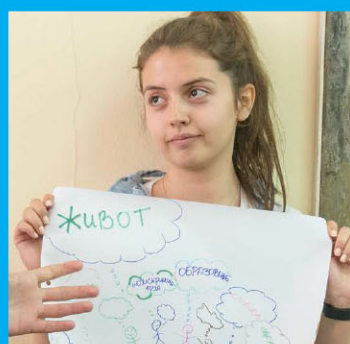
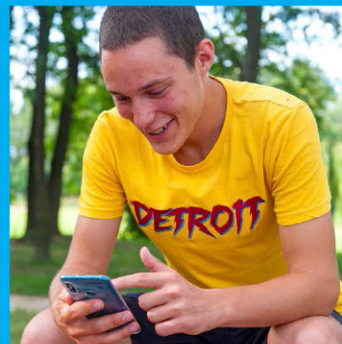


2019



# Situation Analysis

## OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN SERBIA



# **Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Serbia**

2019

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2019

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACE</b>	Adverse childhood experiences
<b>CBS</b>	Community-based services
<b>CEB</b>	Council of Europe Development Bank
<b>CFCA</b>	Centres for Foster Care and Adoption
<b>CRB</b>	Children's Rights and Business Principles
<b>CRC</b>	Committee on the Rights of the Child
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>DCU</b>	Developmental Counselling Unit
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>ECD</b>	Early Childhood Development
<b>ECE</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>ECEC</b>	Early Childhood Education and Care
<b>ECI</b>	Early Childhood Interventions
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FSA</b>	Financial Social Assistance
<b>GRB</b>	Gender Responsive Budgeting
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced People
<b>IEP</b>	Individual Education Plans
<b>IFI</b>	International Financial Institution
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>IMR</b>	Infant Mortality Rate
<b>IVF</b>	In-Vitro Fertilization
<b>KOMS</b>	Umbrella Organization of Youth of Serbia
<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>MoESTD</b>	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
<b>MoTTT</b>	Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications
<b>MoLEVSA</b>	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs
<b>MoYS</b>	Ministry of Youth and Sports
<b>NEET</b>	Not in Employment, Education or Training
<b>NMR</b>	Neonatal Mortality Rate
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PMR</b>	Perinatal Mortality Rates
<b>RFZO</b>	State Health Insurance Fund
<b>RYCO</b>	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
<b>SCRM</b>	Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Republic of Serbia
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>SGDs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SILC</b>	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
<b>SIPRU</b>	Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Government of Serbia
<b>SORS</b>	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
<b>UNDESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>UNOPS</b>	United Nations Office for Project Services
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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A number of United Nations agencies and development partners in Serbia were consulted during the process, including the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, UNFPA, UNDP, UNHCR, the European Delegation, the World Bank, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Swedish International Development Agency and many others.

Consultation meetings on the main findings were organised with more than 40 key governmental, non-governmental and independent stakeholders, including: Ministry of Labour, Employment Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Culture and Information, National Assembly, Ombudsman, Commissioner for Protection of Equality etc. Beneficial inputs and data were provided by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia.

A youth consultation group was also organised to seek inputs on findings and recommendations directly from youth, and these have been incorporated into the report.





# Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Serbia

# 01

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he Situation Analysis (SitAn) is an analytical narrative report on children's rights and well-being in a specific country. The analysis, which is rights-based, looks at the progress, challenges and opportunities to achieving child rights, well-being and the patterns of deprivation that children face. It analyses the causes of these deprivations and the barriers that prevent the fulfilment of child rights. It examines and acknowledges the progress of policy and programme interventions for at-scale coverage of inclusive social services for key populations, including the adequacy of policy delivery, especially budgets and resources, with a focus on ensuring no child is left behind. It looks at the unequal realization of rights and levels and depths of disparities across different equity dimensions. It highlights the situation of children who are left behind, in spite of their rights to social services and opportunities, and those most at risk of being left behind. It also highlights those aspects of child rights where further attention and action may be needed.

The methodology for the SitAn derives from UNICEF's Core Guidance<sup>1</sup>, and the analysis draws from a variety of credible data sources. The primary sources of data are official statistics and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). The report also draws on data from verified sources such as: government reports; analyses by international agencies, European Union (EU) institutions, IFIs; stakeholder submissions to international institutions, including to international human rights mechanisms and recommendations from these; findings from country or cross-country

evaluations; peer-reviewed academic publications; civil society reports etc.

Care was taken to triangulate data from a range of sources to ensure that analysis is based on a balanced and representative body of evidence, and that data presented is valid and current, including through a wide consultative process with government bodies, experts, independent bodies, academia, civil society and media representatives, as well as through consultations with youth. The confidentiality and anonymity of key informants from interviews and consultations has been carefully protected.

