Delegations are kindly invited to use this template to share their comments on any of the draft country programme documents being presented to the Executive Board during the second regular session.

Delegation name: United States of America

Draft country programme document: Serbia

In accordance with Executive Board decision 2014/1, country programme documents are considered and approved in one session, on a no-objection basis. All comments received by the Office of the Secretary of the Executive Board before the deadline will be made public on the Executive Board website, and considered by the respective regional office, in close consultation with the country office and the concerned Government.

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| General comments        | We have concerns regarding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reference in Serbia’s CPD. The CPD should be focused on UNICEF’s work in Serbia, and promotional mentions of the P.R. China’s BRI is neither appropriate nor relevant. UNICEF’s mandate is to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. It’s mandate is inherently non-partisan and therefore, should not advocate or advance the political and policy agendas of third country governments. Otherwise, overall, the country plan appears to represent a continuation of existing lines of effort. UNICEF can play a special role in aiding Serbia in the adaptation of pre-university education modalities to COVID-19 conditions. The Ministry of Education recognizes that current adaptations (notably online education) create access issues for low-income, rural and minority children. Similarly, COVID-19 has created new challenges for child protection and the mental health of youth. We would therefore welcome further attention to these issues in the country plan for Serbia. | UNICEF thanks the United States of America for its comments. The reference to the BRI has been deleted. We would like to note that the reference was meant to describe a situation. UNICEF would like to confirm that efforts in Education, child protection and mental health will be addressed in the context of COVID-19, as follow:  
  - pre-university education with a focus on most vulnerable (paragraph 38 specifically mentions most vulnerable children while paragraph 40 refers to innovation, that includes digitalisation of education)  
  - Child protection (paragraph 43)  
  - Mental health of young people (paragraph 48)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
UNICEF’s work to build public financing capacity is a valuable addition that supports Serbia’s ability to generate greater domestic financial resources for its national development.

| Comments on specific aspects of the country programme document | Page 2, Paragraph 1:  We have concerns regarding the reference to Serbia’s bilateral BRI MOU with China with its free trade agreement with the Eurasian Union and its candidacy for EU membership. The EU is a treaty-based institution with strong governance and high, transparency standards agreed to by all its member states. In contrast, the BRI is based on a series of bilateral MOUs negotiated directly with the PRC that lack an intergovernmental governance structure and a highly inconsistent application of standards. USAID/Serbia is particularly appreciative of UNICEF’s steps to undertake COVID-19 cash assistance programs in Serbia for the most vulnerable populations. We think that this approach is appropriate for Serbia and recommend its continuation. | See above. | We thank for the comment and we will work with the government for them to ensure sustainability of relevant cash assistance programmes. |