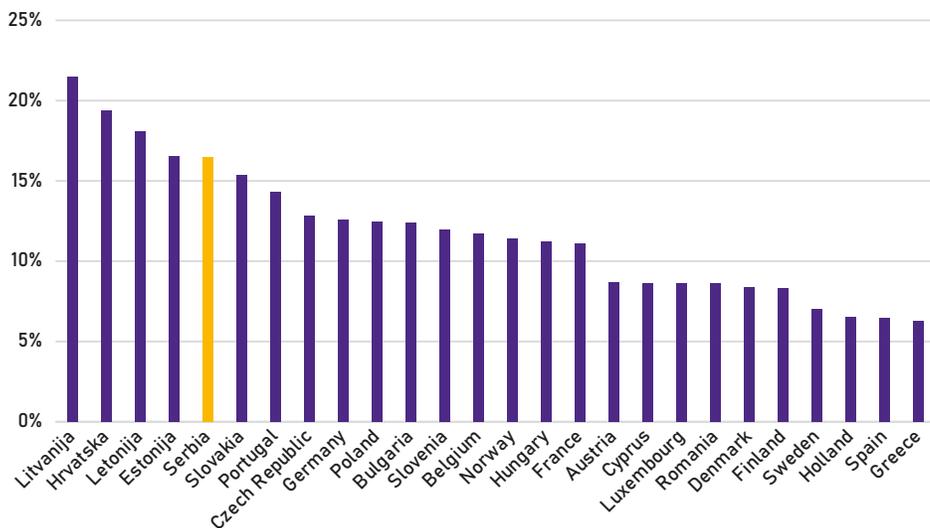
No significant changes have been made in the previous period in terms of the institutional framework for the improvement of this indicator. No new bodies were formed and capacities of the existing bodies have not been noticeably strengthened.

## II. No noticeable progress was made in the previous period in terms of reducing the percentage of the bottom 40% of the population assessing their health status as poor.

The percentage of the bottom 40% of the population assessing their health status as poor was reduced from 17.8% in 2019 to 16.5% in 2020.

These data are interesting due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which should otherwise have a negative impact on the health of the population. However, despite this slight decrease, Serbia is still at the top (or bottom, depending on how it is viewed) of the European countries when it comes to this indicator, as presented in Chart 10.

Chart 10 The share of the population assessing their health status as poor – the bottom 40% of the population



Source: Eurostat

It may be said that there are gender differences in terms of assessed health status. Namely, in terms of the bottom 40% of the women population, almost 20% (19.3%) assess their health status as poor, which is over 6 percentage points more than men in the same income group (13.2%).

The most important strategic and planning documents that would affect the improvement of the health status of the poorest have not been adopted. As already pointed out, the new ESRP has not been adopted yet, nor has the national

recovery plan. On the other hand, the Public Health Strategy for the period 2018-2026 is still in effect. It should be pointed out that reduction of inequalities in the health system is included in the vision and it is the first specific objective in the Strategy. Also, activities were defined for improving the health status of vulnerable groups. However, apart from vulnerable groups,<sup>40</sup> the Strategy does not cover improvement of the health of the lower income population and the population with the lower social status. No action plan for the implementation of the Strategy has

<sup>40</sup> Defined in the strategy as youth, women in the reproductive period, older workers, persons with disabilities, the unemployed, employed in small and micro legal entities, farmers.

been adopted, which would list necessary steps for achieving Strategy objectives.

As already pointed out, Serbia spent a large amount of money on mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the health system received great support through investments in medical facilities and equipment, and raising salaries of health workers, no account was taken of how to ensure greater access to health services for the socially vulnerable population. On the contrary, as one of the negative consequences of focusing exclusively on COVID-19 was that a large number of patients whose cases were not assessed as urgent or routine, inclu-

ding pregnant women, cancer patients and risk group members, had difficulties in accessing health care. For this reason, COVID-19 became an obstacle to accessing essential preventive services, which will inevitably lead to a huge backlog and further complicate and make their treatment more difficult (Rupasinghe et al., 2020).

There have been no significant changes in the previous period in terms of the legislative and institutional framework for the improvement of this indicator. No new bodies were formed and capacities of the existing bodies have not been noticeably strengthened.

## Conclusion

It may be concluded that no significant progress has been made on the whole, when it comes to achieving target 10.1. Although, the severe material deprivation rate among the bottom 40% of the population slightly reduced, it is still far from the set target, or from the EU average. In addition, there are no significant gender and age differences in the severe material deprivation rate. The most important public policies in this field have not been adopted, or have not been sufficiently focused on this problem. In addition, the new law partially affected inequality reduction, however, many other problems remained unresolved such as minimum child care allowance, child allowance for the fifth child, insufficient coverage and

inadequate level of social assistance. In the end, the issue of violating citizens' privacy by the new Law on Social Cards was opened.

In the previous period Serbia managed to slightly reduce the percentage of the bottom 40% of the population assessing their health status as poor. However, it is still at the bottom of the list of European countries in terms of this indicator. Also, there are relatively significant gender differences in terms of assessed health status. Finally, the most important policies in this field were not adopted, or are inadequately dealing with the improvement of the health status of the poorest.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 10.1:

- » Adopt a new ESRP and national recovery plan and include indicators for target 10.1 in these strategic documents;
- » The next state aid package obtained for fight against the consequences of COVID-19 should be differentiated in the manner to target the socially vulnerable population, which will save money and reduce inequality;

- » Make additional amendments to the Law on Fiscal Support to Families with Children in order to prescribe a minimum allowance for the child care period, as well as parental allowance for the fifth (and every subsequent) child;
- » By amending the law, review and potentially reduce requirements (primarily in terms of assets) for obtaining social assistance in order to improve the coverage of socially vulnerable persons who do not otherwise meet all the requirements;
- » Adjust the social assistance amount to be in accordance with Article 13 of the European Social Charter, so that the aid crosses the poverty line, that is, ensures coverage of basic expenses such as rent in social housing and utility bills;
- » Adopt an action plan for the implementation of the Public Health Strategy, which would list necessary steps for the achievement of Strategy objectives, primarily for the improvement of health of vulnerable groups;
- » Adopt amendments to the Law on Personal Income Tax in accordance with the recommendations of the Fiscal Council so that the nominal tax rate is increased from 10% to 20%, with an increase in the non-taxable portion to RSD 40,000, which would reduce the fiscal burden to lowest wages and, thus, reduce inequality;
- » Develop new ways of informing vulnerable groups about their economic and social rights;
- » In accordance with SIPRU recommendations, and in the context of creating social cards, develop a procedure for identifying persons in long-term material deprivation, which may be most effectively determined through extremely low income per household member.

## Priority area 3: REACHING EUROPEAN LEVEL OF DEMOCRACY, RULE OF LAW AND QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONS

Functional institutions based on the good governance principles and respect for the rule of law are necessary conditions for exercising and maintaining human rights, same as other European, or universal values. In this regard, the achievement of SDG 16 is extremely impor-

tant, which implies construction of functional and responsible institutions at all levels. SDG 16 is compatible with political and institutional priorities in the negotiation process between Serbia and the EU.

## Nationalised target 16: Promote a peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development, ensure access to justice for all and built functional and responsible institutions at all levels.

As a candidate country for EU membership, Serbia assumed responsibilities to implement a set of reforms that match the essence of development priority 3. Covered primarily with the fundamental cluster in the accession process, including political criteria and chapters on judiciary and fundamental rights, justice, freedom and security, these reforms take precedence over remaining commitments considering that the course and dynamics of negotiations depends on progress in these fields.

Reforms in the fields relevant to this development priority have been implemented for several years and refer to the adoption of appropriate

legal and institutional solutions as well as to the ability to adequately implement adopted solutions, strengthen institutions and achieve tangible results in practice. Report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" from 2020 indicates that the general state of the rule of law, the quality of institutions and freedom of expression are at the low level, and that the concept of accountability in public administration is underdeveloped, and that elements of a captive state are present. This text provides an assessment of Serbia's progress in achieving development priority 3 in the period after the publication of the report.

### Progress assessment

Global progress monitoring indicators in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" include the following:

- I. Evaluation of the EC Annual Report;
- II. The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI);
- III. Freedom House assessment of the condition of freedoms and democracy;
- IV. World Justice Project Rule of Law Index;
- V. Corruption Perception Index (CPI).

These sources serve as measures for assessing Serbia's progress in the rule of law, good governance and the functioning of democratic institutions in general, and represent the most relevant international indicators for nationalised target 16 or development priority 3. In addition

to them, there are many other indicators that show the condition and progress in certain fields relevant for this development priority. The following text provides an overview of the latest results for Serbia using all the listed sources and a few others.

### **I No significant progress in fulfilling political criteria in Serbia's EU accession process was made during the reporting period.**

Namely, the EC Serbia Report 2021 estimates that *limited progress* was made when it comes to the political criteria essential for development priority 3, namely, in the PAR, functioning of the judiciary, fight against corruption, fight against organised crime and freedom of expression. Also, the assessment of readiness for membership in these fields remained unchanged in relation to the Commission's Report from 2020, even in relation to previous reports. Thus, in terms

of readiness for membership, there is visible continuous stagnation.

Despite the new PAR strategic framework for the period 2021–2030, which includes adoption of accompanying, complementary public policy documents for certain fields of this reform, and the accelerated development of e-government in response to the consequences of the crisis caused by the coronavirus in 2021, it is still necessary to solve the key problems transferred from the previous period. In other words, the Commission once again points out in the 2021 Report that it is necessary to reduce the number of acting officials in public administration by announcing competitions for all jobs currently held by persons with this status; enable the PPSRS to play a strong role in quality control for the purpose of effective implementation of the Law on Planning System; and establish a uniform, comprehensive and transparent system for planning and managing capital projects.

Also, the main recommendations of the Commission in the field of the judiciary and fight against corruption are valid for the next period. In addition to continuing work on the constitutional reform, it is reiterated that it is necessary to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and prosecution through legal and constitutional amendments, including strengthening the role of the High Judicial Council and the State Council of Prosecutors in preserving judicial independence and prosecution autonomy. When it comes to fight against corruption, although the position of the Anti-Corruption Agency was improved with the new legal framework, results are still missing when it comes to investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption cases, while, on the other hand, a new national anti-corruption strategy has not been adopted yet.

In the field of freedom of expression, although the Action Plan for the implementation of the Media Strategy was adopted, a limited number of measures were implemented in the reporting period, while assaults on journalists by senior officials continued. In this regard, a large number of media associations withdrawn from the Working Group for the safety of journalists. In such circumstances, the remained priority is improvement of the overall environment for freedom of expression by ending threats and assaults on journalists, timely implementation of the media strategy, strengthening media pluralism, and transparency and fairness of co-financing the media content of public interest, media ownership and media advertising. Finally, in the field of fight against organised crime, it is necessary to work on previously identified deficiencies, which implies better results in the field of investigations, prosecutions and convictions in cases of organised crime, including money laundering, as well as seizure and confiscation of criminally acquired property.

## **II According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) and results of almost all indicators, Serbia regressed to some extent in 2020 compared to 2019.**

The Worldwide Governance Indicators give an assessment of the governance state based on six composite indicators: political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, control of corruption, and voice and accountability. These complex, aggregate indicators combine views of a large number of respondents from the general population (citizens), businessmen and experts, in all countries in which they are measured. They are based on over 30 individual data sources produced by various research, non-governmental and international organisations and the private sector. The following table provides an overview of results for Serbia in the past two years.

**Table 1** Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) for Serbia for 2019 and 2020 per percentile range from 0 to 100 (where 0 is the lowest, and 100 the highest rank)

	2019	2020
Control of corruption	40.4	37.5
Government effectiveness	54.3	54.3
Political stability and absence of violence	45.3	43.9
Regulatory quality	60.6	57.2
Rule of law	48.1	47.6
Voice and accountability	44.0	40.6

Source: The Worldwide Governance Indicator

**III The latest Freedom House reports for 2021 – “Freedom in the World”, which evaluates the level of freedoms in countries, i.e., “Nations in Transit”, which evaluates the level of democracy, speak about Serbia’s unchanged status, that is, about a slight decline in the overall score.**

Serbia retained the status of a *partially free* country with the overall score of 64/100 (down from 66/100 compared to 2020) and the status of a *transitional or hybrid regime* with a score of 48/100 (down from 49/100). Among the key events in 2020 Freedom House lists the parliamentary elections marked by a boycott of opposition parties due to inadequate election conditions and by the lowered electoral threshold for the necessary votes to participate in the distribution of mandates as an attempt to weaken the announced boycott. It is also stated that civil protests against COVID-19 suppression measures were marked by the use of force against the protesters and journalists and that the public is non-transparently informed when it comes to data on deaths due to coronavirus.

**IV Similarly, the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index is slightly declining.**

In overall, Serbia’s score for 2021 is lower than in the previous year (drop from 0.50 to 0.49), although it advanced one place in the overall ranking (81<sup>st</sup> out of 139 countries). Still, if individual factors that make up the overall index are looked at, they mostly show a slight decline compared to the previous year. In terms of the possibility of control of the executive bodies by the legislative, judiciary, independent bodies and civil society, there has been a continuous decline since 2015. Similarly, in terms of government openness and transparency, this index has been declining since 2016.

**Table 2** The Rule of Law Index for 2019 and 2020 per eight composite factors (0 means the lowest commitment to the rule of law, 1 the highest)

	2020	2021
<b>Total score</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.49</b>
Control of power and actions of executive bodies	0.39	0.38
Absence of corruption	0.44	0.43
Government openness and transparency	0.47	0.46
Fundamental rights	0.57	0.56
Order and security	0.77	0.77
Law enforcement	0.48	0.47
Justice in civil matters	0.51	0.50
Justice in criminal matters	0.40	0.39

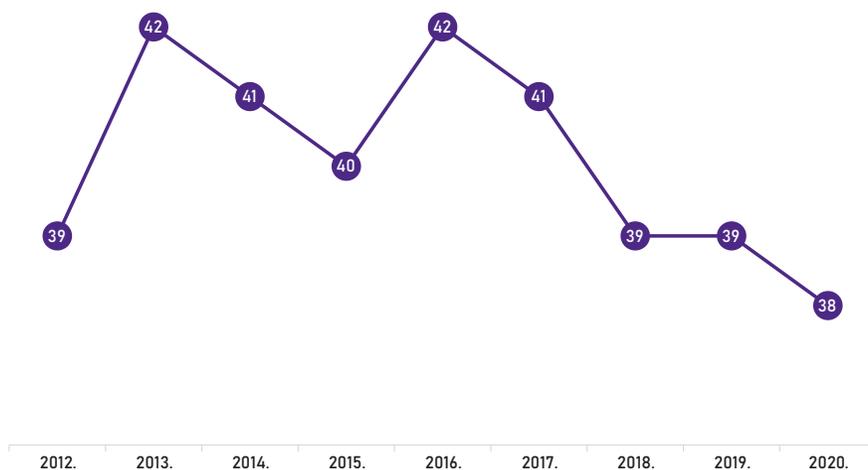
Source: The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index

### V According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International, Serbia is still in a disadvantaged position.

After going down by four places in 2019, from 87<sup>th</sup> to 91<sup>st</sup> place among 180 countries, a similar

trend continued according to the latest results in 2020 – Serbia currently ranks 94<sup>th</sup> due to a slight drop in the overall score. This is also Serbia's lowest score according to this index from 2012 onwards (38/100).

**Chart 11** Serbia's score according to the Corruption Perceptions Index in the period 2012–2020 (on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 is the lowest and 100 the highest score)

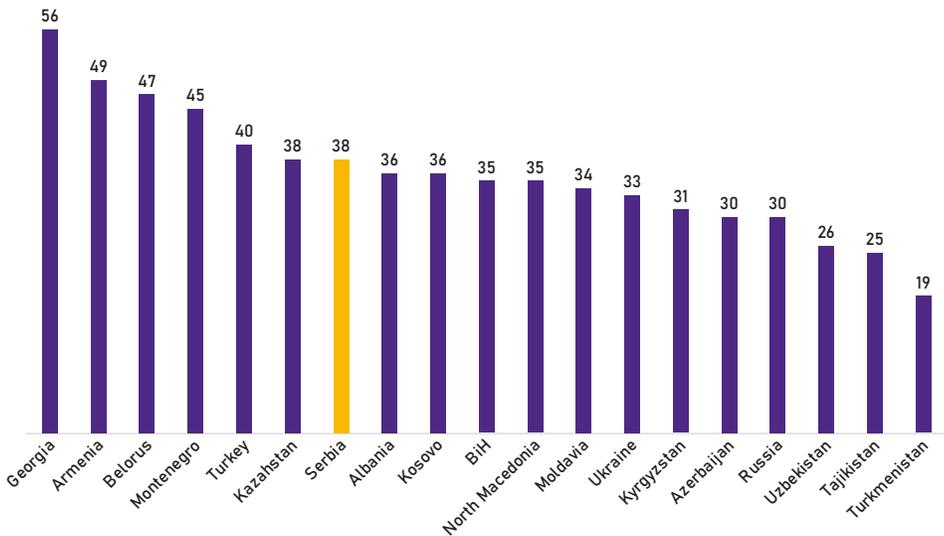


Source: Transparency International

In the EECA group of countries, Serbia is not one of those that are rapidly advancing or regressing, however, the Corruption Perceptions Index still ranks Serbia among countries to watch. The

greatest challenges in Serbia are the rule of law and democratic erosion, whereas the COVID-19 pandemic additionally affected the risks of corruption due to insufficient access to information.

**Chart 12** The score of the EECA group of countries according to the Corruption Perceptions Index for 2020 on the scale from 0 to 100 (0 the lowest, 100 the highest score)



Source: Transparency International

**VI In the end, it should be pointed out that there are other indicators, research and assessments that can be used for monitoring achievement or informing about development priority 3, or SDG 16.**

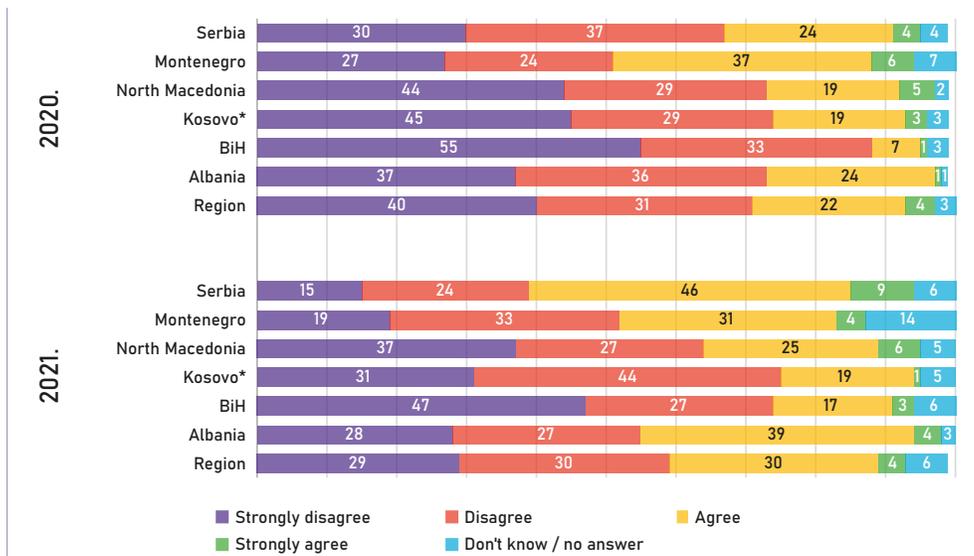
For example, according to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, democracy in Serbia in 2020 was marked as defective, with a score of 7, which classifies it among the low ranked countries in the Eastern Europe region and the same is true of economic transformation, which is considered to be limited. Among other things, Serbia Report states that the executive bodies dominate legislative and judicial bodies and that it is necessary to re-establish the brake system and balance between different government bodies. Compared to 2018, the results of this index show a downward trend in all dimensions (democracy, economy, governance).

Public opinion polls of the Balkan Barometer include, among other things, a series of questions

about the functioning and control of executive bodies, independence of the judiciary, position of independent institutions and susceptibility to corruption of various sectors of public policies and bodies. For example, according to this survey for 2021, the perception of the effectiveness of fight against corruption in Serbia is more positive than in the previous year and is the only case of agreement of the majority population in the entire Western Balkans (55%, Chart 13). However, despite the generally more positive perception, public opinion from the same survey is diametrically different when it come to the issue of susceptibility of certain sectors to corruption and more than two thirds of citizens agree that corruption affects the work of the judiciary in Serbia. On the other hand, according to updated SORS data from 2021, out of the total number of persons who had at least one contact with a public servant in the last 12 months, almost every tenth gave a bribe or was asked for a bribe<sup>41</sup> (indicator 1, target 16.5).

41 The data was taken from the SORS website, where it is stated that the source of data is UNODC – UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and that the data from 2010 were last updated in November 2021. See at: <https://sdg.indikator.rs/area/peace-justice-and-strong-institutions/?subarea=SDGUN160501&indicator=160501IND01>.

**Chart 13** Perceptions of the population in the Western Balkans of the question “Do you agree that the government is effective in combating corruption?”



Source: Balkan Barometer, 2021

## Conclusion and recommendations

Judging by the latest results from a number of international and regional sources, no significant progress has been made in achieving SDG 16, that is, Serbia has not reached a higher level of democracy, the rule of law and the quality of institutions in the reporting period. Moreover, the data suggest mostly negative trends or stagnation.

It should be stated that changes in the legal and public policy framework continued to be made, as stated in Goal 16 monitoring report. The Public Administration Reform Strategy, the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System, the Gender Equality Strategy, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, the LGE and the Law on Prevention of Corruption stand out. However, the results of EC assessments, as well as other objective indicators presented in the text, unequivocally lead to the conclusion that

primary problems are insufficient implementation of already adopted regulations and measures, as well as insufficient political support to strengthening democratic institutions and institutes that lead to a higher level of democracy, the rule of law and the quality of governance, which is a condition for Serbia's accession to the EU. The data and estimates also suggest that unplanned crises, such as the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, shed light on some of the mentioned shortcomings.

Consequently, in terms of taking priority activities towards achieving SDG 16 or development priority 3, key measures and interventions that need to be implemented are provided in EC annual reports. Also, when it comes to improving the legal, institutional and policy framework, a number of recommendations are presented in Goal 16 monitoring report and will not be reiterated here.