Some limitations to data noted are as follows. Administrative data sources in Serbia generally do not disaggregate data on children by wealth quintiles, ethnicity and disability, which narrows the scope for understanding the situation of children who are potentially left behind. The MICS survey, which fills some of these gaps, was last implemented in 2014. With new MICS data due to be published in early 2020, certain gaps in data are evident. Some limitations are also noted in the availability of data for adolescents, with a number of surveys covering different adolescent age groups, thus providing a somewhat incomplete overview of their situation. Data limitations are also evident for children on the move, with a comprehensive overview of their situation yet to be created.

The SitAn is intended to be a reference document on children in the country, useful to government bodies, independent bodies, development partners including UNICEF, civil society, private sector as well as a broader audience.

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, 'Core Guidance: New Generation Situation Analysis' (not yet published), New York, 2019.





**Situation  
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in Serbia**

# 02

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW

**Table 1. Key facts about the Republic of Serbia, 2017**

(Source: SORS, 2017)

Indicator	Value
Official language	Serbian
Total population estimate	7,020,858
Natural increase per 1,000 inhabitants	-5.3
Infant mortality per 1,000 live births	4.7
Ageing index <sup>2</sup>	T: 141.6; M: 120.9; W: 163.4
Average age	T: 43.0; M: 41.6; W: 44.4
GDP total in 2017 in RSD	4,754,368 million (44,227 million USD)
GDP per capita in RSD	677,178 (6,299 USD)
GDP growth rate (2017)	2%
Life expectancy at birth	M: 73; W: 77.9
Total fertility rate	1.5
Average number of household members	2.88
Families with children by number of children	51.7% with one child
Estimated number and percentage of children (0-17 years)	1,218,906 (17.3%)
Estimated number of youth (15-24 years)	749,666 (10.6%)
Population projections (zero net migration variant) <sup>3</sup>	6,569,116 (2031) 6,180,614 (2041)

Serbia is a country located at the intersection of Central and Southeast Europe. Following the disintegration of the Socialistic Federative Republic

of Yugoslavia after war and conflicts during the 1990s, Serbia transitioned to democratic governance.

<sup>2</sup> The ageing index of a population is the ratio of old (aged 60 and above) to young (0-19) populations

<sup>3</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Population Projections of the Republic of Serbia 2011-2041, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia Belgrade, 2014.



**Figure 1. The Republic of Serbia**  
**on a map of Europe**  
 (Source: UNICEF)



Serbia is classified as an **upper-middle-income country**, and is a constitutional, multi-party, parliamentary republic with three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judiciary. It is a unitary decentralized state with central government and two autonomous provinces (Vojvodina in the north and Kosovo and Metohija in the south). The system of local self-government is comprised of **174 local self-government units**, grouped into 29 administrative districts<sup>4</sup>.

Decentralized levels of governance have an important jurisdiction over the wellbeing of children, including financing (from its own revenues) preschool, running costs of schools and additional education needs of children, child protection services and additional support for children and families.

With a population of around 7 million, Serbia has over 20 ethnic minority populations. The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is the most diverse in this regard, operating in six official languages<sup>5</sup>. Most people (59 per cent) live in urban areas while the rest live in semi-urban and rural areas<sup>6</sup>.

Serbia is ranked 67<sup>th</sup> out of more than 185 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>7</sup>, with a score of 0.79 in 2017. It has a higher HDI than its less developed neighbors, like Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, but is far off from the most developed countries in Europe — Germany (0.94), the U.K. (0.92) and in the region — Slovenia (0.90)<sup>8</sup>. The average life expectancy at birth is 75.4 years (2017)<sup>9</sup>. Life expectancy has had slow but solid growth since 2000 (72.1), although it is still far from the EU average.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, 'Local Self-Governments in Serbia', <<http://mduls.gov.rs/en/registers-and-databases/local-self-governments-in-serbia>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The Human Development Index is a measure for understanding the wellbeing in a country and the general conditions for growth and development that entails health, educational, and economic parameters: living a long and healthy life, having knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions (min = 0, max = 1).

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, 'Human Development Index (HDI)'. <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, <[http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs/republika\\_srbija/libraries.aspx/Catalog.aspx](http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs/republika_srbija/libraries.aspx/Catalog.aspx)>

# 1. POLITICAL CONTEXT

Serbia is a member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Central European Free Trade Agreement, and NATO's Partnership of Peace.

Based on its major strides in terms of reintegration with the European and international structures, Serbia was granted the status of a **candidate country for European Union (EU) accession** (March 2012). Other milestones in the process of EU integration included the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and its member states and the Republic of Serbia (September 2013); and opening of negotiations of 18 chapters<sup>10</sup> (out of a total of 35 negotiation chapters), of which two chapters have already been provisionally closed<sup>11</sup>. In 2018, the European Commission (EC) adopted its "Strategy for the Western Balkans", which mentioned 2025 as a potential year of Serbia's accession and listed six priority initiatives related to strengthening the rule of law, increasing engagement in security and migration, strengthening support to socio-economic development, improving transport and energy connectivity, implementing a digital agenda for the region and supporting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.