## Priority area 4: COMPETITIVE ECONOMY AND PRODUCTIVE JOB

In the next decade, Serbia needs to swing the pendulum from low labour and energy cost-based competitiveness towards the competitiveness based on knowledge and productive jobs. In this regard, it is important to promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation (target

8.3), achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (target 8.5) and enhance investments in research and development, upgrade technological capabilities and encourage investments, particularly in the private sector (target 9.5).

**Nationalised target 8.3: Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small – and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.**

**Nationalised target 8.5: By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value**

Similarly to other countries in the Western Balkans, Serbia is a country of a relatively low living standard and slow economic growth. According to the data from the last year's report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report", Serbia's GDP per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) reaches only 40% of the EU average, or 60% of the new members states' average (Central and East Europe). However, in nominal terms, which measure the ability of the population to purchase durable consumer goods, like cars and mobile phones or to travel, the situation is even more unfavourable, that is, Serbia's GDP per capita is only 21% of

European, or 50% of the new member states' average. If we take into account that in the previous decade (2010–2019) Serbia on average grew at an alarmingly low rate of 2.1% per year, it may be concluded that its position could not have been significantly improved (Priority Report, 2020).

The economic growth accelerated *slightly* in recent years. After more than a decade of stagnation, since the World Financial Crisis, the economic growth increased to almost "acceptable" 4.2% in the period 2018–2019. Fiscal consolidation, attracting a large number of foreign direct investments and increased investment in public

infrastructure created conditions for better economic performance (Udovički, 2021). This growth is far from potential and necessary for Serbia to become a modern and developed economy modelled on EU countries. For example, in its study from 2019, the World Bank estimated that Serbia has the potential to grow as much as 7% per year, which would mean doubling the level of its GDP every 10 years (World Bank, 2019).

The main cause of this situation is insufficient and low productive employment. According to the data from the last year's report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report", only 65% of the population in the age group 20-64 was employed, while the European average is 73%. In addition, Serbia has very low average labour productivity, lagging between 20% and 50% behind new member states – even the least productive Bulgaria is almost one-fifth more productive than Serbia. Actually, almost

80% of Serbia's GDP growth in the last five years is the result of a simple employment increase, while productivity grew by only 1% per year.

The employment structure is unfavourable, with a large share of sectors with low added value and low productivity. Although partial re-industrialisation took place in the past decade, the productivity of the manufacturing industry actually declined. In addition, the service sector recorded an increase in employment, however with very limited productivity growth. In the end, Serbian agriculture, which is largely traditional, fragmented and informal, on average has extremely low productivity and makes as much as 20% of employment. Taking into account the above factors, it is not a big surprise that the expected wage of the average household can "cover" the average market basket only in the Belgrade region.

## Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving targets 8.3 and 8.5 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

- I. Achieve employment rate of the population in the age group 20-64 of 75%, with median wage enabling buying an average market basket;
- II. Increase total labour productivity by 50% and increase labour productivity in the manufacturing industry by minimum 50%;

- III. By 2022, reach the share of private investments in GDP of minimum 20%, and public investments of minimum 5% of GDP.

### **I. Slight progress has been made in the previous period in terms of achieving targets measured by the first indicator.**

According to the Labour Force Survey, in the second quarter<sup>42</sup> of 2021, the employment rate<sup>43</sup> for the age group 20-64 was 66% (63.1% in the same quarter in 2020). This points to the recovery of the labour market after the first "strike" of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, but also to a slight improvement as the future employment

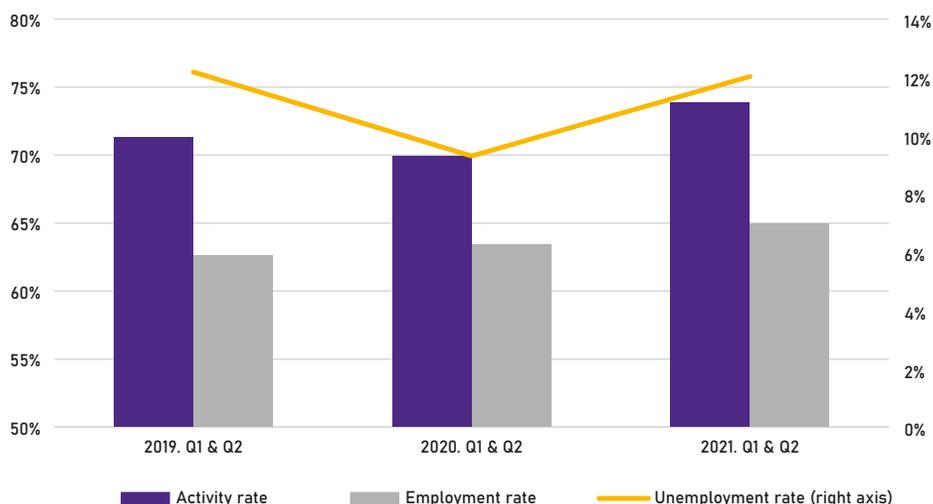
42 Last updated on 01/09/2021

43 The employment rate is calculated as the share of employees in the total population in the age group 20-64.

rate exceeds the pre-crisis level (63,7% in the same quarter 2019). However, it is important to emphasise that in the midst of the crisis almost exclusively informal employment rate significantly dropped<sup>44</sup>, which consists of the vulnerable<sup>45</sup> category of workers. According to CEVES assessments, a drop in the informal employment rate in late March and mid-April (with curfew was in force) amounted to 80% compared to normal levels, whereas at the end of the second quarter, employment was about 20% lower, which means that there was a relatively rapid recovery and return to the level that was close the level before the crisis (Udovički and Medić, 2021). On

the other hand, the unemployment rate<sup>46</sup> for the same age group in the same period was 11.2% (7.9% in the same quarter in 2020). However, it should be taken into account that in 2020, there was a decline in population activity, and thus the unemployment rate was lower than in 2019 (11.2% in the same quarter) and returned to the pre-crisis level in 2021. This is particularly important for the fact that, according to the data from the Labour Force Survey, the inactive population or population unemployed for a long time in the age group 15-64, in the second quarter of 2021, counts one million and a half, of whom about 400 thousand is the population in the age group 25-45.

**Chart 14** Activity, employment and unemployment rates – average for Q1 and Q2 in the period 2019-2021



Source: SORS

44 According to the ILO definition, informal workers are: (1) those who work in an unregistered company, (2) those who work in a registered company without a formal employment contract and without social and pension insurance, (3) unpaid assisting household members.

45 For example, compared to the formally employed persons, informal workers earn on average about 30% lower wage and in 60% of cases assess the financial situation of their household as bad or mostly bad. Also, more often than formally employed, they belong to vulnerable socio-demographic groups – young, older, as well as less educated (Udovički and Medić, 2021).

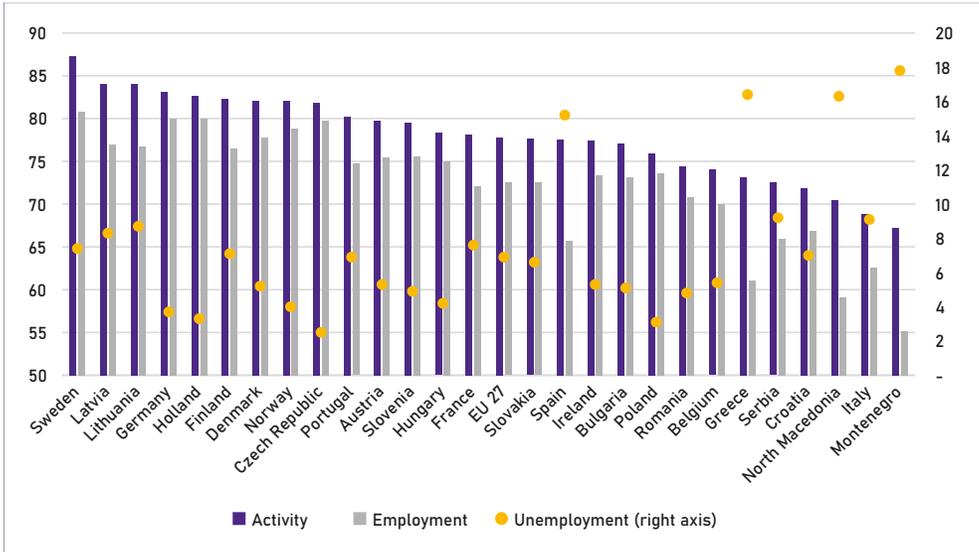
46 The unemployment rate is calculated as a quotient of the number of the unemployed and the number of active persons (employed plus unemployed).

In addition, the changed methodology of the Labour Force Survey applies from January 2021, where the most significant change is that persons who produce agricultural goods and services intended for personal consumption, i.e. without placement on the market, are excluded from the count of contingent workers. In this manner, compared to the previous methodology, the

number of employees reduced as most of them were moved to inactive persons and, to a lesser extent, to unemployed persons.

As presented in Chart 15, Serbia falls into the category of European countries with the lowest levels of activities and employment.<sup>47</sup>

**Chart 15** Activity, employment and unemployment rates of the population in the age group 20–64 in 2020



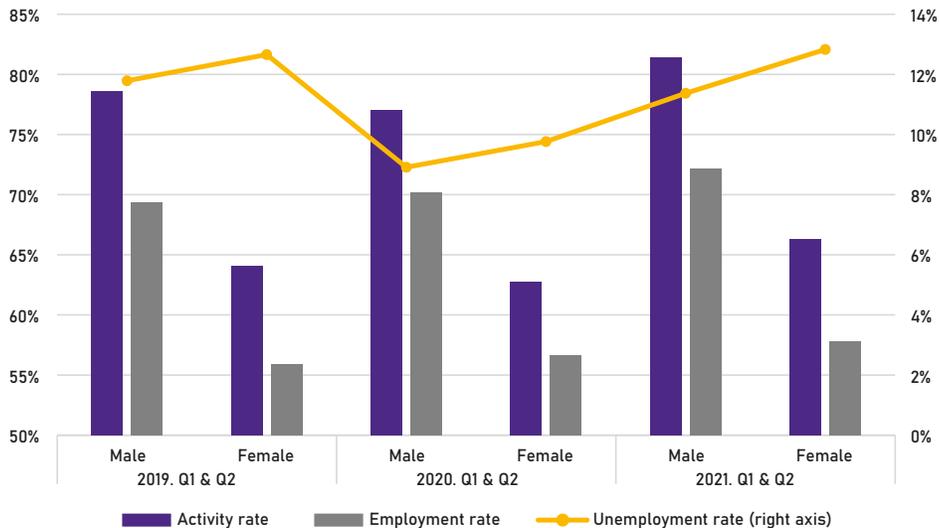
Source: Eurostat

There are still great gender differences on the labour market. Observing the employment structure in the same period for the same age group, the employment rate for men is 73% (70.5% in the same quarter in 2020) and for women 59% (55.8% in the same quarter in 2020). The unemployment rate for men is 10.6% (7.6% in the same quarter

in 2020) and for women 12% (8.3% in the same quarter in 2020). Such a large difference between the employment rate for men and women means that a large number of women are inactive and do not even look for a job, which potentially indicates to the discouragement of women to look for a job.

<sup>47</sup> It should be emphasised that the data obtained from Eurostat are based on the old methodology and they differ from the data stated in the text above. However, they were used for comparing Serbia with other countries.

**Chart 16** Activity, employment and unemployment rates per gender – average for Q1 and Q2 in the period 2019–2021



Source: SORS

The share of the informal employment rate in non-agricultural activities slightly dropped from 6.8% in 2020 to 6.1% in 2021.<sup>48</sup> Data on the gender structure in informal employment for 2021 are still not publicly available.

According to SORS data, in July 2021, the median net wage amounted to RSD 49,999, which marked a nominal increase of 8.5% compared to the same period in the previous year (when it amounted to RSD 45,736). The real increase (when inflation is included) is 5.8%. However, it amounts to only 65% of the average market basket in the same period (RSD 76,689). Still, what is positive is that this difference decreased compared to last year when median wage was 62% of the average market basket. It should be noted that median wage partially increased due to the increase in the minimum wage, which amounts to 6.6% from 1 January 2021 compared to last year.

According to the latest data from the Labour Force Survey for September 2020, the gender wage gap was 8.1% and did not change significantly compared to 2019 (when it was 8.2%).

The public policy framework in the field of employment and decent work requires significant improvements. The new Employment Strategy for the period 2021–2026 was adopted in 2021. The main problem is that the planned allocation of funds for AEP measures until 2026 amount to only 0.2% of GDP per year, although the target value in the previous strategy was 0.5% until 2020. Such modest allocations of funds classify Serbia among the low ranked European countries in terms of the coverage of unemployed people with AEP measures (FCD, 2021).<sup>49</sup> In addition, the Strategy does not have clear relations with the educational policy. Focus on meeting the quantitative goals of employment was also maintained without the introduction of indicators

48 Last updated on 31/08/2021

49 EAP measures in 2018 covered only 5.1 out of 100 unemployed, whereas in the EU, the smallest coverage had Romania, i.e. 5.3 (FCD, 2021).

of the *quality* of employment or decent work (FCD, 2021). Measures for removing barriers to women's inclusion on the labour market, such as development of services of care for children and the elderly, have been omitted. Target values for activity and employment rates are low because half of an increase in the employment rate will be the result of a decrease in the working age population (FDC, 2021). In addition, the Strategy did not envisage measures for strengthening capacities of social partners and the Social and Economic Council (FCD, 2021). Additionally, the Strategy does not contain the measure proposed by the Association of Free and Independent Trade Unions for motivating employees to register in the NES more often. Finally, the employment policy is not viewed from the perspective of sustainable development at all (FCD, 2021).

Recent amendments to the legislative framework did not fully resolve the status of freelancers. With the adoption of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Personal Income Tax and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Compulsory Social Insurance Contributions, relatively favourable tax treatment of freelancer was introduced for income earned from 2015 to the end of 2021, whereas certain part of the amendments will apply from 2022, which will enable freelancers who want to change their status to do so in a timely manner (e.g. to become entrepreneurs or establish a limited liability company). However, one of remarks on this solution was that the health insurance debt was not written off and freelancers could not even use it in the previous period, considering that their status was not regulated. Essentially, the problem is the fact that the state should perform its legal obligation to collect taxes and contributions, but not in the manner that would discriminate a certain group of people. However, the status of internet workers has not been fully regulated considering that a working group for drafting the Law on Flexible Forms of

Work, whose entry into force was announced for 1 January 2022, still has not been formed. It is also not good that the status of freelancers will not be resolved together with the Labour Law, which should thoroughly define workers and employers, as well as their rights, considering that the law will not be discussed about before 2023 (Obradović, 2021).

Adoption of the amendments to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children will improve the position of women workers, which will have a positive impact on general employment and wages, however, some problems remain unresolved. In addition, a proposal to amend the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children was adopted in 2021, whose most important solution is that the full monthly maternity allowance, i.e. maternity pay, cannot be less than the minimum pay determined on the day when this right started to be exercised. In addition, this law repeals the provision that required from mothers of children with disabilities to choose between the maternity allowance and the allowance to which their child is entitled. In addition, the rights of insured female farmers will be equal to the rights exercised by other women who have recently given birth in Serbia. However, the new law did not completely remove the old provisions regarding child care leave, which are contrary to the International Maternity Protection Convention. As stated by the Association "Moms Rule", there is still no minimum allowance for the child care period and this period is longer than maternity leave (Euronews, 2021). In addition, the Law still does not recognise the right to parental allowance for the fifth child.

The new Law on Work Engagement due to Increased Workload will not contribute to the improvement of decent work and employment in the economy. A public debate on the Draft Law on Work Engagement due to Increased Workload has ended, which means that this

Law could be adopted soon. The basic idea is that the existing Law on Seasonal Workers, in addition to agriculture, expands to construction, catering and tourism and other fields. The problem is, however, that the stated activities are not occasional. According to the union, amendments will jeopardise the rights of workers, who will from now on be employed without the employment contract. In addition, according to the new Draft Law, a foreigner who can enter Serbia without a visa can be hired in activities stated in the law without a work permit. An additional problem is that the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia and two regulations were not consulted in the NALED's analysis of the consequences and effects of this Law, according to experts. In addition, the study included a survey of employers without consulting workers to whom the law applies (N1 Beograd, 2021).

No significant changes have been made in the previous period in terms of the institutional framework related to this field. No new bodies have been formed and capacities of the existing bodies have not been noticeably strengthened.

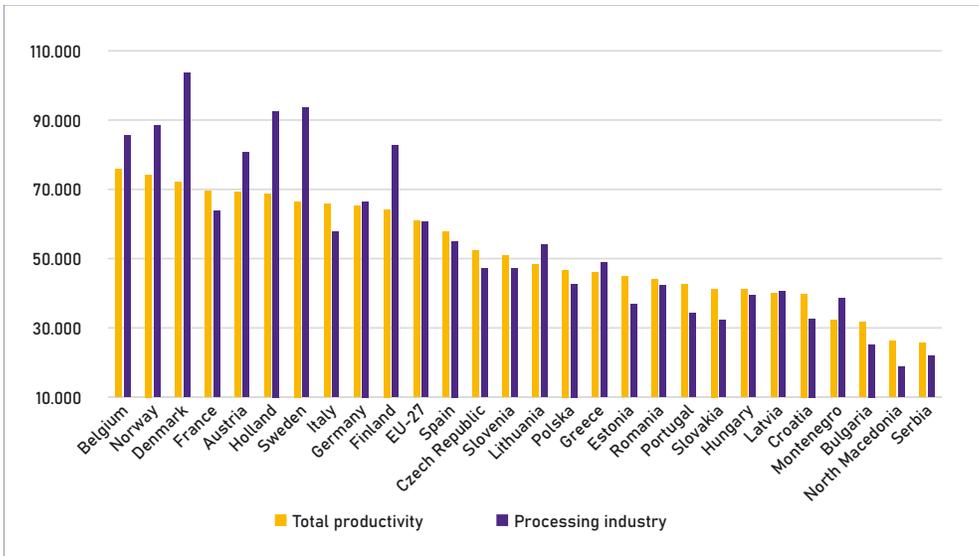
## **II. No significant progress has been made in achieving higher productivity in the previous period.**

According to calculations based on the latest SORS data, the total labour productivity in Serbia

in 2020 amounted to RSD 1,410,378 (EUR 11,967), which is a drop by 1% compared to the previous year. In terms of the manufacturing industry, labour productivity in 2020 amounted to RSD 1,287,264 (EUR 10,922), which marks a growth of 0.2% compared to 2019. However, the effect of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic should be taken into account considering that the state of emergency and curfew lasted for two months, from March to May. Production dropped and, consequently, added value. However, most sectors have maintained employment (which mostly dropped in case of informal jobs), which affected a decline in GVA. This means that it is not particularly relevant to observe productivity growth in this period, especially not in the manufacturing industry. On the other hand, at the level of the entire industry (manufacturing industry, mining and energy), the average labour productivity in the first two quarters in 2021 increased by 5.7% compared to the same period in 2019.

As presented in Chart 17, when labour productivity is expressed in purchasing power parity, Serbia is the least productive country in Europe,<sup>50</sup> whereas its manufacturing industry is also the least productive, after North Macedonia.

50 Among European countries whose data are available at Eurostat. Lower productivity data for some of potential "candidate" countries, like Ukraine, Bosna and Herzegovina, Moldavia and Albania, are not available.

**Chart 17** Labour productivity in 2020 – GVA per employee (PPP EUR in 2020)

Source: Eurostat

The ERP to a certain extent covers relevant indicators related to productivity, however, objectives are relatively modest. The new ERP for the period 2021–2023 was adopted in February 2021. In terms of productivity, structural reform 7: *Improving competitiveness of industry* was added, which includes the implementation of measures defined in the Industrial Policy Strategy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2030, in coordination with the Smart Specialisation Strategy 2020–2027. Two indicators that measure results of the implementation of this reform include an increase in the GVA share of the manufacturing sector in total GVA from 17.5% in 2018 to 19.5% in 2023, as well as GVA increase per employee in the manufacturing sector from EUR 15,700 in 2018 to EUR 19,000 in 2023. The question is, however, why the GVA share of the manufacturing industry in total GVA is not taken into account, which would make this indicator more measurable and internationally comparable. For example, according to the World Bank data, in 2019, the share of the Serbian manufacturing sector in GDP was only 13.6%. On the other hand, the Czech Republic, as a country that has lar-

gely converged towards developed Western European countries, constantly has a share of the manufacturing sector above 20%, which indicates that the (manufacturing) industry is still the main driver of economic development (Haraguchi et al., 2017) and that Serbia should focus more on its development.

The Industrial Policy Strategy 2021–2030 and related Action Plan for the period 2021–2023 represent an adequate planning framework in this field. The overall objective of the Industrial Policy Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021–2023 implies improving competitiveness of Serbian industry. One of the measures involves adjusting criteria for attracting investments in industry in order to increase the GVA share. The Action plan for the implementation of the Industrial Policy Strategy for the period 2021–2023 contains activities for the implementation of these measures that include defining a new set of criteria for attracting investments that will favour investments with higher added value, higher technological level and greater potential for involving domestic suppliers, as

well as harmonising the incentive system with new criteria. The Development Agency of Serbia is responsible for the implementation of both activities in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy, and the time limit for the completion of these activities is the fourth quarter of 2021. However, one gets the impression that not much has been done in achieving the set objectives.

The Action Plan for the implementation of the Smart Specialisation Strategy for the period from 2020 to 2027 adequately sets relevant productivity objectives. For example, when it comes to monitoring the implementation of measures and achieving Strategy objectives, in each of the four priority areas (food for the future, information and communication technologies, creative industries and machines and production processes of the future), one of the objectives is to increase total added value per employee (each of the areas has different baseline and target values).

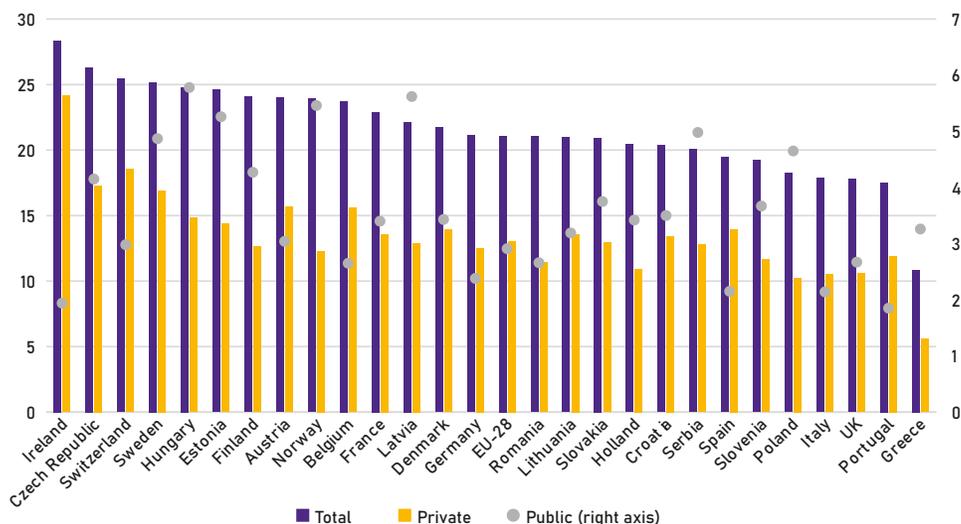
With the adoption of the new Law on Electronic Invoicing, progress has been made in the legislative framework in this field. This year, the Law on Electronic Invoicing was adopted, whose main objective is to contribute to the improvement of the business environment by introducing a new fiscalisation model and switching to electronic invoicing. The use of the electronic invoicing system will be free of charge and should provide greater legal certainty in the fields in which electronic invoices are delivered, accepted and stored, and at the same time contribute to the acceleration of work and business processes. The phased introduction of the obligation to issue and receive electronic invoices is planned to start from 1 January 2022, with special time limits for the public and private sector.

There have been no significant changes in the past period when it comes to the institutional fra-

mework related to this field. No new bodies have been formed, nor have the capacities of already existing bodies been noticeably strengthened.

### **III. In the past period, public investments reached the planned level, whereas the share of private investments in GDP remained far below satisfactory.**

According to the latest Eurostat data for 2018, the public investments share in GDP was 4.98%, which practically meant the achievement of the 5% objective. However, the question of the appropriateness of certain public investments is still very relevant. For example, roads are being built in Serbia for which it is not entirely clear whether they are economically viable through tolls, because traffic is low and maintenance costs are high, such as for the highway from Belgrade to Surčin (Danas, 2021). Construction of such roads is justified in the short term (labour is employed, construction materials and machines are produced and purchased) and in the medium term (the economy uses better infrastructure, which reduces operating expenses), because it has a favourable effect on GDP growth. However, in the case of Serbia, the involvement of the domestic economy in large infrastructure projects is small, which eliminates the positive spillover effect on the economy. When it comes to private investments, according to the same source, they reached only 12.8% of GDP in 2018, which is far below the planned level. Two key reasons for the low level of private investments are the extremely low level of savings, as well as weak institutions, primarily the lack of the rule of law and endemic corruption (Nova ekonomija, 2019). As presented in Chart 17, Serbia was among the European countries with the largest share of public investments in GDP in 2018, while the share of private investments was slightly below the EU average.

**Chart 18** Total public and private investments (% of GDP) in 2018

Source: Eurostat

In terms of investment level, ERP objectives are relatively modest. According to the ERP, for the period from 2021 to 2023, within the already mentioned structural reform 7: *Improving the competitiveness of industry*, the plan is to increase the share of total investments in GDP from 20.1% in 2018 to 24% in 2023. It can be concluded that, compared to the set indicators, this objective is very modest considering that the indicator recommends that public and private investments (excluding household investments) together reach the level of 25% of GDP by 2022. In addition, the data show that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe had investment rates of about 25% of GDP in the period of their most dynamic growth, when they were approaching developed European countries the fastest, while East Asian countries, as absolute "champions" of development in the last few decades, have achieved investment rates of as much as 30-40% of GDP.

The Industrial Policy Strategy 2021–2030 correctly sets appropriate objectives and measures in this field. Specific objective 3 in the Industrial Policy Strategy 2021–2030 is to increase the

total amount of investments in industry, as well as the quality of investments. The indicator that measures results of this objective is the share of investments in GDP, which are planned to increase from 20.1% in 2018 to 25% in 2030. However, it is not clear why the description of the objective is increasing the number of investments in *industry* if the indicator measures the level of *total* investments. When it comes to specific measures for achieving this objective, measure 3.4: Industrial zone infrastructure development support programme, can be singled out as very favourable given that industrial zones or parks are one of the key elements for achieving dynamic economic growth, which is particularly supported by the case of China (UNIDO, 2020). In addition, measure 3.5, which implies balancing regional industrial development, is particularly relevant for the Serbian economy, given the very unbalanced regional development.

The Action Plan for the implementation of the Industrial Policy Strategy for the period from 2021 to 2023 defines specific activities and indicators for measuring the realisation of Strategy objec-

tives. For example, for the above-mentioned measure 3.4, the plan is to increase the annual value of business infrastructure development support (industrial zones and other business infrastructure) from RSD 295.8 million in 2018 to RSD 1,350 million. In addition, in terms of measure 3.5, the plan is to increase total annual incentives for regional development in the form of financial support for attracting investments from RSD 5,537.4 million to RSD 7,000 million.

The main shortcoming of all public policies in this field is the fact that they do not sufficiently address the problem of private *domestic* investments, which are extremely low in Serbia and which are key to achieving dynamic and sustainable economic growth. For example, the Law on Investments defines activities of the Development Agency of Serbia on the basis of which it creates programmes for subsidising investments for companies in Serbia. Despite the fact that small and medium-sized (predo-

minantly domestic) enterprises receive a certain level of support due to these programmes, they face unfair market competition given that large enterprises and foreign investors have direct communication with the state and thus gain an advantage (European Commission, 2021). In addition, the level of state subsidies for large enterprises and foreign investors far exceeds the level of subsidies for small and medium-sized enterprises (European Commission, 2021). However, increased domestic investments would increase resilience of the economy to external shocks, which is especially important in times of crisis like the one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Nova ekonomija, 2020).

There have been no significant changes in the past period in terms of the legislative and institutional framework related to this field. No new bodies have been formed, nor have the capacities of already existing bodies been noticeably strengthened.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that no significant progress has been made on the whole when it comes to achieving targets 8.3 and 8.5. Employment indicators on the labour market have improved slightly, however, median wages still cannot cover the average market basket. In addition, recent public policies in this field do not bring substantial and much-needed improvements (increasing ALMP measures, motivating the inactive population to look for a job, measures of decent work, links with education policy), while recent legal changes are partly a step in the right direction (increase of maternity allowance), as well as a step backwards, such as the Draft Law on Work Engagement due to Increased Workload in Certain Activities.

When it comes to productivity, it grew more slowly in the economy as a whole and decreased slightly in the manufacturing sector in the obser-

ved period from 2019 to 2020 due to the effects of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, at the level of industry as a whole, a slight increase was made in average productivity in the first two quarters from 2019 to 2021. On the other hand, strategic objectives are adequately set, but relatively modest (insufficient growth of GVA share of the manufacturing industry in GDP), while changes in the legislative framework can be assessed in principle as positive (Law on Electronic Invoicing).

Finally, although the share of public investments in GDP has risen to an adequate level, there is a question of the economic viability of certain infrastructure projects. On the other hand, private investments have remained "stubbornly" low for the country of this level of development, which we owe to low savings, as well as bad institutions. Strategic documents in this field

correctly identify the main objectives, but set them relatively modest and fail to address the problem of low domestic private investments.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving targets 8.3 and 8.5:

- » Amend the current Employment Strategy 2021-2026 to increase budget allocations for active employment measures to 0.5% of GDP, as well as to define activities to motivate the inactive population and employ the population that has been unemployed for a long time;
- » Amend the Law on Work Engagement due to Increased Workload in Certain Activities before its adoption. The Law needs to be regulated in accordance with the Constitution, the Labour Law and international conventions signed by Serbia;
- » Regulate the status of internet workers in accordance with the Constitution, the Labour Law and international conventions signed by Serbia. It is necessary to recognise their specific position, but not in a manner that they would be favoured or discriminated against (e.g. tax) compared to other employees. Consult examples of good practice from Europe and the world;
- » Set the increase of the share of the manufacturing industry in GDP to 20% by 2030 as a strategic objective in the new ERP, and define activities for achieving this objective;
- » The Ministry of Economy should, in cooperation with the Academy, international organisations (e.g. World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs [UN DESA]) and the civil sector, conduct a study of the efficiency of public investments in Serbia in the last 10 years and make it a starting point in strategic planning in this field.

## Nationalised target 9.5: By 2030, enhance investments in scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities and encourage innovation – particularly in private sector

Although, according to the SORS research (2019), over 50% of enterprises in Serbia are innovative, innovations are mostly incremental, i.e. refer to small improvements in existing products or services. Business entities record low investments in research and development (R&D), which is best reflected in low patent activity and low export levels of high-tech products in total exports. This situation is to some extent influenced by the structure of the economy which is dominated by low-tech industry and services. An

important limiting factor is the low percentage of employees with a university degree. Over 15% of small enterprises do not have any employees with higher education (SORS, 2019). In addition, Serbian business sector is characterised by an unfavourable technological structure and low competitiveness. The processing industry is dominated by products of low technological complexity, which is a consequence of low technological capacities of business entities in Serbia.

## Progress assessment

This section reviews annual monitoring of Serbia's progress towards achieving target 9.5 compared to the following performance indicator defined in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report":

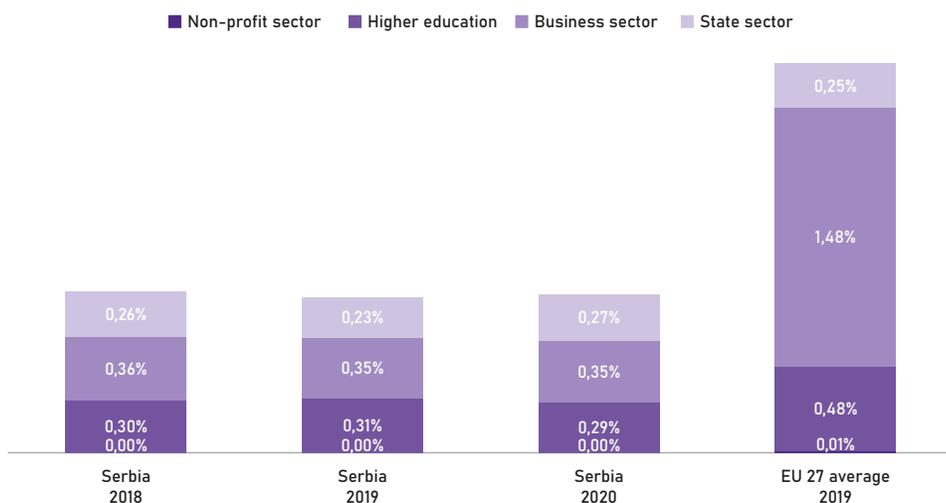
- I. Double investments in research and development and achieve the level of 1.8% of GDP, of which private sector accounts for 2/3;
- II. Achieve real labour productivity growth of 50% and reach the productivity level of today's EUR 22,500 per employee;
- III. Raise the export share of high-tech products and knowledge-intensive services to 20% of total export.

The above success indicators represent specific results to be achieved by 2030 in order to achieve target 9.5 within priority area 4: "Competitive economy and productive jobs".

### I. There has been no significant progress in total R&D expenditures in the previous period.

According to the latest SORS data, the share of total R&D expenditures in GDP in 2020 amounted to 0.91%, which is a slight increase compared to 2019 (0.89%), but also a decrease compared to 2018 (0.92%). In addition, the increase in total R&D expenditures is mostly the consequence of increased government sector investments, which increased from 0.23% to 0.27% of GDP in the last year, while business sector investments remained unchanged (Chart 19). In addition, business sector R&D investments are significantly below the EU-27 average. The average business sector R&D investments in EU-27 amount to 1.48% of GDP, which makes 66% of total investments. On the other hand, total business sector investments in Serbia amount to 0.35% of GDP, which is 38% of total R&D investments (Chart 19).

**Chart 19** A comparative overview of R&D investments as a GDP percentage per sectors in Serbia and EU-27 in the last three years



Source: Author's calculation based on SORS and Eurostat data

One of important indicators for achieving target 9.5 defined by the 2030 Agenda is the number of researchers. This indicator is important due to the fact that the increased number of researchers is a necessary condition for improving scientific research and developing technological capabilities of industrial sectors, especially in developing countries. The number of researchers in Serbia (expressed as the full-time equivalent) per million inhabitants increased from 2,361 in 2019 to 2,405 in 2020 (SORS). These data represent positive development considering that, out of the total number of new researchers, over 30% are in the business sector. The increase in the total number of researchers in the business sector also contributed to the increase in the total share of researchers from the business sector in the total number of researchers from 9.04% in 2019 to 9.37% in 2020 (SORS, 2021b). In addition, the percentage of women in the total number of researchers in Serbia is over 53% (SORS), which keeps Serbia well ahead the EU-27 average of 32.8% (Eurostat, 2021).

The Government of the Republic of Serbia makes certain efforts in encouraging the business sector to invest in R&D and these efforts are visible in two new measures. The first of the two measures of the RS Government, R&D deduction, implies tax relief for enterprises that invest in R&D. Specifically, expenses that are directly related to research and development conducted by the taxpayer in the Republic of Serbia may be stated as an expense in the tax balance as twice the amount. This relief is prescribed by the Law on Corporate Income Tax (Article 22(g)) and this measure is expected to increase business sector investments in research and development in the upcoming period.

There is another tax relief, IP Box. This measure implies that the corporate tax based on intellectual property income (e.g. patents, software) created in Serbia may be reduced from standard 15% to 3%. This measure is prescribed by the Law on Corporate Income Tax (Article 25(b)) and is regulated in more detail in the Rulebook on

Conditions and the Method of Excluding Qualified Income from Corporate Income Tax Base.

Although the two measures were adopted in 2019, the results of the application of tax relief are expected to be visible only in the following period. Based on the latest SORS data, the Tax Administration issued decisions for 108 business entities on granting R&D deduction in 2020. A relatively low number of companies that used this measure in the past year shows that activities of promotion of these measures were insufficient and that a significant number of companies are not aware of these possibilities.

## **II. There has been no increase in labour productivity in the previous year.**

Acceleration of economic growth in the period 2018–2019 was driven primarily by faster growth in labour productivity (added value per employee), which in 2019 increased by 6.75% compared to 2018. However, a 1% drop in productivity occurred in 2020. It should be taken into account that the coronavirus pandemic is one of the key causes of productivity decline in 2020, which implies that this year is not relevant for the analysis. On the other hand, if we compare the average labour productivity of the whole industry (manufacturing industry, mining and energy) in the first two quarters of 2019 with the same period in 2021, we notice an increase in the average productivity by 5.7% (SORS, 2021a).

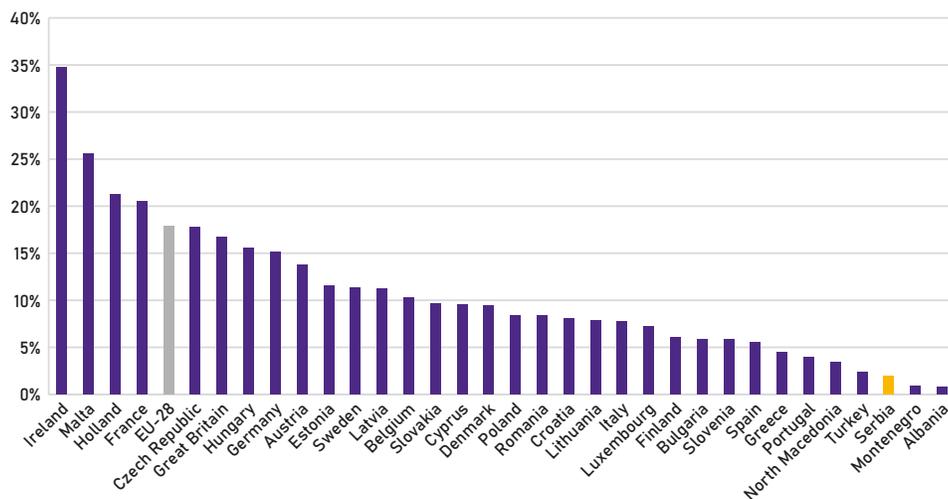
## **III. Serbia has not made a significant progress in exporting high-tech products and knowledge-based services.**

According to the latest available data (Eurostat, 2021), the total export share of high-tech products in total exports of the Republic of Serbia (excluding services) amounted to 1.9% in 2018 (Chart 20). A decline in the export share of high-tech products that has been recorded since 2012 (2.6%) represents a very negative trend. This may

be explained by the fact that, in the previous period, Serbia attracted foreign direct investments of a very low level of complexity and sophistication, which created relatively weak positive spillover effects for the economy. For example, according to the CEVES survey (2019), as much as 50% of employment in the period 2009-2015 is the result of foreign direct investments type 1, which

include production of automotive cables, woven fabrics, seat covers, and which mainly employ 70% or even 80% of the labour force with low or almost no qualifications. According to the current situation and trend analysis, the targeted 20% of exports of high-tech products and services will be difficult to achieve without introducing relevant support measures and policy changes.

**Chart 20** The export share of high-tech products in total exports of EU countries and associated countries in 2018



Source: Eurostat

## Conclusion

No significant progress has been made in the previous reporting period in terms of achieving target 9.5. In terms of total R&D investments, Serbia is ahead of other economies in the Western Balkans, but significantly below the EU average and far from the projected objective that should be achieved by 2030. It is necessary to invest greater efforts in increasing business sector R&D investments and one of the ways is to organise promotional activities and educational seminars for the business sector on how to use existing tax incentives for R&D investments. This specific measure is envisaged by the Action Plan for the Smart Specialisation Strategy, however it has not been implemented in practice yet.

Positive development is the growth of the number of researchers, especially in the business sector. However, although this represents progress, the number of researchers in the business sector should grow at a much faster rate to reach the planned objectives by 2030.

Real expectations are that labour productivity will increase again after the end of the coronavirus pandemic and reach values before the pandemic.

Serbia has made no progress when it comes to growing exports of high-tech products and services. Considering the current level, it is highly unlikely that Serbia will reach 20% of the target

value without making a significant change in the foreign direct investment policy, which largely determines the structure of exports.

The existing legal and strategic framework is good and represents a good basis for Serbia's progress towards achieving target 9.5. However, implementation of strategic documents and the

monitoring and evaluation system are insufficiently transparent and very often quite inefficient. Much greater responsibility of competent ministries is required when it comes to the implementation of action plans and strategies, as well as introduction of the efficient monitoring and evaluation system.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 9.5:

- » Start with the implementation of measure 2.14: popularisation and increased use of newly implemented tax relief packages for R&D, which is defined in the Action Plan of the Smart Specialisation Strategy for the period 2021–2022;
- » Introduce the information system for monitoring implementation of action plans for strategies in the field of research and development in the MESTD;
- » Improve communication and coordination between line ministries in charge of innovation and research – establish an inter-ministerial working body for the implementation of the Smart Specialisation Strategy for the period 2020–2027 and the Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2025.
- » Consider a shift in the policy for attracting foreign direct investments by giving priority in terms of foreign investor subsidies to the companies that are establishing a research centre in the Republic of Serbia.

# Priority area 5: SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND SMART DEVELOPMENT AND THE FUTURE OF LABOUR

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, education needs to enable all young people to acquire competencies for decent work and life. Education is crucial for reaching all other sustainable development goals. Therefore, it is necessary to implement measures to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary

and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes (target 4.1) and to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (target 4.4).

**Nationalised target 4.1:** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

**Nationalised target 4.4:** Increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Quality education that leads to achieving relevant learning outcomes should enable an individual to actively participate in all areas of social life. Education is also a key element for achieving all other sustainable development goals.

Data on the quality and relevance of education in Serbia show that it is far from 21<sup>st</sup> century education: the achievement of Serbian students corresponds to the achievement of students from OECD countries of almost one and a half years younger age; after completing compulsory primary education, almost 40% of students in Serbia are functionally illiterate and the percentage of the 15-year-olds at-risk<sup>51</sup> amounts to 46% of

reading literacy and scientific literacy and 48% on the mathematical literacy scale (Videnović and Čaprić, 2020).

The implementation of priority targets of education (4.1 and 4.4) is focused on the quality of education. However, achievement of these targets ensures inclusion and fairness in education. It should be borne in mind that quality education and acquisition of relevant skills are not and should not be limited to the needs of the labour market, current and future, but that they should contribute to personal development, self-awareness and critical viewing of the world.

## Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving targets 4.1 and 4.4 in 2030 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

- I. Reduce the share of students failing to achieve basic literacy to 8% in reading, mathematics and science (baseline value 37.7% for reading and science, and 39.7% for mathematics);
- II. Increase the parity index for vulnerable students to a value ranging between 0.9 and 1 (baseline value 0.62 for reading and 0.60 for mathematics);
- III. Reduce 15–29 youth NEET to 8% (baseline value 19%).

The following text provides an overview of indicators<sup>52</sup> with new data available.