Serbia's **international position is balanced** between EU integration and at the same time maintaining good relations with the major non-EU countries: The United States of America (USA), Russia, China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which are emerging as new investors.

<sup>10</sup> Chapters opened for negotiation: Chapter 4: Free movement of capital; 5: Public procurement; 6: Company law; 7: Intellectual property law; 9: Financial services; 20: Enterprise and industrial policy; 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights; 24: Justice, freedom and security; 25: Science and Research (provisionally closed); 26: Education and culture (provisionally closed); 29: Customs Union; 30: External relations; 32: Financial control; 35: Other issues/Item 1: Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo (in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999))

<sup>11</sup> European Council, Council of the European Union, 'Serbia, Status of Negotiations', <consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/Serbia>, accessed 13 May 2019.

# 2. OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY

The overall economic outlook of the country is positive, as a result of macroeconomic measures and fiscal adjustments, with a steady decrease in public debt and unemployment, and growing exports and foreign direct investment (FDI). Yet, citizens still do not feel significant economic prosperity in their households, which is reflected through low purchasing power and high levels of migration, especially among young people. A high share of the informal economy persists, estimated at about 30 per cent of the GDP<sup>12</sup>. One of Serbia's key economic problems is its low economic growth, which currently stands at around 3.5 per cent as opposed to its economic potential of 5 per cent<sup>13</sup>. Its GDP per capita (4,905 euros in 2017) is among the lowest in Europe, and it stands nearly 30 per cent below that of Bulgaria, the least developed EU member state<sup>14</sup>.

Serbia has a workforce of 3.1 million out of a total population of 7 million, which puts strong pressure on the state budget. **At the end of 2018, the Serbian budget recorded a surplus<sup>15</sup>**, but its sustainability depends on the implementation of structural reforms; the privatisation and/or restructuring of state-owned enterprises (SOE16), public sector right-sizing and efficiency improvements, in order to create durable, outward-looking growth. The projected budget for 2019 will

<sup>12</sup> Government of the Republic of Serbia. 'Economic Reform Programme for Period 2018-2020', n.d. <[https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/serbia\\_erp\\_2018-2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/serbia_erp_2018-2020.pdf), accessed on 3 September 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Fiscal Council, Republic of Serbia, 'Opinion on the Fiscal Strategy for 2019 with Projections for 2020 and 2021, Summary', [http://fiskalnisanet.rs/doc/eng/Summary\\_Opinion\\_on\\_Fiscal\\_strategy-%202019-2021.pdf](http://fiskalnisanet.rs/doc/eng/Summary_Opinion_on_Fiscal_strategy-%202019-2021.pdf), accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Udovički, Kori. 'Serbia's Economic Structure: Challenges and Opportunities for Accelerating Growth'. Center for Advanced Economic Studies, December 2018. <[ceves.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Serbias-Economic-Structure-Challenges-and-Opportunities-for-Accelerating-Growth.pdf](http://ceves.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Serbias-Economic-Structure-Challenges-and-Opportunities-for-Accelerating-Growth.pdf)>, accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>15</sup> The budget surplus for 2018 was 32.2 billion dinars. For 2019 the projected budget planned a deficit of 0.5 per cent of the GDP.

<sup>16</sup> In the petrochemical, transport, mining and energy sectors.



further decrease the level of public debt to around 50 per cent<sup>17</sup> of the gross domestic product (GDP), but at the expense of lower investment in road and rail infrastructure, environment, education and public health (Fiscal Council, 2019). The debt-to-GDP ratio is low when compared to the average of the new member states (68 per cent) and is mainly pushed by privatized companies<sup>18</sup>. For the purpose of fiscal consolidation, a salary reduction of 10 per cent in the public sector was introduced in 2014 and then halved in 2018 to the level of 5 per cent. The reduced earnings hit the education and social services and their workers, together with the public sector hiring freeze. The government has announced that by 2020 it will again selectively provide employment in the public sector.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- 10.c.1 Remittance costs as a proportion of the amount remitted
- 17.1.1 Total government revenue as a proportion of GDP, by source
- 17.1.2 Proportion of domestic budget funded by domestic taxes
- 17.2.1 Net official development assistance, total and to least developed countries, as a proportion of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee donors' gross national income (GNI)
- 17.3.1 Foreign direct investments (FDI), official development assistance and South-South Cooperation as a proportion of total domestic budget
- 17.3.2 Volume of remittances (in United States dollars) as a proportion of total GDP

<sup>17</sup> Public debt of Serbia is 23.17 billion euros (January 2019), or 50.6 per cent of the GDP.