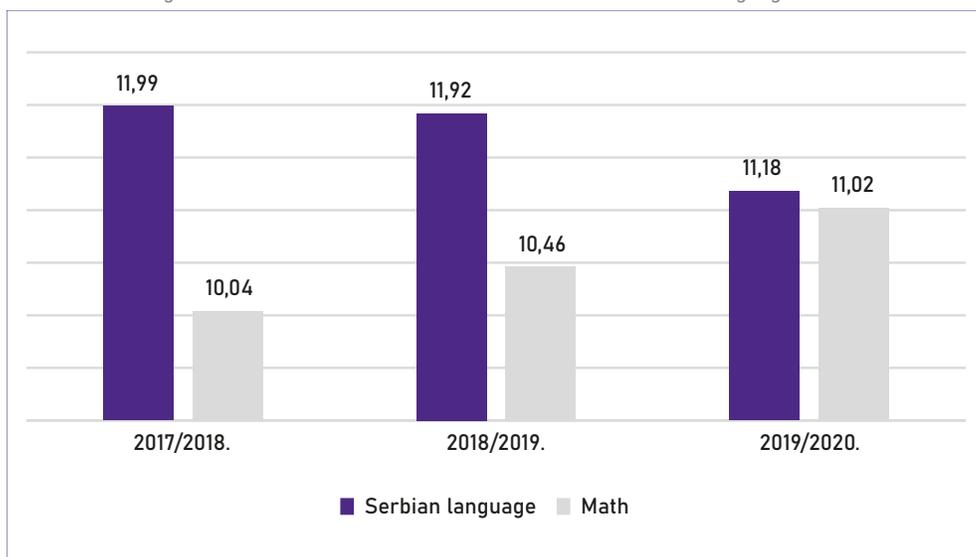
51 Data on the percentage of the 15-year-olds at-risk are obtained when the 15-year-olds who for various reasons did not participate in PISA testing (did not even go to primary school or dropped out of primary school, did not pass the final exam at the end of primary education) are added to the percentage of the 15-year-olds who participated in the PISA survey and had an achievement below level 2.

52 Data for the first two indicators were taken from the PISA survey, which will be conducted in 2022 instead of 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The key indicators of the quality of education are data on educational achievements and outcomes determined by an external and objective assessment. Education in Serbia disposes with very modest quality indicators and available data enable determining facts about education in Serbia only on the basis of primary education (Ivić et al., 2021). Serbia participates in two international systems of the evaluation of educational achievements: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which includes fourth grade primary school students, and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which includes 15-year-old

students. The only external examination at the national level is conducted through the final exam at the end of primary education (Ivić et al., 2021). Since the PISA survey is conducted every three years, we provided an overview of results of the final exam in school year 2019/2020 (Chart 21). Student achievements in all three years are very low and ranges around 11 points out of possible 20, where two-fifths of students fail to solve even half of the tasks in the test. Results per districts show that there is a large difference in student achievements at the final exam. Thus, at the final exam in 2020, more than two thirds of districts were below the national average.

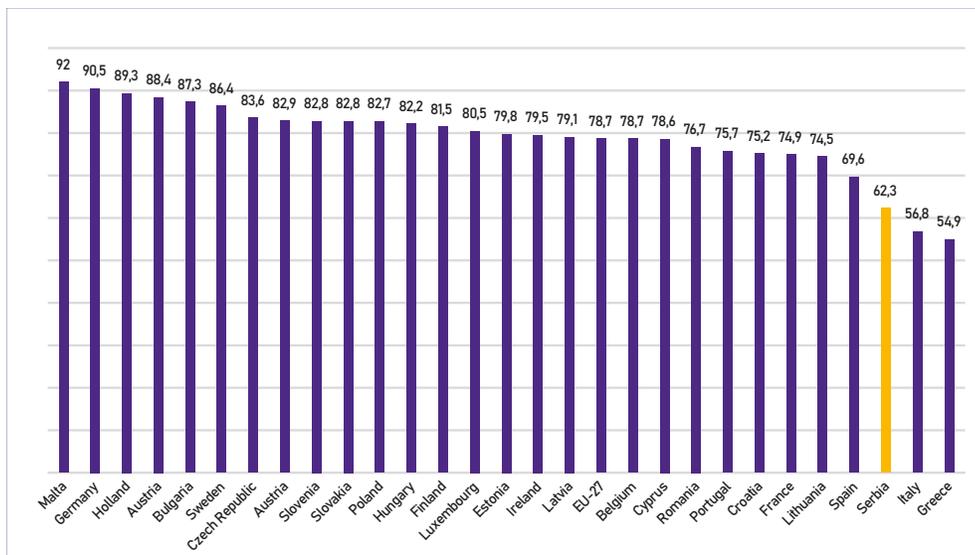
**Chart 21** Average achievement of students in the final exams in Serbian language and mathematics



Source: Ivić et al., 2021

**I. In 2020, compared to 2019, the position of youth in transition from education to the labour market deteriorated – the employment rate in the period from one to three years after graduation decreased by 4.2 percentage points.**

This trend is present in most EU countries, which is probably caused by the crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic. The same as last year, youth in Serbia face greater difficulties than their peers in most EU countries (Chart 22) and lower employment rates are found only in youth in Greece and Italy.

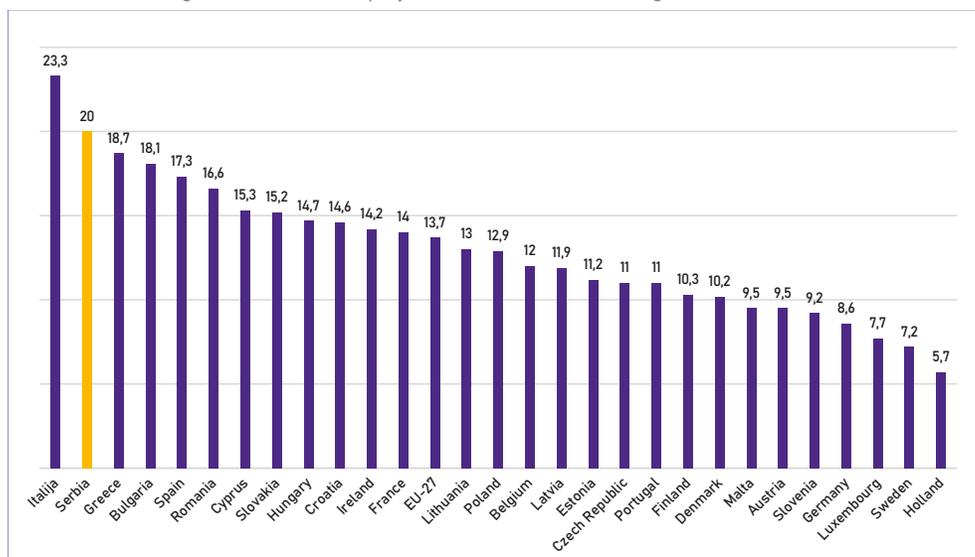
**Chart 22** Employment rates of recent graduates aged 20–34 (%)

Source: Eurostat

## II. Other indicators of transition from education to the labour market – youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) – also indicates a more unfavourable position of youth aged 15–29 compared to the previous year.

The NEET rate increased by one percentage point, mostly in case of people with secondary education (by 2.1 percentage points). Together with Italy, Serbia has the highest NEET rate (Chart 23). One fifth of youth are unemployed or not in education. The largest obstacles in entering the labour market have people with university and secondary education (NEET rate from 23.8% and 21.8% respectively). The specificity of the NEET

rate in Serbia is that it is rather high in youth with university education and is twice as high as the average for EU countries – 27% (10.7%). A quarter of youth who have completed secondary vocational education are unemployed or not in education, which ranks Serbia, along with Italy, among the countries with the highest NEET rate for this level of education. Compared to general secondary education, secondary vocational education is not a guarantee for easier entry on the labour market since the NEET rate for youth who have completed secondary vocational education (25.1%) is 3.4 times higher than for youth who have completed general education (7.3%), which speaks about the problem of relevance of secondary vocational education.

**Chart 23** Youth aged 15–29 not in employment, education or training (NEET) (in %)

Source: Eurostat

The SDERS and the Action Plan 2021-2023 for the Implementation of the Strategy were not adopted in 2021. The new strategic document represents a step backwards compared to the previous one both in terms of planning quality and set target values. The quality of the primary and secondary education is mentioned in the first overall objective and in several specific objectives. However, none of the quality indicators stated in the overall objective refer to secondary schools. Despite the fact that functional literacy in all three domains is set as the target value, there are no specific objectives and measures that are relevant for the achievement of these target values. Target values (18.6%) are far below those set for indicators for achieving target 4.1 (8% of functionally illiterate by 2030). The relevance of education is mentioned in general objectives and one specific objective for university education, as well as in one measure related to adult education. Target values for increasing the number of young people and adults with relevant skills were not

defined. Two indicators of overall objectives refer to the relevance of education. The first indicator in the first overall objective refers to the NEET rate for the age group 15–24 (reduction from 15.3% to 10% in a ten-year-period), that is, for the age group with the lowest rate because most young people in that age group is in the formal education system. The second indicator within the second overall objective is defined as the percentage of students who were employed in their profession (maximum three years) after graduation with a target value of 70%, which is the same as in 2019.<sup>53</sup>

The Employment Strategy for the period 2021–2026 does not show a commitment with planned target values to improve the position of youth in relation to the working age population. According to projected values, the gap between the working age population and youth will increase in terms of employment and activity (Bradaš, 2021).

53 The baseline value of the indicator states that “the system has yet to start collecting this data” (SORS, p. 57). However, the data exists in the Eurostat database for Serbia as well, and for 2019 it is 70.7%. Data are available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT\\_LFSE\\_24\\_\\_custom\\_1654544/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT_LFSE_24__custom_1654544/default/table?lang=en).

## Conclusion

The values of indicators that refer to the relevance of skills marked a slight decrease in the previous reporting period. Youth continue to face difficulties in transition from education to the labour market, which is further enhanced with the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. If such a trend continues, Serbia will achieve target values in targets identified as priorities for SDG 4 by 2030.

On the other hand, public policies, primarily in the field of education and labour market, which should create interventions that will lead to the achievement of target values set in targets 4.1 and 4.4, do not do this. New strategic documents in these fields set very low target values or, in the case of more ambitious objectives, do not provide instruments for their implementation.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving targets 4.1 and 4.4:

- » Initiate the SDERS revision process so that target values are adjusted to the values set in the 2030 Agenda for targets 4.1 and 4.4;
- » Redesign SDERS specific objectives and formulate specific measures that will lead to increased quality and relevance of education;
- » Increase education expenditure to at least 6% of GDP, which was the target set in the previous strategic document.

# Priority area 6: RESPONSIBLE AND EFFICIENT USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

It is necessary to make a shift from inefficient use of non-renewable resources to investments in green growth. The key is to upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and en-

vironmentally sound technologies and industrial processes (target 9.4), significantly increase the share of renewable energy in energy mix (target 7.2) and double energy efficiency level (target 7.3), as well as achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources (target 12.2).

## Nationalised target 9.4: By the end of 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes.

Compared to the EU, whose share in electricity generation from renewable sources increased significantly in the last several years, Serbia is moving in the opposite direction and records a constant increase in electricity generation from non-renewable sources, i.e. solid fossil fuels such as coal. According to official data of the International Energy Agency, Serbia increased its electricity generation from coal by 3.43% in the last year.

In addition, the manufacturing industry recorded an increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the fuel combustion process in 2018 (the latest available data). Moreover, observed in the last five years, the trend of growth of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from industrial plants is constant, with negligible annual oscillations.

One of important strategic documents for progress in this field is the Industrial Policy Strategy for the period 2020–2030. One of its objectives is to shift the industry from the linear to the circular model. The Action Plan for the implementation

of the Strategy is at the stage of implementation of three measures for the promotion of the circular economy – education of economic entities, encouragement of investments in circular and low-carbon economy solutions and encouragement of more efficient use of material resources and energy efficiency in industrial processes. Implementation of these measures is expected to make progress in the upcoming period when it comes to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the manufacturing industry.

During the EU – Western Balkans Summit, held on 6 October 2021, Serbia signed the Action Plan for the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which represents an important strategic document for the entire region. By signing this strategic document, Serbia decided to introduce measures that will contribute to decarbonisation, circular economy, pollution reduction, energy efficiency, etc. One of the most important Green Agenda goals, which should contribute to achieving target 9.4, is reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030.

### Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving target 9.4 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

I. Reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per 1 EUR of GVA by 50%, namely reach the level of about 0.6 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per GVA unit, while maintaining or increasing the share of the manufacturing industry in the GVA;

II. Reduce the share of electricity generated from solid fossil fuels by 20%, namely reach the level of about 50%, which is approximately the current level in North Macedonia and the Czech Republic.

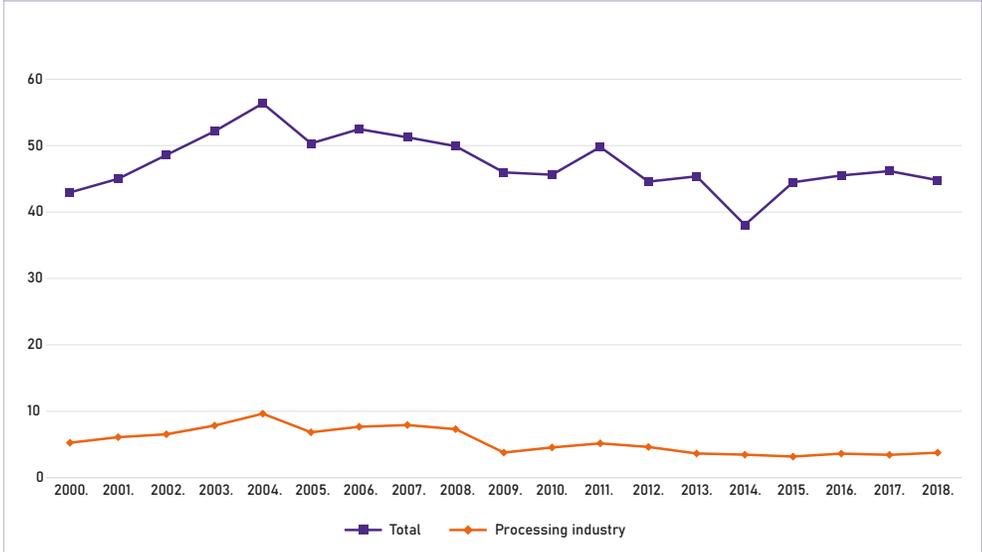
The following text provides an overview of the Republic of Serbia's progress towards achieving the stated targets, taking into account the latest available data from national and international sources.

## I. There has been no reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per unit of value added in the past period.

According to the latest available data, the Republic of Serbia emitted 3.77 million tons of

CO<sub>2</sub> in 2018 from the fuel combustion process in the manufacturing industry, which represents an increase in harmful gases emissions compared to 2017, when this value was 3.44 million tons (Chart 24).

**Chart 24** CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the fuel combustion process (million tons), Republic of Serbia

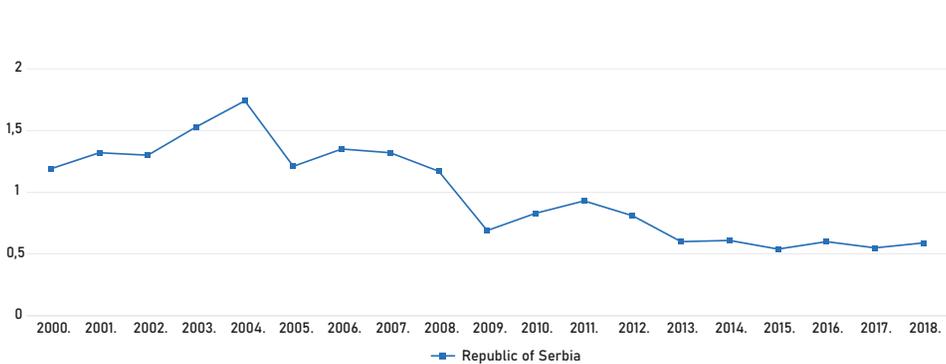


Source: International Energy Agency

Chart 25 shows the trend of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the manufacturing industry in the period from 2000 to 2018, expressed in unit of measurement: kg of CO<sub>2</sub> at constant 2015 USD. After the

period of reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which lasted from 2004 to 2013, this value was constant in the period from 2014 to 2018 with negligible annual oscillations.

**Chart 25** CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per unit of value in the manufacturing industry (kg CO<sub>2</sub> at constant 2015 USD)

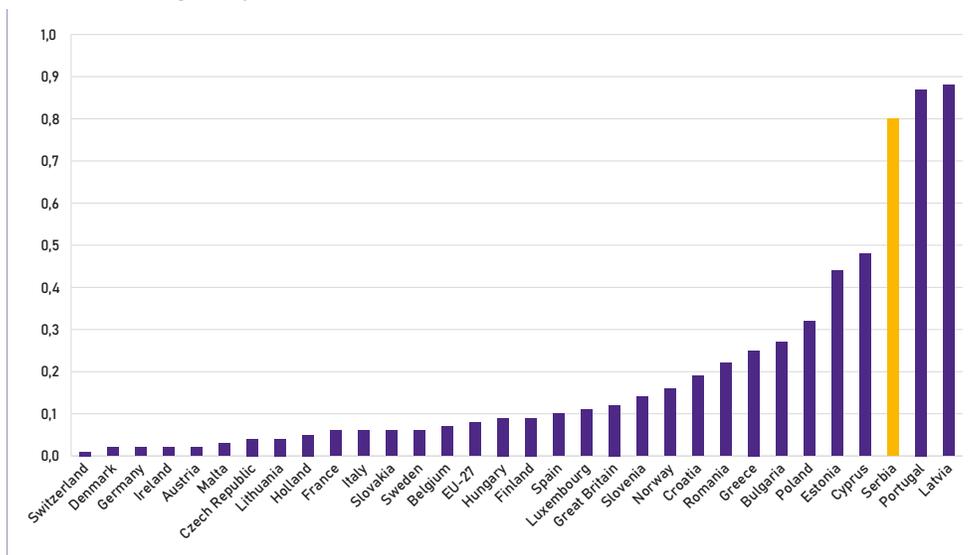


Source: International Energy Agency

According to the intensity of PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions from the manufacturing industry, Serbia is at the bottom of the list of European countries (Chart 26). According to this indicator, the intensity of

PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions from the manufacturing industry of the Republic of Serbia in 2018 was 0.8 grams per euro, which is significantly higher than the EU-27 average (0.08 grams per euro).

**Chart 26** The intensity of PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions from the manufacturing industry in 2018. Unit of measurement: (grams per euro, chain-linked volumes, 2010)



Source: Eurostat

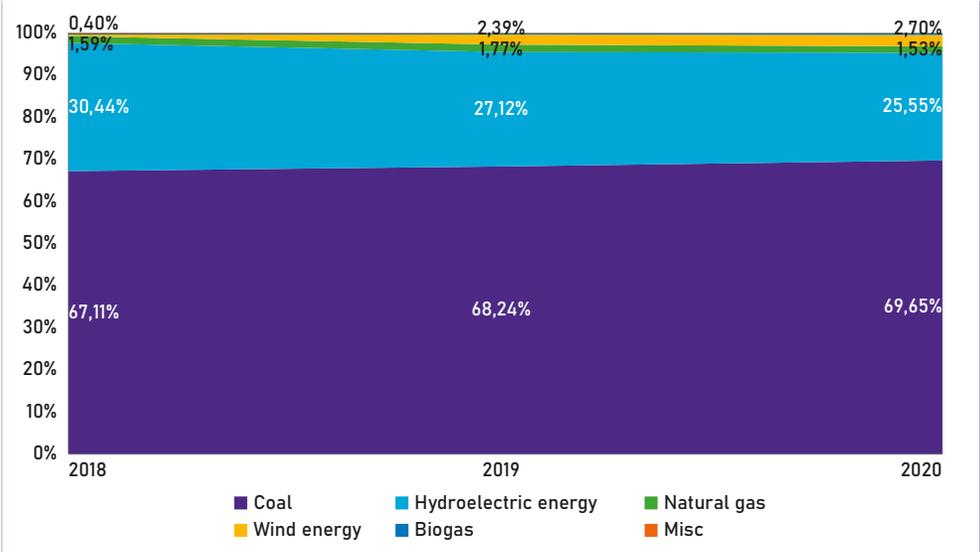
In addition, the value of the intensity of emissions of 0.8 grams per euro in 2018 represents the highest recorded value since 2008 (Eurostat, 2021). Thus, instead of reducing the intensity of PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions, the impact of the manufacturing industry on air pollution is constantly increasing.

## II. Serbia has made no progress in reducing the share of solid fossil fuels in electricity generation.

Moreover, Serbia recorded significant growth in coal-fired electricity generation (Chart 27). According to the data from the International Energy Agency, the total share of electricity generation from coal increased by 1.4% in the

last year, and by 2.5% in the last two years. In addition to the relative share, Serbia recorded increased electricity generation from coal in absolute values by 879 GWh, which is 3.43% of increase in electricity generated from coal in the last year. On the other hand, the share of hydroelectric power significantly dropped in the last two years, from 30.44% to 25.55%. Although it does not make a significant market share, it is worth emphasising that in the last two years, the share of wind energy in electricity generation increased from 0.4% (in 2018) to 2.7% (in 2020). The share of other sources of electricity generation is significantly lower.

**Chart 27** The share of different sources of electricity generation in the Republic of Serbia in the period 2018–2020



Source: International Energy Agency

In the past year, two laws important for future progress in achieving target 9.4 were adopted: the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources and the Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy. Implementation of these laws is expected to increase the use of clean technolo-

gies in the industry, increase energy efficiency in production and significantly increase the share of energy generation from renewable sources, which will affect the achievement of target 9.4 in the upcoming period.

## Conclusion

Based on the current situation and trend in the last reporting period, a conclusion can be made that, instead of working on achieving target 9.4, Serbia is moving further away from it. Unlike the EU, which records higher electricity generation from renewable energy sources compared to coal, Serbia has not seen a continuous decline in electricity generation in recent years. In addition, the manufacturing industry also recorded an increase in adverse environmental impact in the last reporting period.

Serbia is at the very beginning of the implementation of specific measures that should affect the achievement of target 9.4. On 18 March 2021, Serbia adopted the Law on Climate Change, which is why it is expected that specific strategic documents and measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions will be created in a cost-effective and economically efficient manner, which will significantly contribute to the achievement of target 9.4 in the upcoming period. In addition, it is expected that the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources and the Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy will give specific results.

In view of the legal, institutional, organisational or strategic framework, it may be concluded that

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 9.4:

- » Create specific strategic documents (strategy, action plan, policy instruments) related to climate change adaptation in order to achieve full implementation of the new Law on Climate Change;
- » Introduce incentives for the use of clean technologies in the manufacturing industry and the use of renewable energy sources, as well as policy measures that will lead to reduced emissions of harmful gases from the manufacturing industry.

## Nationalised target 7.2: By the end of 2030, significantly increase the share of renewable energy in energy mix

The Republic of Serbia has exceptional potentials for energy generation from renewable sources such as biomass, solar energy, wind energy, energy from large watercourses. At the same time, biomass alone makes over 60% of the total potential of renewable energy sources. Insufficient efforts in their exploitation in the previous decade have led to the failure to meet national targets for 2020 in terms of the share of energy from renewable sources in final consumption, as well as the share of energy from renewable energy sources in final consumption

of the transport, electricity and heat generation sector. It is necessary to achieve a significant increase in the production of electricity, heat and fuels from renewable energy sources in order to reach sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia and to respond to the growing demand for decarbonisation of the electricity sector and other energy-intensive sectors. In addition, such transformation would reduce negative health consequences and increase country's energy security.

## Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving target 7.2 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

- I. Achieve the level of 27% of total final energy consumption from renewable sources at the national level;
- II. Achieve the level of 10% of total final energy consumption from renewable sources in the transport sector at the national level.

The stated targets are the official targets of the Republic of Serbia until 2020 and it commit-

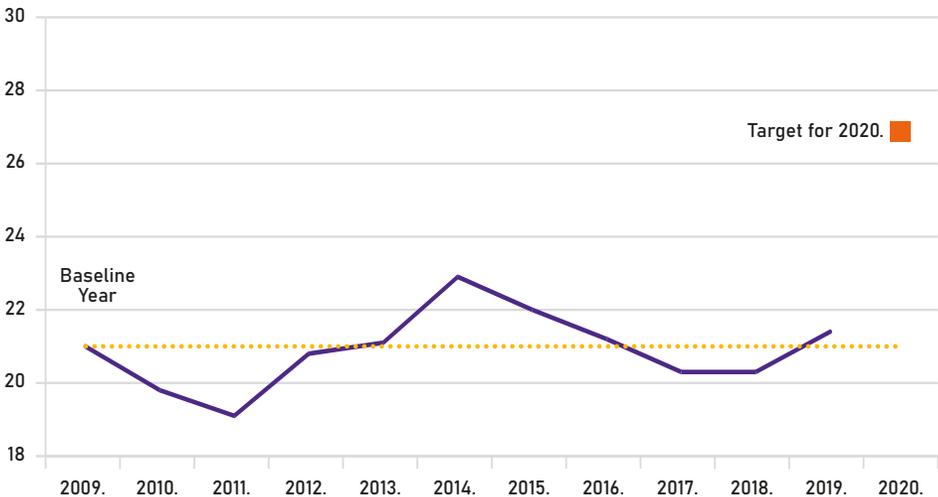
ted to achieving them by transposing Directive 2009/28/EC on renewable energy sources, whose provisions became part of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community by Decision of the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community D/2012/04/MS-EnZ. No significant efforts have been made in the previous decade in achieving these targets, thus, their achievement remained out of reach. Progress made in year 2019, for which the latest data are available, is negligible in terms of achieving the targets. However, the Republic of Serbia expects to set new targets for 2030 equally ambitious as the targets at the EU level.

### I. Measures have been taken in the previous period to increase the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption.

According to the latest published data for 2019 (21.4%), the Republic of Serbia has recorded a slight increase compared to 2018 (20.3%) in terms of the share of renewable energy in total final consumption and it is quite certain that it will not meet the mandatory target of 27% set for 2020. In terms of other signatories of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community from the Western Balkans, Montenegro and Kosovo<sup>7</sup> will achieve set targets, and the reason for this is primarily an audit of data on the amount of biomass consumed. To conduct an audit, it is necessary to conduct research that the Republic

of Serbia announced for 2021 in cooperation with the SORS and with the financial support of the Energy Community Secretariat (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2021). It should be borne in mind that this indicator is limited in its nature and depends on total final energy consumption, namely, it does not always reflect the actual amount of consumed energy from renewable sources. The year 2014 is thus indicative, in which, at first glance, the Republic of Serbia achieved the highest energy generation from renewable sources. However, in this case, the increased RES share in final consumption was the result of significantly reduced final energy consumption due to the impact of floods on the electricity sector, and not due to the actual increase in the use of energy from renewable sources.

**Chart 28** The share of renewable energy sources in total final energy consumption in Serbia over the years, 2021



Source: Eurostat

In accordance with the recommendations of the Non-Governmental Sector Report published in 2020, the development of a new development strategy has begun along with the development of an Energy Strategy Implementation Programme and the NECP. It remains to be seen whether the new planning framework will

finally keep up with time and set a direction and define time and pace of decarbonisation of the electricity sector in accordance with country's international obligations, which is inevitable if we strive to increase energy generation from renewable sources. With the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans,

signed in October 2020, the Republic of Serbia has also unequivocally committed to increasing the RES share in its energy mix. In accordance with the provisions of the new Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources, the 2030 targets will be set in the process of drafting the NECP, which refer to the share of energy from renewable sources in gross final energy consumption, final energy consumption in the transport sector, as well as in the electricity and heat generation sector. The signatories of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community, including the Republic of Serbia, confirmed the opinion that these targets should be equally ambitious as the targets at the EU level with the General Policy Guidelines on the 2030 Targets for the Energy Community and the Signatories of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community of November 2020, adopted by the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community (Energy Community, 2020).

The legal framework of the Republic of Serbia has been significantly improved in terms of the promotion of renewable energy sources. This primarily refers to the new Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources from April 2021, which states conditions for mass investments in the RES sector. This is primarily reflected in the status of the buyer-manufacturer, or so-called prosumer, which was recognised in the country's legislation for the first time. The adoption of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Energy made the prosumer status the subject of defining and the subject of the umbrella sectoral law. Legal entities, as well as households and building communities acquire the prosumer status, and they connect private facilities for electricity generation from RES (primarily photovoltaic systems) to internal installations, where they use generated electricity for personal needs and the rest is delivered to the electric power system. In order to better define the manner of acquiring the prosumer status, as well as the relation between the prosumer and the supplier, the Regulation on the Criteria, Conditions

and Manner of Calculation of Receivables and Liabilities between the Prosumer and Suppliers was adopted in August 2021. Certain restrictions for prosumers still exist, they cannot use other incentives that are the subject of the new law, nor are they entitled to the right to a guarantee of origin. Another important component of the new Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources is the incentives reform. In accordance with the recommendations of the Non-Governmental Sector Report published in 2020, the feed-in tariffs were eliminated, and they were retained only for small plants and demonstration projects. Feed-in tariffs have been replaced with market premiums, which also represent a type of operating state aid in the form of a supplement to the market price of delivered electricity. However, unlike feed-in tariffs, market premiums are not guaranteed beforehand to producers and their amount is determined in a public competition, or at auctions. Based on the quotas prescribed by the Government, the Ministry in charge of mining and energy conducts auctions and informs the public about their execution, while the Energy Agency of the Republic of Serbia determines the maximum amount of the market premium. Bidding ensures more efficient spending of limited public resources and less burden for end users. In addition, the competent ministry publishes a three-year incentive plan which, among other things, contains a tentative auction schedule, expected new capacities and total incentives. The competent ministry still has not adopted the relevant plan, which is expected to be adopted by the end of February 2022. For the first time, the Ministry announced a public call for local self-government units, which would support installation of solar panels and accompanying installations for electricity generation in households for September 2021. This will directly contribute to increasing this form of energy generation. One observation in the Non-Governmental Sector Report was the definition of precise conditions for the construction of small hydro power plants to avoid their construction

primarily in protected areas. The Law on the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources, as well as the amended Law on Nature Conservation, introduce a ban on the construction of hydro power plants in protected areas, except in the case of projects of public and general interest and national importance, without defining how these interests are determined. According to the Law on Nature Conservation, the MEP determines whether there is a public or general interest within 15 days from the submission of the request of the competent authority.

The institutional framework for implementation has been slightly changed and the RES Department of the Ministry of Mining and Energy was transformed into the u Green Energy Department, headed by the Assistant Minister. In this way, the importance of the Department has been improved in the institutional sense. However, the number of workplaces envisaged in this Sector has not been met.

## **II. No progress has been made in increasing the share of renewable energy in final consumption in the transport sector.**

By transposing Directive 2009/28/EC on renewable energy sources, the Republic of Serbia committed to reaching the mandatory share of renewable energy in final consumption of several sectors, including the transport sector. In the case of the Republic of Serbia, this target was set at 10%. However, due to the lack of adequate incentive facilities, this target has not been achieved. In 2019, the share of renewable energy in total final consumption in the transport sector amounted to 1.14%, which is the lowest value since 2010 (SORS, 2021a).

With the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda, the Republic of Serbia showed commitment to the implementation of measures that will

contribute to increasing the share of renewable fuels in final consumption in the transport sector. They include the implementation of sustainable mobility solutions at the regional level, including plans for the use of alternative fuels and the construction of filling stations, as well as increasing regional cooperation in the development of an alternative fuel infrastructure and similar facilities. Finally, the Declaration calls for the preparation and implementation of sustainable urban mobility plans for urban areas. During the reporting period, several cities in Serbia have prepared these plans, including Belgrade and Šabac (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2020).

The Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources introduced important novelties in the use of renewable energy sources in the transport sector. In addition to biofuel, this category also includes biomethane, electricity, renewable liquid and gaseous fuels of non-biological origin (primarily hydrogen) and recycled carbon fuels. In order to achieve the planned share of renewable energy sources in final energy consumption in the transport sector by 2030, which will be defined by the NECP, the Law opens a possibility for granting incentives to biofuel producers in the form of investment state aid. In addition, the subject of an incentive may also be renewable hydrogen and other similar innovation technologies that contribute to increasing the use of energy from renewable sources, as well as in other non-transport sectors. According to the announcements of the competent ministry, renewable hydrogen will be the subject of the Energy Sector Development Strategy for which contributions will be prepared by the Hydrogen Strategy Team, which brings together representatives of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the University in Belgrade, the Institute Mihajlo Pupin and the private sector (Ministry of Mining and Energy, 2021).

## Conclusion

Due to the lack of political will, measures taken in the previous decade in the Republic of Serbia were not nearly enough to respond to international commitments, which may be seen in missed targets for the share of renewable energy in final consumption. However, reforms in the country's planning framework have been initiated in 2021,

which will integrate new ambitious targets in the field of renewable energy sources, whereas the regulatory framework, which has been significantly improved with a new package of laws, will provide significant investments in the upcoming period.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 7.2:

- » Adopt ambitious 2030 targets on the share of energy from renewable sources in gross final energy consumption and final energy consumption in the transport, electricity and heat generation sector within the NECP;
- » Adopt a three-year incentive plan whose implementation will ensure monitoring of the trajectory needed for achieving 2030 targets in the field of renewable energy sources;
- » Conduct campaigns aimed at informing the public about the benefits of acquiring the prosumer status and promoting the installation of photovoltaic systems in households by the Ministry in charge of energy affairs;
- » Announce public calls for support to the installation of photovoltaic systems in local self-governments throughout the Republic of Serbia;
- » Implement support programmes for research and development projects in the field of renewable hydrogen and other innovative technologies. Provide an incentive for production, transport, warehousing and use of renewable hydrogen;
- » Establish institutional mechanisms at the national level for providing support to local self-governments interested in building biomass-fired heating plants. Promote energy transition from fossil fuels in the heating system at the local level.

## Nationalised target 7.3: By 2030, double energy efficiency level.

The Republic of Serbia is characterised by high energy intensity, that is, high energy consumption per unit of produced value, which is most often expressed in GDP. Obsolescence of industrial processes, inefficiency of the electricity sector and in particular high energy consumption in households, due to a number of reasons such as poor quality of thermal insulation and use

of inefficient devices, are some pieces of the puzzle whose systematic solving will unlock sustainable development. By making room for savings in energy consumption, space opens for more efficient use of limited resources and raises energy security whose importance is especially evident in conditions of market disturbances of prices of energy products.

## Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving target 7.3 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

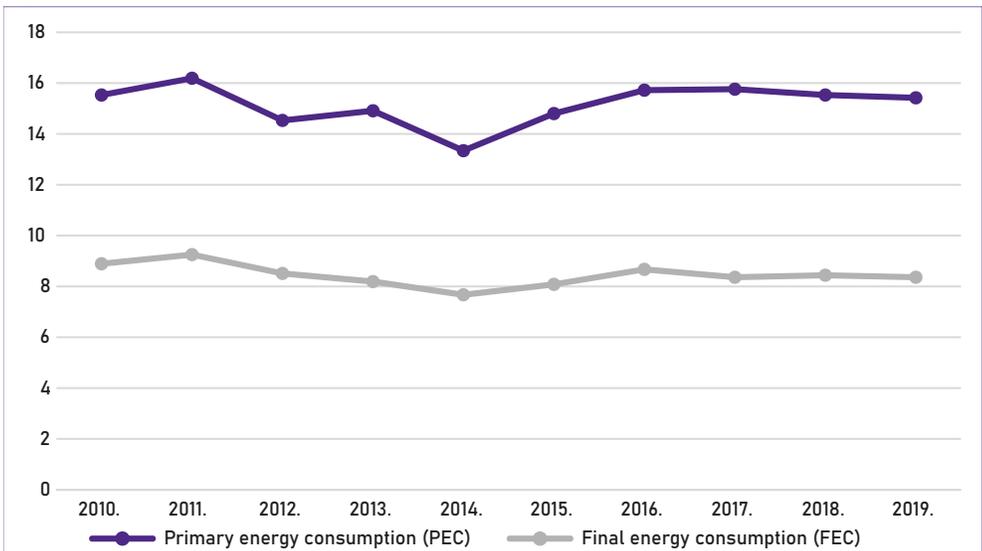
- I. Significantly reduce the level of final energy consumption at the national level;
- II. Achieve the energy intensity level of 5 MJ/USD.

Official targets of the Republic of Serbia in the field of energy efficiency referred primarily to reduced final energy consumption, whereas energy intensity in this regard can be used as a complementary indicator. After the failure to adopt realistic targets for 2020 at the level of the Energy Community, new, measurable targets for 2030 will be adopted in the NECP, which is being drafted. In the period from 2010 to 2018, the largest part of the planned reduction of final energy consumption was achieved and defined in three energy efficiency action plans. The trend of final and primary energy consumption reduction continued in 2019.

### I. The implementation of existing measures and the establishment of new measures continued in the previous period for the purpose of increasing energy savings in final consumption.

Official targets of the Republic of Serbia in terms of savings in final energy consumption in the period from 2010 to 2018 were defined in Directive 2006/32/EC on energy efficiency, and transposed through energy efficiency action plans. As a signatory to the Treaty establishing the Energy Community, the Republic of Serbia assumed an obligation in 2018, in accordance with the Directive, to make savings in the amount of 0.7524 Mtoe, which is 9% of the reference energy consumption from 2008. A total of 88% of envisaged savings were made, that is, 0.661 Mtoe. Savings were mostly made by the residential sector (0.2487 Mtoe), then transport sector (0.2417 Mtoe), public and commercial sector (0.97 Mtoe) and industry sector (0.0736 Mtoe).

**Chart 29** Level of total primary and final energy consumption in the Republic of Serbia in the previous decade, 2020



Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia

Energy savings were affected by a set of measures, which include the sale of more modern vehicles, the construction of better insulated and more efficient facilities, the sale of more efficient devices and similar. Indicative targets for primary and final energy consumption in 2020, as well as calculation methodology, were adopted in accordance with Directive 2012/27/EU on energy efficiency at the level of the Energy Community. Targets for 2020 were defined in accordance with the projected values of primary and final energy consumption in the Energy Sector Development Strategy until 2025, with projections until 2030. However, energy consumption of the Republic of Serbia remained significantly below the projected values, thus the 2020 targets remained easily achievable. According to the latest data on the implementation of the Energy Balance of the Republic of Serbia in 2019, the total primary consumption of the Republic of Serbia amounted to 15.42 Mtoe, while the target value for 2020 is 17.98 Mtoe. Also, the amount of final consumption for 2019 was 8.36 Mtoe, while the target value amounted to 13.10 Mtoe. Having this in mind, the Republic of Serbia made efforts, as pointed out in the Regulation on determining Programme for the Implementation of the Energy Sector Development Strategy from 2017, to maintain the trend of final energy consumption savings at the level of 1% compared to 2008, for the period from 2018 to 2020. According to the latest available data presented in Chart 29, final consumption was reduced by 0.08 Mtoe in absolute amount in 2019 compared to 2018.

At the moment, the Republic of Serbia has no official objectives in the field of energy efficiency for 2030. This will change with the adoption of the NERP, which will define the objectives and measures for their achievement. Horizon 2030 and precisely defined objectives will enable effective planning and long-term rationalisation

of energy consumption. The NERP will replace previous action plans for energy efficiency, whose development was prescribed by the Law on Efficient Use of Energy from 2012, in accordance with Decision of the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community D/2009/05/EnZ by which the signatories of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community accepted the obligation to implement Directive 2006/32/EC on energy efficiency. In the period from 2010, the Republic of Serbia has adopted three energy efficiency action plans, the last of which expired in 2018. Three years later, the Fourth Energy Efficiency Action Plan was adopted. A draft of this document was prepared in 2020 and was sent to the Energy Community Secretariat in April 2021, which approved it. After that, the draft was sent to relevant state administration bodies for review and comments, and it was finally adopted in August, with a validity period until 31 December 2021, that is, for a period slightly longer than 4 months. Another strategic document that is crucial for the mentioned field, which is currently being drafted, is the Energy Sector Development Strategy, as well as the Energy Strategy Implementation Programme.

The legal framework of the Republic of Serbia in the field of energy efficiency was the subject of significant improvements during the reporting period. First of all, a new Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy was adopted, which replaced the existing Law on Efficient Use of Energy from 2013, and also kept a large number of old solutions. In accordance with the recommendations of the Non-State Sector Report, the new Law transposed Directive 2012/27/EU on energy efficiency.<sup>54</sup> Full transposition is expected with the adoption of a set of planned by-laws, whose adoption is envisaged by the new Law. The new Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy introduced a number

54 Transposition includes revisions of the Directive on energy efficiency, Directive 2013/12/EU, Directive (EU) 2018/844, Directive (EU) 2018/2002, Regulation (EU) 2018/1999, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/826 and Directive (EU) 2019/944.

of significant innovations in the field of energy efficiency improvement. One of them is regulation of the field of energy rehabilitation of central government buildings larger than 250 m<sup>2</sup>. Every year, the determined percentage of the sum of the total net floor area of all such buildings now becomes the subject of energy rehabilitation. The exact percentage in the total net floor area of buildings and the list of specific buildings that will be retrofitted are determined by the Plan for energy rehabilitation of central government buildings by the Government at the proposal of the Minister in charge of energy affairs. This will ensure a continuous reduction of energy consumption in these buildings. The obligation of conducting an energy audit has been extended by the new Law from the obligors of the Energy Management System to large legal entities, that is, enterprises. In addition, the plan is to establish the Directorate for Financing and Encouraging Energy Efficiency, digitalised reporting through the MVP database<sup>55</sup> which monitors progress in terms of objectives defined by the NERP, ISEM and SEMIS databases<sup>56</sup> intended for obligors of the Energy Management Systems and more. The old Law on Energy Efficiency has not, however, been fully suppressed, and has been temporarily retained in order to further define the Energy Efficiency Action Plan and the Energy Efficiency Fund.

Regarding the instruments that were available to the Ministry of Mining and Energy, which were used to rationalise the consumption of final energy in the public sector, the Budgetary Fund for Energy Efficiency Improvement and the Energy Management System singled out. A competition was conducted in October 2020 based on which resources from the Budgetary Fund for Energy

Efficiency Improvement were allocated for energy efficiency improvement projects of 20 local self-governments. The total value of new projects is RSD 470 million, of which RSD 270 million were allocated from the Budgetary Fund, while RSD 200 million were allocated from the budgets of local self-governments (Ministry of Mining and Energy, 2021a). In addition, the Public Investment Management Office has continued to manage projects for the renovation and rehabilitation of public buildings in the education, health and social protection sectors across the country, while ensuring lower energy consumption in these buildings. Two public calls were announced for the first time in the observed period, intended to support households in improving their thermal envelopes, that is, thermo-technical systems. Thus, for the first time, support was established to reduce final energy consumption in the residential sector, which is responsible for a third of total consumption. As part of the Programme for Financing Activities and Measures for Improvement of Efficient Use of Energy in 2021, the Ministry of Mining and Energy announced a competition for co-financing energy efficiency measures through the improvement of the outer envelope, improvement or replacement of heating systems and installation of solar collectors for hot water production. Funds in the amount of RSD 224.3 million were allocated to 67 local self-governments (Ministry of Mining and Energy, 2021a). The second similar call was conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the amount of RSD 100 million, which supported projects for the reduction of air pollution from individual sources in 10 local self-governments (Ministry of Health, 2021a). At the same time, the MEP conducted another call in the amount of RSD 200 million, through which it supported projects of 24 local

55 MVP (monitoring and verification platform) is an information system for monitoring and verification of final energy savings, managed by the Ministry in charge of energy affairs.

56 ISEM is an information system for monitoring and analysis of energy and water consumption in public buildings, which supports the needs of the energy management system and is managed by the Ministry in charge of energy affairs; SEMIS is an information system for monitoring the implementation of the energy management system managed by the Ministry in charge of energy affairs.

self-governments related to the procurement, replacement, reconstruction and rehabilitation of heating boilers in public buildings (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2021b).

Institutional and coordination mechanisms for the implementation of energy efficiency measures have been significantly improved with the adoption of the new Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy. The main novelty is reflected in the establishment of the Directorate for Financing and Encouraging Energy Efficiency, as a body within the Ministry responsible for performing executive and professional activities of financing energy efficiency jobs. Once established, it will replace the current Energy Efficiency Fund, which served only as a budget line to finance public sector projects. The scope of the Directorate envisaged by the new Law is quite wide. According to the Law, the Directorate will be in charge of preparing proposals for the annual programme for financing energy efficiency improvement activities and measures, preparing and implementing individual projects financed from foreign sources, such as the EU, then implementing all activities related to the allocation of incentives for the implementation of energy efficiency measures, and other related activities. At the same time, public calls will not only finance the retrofit of public buildings, they will also finance private households and legal entities, which will significantly increase the scope of consumption rationalisation. In addition, the Directorate will monitor making of energy savings and reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as a result of implemented activities. It will organise the provision of information and advice on the possibilities of implementation of energy efficiency measures, etc. According to the described tasks, this institution will become the primary actor in the implementation and monitoring of the activities directly related to target 7.3. Despite announcements, the Directorate was not formed in June 2021 and the date of its establishment remains unknown. A complementary activity

can be seen in the launching of the National Coalition for Energy Poverty Reduction, whose function will be to contribute to the reduction of energy poverty through a number of activities, including the creation and change of public policies especially in the field of energy efficiency. The intention is to ensure more efficient energy consumption in households and maximise the comfort of house members. The organisational unit within the Ministry of Energy responsible for energy efficiency has remained unchanged. This refers to the Sector for Energy Efficiency and Heating Plants and its Department for Energy Efficiency Improvement, Sustainable Development and Climate Change in the field of energy. The need for capacity building in the mentioned sector is obvious. In addition, the Department for Housing and Architectural Policy, Communal Activities and Energy Efficiency within the MCTI, which is responsible for energy efficiency in building construction, and the Market Inspection Sector of the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications are relevant for the implementation of eco-design and energy labels regulation.

## **II. The energy intensity of the Republic of Serbia continues to be significantly higher than the European average, however a declining trend has continued.**

The purpose of energy intensity is to calculate the efficiency of the country's economy, that is, the amount of energy needed to produce one unit of GDP. The limitation of this indicator should be borne in mind. First of all, sudden changes in the amount of energy consumption (such as in 2014), or GDP, can cause changes in the country's energy intensity. The SORS continues to monitor this indicator, measured through primary energy and GDP. The SORS data about this indicator that cover the past decade have been revised. According to the results of the last revision, the country's energy intensity decreased from 6.2 MJ/USD in 2010 to 5.3 MJ/USD in 2018

(Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2021b). According to the Energy Agency, the country's energy intensity is at the regional level in 2019, but 1.49 times higher than the European average (Energy Agency, 2020). Progress was noticed compared to 2018, bearing in mind that at that time it was 1.85 times higher than the European average (Energy Agency, 2019).

Reforms in the planning and legal framework in the field of energy efficiency, as well as the newly established measures listed within the first indicator, also refer to this indicator. The newly established Directorate for Financing and Encouraging Energy Efficiency stands out in the institutional framework related to this indicator, which will provide support to the public sector and for the first time to households in improving

energy efficiency. This is particularly important because the residential sector in Serbia has a significantly greater share in total final energy consumption than in the EU and, thus, causes country's higher energy intensity. According to Eurostat data, households in the Republic of Serbia participated with 34% in total final energy consumption in 2019, while in the EU they participated on average with 26% (Eurostat, 2021b). A number of reasons contribute to the comparatively greater consumption of Serbian households, such as poor thermal insulation, the use of outdated heating systems, inefficient devices and the like. Therefore, the newly established Directorate for Financing and Encouraging Energy Efficiency, as well as competitions for improving energy efficiency in the public sector and households, will ensure reduced energy intensity.

## Conclusion

Primary and final energy consumption recorded only a slight decline in 2019, and the latest data on this are available. The regulatory reform implemented in 2021 in the field of energy efficiency provided important innovations. First of all, the objectives and measures for their achievement will be defined in the NECP, whose adoption will provide a transparent framework for monitoring the progress of the Republic of Serbia in the field

of energy efficiency. This has not always been possible in the previous decade due to the lack of relevant planning documents and imprecisely defined objectives. In addition, the Directorate for Financing and Promoting Energy Efficiency will provide the necessary institutional framework for the implementation of innovative measures needed to increase energy savings, especially in the residential sector.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 7.3:

- » Adopt ambitious targets in the field of energy efficiency for 2030 within the NECP;
- » Expand support for improving the energy efficiency of private households;
- » Design tailored support programmes for energy-poor citizens who are unable to participate in co-financing regular programmes;
- » Establish the Directorate for Financing and Encouraging Energy Efficiency;
- » Implement a programme for informing the public about the importance and type of measures for energy efficiency improvement in private households by the Directorate for Financing and Encouraging Energy Efficiency;
- » Establish mandatory consumption-based metering and collection in district heating systems.

## Nationalised target 12.2: By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources

A modern management system in all domains, especially in the field of natural resource management, should gain a new dimension and that is sustainability. Modern strategic natural resource management includes the concept of sustainable management. In order to enable sustainable management of natural resources, it is necessary to start from a strategic plan as the first phase of defining objectives, means and methods.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods already covers the sustainable use and protection of natural values, or natural resources in the Republic of Serbia. Based on this Strategy, each individual natural resource or goods required detailed defining

of the method of use and protection of these natural resources through plans, programmes and baselines. However, these documents have not been drafted yet, which hinders good quality implementation of the Strategy and sustainable use of resources.

The essence of managing renewable natural resources is reflected in balancing the level of resource depletion and their regeneration rate. Management of non-renewable natural resources is much more complex and they represent one of the major factors of ecosystem pollution regardless of whether this concerns their use or their access. Therefore, these resources need to be managed with extreme caution and sustainability.

### Progress assessment

The indicator for monitoring the achievement of target 12.2 proposed in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" is as follows:

- I. Resource productivity with a target value of 0.7 EUR/kg by 2030;

This indicator measures the total amount of materials directly used by an economy and is defined as the annual quantity of raw materials extracted from the domestic territory of the focal economy, plus physical imports, minus all physical exports. In the period by 2030, the target for the Serbian economy could be to reach the level of 0.7 EUR/kg, measured by the resource

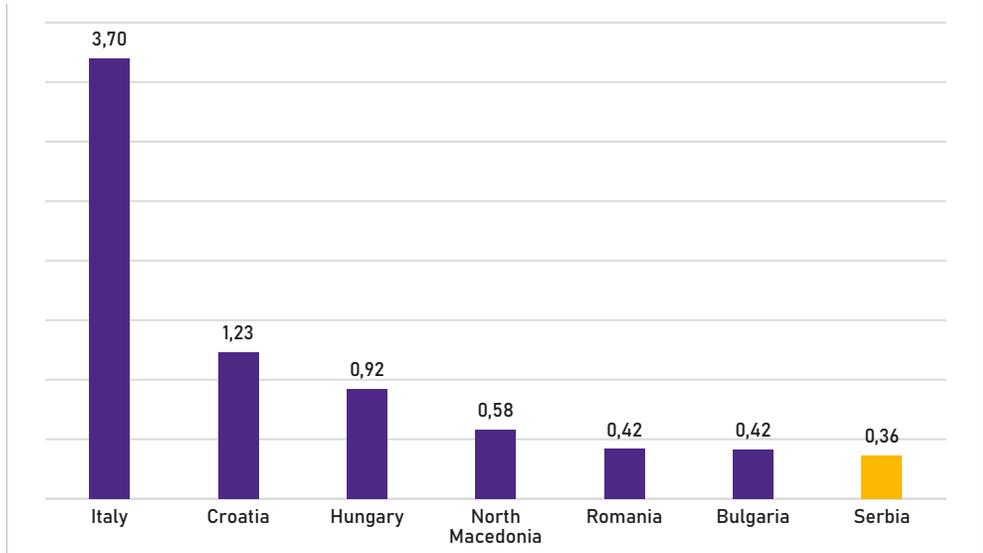
productivity indicator, which is at the level of Central and Eastern European countries.

In the SORS database (2021c) for monitoring indicators of Sustainable Development Goals, the latest data entered for this indicator are for 2019. The Eurostat website lacks data about this indicator for Serbia for 2020, which is why **it is not possible to assess progress in achieving target 12.2 in the reporting period.**<sup>57</sup>

Resource productivity in the Republic of Serbia had an annual growth rate of 0.49% in the period from 2010 to 2019. Chart 30 shows data for 2019 for Serbia and the surrounding countries and, according to the presentation, it is clear that Serbia ranks last in resource productivity.

57 Serbia is not an EU member state, thus there is no assessment of the resource productivity indicator on the Eurostat website. According to EU Regulation 691/2011 (legally binding act in the EU), the time limit for submitting data to Eurostat for the Material Flow Account is 24 months from the reference year. Eurostat for EU member states conducts an assessment after 12 months. SORS performs an annual calculation for this account and submits the data to Eurostat in December for the previous year. Several months after validation, data are published on the Eurostat website.

**Chart 30** Resource productivity – ratio between GDP and domestic material consumption (EUR per kg of material)



Source: Author's calculation based on data available at Eurostat

No changes have been made to the strategic framework in the reporting period that would contribute to the achievement of target 12.2. First of all, action plans for the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods have not been adopted.

In April 2021, four laws in the field of energy and mining were adopted, including two new laws – the Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources and the Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy, as well as amendments to two laws – the Law on Energy and the Law on Mining and Geological Exploration. Amendments and adoption of these laws may be relevant for achieving target 12.2 as they cover sustainable management of natural resources and

emphasise the use of renewable energy sources. Amendments to the Law on Mining and Geological Exploration changed definitions of certain terms, such as mineral resources, geological prospecting area, exploration license holder, exploitation field, and new terms were introduced such as security, investment agreement and preparatory works. It was determined that geological exploration and exploitation of mineral resources are of public interest and, exceptionally, in case exploitation is conducted in a protected area or an ecological network area, public interest and importance are determined in accordance with the law governing nature conservation.

In terms of the institutional framework, no significant progress has been made in the past year.

## Conclusion

Successful monitoring of the achievement of target 12.2 requires regular collection and processing of data required by the indicators defined by

the 2030 Agenda. The lack of data at the national level has made it impossible to assess progress in achieving targets in this reporting period.<sup>58</sup>

58 SORS performs annual calculations for the Material Flow Account, including calculation of the resource productivity indicator. According to the EU Regulation 691/2011 for the Material Flow Account, the time limit for submitting data to Eurostat is 24 months from the reference year.

Some of the key tools for making progress in the implementation of target 12.2 have not been adopted yet, such as action plans for managing

individual resources in line with the National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Resources and Goods.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 12.2:

- » All elements of circular economy, green procurement and energy efficiency need to be embedded in the strategic document addressing sustainable use of natural resources and goods;
- » Pass adequate laws regulating environmentally harmful and unacceptable production and consumption, i.e. import and export of environmentally unfriendly products and services;
- » Develop and adopt action plans for managing individual resources in line with the National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Resources and Goods.

# Priority area 7: CLEAN AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Investments in local infrastructure – primarily in wastewater treatment, solid waste management and protection from air pollution represent a priority to achieve clean local communities, healthy life and better quality of life for all citizens. It is necessary to implement measures to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water (target 6.1), improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating

dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials (target 6.3), reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and waste management (target 11.6), substantially reduce waste generation (target 12.5) and strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters (target 13.1).

## Nationalised target 6.1: By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water.

Serbia is relatively rich in water resources, however, despite this, the coverage of the population with public water supply is significantly lagging behind the European average. The national population does not have equal access to water and there are significant territorial differences in terms of the quality and quantity of accessible water.

In addition, a significant percentage of drinking water samples monitored at the national level are of inadequate quality.

National objectives for the improvement of the water supply system, set by the Water Management Strategy on the territory the

Republic of Serbia until 2034, are less ambitious than those defined by the 2030 Agenda. National objectives include increasing public water supply of the population to 93–97% by 2034 (Government

of the Republic of Serbia, 2017), while target 6.1 envisages connecting the entire population (100%) by 2030.

## Progress assessment

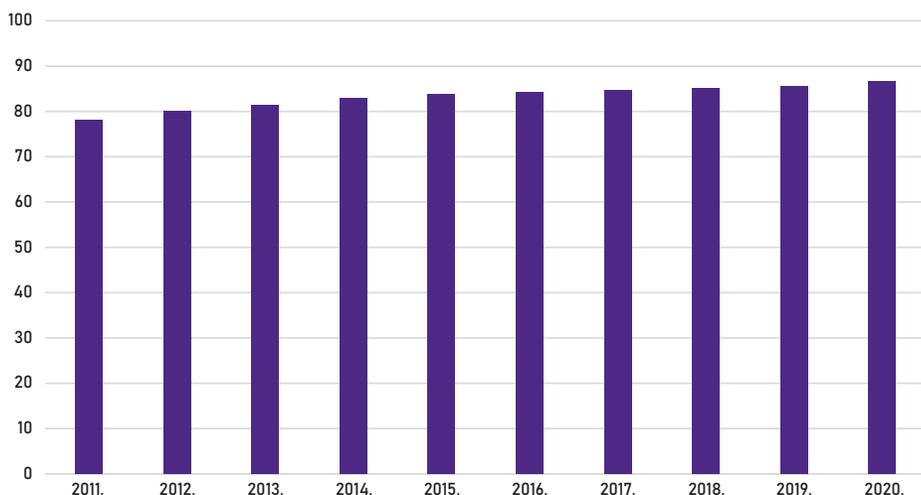
The following indicators for achieving target 6.1 in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are proposed as indirect indicators:

- I. The percentage of the population using drinking water from adequately managed public systems (from public water supply systems) should be 100%;
- II. Adequate water supply – the percentage of adequacy of drinking water samples in national monitoring should be 100%.

### **I. There has been less progress in the percentage of the population connected to public water supply systems in the past period.**

According to the SORS data (2021), which refer to 2020, 86.7% of households are connected. The percentage of the population connected to water supply systems was constantly slightly increasing in the previous decade, so there was an increase from 78% in 2011 to today's 86.7%.

**Chart 31** Percentage of households connected to public water supply systems



Source: SORS. Municipalities and regions in Serbia (editions from 2011 to 2020)

The Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy on the territory of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2023 was adopted in 2021. This Action Plan defines a specific objective related to increasing

the percentage of the population connected to public water supply systems.

Two indicators are prescribed for the stated objective from the Action Plan:

1. The percentage of households connected to the water supply network;
2. Water used for supplying drinking water.

In addition, the Action Plan contains four measures that can contribute to increasing the percentage of the population covered with public water supply systems:

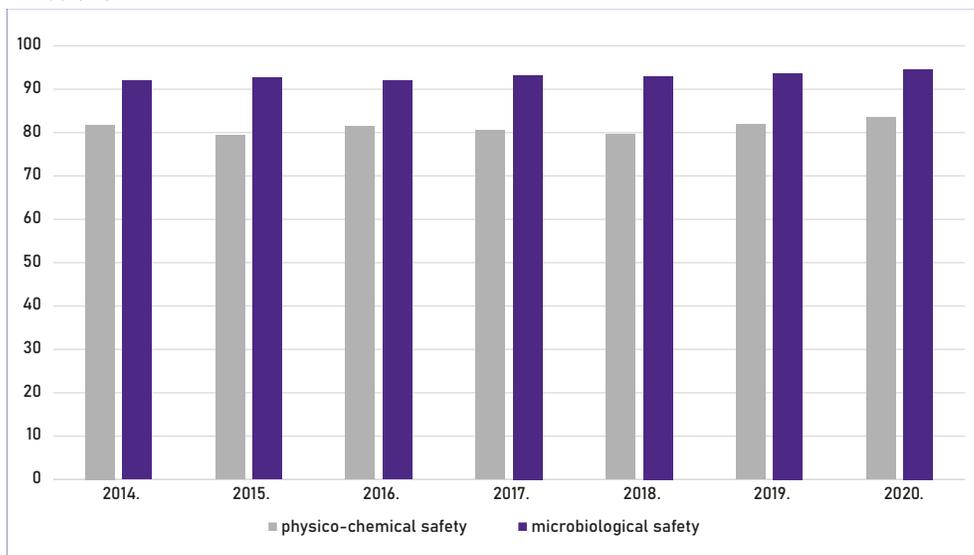
1. Continued construction of dams with reservoirs;
2. Continued construction of regional drinking water supply systems;
3. Completion of the existing public water supply network in settlements and its extension to suburban areas;
4. Maintenance of existing systems in operation, replacement of old pipes and connections and repair of damaged facilities.

There have been no changes in the legal framework in the previous period that would contribute to the improvement of public water supply. In terms of institutional and administrative framework, no significant progress has been made in the last year. The lack of human and material resources remain a major obstacle to significant progress in this field.

## II. Little progress has been made in increasing the drinking water quality in the previous period.

According to the data of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut", a total of 2,056 public water supply systems and water facilities were subject to control in 2020. A total of 92,250 samples were tested for physical and chemical adequacy, of which 83.5% were safe to drink. A total of 94,256 samples were tested for microbiological adequacy, of which 94.6% were safe to drink. In the 2019 report, the physical and chemical adequacy of drinking water samples was 81.9%, and microbiological 93.7%.

**Chart 32** Percentage of samples with good quality of drinking water connected to public water supply systems



Source: Institute of Public Health of Serbia "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut"

No significant changes have been made in the previous period in terms of the strategic and legal framework that would improve the quality

of drinking water. Administrative and institutional capacities have not changed either.

## Conclusion

Based on the indicators, some progress has been made in the previous reporting period in achieving target 6.1. Progress has been made due to the improvement of water supply systems at the local level, that is, due to the improvement of local distribution networks and water purification systems.

Despite slight progress, Serbia is still lagging behind European countries in the percentage of

the population connected to public water supply systems. The average share of the population connected to public water supply systems in EU countries is about 95% (Eurostat, 2021). Also, in Serbia, the percentages of drinking water samples of inadequate quality are relatively high (close to 1/5 of samples) and are by no means negligible. It is especially worrying that some cities (Zrenjanin, Titel, Kanjiža, Blace, etc.) have not had proper drinking water supply for a long time.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 6.1:

- » Provide strategic and financial support to local self-governments in improving water supply systems;
- » Identify all settlements that have a constant problem with water quality and implement urgent measures for achieving adequate drinking water quality;
- » Further improve drinking water quality monitoring.

## Nationalised target 6.3: By the end of 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally.

Surface and groundwater in Serbia are exposed to high levels of pollution from both concentrated and diffuse sources. Most municipal and industrial wastewater (concentrated sources of pollution) is not treated and is discharged directly to recipients. The percentage of the population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment is below 15%, whereas this percentage is much higher in EU countries (mostly over 60%). Diffuse pollution sources and, above all, individual sewage systems

and agricultural runoff greatly contribute to overall water pressures. Data on diffuse pollution sources are still insufficiently accurate.

Protection of water from pollution is the worst regulated field in the water sector. The basis of the legal framework for water protection is the Law on Waters and the Law on Environmental Protection. Serbian regulations in this field are still not fully harmonised with EU policies. Important planning documents

are still missing in the field of water protection from pollution, above all the Water Management Plan and the Plan for Water Protection from Pollution.

The Water Management Strategy on the territory of the Republic of Serbia until 2034 sets as one of

strategic objectives reaching and maintaining good status and good ecological potential of surface and groundwater bodies in order to protect human health, preserve marine and coastal ecosystems and meet the needs of water users.

## Progress assessment

The following indicators for achieving target 6.1 in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are proposed as indirect indicators:

- I. Increase the percentage of treated wastewater;
- II. The percentage of water bodies with good quality status should be 100%.

### I. In the past period, there has been little progress in the percentage of treated wastewater.

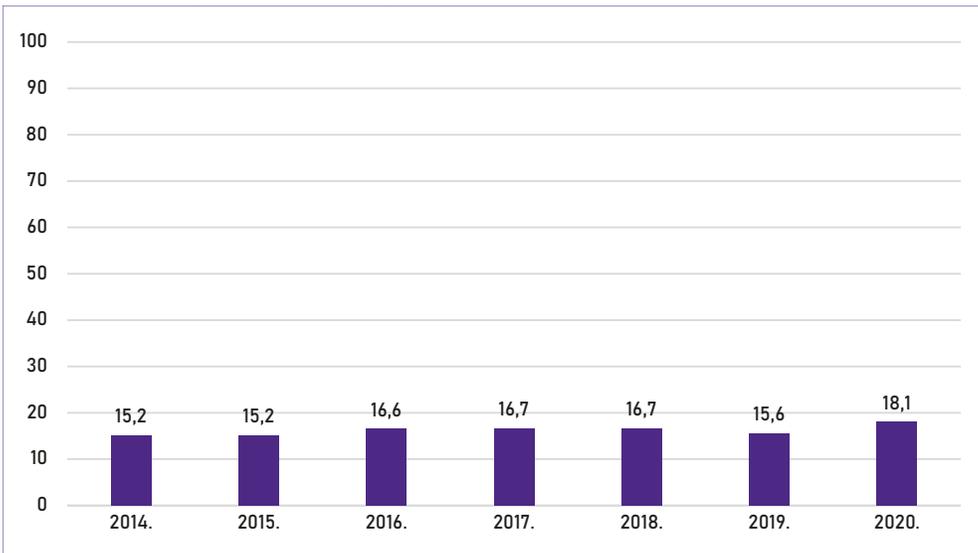
According to the SORS data (2021e), a total of 304 million m<sup>3</sup> of wastewater was discharged

into the public sewer in Serbia in 2020, of which 55 million m<sup>3</sup>, or 18.1%, was treated. In the same period, 28 million m<sup>3</sup> of total discharged 104 million m<sup>3</sup> of industrial water, i.e. 27%, were treated (SORS, 2021b). This represents a slight increase compared to 2019, when 15.6% of municipal wastewater was treated (SORS, 2020).

If only municipal wastewater with at least secondary treatment is taken into account, the percentage of treated water in 2020 amounted to 16.8%, while in 2019 it was 14%.

Data on the percentage of the population connected to urban water with at least secondary treatment have not been published for 2020.

Chart 33 Percentage of treated municipal wastewater (%)



Source: SORS

Regarding the strategic framework for water protection, some changes were made in 2021 with the adoption of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy in the territory of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2023. This Action Plan puts into operation the Water Management Strategy on the territory of the Republic of Serbia until 2034. This Action Plan defines a specific objective that refers to the protection of water from pollution.

The Action Plan prescribes several specific measures for increasing wastewater treatment, namely:

1. Introduce monitoring of the ecological and chemical status of surface waters and the chemical and quantitative status of groundwater;
2. Develop wastewater communal infrastructure;
3. Prepare technical documentation for the construction of a wastewater treatment plant.

According to this Action Plan, the target value for the percentage of the population connected to wastewater plants in 2023 is 15.4 %.

No changes have been made in the previous period in terms of the legal framework that would contribute to the improvement of water protection.

In terms of the institutional and administrative framework, there has been no significant progress in the past year either. The lack of human resources at the local and national level is still evident, which is reflected in the slow and inefficient preparation and implementation of projects for the construction of wastewater treatment plants.

## **II. Data on the percentage of water bodies with good status are not available for the previous period, thus it is not possible to assess progress.**

In the national database of sustainable development goals, data for this indicator exist only for 2014 and 2017 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2021c).

The share of all water bodies with good water status in 2014 was 62.2%, and in 2017 it was 67.8%. Groundwater bodies on average have better water status and 88.4% of them have good status. On the other hand, only 54% of river water bodies have good water status.

The latest report on surface and groundwater quality prepared by SEPA refers to 2019.

The Action Plan for the implementation of the Water Management Strategy prescribes several measures that can contribute to the improvement of water status in Serbia. In addition to measures related to the reduction of pollution and increase of wastewater treatment, the Plan also envisages monitoring of the ecological and chemical status of surface waters and of the chemical and quantitative status of groundwater.

The legal framework for water protection has not changed in the previous period. There has been no progress in the administrative and institutional framework either that would have an impact on this indicator. It is evident that there are still insufficient capacities for conducting appropriate water monitoring that would provide reliable data for the planning and execution of specific water protection measures.

## Conclusion

Based on the indicators, some progress has been made in the previous reporting period in terms of the percentage of water treatment. Given the very small percentage of wastewater that is treated, progress should be made significantly faster in order to improve water quality and drastically reduce pollution by 2030. With about 15% of treated wastewater, Serbia is significantly lagging behind EU countries in terms of wastewater treatment. Among the EU countries, Croatia (36.9%) and Romania (48.1%) have the lowest percentage of treatment, and all other

countries have significantly higher percentages (Eurostat, 2021).

Monitoring of surface and groundwater quality in Serbia is still underdeveloped to make reliable progress assessments. To make progress in water monitoring, it is necessary to build capacities of the Environmental Protection Agency and other competent bodies, but also to improve the regulatory framework so that measurements and data are harmonised and comparable with European standards.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 6.3:

- » Develop a Water Management Plan and a Plan for Water Protection from Pollution;
- » Update and complete water polluters cadastral at local and national levels;
- » Provide capacities and financial resources for faster construction of water treatment plants;
- » Develop mechanisms for monitoring water pollution from bulk sources;
- » Advance control of industrial water pollution;
- » Define specific measures for reducing water pollution from bulk sources.
- » Improve national monitoring of surface and groundwater quality;

## Nationalised target 11.6: By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.

Everywhere in the world, cities are recognised as major environment polluters, especially in the context of generating large amounts of waste and air pollution, which is why it is necessary to increase efforts to reduce their impact on the environment and human health. In the fields of air quality improvement and waste management, Serbia has an adequate legal framework, which is significantly harmonised with the EU *acquis*. However, institutional capacities are not fully adequate and there are no specific results.

There have been no significant changes in the previous year in terms of waste management: the percentage of coverage of the population with municipal waste collection services has remained at approximately the same level as in the previous year, and the recycling share remains low. Air quality has not improved – seven of the eight agglomerations of the Republic of Serbia recorded excessive air pollution in 2020.

## Progress assessment

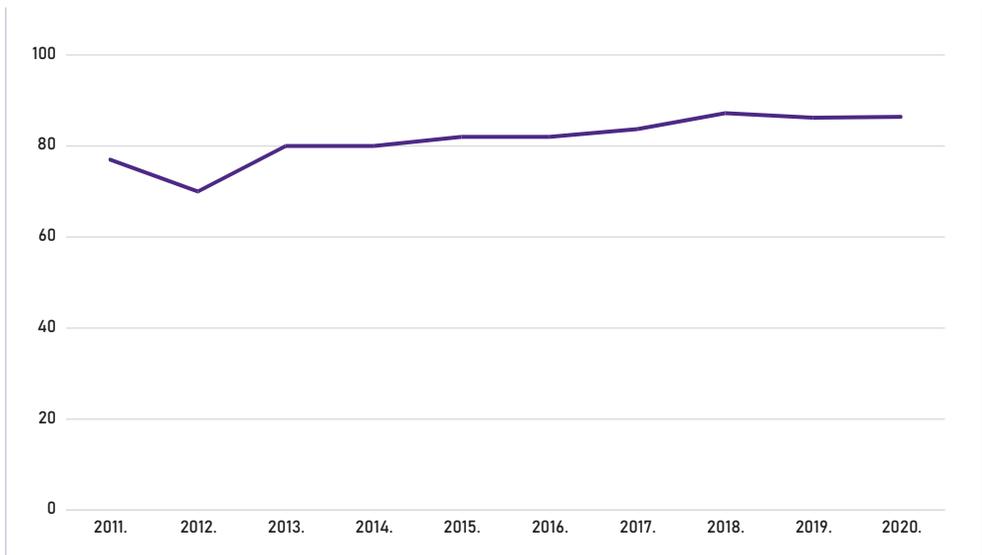
This section provides an overview of Serbia's annual progress according to the indicators defined in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report":

- I. By 2024, reach 100% coverage of the population of the Republic of Serbia with municipal waste collection services (in line with the draft National Waste Management Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2019–2024);
- II. Reduce PM<sub>2.5</sub> emission by 22% by 2030 (in line with Directive 2016/2284/EU INEC Directive).

### I. The coverage of the population of the Republic of Serbia with communal waste collection services remained at approximately the same level in 2020 as in 2019, and lower compared to 2018 (Chart 34).

The number of landfills has not increased in the past year. Although the plan is to build 29 regional sanitary landfills by 2020 (Coalition 27, 2020), there is still a total of 11 landfills, of which nine are regional and two are local (SEPA, 2021). The percentage of recycled waste in total municipal waste of the Republic of Serbia is 3%, which is still significantly below the EU average (48%) (European Commission, 2021). An additional waste-related problem, which also affects air quality, is inadequate landfill management. This is evidenced by landfill fires throughout Serbia. In 2021, landfills burned in Vinča, Bečej, Bor, Bujanovac, Jagodina, Kostolac, Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Požarevac, Sopot, Topola, Valjevo and Zrenjanin (Spasić, 2021b).

**Chart 34** Average coverage of waste collection (%) in the Republic of Serbia, 2011–2020



Source: SEPA (2020 and 2021), Environmental Reports of the Republic of Serbia for 2019 and 2020

Waste management strategic documents are still missing. The Waste Management Strategy for the period 2019-2024 is still in procedure. In addition, the Waste Management Programme with the National Waste Management Plan for the period 2021-2024, which should be the main document for waste management planning, is being drafted.

Serbia has considerably harmonised its legislation in the field of waste management with EU regulations, however these regulations have not been implemented adequately. The legal framework in the field of waste management should be improved with amendments to the Law on Waste Management, which are currently in the public debate process (Spasić, 2021a). These amendments should contribute to the harmonisation of the legal framework with European regulations and more efficient implementation of regulations.

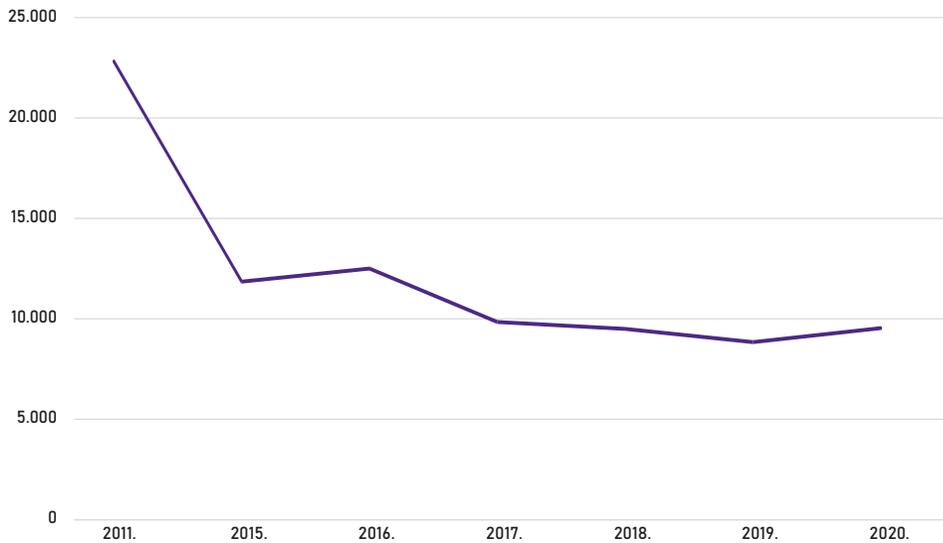
As stated in the EC Report, it is necessary to increase efforts in complying with environmental impact assessment rules and closing illegal landfills, as well as in increasing investments in waste reduction, sorting and recycling. As mentioned several times, it is necessary to strengthen institutional capacities, primarily of the Environmental Protection Agency, which employs fewer people than envisaged by systematisation and which has recently undergone staff changes in terms of employees with many years of experience.

## **II. There are no data on the reduction of PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions in the Republic of Serbia in the previous year.**

Since there is no report on the implementation of the National Emission Reduction Plan of Major Pollutants (NERP) from old large combustion plants, which would show annual emissions from 12 plants (Energy Community, 2021), the following sources were used in the text to give a general idea on particle emissions: the Annual Report on the Implementation of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community, EPS Environmental Reports and the Annual Air Quality Report published by SEPA.

The Report on the Implementation of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community shows a 2% increase in 2020 compared to 2019 of dust concentrations (including PM<sub>2.5</sub> among other particles) emitted by all plants under the Large Combustion Plants Directive (LCP Directive) (all plants with a capacity exceeding 50 MW). On the other hand, there has been a 0.5% reduction in dust emissions in 12 plants under the NERP (old large plants) in the same period (Energy Community, 2021).

EPS Environmental Reports show that there has been a reduction in particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> combined) in the period 2011-2020 emitted by thermal power plants within PE EPS from 22.8 thousand tons in 2011 to 9.5 thousand tons in 2020 (EPS, 2011-2020). The lowest concentrations were recorded in 2019, while in 2020 they remained at the similar level as in 2018. However, in Nikola Tesla A (A1-A3) and Kostolac A and B plants, emissions in 2020 exceeded maximum particulate matter emissions projected by NERP, in Nikola Tesla A plant almost by double.

**Chart 35** Quantities of emitted particulate matter from thermal power plants within PE EPS (t/year)

Source: Environmental Reports, EPS (2011, 2015–2020)

The Air Quality Report published by SEPA contains data on the concentrations of particles in the air, but not data on emissions of these particles. According to the latest Annual Report for the Republic of Serbia for 2020, in seven out of eight agglomerations determined by the Regulation Determining the Zones and Agglomerations, the air was classified in the third category in 2020, that is, it was characterised as excessively polluted. In agglomerations Belgrade, Niš, Smederevo, Pančevo, Užice and Kosjerić, the air was classified in the third category, that is, it is excessively polluted due to exceeded limit values of suspended particles PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>. The air in Bor agglomeration is of the same category due to exceeded limit values of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), while in Novi Sad the air is classified in the first category, that is, clean or slightly polluted. Although the SEPA Report shows what kind of air the citizens of Serbia breathe, it does not show the volume of particles emitted in the Republic of Serbia.

In June 2021, the city of Belgrade adopted a new Air Quality Plan for the period from 2021 to

2031. CSOs expressed concern about the actual effects of this Plan. The organisations state that the Plan was adopted without adequate public participation and that such a solution leaves broad space for discretionary decision-making by the authorities on whether to really implement air pollution prevention measures (RERI, 2021). In addition, many LGUs are late with the adoption of local air protection policies (Coalition 27, 2021).

Serbia's legal framework in the field of air quality is well harmonised with the EU legislation, however, the implementation of these regulations needs to be accelerated, including the adoption of air quality plans, and the air quality control system needs to be further improved, as stated in the EC Report. On the positive note, the SEPA Report states that the air quality measurement system has been improved and that data validity increased from 85% in 2019 to 90% in 2020 (SEPA, 2021).

Although harmonisation of regulations and air quality indices is important, increased investments are essential and have a real prospect to contribute

to reducing harmful emissions and improving air quality. Financial allocations for environmental protection are still insufficient to solve accumulated environmental problems. The MEP allocated about EUR 3.5 million in the budget for 2021 for reducing air pollution from individual sources – furnaces/stoves (houses and independent communities),

replacement of boiler rooms in public institutions and afforestation to reduce air pollution (Coalition 27, 2021). However, the Fiscal Council stated that it is necessary to allocate minimum EUR 500 million a year to solve environmental problems in Serbia and the level of investments in 2021 reached EUR 170 million (Fiscal Council, 2021).

## Conclusion and recommendations

No significant progress has been made in the previous reporting period in terms of achieving target 11.6 and additional efforts need to be made to bring Serbia closer to its achievement.

The following actions need to be taken in the field of air protection:

- » Introduce the "polluter pays" principle to encourage economic investment in green transformation;
- » Direct subsidies that are not used extensively for reducing air pollution; for example, subsidies for purchasing electric and hybrid cars should be redirected, for example, to financing solutions that will more effectively contribute to reducing harmful emissions and increasing air quality;
- » Build institutional and financial capacities for air quality control;

» Continue improving the network and data obtained from the network, in particular setting up stations in areas where no official measurements are conducted;

» Implement NERP and adopt and consistently implement local air quality plans.

The following actions need to be taken in the field of waste management:

- » Increase the coverage of the population with communal waste collection services;
- » Improve management and control at landfills in Serbia by the competent authorities;
- » Build a network of regional waste treatment centres according to global standards;
- » Adopt strategic documents such as the Waste Management Strategy and the Waste Management Programme with the National Waste Management Plan for the period 2021–2024.

## Nationalised target 12.5: By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.

In 2009, Serbia adopted the Law on Waste Management and the Law on Packaging and Packaging Waste, which set conditions for the establishment and development of an integrated waste management system in the Republic

of Serbia in accordance with the standards of relevant EU legislation in this field. Waste management is directly or indirectly regulated by other regulations that provide a legal framework

for environmental protection and sustainable development in the Republic of Serbia.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, total waste generation in Serbia in 2020 amounted to 12.5 million tons, of which 67,000 tons were classified as hazardous waste (SEPA, 2021).

## Progress assessment

The indicator for achieving target 12.5, defined in the 2030 Agenda and report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report", is as follows:

- I. By 2029, achieve the packaging waste recycling/reuse level of 53%

The national recycling rate is the amount of material recycled in the country together with the amount of waste exported for recycling out of total waste generated in the country, minus the material imported for recycling. This indicator is a measure of Serbia's success in complying with the waste management hierarchy, which would contribute to a significant increase in recycling by 2030.

The publication "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda", published last year, presented an important conclusion that a new waste management strategy needs to be adopted to enable monitoring of target 12.5. The Law on Waste Management defines the waste management hierarchy principle, which covers all aspects of target 12.5.

The Law on Waste Management defines recycling as any recovery operation by which the waste is reprocessed into a product, materials or substances, whether for the original or other purposes, including the reprocessing of organic materials, except for the recovery for energy-related purposes and the reprocessing into materials that are intended for use as fuel or for covering landfill sites.

The Packaging Waste Reduction Plan for the period from 2020 to 2024 sets objectives for waste reduction and recycling in the Republic of Serbia (Table 3), which are in accordance with Specific Plans for the implementation of Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC, Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste and Directive 2012/19/EC on waste electrical and electronic equipment.

**Table 3** Recycling objectives

OBJECTIVE	2024	2027	2029	2032	2039	2044
Recycling / reuse of packaging waste	46%	51%	53%	65%	65%	70%

Source: Government of the Republic of Serbia

Table 4 shows data on recycled material quantities. It is clear that there is a **slight increase in the amount of recycled material, which represents progress towards sustainable waste management**. Serbia is still far from achieving objectives that are in accordance with the Specific Plans

for the implementation of Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC, Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste and Directive 2012/19/EC on waste electrical and electronic equipment.

**Table 4** National recycling rate in tons of recycled municipal and packaging waste material

PERIOD	2017	2018	2019	2020
Republic of Serbia	283,000	330,000	334,000	343,000

Source: SEPA

One of the main obstacles to collecting data on the quantities of generated waste, regardless of the type of waste, and in this case of recycled waste, is that not all waste producers send their data to the Environmental Protection Agency although this is a legal obligation prescribed by the Law on Environmental Protection. Every waste producer, except households, is obliged to keep daily records of waste and submit a regular annual report to the Agency, including data on types and quantities of generated waste. Reporting is done according to the Rulebook on the methodology for the development of national and local registers of sources of environmental pollution, as well as methodology for types, methods and time limits for data collecting and the Rulebook on the form of a daily record and annual waste report with the filling in instructions.

There have been no changes in strategic documents in the analysed period that are relevant for monitoring this indicator. In 2019, through the twinning project "EU Support to the development of a strategic framework in the field of waste management", the following planning documents were prepared: the draft Waste Management Strategy and the Waste Prevention Programme, which would contribute to reaching the target value for this indicator. However, they have not been adopted yet. Based on the Law on Packaging and Packaging Waste, the Government passed the Regulation on the establishment of the Packaging Waste Reduction Plan for the period from 2020 to 2024. This Plan sets overall recycling objectives, where an objective for 2020 was recycling 56% of total packaging waste. In June 2021, SEPA published "Report on packaging

and packaging waste management in 2020". According to data from this Report, operators reported 226,020.8 tons of reused packaging waste. Out of this quantity, a total of 216,711.2 tons of packaging waste were handed over for recycling. These data show that overall national objectives of the Republic of Serbia in 2020 related to waste reuse in the amount of 62.6% and waste recycling in the amount of 60.0% were achieved. However, informal collectors in the organised waste management system are a big problem. Monitoring recycling activities is more complicated in the informal sectors. The new Law on Waste Management should recognise informal collectors, as the amount of recycled waste they collect is not included in data collected by SEPA and, consequently, not even in data on achieving the indicator for target 12.5.

The Waste Management Programme of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2024 was drafted in September 2021 in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Planning System of the Republic of Serbia and accompanying by-laws. One of important changes this programme should bring, which is important for achieving target 12.5, is transition from the concept of regional sanitary landfills to the concept of regional recycling centres.

Several changes have been made in the reporting period in terms of the legal framework that ensure the achievement of target 12.5. Based on the Law on Waste Management, the Minister of Environmental Protection amended two important rulebooks:

- » Rulebook on the form of a daily record and annual waste report with the filling in instructions;
- » Rulebook on categories, testing and classification of waste.

These Rulebooks are important for achieving target 12.5 because they regulate waste records, waste characterisation and categories, which is the first step in responsible waste management. When data on waste category and characterisation and data on quantities exist, it is possible

to make an assessment of whether that waste can be recycled or not. In order to manage waste sustainably, it is primarily important to know waste quantities and its character.

Some progress has been made in the past year in terms of the institutional framework. The Section for Development of Waste Management System and Cooperation with LGUs has been established within the Waste Management Department in the Ministry of Environmental Protection, which will perform tasks leading to sustainable waste management.

## Conclusion

No major changes have been made in the reporting period in terms of achieving target 12.5. The Waste Management Strategy, the umbrella document for the waste area, has not been adopted. The Law on Waste Management has not been amended, only two rulebooks have been revised. A positive change is the achievement of the packaging waste recycling objective.

There is still a trend that most waste ends up in unsanitary landfills without prior selection. In this manner, the waste that could be recycled is mixed with other waste and thus, instead of being useful, it additionally pollutes the environment.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 12.5:

- » Adopt the Waste Management Strategy with the Municipal Waste Management and Recycling Action Plan;
- » Introduce the functional inspection oversight system;
- » Ensure preconditions for the implementation of the waste management hierarchy principle with a focus on waste generation prevention, waste reuse and waste recycling;
- » Impose sanctions on LGUs not forwarding reports and data on municipal waste management on their territory to the Environmental Protection Agency;
- » Educate population on the proper waste separation at origin;
- » Introduce obligation on the households to separate waste;
- » Increase recycling promotion in order to increase the recycling level;
- » Ensure separation of waste that can be recycled during landfills remediation.

## Nationalised target 13.1: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters.

Due to the increasing temperature amplitudes that occur on a daily, seasonal and annual level, as well as the changed precipitation regime, Serbia is facing hazards related to climate conditions and natural disasters.

The Report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda" states that there is no umbrella strategic and legislative framework that regulates the field related to target 13.1. In addition, the Report states that data

related to this field are not collected systematically and are not published regularly and that the capacities of relevant institutions are generally insufficient. The overall assessment is that resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters are not sufficiently strengthened in Serbia. However, the progress made over the past year is encouraging when positive developments took place in the field of target 13.1.

### Progress assessment

Indicators for achieving target 13.1 proposed in Report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are as follows:

- I. Reduce the number of deaths, missing persons and persons directly affected by disasters per 100,000 inhabitants;
- II. By the end of 2030, all local self-government units have adopted and implemented disaster risk mitigation strategies in line with national disaster risk mitigation strategies.

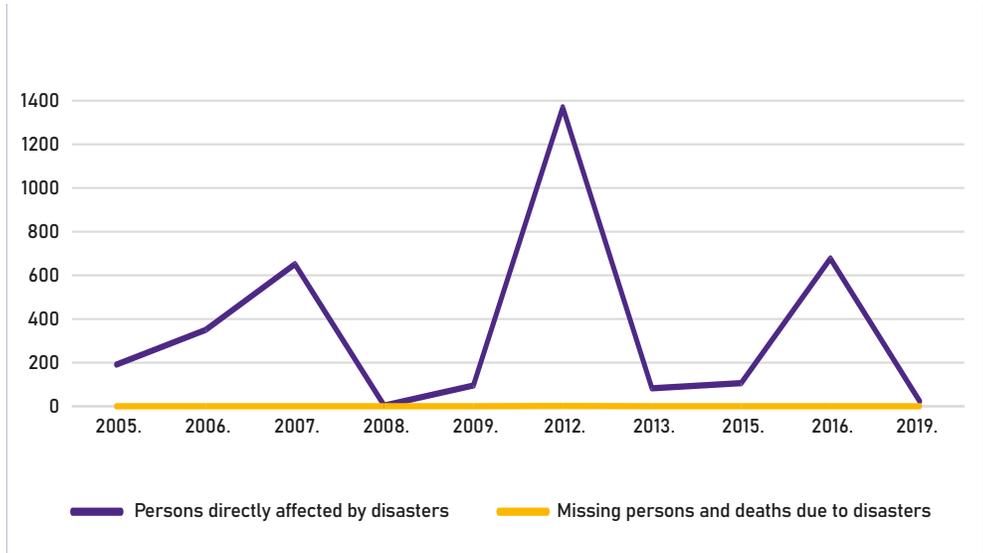
The following part of the text provides an overview of these indicators, taking into account the latest data.

#### **I. Progress has been made in the previous period in terms of reducing the number of persons directly affected by disasters.**

According to available data, the number of persons directly affected by disasters per 100,000 inhabitants in 2016 was 677, while in 2019 it was 23 (SBS, 2021a). Progress has also been made in monitoring indicators. The SORS started publishing data related to indicator 13.1.1, that is, data related to the number and share of deaths, missing persons and persons directly affected per 100,000 inhabitants (SORS, 2021b).

As presented in Chart 36, data on the share of deaths, missing persons and persons directly affected per 100,000 inhabitants vary greatly depending on the year, thus, it is difficult to extract information on trends. So far, data up to 2019 have been published. An additional problem is that data were not published for some years, such as for 2014, when major floods in the territory of the Republic of Serbia occurred, which directly affected a large number of affected people.

**Chart 36** Deaths, missing persons and persons directly affected by disasters per 100,000 inhabitants



Source: Designated national contact in the SENDAI Monitoring Framework

The Law on Climate Change was adopted in March 2021. Its adoption completed the legal framework in this field. In synergy with other laws regulating the field of environmental protection, disaster risk reduction and emergency management, this Law should form the basis of the legal framework in strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters. The Law still lacks support of all by-laws that would make it operational.

## **II. It is not possible to assess progress in a number of local self-governments that adopt and implement disaster risk reduction strategies at the local level in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies.**

Since only data for 2018 may be found on the SORS website (the source is the stated national contact in the SENDAI Framework), it is impossible to make a comparison and assess progress of this indicator. The objective is that, by the end of 2030, all local self-governments

have adopted and implemented a disaster risk reduction strategy in line with the national disaster risk reduction strategy. As in the case of the first indicator for this target, data have become available, which is progress in relation to the information from the report "Serbia 2030 – Readiness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda".

According to the available SORS data for Serbia for 2018, only eight out of 174, or only 4.6% of local self-governments, have adopted and implemented local disaster risk reduction strategies in accordance with the national disaster risk reduction strategy. There are no data available for the period after 2018 (SORS, 2021a). For the period before 2018, there are no available data on the number of local self-governments that adopted and implemented local disaster risk reduction strategies, so it is still not possible to quantify progress. In order to achieve target 13.1, it is necessary to accelerate the process of adoption and implementation of these strategies at the local level in the upcoming period.

The legal and institutional framework referring to resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disaster have not been harmonised and integrated into

other sectors, primarily water management, agriculture, urban planning, construction, infrastructure, forestry, nature conservation and energy sectors.

## Conclusion

Progress has been made in the previous reporting period in achieving target 13.1. Some progress has been made in adopting the legal framework, while the strategic framework is still lagging behind. The greatest progress has been made in data availability and the SORS now regularly publishes data on indicators for target 13.1. However, some data are missing, such as the number of local self-governments that adopted

and implemented local disaster risk reduction strategies before 2018, as well as data on deaths, missing persons and persons directly affected by disasters for certain years. The number of local self-governments adopting disaster risk reduction strategies is still quite small and an additional problem pose limited capacities of local self-governments for the implementation of these strategies.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 13.1:

- » Adopt the Low Carbon Development Strategy with the Action Plan;
- » Draft a plan for reducing the number of deaths, missing persons and persons directly affected by disasters;
- » Strengthen institutional capacities of local self-governments in order to develop and implement the disaster risk reduction strategy at the local level;
- » Define and adapt legal and institutional framework related to climate change adaptation and integrate them into other sectors, primarily water management, agriculture, urban planning, construction, infrastructure, forestry, nature conservation and energy.

# Priority area 8: SAFEGUARDING NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

For the protection of ecosystems in Serbia, besides the environmental protection sector, additional relevant sectors are the sectors of forestry, water management, agriculture, ener-

gy, transport and spatial planning. It is crucial to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage (target 11.4) and to take urgent and significant action to

reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt

the loss of biodiversity and protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species (target 15.5).

## Nationalised target 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

Safeguarding the natural and cultural heritage is the civilizational responsibility of all the countries in the world. When it comes to Serbia, which is rich in natural and cultural sites, the legal framework for their protection is adequate and largely harmonised with European legislation. However, additional efforts need to be made to safeguard these treasures.

Based on a review of progress over the past year, it may be concluded that Serbia is making progress towards establishing the Natura 2000 ecological network, but that the percentage of territory under some form of nature protection regime has not increased. In addition, no site from the proposed national list was included on the UNESCO list.

### Progress assessment

This section provides an overview of Serbia's annual progress according to the indicators defined in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report". Success indicators for achieving target 11.4 are as follows:

- I. Increase the area under one form of the nature protection regimes to 20% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia;
- II. Ensure conditions for including at least one more site from the proposed (tentative) national list on the UNESCO list.

#### **I. There has been no increase of the area under one form of nature protection regime in the previous period.**

According to the latest available data, 678,237 ha are under protection of the Republic of Serbia, that is 7.66% of the territory (EPIS, 2021), which is below the global (15.67%) and European average (about 18%).

Amendments to the Law on Nature Conservation, adopted in April 2021, additionally harmonised the legislative framework related to nature conservation with European

regulations. Serbia has improved the level of harmonisation with European legislation in the field of nature conservation, especially with directives on habitats and birds, as stated in the EC Progress Report for 2021. With these amendments, Serbia accelerated the establishment of the Natura 2000 ecological network and data show that one third of the territory of Serbia could be protected by the Natura 2000 network (EU for Natura 2000 in Serbia, 2021). However, the legal framework needs to be further harmonised through the adoption of standards for prohibited methods of hunting and killing wild animals.

Amendments to the Law on Nature Conservation introduced a ban on the construction of mini hydro power plants in protected areas, as well as the precautionary principle that allows immediate action in case of imminent danger to nature, regardless of the fact that there are not enough scientific data. In addition, according to the competent ministry, these amendments enable an increase of the surface of protected areas and envisage the formation of the Council of protected areas users, which should involve local people and other users of protected areas, including CSOs.

### Box 1 Construction of illegal facilities

The illegal hospitality facility, built at the very top of the Kopaonik mountain within the protected natural unit of the Kopaonik National Park, has not been demolished yet despite the promise that it will be removed. No one has yet been held accountable for the construction of this facility although certain individuals have been detained.

The adoption of amendments to the Law on Nature Conservation was accompanied by public dissatisfaction, primarily of CSOs, related to nature conservation. Dissatisfaction was caused by the lack of public debate transparency. Many of the organisations believe that such legal regulation subordinates nature conservation to economic development and that it is necessary to adopt a new law in order to ensure adequate nature conservation. A dialogue is under way between the representatives of relevant ministries and the public, that is CSOs, which have been supported by international organisations in Serbia (BOS, 2021).

Institutional capacities for nature conservation remain insufficient especially in the context of law enforcement and wildlife trade control, as stated in the EC Report. It is necessary to strengthen SEPA capacities, as well as the capacities of inspection bodies and to improve cross-sectoral cooperation.

## II. No site from the proposed (tentative) national list was included on the UNESCO list in the previous year.

One of the Strategic priorities of the cultural policy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2025, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in early 2021 and formulated by the Ministry of Culture and Information, is deepening cooperation with UNESCO and listing and protecting "more of our cultural treasure". According to the findings of the

author's team, there is no information on any changes in cooperation with UNESCO.

After the Kalemegdan Fortress in 2020, the Serbian monument – Dečani Monastery in Kosovo – is again on the list of the seven most endangered cultural monuments and heritage sites in Europe published every year by Europa Nostra. (Box 1).

The proposed national list for the UNESCO list includes eleven sites of cultural and historical significance, and among the last added to this list are the Danube Limes with the Belgrade Fortress as a key element and the cultural landscape of Bač (UNESCO, 2021). However, the treatment of the Belgrade Fortress does not support the successful nomination of the Danube Limes. In March 2021, the Administrative Court passed a judgement on revoking the building permit for the construction of a gondola on Kalemegdan, which was issued by the MCTI in April 2019. However, due to the statements of city officials and officials of the Republic of Serbia that "the gondola will be built", there is still a fear that this idea has not been abandoned (Danas, 2021). The construction of the residential and business complex "K-District" on the border of the Lower Town of Belgrade Fortress, which is completely located in the zone of protected area and

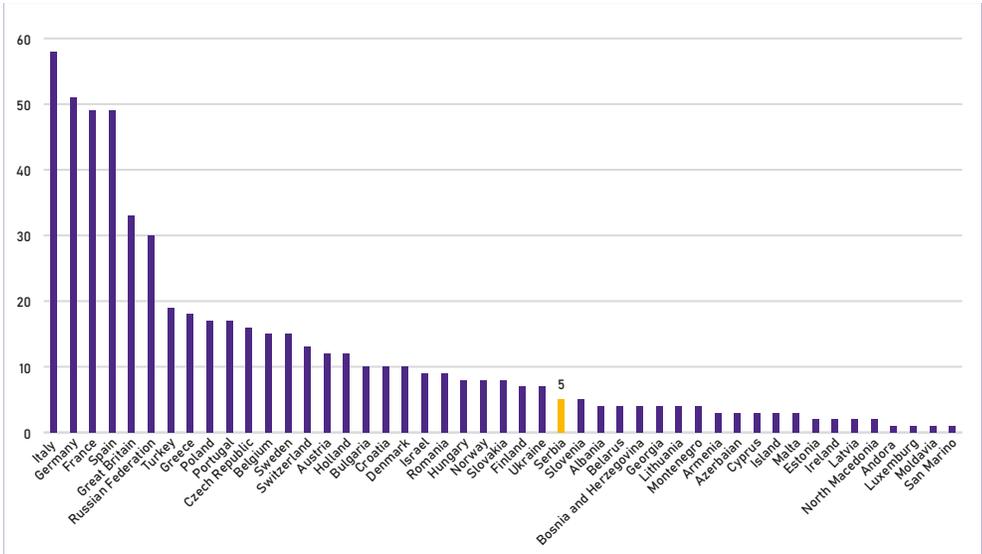
### Box 2: Dečani Monastery is on the list of the seven most endangered monuments

Dečani Monastery is one of the medieval sacral monuments in Kosovo and Metohija, which together make up one of the five sites in Serbia under the protection of UNESCO, and are on the list of endangered monuments. Although it has been under strong military protection for over 20 years, which testifies to its enormous historical and cultural significance for Europe and the world, the monastery is under constant risk due to inappropriate local development and the plan for construction of an international road (Evropa Nostra, 2021).

practically leans on the above-ground parts of the 18th century artillery fortification (Nova ekonomija, 2021), is additionally discouraging.

All this contributes to the prospect that the nomination of the Danube Limes for the UNESCO list will be rejected.

**Chart 37** Number of UNESCO-protected sites in Europe, 2021



Source: UNESCO, World Heritage List

On the positive side, the project for the conservation and restoration of Negotin Wine Cellars, one of the monuments on the proposed national list, was nominated for the Ilucidare prize in 2021 by the Ilucidare consortium that includes the EC and Europa Nostra. Negotin Wine Cellars were nominated in the category of International Cooperation in the Conservation of Cultural

Heritage owing to successful annual Regional Restoration Camps organised through the co-operation of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia and Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHWB), as well as the implementation of the international project "Architecture Summer School" of the group of architects. (EU in Serbia, 2021).

## Conclusion

No significant progress has been made in the previous reporting period in achieving target 11.4. Serbia has a good level of harmonisation with European legislation in the field of nature and

culture protection, however, it lacks additional institutional and financial capacities to make the desired progress in these fields.

## Priority activities

- » Continue working on the development of the ecological network in accordance with the standards of the EU Natura 2000 ecological network;
- » Strengthen capacities of institutions dealing with the preservation of cultural and natural heritage: the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as national and local institutes for the protection of monuments;
- » Improve inspection mechanisms and capacities for the protection of the environment and cultural sites through the control of illegal trade and hunting of wild animals and the control and prevention of illegal construction activities in protected areas.

## Nationalised target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened pieces.

Like other countries in the Western Balkans, Serbia is characterised by great genetic, species and ecosystem diversity. So far, about 44,000 species and subspecies have been documented on the territory of Serbia (Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, 2021). For this reason, Serbia is greatly responsible for the protection and preservation of wild species and their habitats. Factors endangering biodiversity are numerous and the most pronounced ones are destruction, degradation and fragmentation

of habitats due to infrastructure development, built-up areas, agriculture and other activities, excessive exploitation of wild species, spread of invasive species and pollution. In addition, there are significant shortcomings in the strategic and legal framework governing this field and the capacities of relevant institutions are generally insufficient. The general assessment is that the nature conservation system does not provide the necessary protection of habitats and species (Belgrade Open School et al., 2020).

## Progress assessment

The following indicators for achieving target 15.5 in the report "Serbia 2030: Development Priorities – the Non-State Sector Report" are proposed as indirect indicators:

I. Protected areas managed according to the Law on Nature Conservation occupy at least 20% of the total territory of the Republic of Serbia;

II. All protected areas in Serbia correspond to the IUCN classification of protected areas, in line with their ranking.

### **I. No significant progress has been made in the previous period in terms of increasing the coverage of protected areas.**

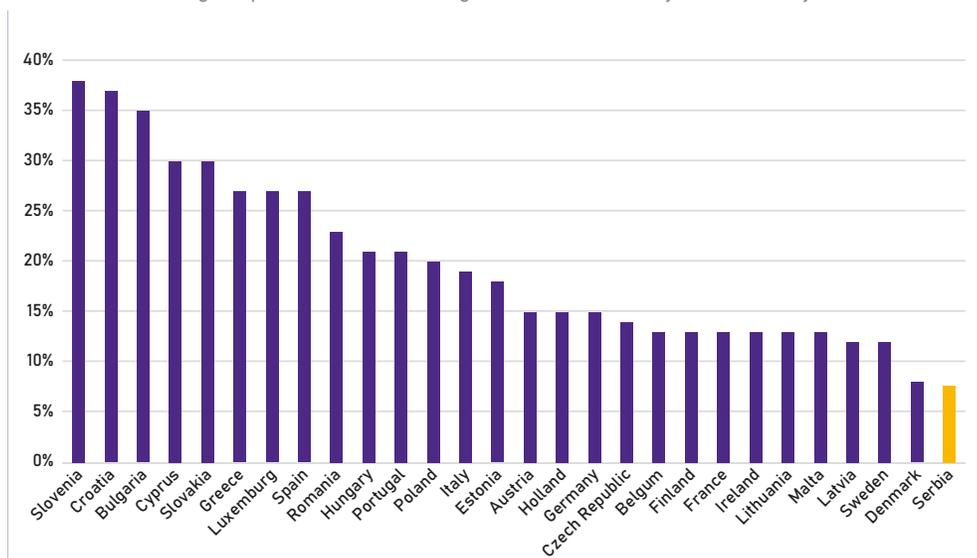
Updated data on the total surface of protected areas in Serbia, as well as changes in the

land surface under protection over time, are not transparent enough. According to available data, it amounts to 678,237 ha, that is 7.66% of the total country territory surface (Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, 2021), however, it is not clear to what period these data refer. It is considered that they probably do not cover all areas declared in the previous year. Protected landscape of Outstanding Features Maljen (10,100 ha) was the largest protected areas declared in the previous period, thus, it can be estimated that the current land surface of protected areas is about 7.8% of the territo-

ry. The total land surface of protected areas is still significantly below the global (15.67%) and European average (about 18%).

In accordance with the Regulation on the ecological network, the percentage of the territory covered by the ecological network of Serbia is somewhat higher, however, these areas cannot be considered protected because their management status, as well as the legal and administrative framework, are still not clearly defined.

**Chart 38** Percentage of protected area coverage in the total territory of the country



Source: Eurostat

The implementation of the EU-funded project (<https://natura-2000.euzatebe.rs/>) was completed in 2021, which aimed to establish an ecological network in Serbia in accordance with the standards of the European ecological network Natura 2000, which could significantly increase the percentage of areas under effective protection. The project has made significant progress in collecting and systematising biodiversity data necessary for the establishment of the ecological network.

The Nature Conservation Programme from 2021 to 2023 was adopted in 2021. In the strategic sense, the Programme fully contributes to the improvement of the protection of species and habitats because all its objectives and measures are oriented in this direction. Among other things, the Programme defines specific objectives that would directly contribute to the achievement of target 15, such as increasing the coverage of protected areas and the establishment and development of the ecological network of Serbia.

However, the adopted Programme only partially solves the long-standing lack of a strategic document in the field of nature conservation, as it is a medium-term strategic document.

The Law on Amendments to the Law on Nature Conservation was adopted in 2021, but the provisions on protected areas have not been substantially amended. Certain procedures for declaring protected areas have been clarified (notification on the protection procedure) and planning documents (plans for establishment of protected areas) have been more clearly defined. Also, the new law introduced the possibility of providing financial resources for LGUs whose territories include protected areas. It is estimated that these amendments will have a limited impact on accelerating the increase of the land surface of protected areas.

No significant progress has been made in terms of the institutional framework in the past year. Great deficiencies in human resources in the nature conservation sector continue to be an obstacle to the faster declaration of new protected areas, that is to the increase of the land surface under protection. Insufficient cooperation between different sectors also contributes to the slow and inefficient process of declaring new protected areas.

## **II. No progress has been made in harmonising protected areas in Serbia with IUCN international standards.**

The Nature Conservation Programme sets the improvement of the protected area management system and the ecological network as one of its specific objectives, but it does not envisage specific activities related to the harmonisation of protected area management with international

standards. The Programme envisages a revision of the legal framework for the management of protected areas in the upcoming period, so it can be said that the strategic framework has created space for specific steps in terms of harmonising management with international standards.

Amendments to the Law on Nature Conservation did not include provisions on the categorisation of protected areas. The Law brought some changes in the nature conservation system, but it cannot be said that these are substantial changes that will significantly improve the system of protection of species and habitats in Serbia. Most of the amendments refer to a clearer definition of the ecological network protection mechanism, while nothing has been changed regarding the management of protected areas and their categorisation. In that sense, the adopted amendments did not make progress when it comes to this indicator. In a broader sense, the amendments specify certain elements necessary for the management of the ecological network. This can be conditionally considered progress, but in order to achieve this progress in practice, it is necessary to adopt appropriate by-laws and, above all, an act that would regulate the application of the appropriate assessment mechanism. This would create basic preconditions for the functioning of the ecological network and its inclusion in the system of protected areas.

The institutional framework for nature conservation has not changed in the past year, thus the previously identified lack of capacities has remain unchanged. Changing the categorisation and management system implies well-coordinated cooperation with other sectors and users. However, currently there are no sufficient capacities for achieving such cooperation.

## Conclusion

No significant progress has been made in the previous period in achieving target 15.5. Certain activities related to making amendments to the legal and planning framework are only conditionally considered to be positive developments. Apart from the fact that the amendments to the Law on Nature Conservation were more of technical nature and did not include substantial and necessary changes in the protected areas management system, the hasty and non-transparent manner of passing the law is disputable, as it was passed without effective participation of the experts and public.

The land surface of protected areas has not increased significantly in the previous period. It is evident that the current pace and manner of declaring new areas cannot reach global and European averages, so a more serious revision of the system of establishing protected areas is needed. The key to progress in this field may be the development of the ecological network in accordance with the standards of the EU Natura 2000 ecological network. In order to really achieve this, it is necessary to accelerate the process of establishing this network, as well as to define legal mechanisms for the functioning of the ecological network and management framework.

## Priority activities aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving target 15.5:

- » Draft a new Law on Nature Conservation which would redefine the system of management of protected areas and protection of species and habitats;
- » Urgently draft by-laws regulating the functioning of the ecological network (an act that will further regulate the assessment of acceptability, etc.);
- » Improve the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment and the Law on Strategic Environmental Assessment so that the implementation of procedures envisaged by law ensures information on the actual status of nature in the respective location at the moment when the procedure is being implemented;
- » Establish an official list of the types of habitats and the list of species of all groups of organisms found on the territory of the Republic of Serbia;
- » Ensure and earmark funds for the implementation of protection measures for endangered species and habitats in line with international standards;
- » Implement regular (annual) monitoring of species and habitats at least in the area covered by the Ecological Network of the Republic of Serbia;
- » Continue with the production of red books and lists of endangered species;
- » Develop a plan for strengthening capacities of the services and institutions in charge of nature conservation at the local and national level (environmental inspection, institutes for nature conservation, local self-government services for environmental protection).

# List of abbreviations

<b>AEP</b>	Active employment policy
<b>GVA</b>	Gross Value Added
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>SDG/ SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goal/Goals
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>ERP</b>	Economic Reform Programme
<b>EPS</b>	Electric Power Industry of Serbia
<b>ESRP</b>	Employment and Social Reform Programme in the Process of Accession to the European Union
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>R&amp;D</b>	Research & Development
<b>LGU</b>	Local Self-Government Unit
<b>PE</b>	Public enterprise
<b>MCTI</b>	Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure
<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MESTD</b>	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
<b>MEP</b>	Ministry of Environmental Protection
<b>NECP</b>	National Energy and Climate Plan
<b>NERP</b>	National Emission Reduction Plan to reduce emissions of major pollutants from large combustion plants
<b>NEET</b>	Youth not in employment, education or training
<b>NBS</b>	National Bank of Serbia
<b>NES</b>	National Employment Service
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil society organisations
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>RES</b>	Renewable energy sources
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>PPP</b>	Purchasing power parities
<b>PE</b>	Preschool education
<b>PPS</b>	Public Policy Secretariat of the Republic of Serbia
<b>PAR</b>	Public Administration Reform
<b>SORS</b>	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
<b>SEPA</b>	Serbian Environmental Protection Agency
<b>SEC</b>	Social and Economic Council
<b>SIPRU</b>	Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia
<b>SEDS</b>	Strategy for Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia by 2030
<b>GES</b>	Gender Equality Strategy
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>LL</b>	Labour Law
<b>LGE</b>	Law on Gender Equality

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