<sup>18</sup> Udovički, Kori. 'Serbia's Economic Structure: Challenges and Opportunities for Accelerating Growth'. Center for Advanced Economic Studies, December 2018. <[ceves.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Serbias-Economic-Structure-Challenges-and-Opportunities-for-Accelerating-Growth.pdf](http://ceves.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Serbias-Economic-Structure-Challenges-and-Opportunities-for-Accelerating-Growth.pdf)>, accessed 14 May 2019.

#### Diaspora

Although a comprehensive census of Serbian diaspora and Serbs in the region has never been conducted, it is estimated that Serbia has a large diaspora of around 5 million people. Out of this number, close to 2 million Serbs live in the region, namely in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Romania, Albania and Hungary<sup>19</sup>. The World Bank estimates that **in 2017, citizens of Serbia received close to 3.6 billion USD in personal remittances, and that these formed 8.7 per cent of GDP**, with a growing potential due to the increase in high-skilled emigration (World Bank, 2017). The National Bank of Serbia further estimates personal remittances in 2018 at 3.4 billion EUR<sup>20</sup>. Unofficial data indicate that almost 70 per cent are used to satisfy living costs and basic needs, of which approximately one fifth are used for health and education<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia. 'Migracioni Profil Republike Srbije Za 2017. Godinu', <<http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/migracioni%20profil%202017.pdf>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>20</sup> National Bank of Serbia. 'Serbia's Balance of Payments', <[https://www.nbs.rs/internet/cirilica/80/platni\\_bilans.html](https://www.nbs.rs/internet/cirilica/80/platni_bilans.html)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Bobić, Milica, Vlasta Bobić, Mirjana, Vesković Anđelković, and Kokotović Vlasta Kanazir, Study on External and Internal Migration of Serbia's Citizens with a Particular Focus on Youth, 2016, International Organisation for Migration, Belgrade, 2016. <<https://serbia.iom.int/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Study%20on%20external%20and%20internal%20migration%20of%20Serbia%27s%20citizens%20with%20particular%20focus%20on%20Youth.pdf>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

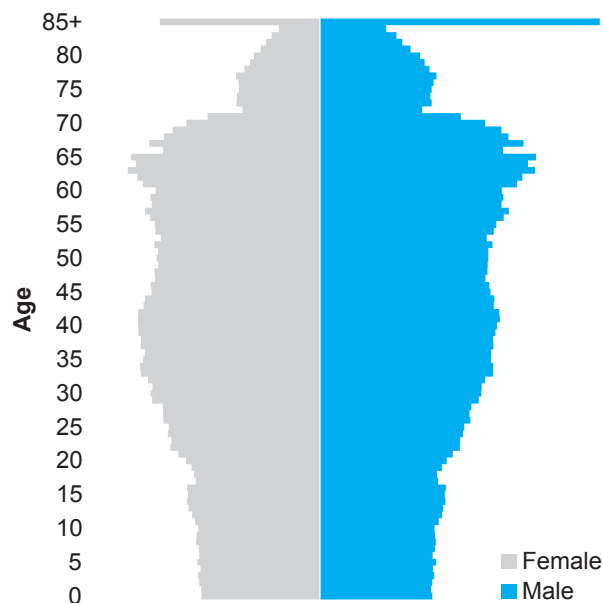
### 3. KEY DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

#### 3.1 Low birth rates

One of the key challenges that Serbia has been facing over the last 10 years is a demographic decline (see Figure 2). The death rates are 57 per cent higher than birth rates. This means that in 2017, the number of people who died was larger than the number of newborn babies by 38,828<sup>22</sup>.

The number of babies born in 2017 decreased by 2.35 per cent when compared to 2014. In 2010, the number of babies born was 68,304, while in 2017 that number was 64,894, which shows a decrease of 4.9 per cent. This could have a negative impact on growth and development as well as on the wellbeing of children and youth because of additional pressures on future generations to ensure economic sustainability. Population projections (medium variant with zero net migration) foresee that the population in Serbia will shrink by 12 per cent by 2041<sup>23</sup>.

**Figure 2. Population pyramid of Serbia in 2017**  
(Source: SORS, 2017)



#### 3.2 Emigration

Besides negative natural growth, the decrease in the population is also caused by emigration, which will continue to influence population trends in the future. There is no precise annual data on emigration flows in Serbia. An average annual negative balance of external migration to European countries is around 15,000 persons per year, according to Eurostat figures on newly arrived immigrants in the EU and European countries. In 2017, the figure was 16,046, with an approximate male to female ratio of 3:2. One in 10 were 0-19 years of age, and 8 per cent were in the 20-24 age group<sup>24</sup>. Serbia is also 31<sup>st</sup> on the list of

<sup>22</sup> Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, 'Vital Statistics', <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

countries with high migration rates towards OECD countries. **OECD reports indicate 43,577 immigrants from Serbia to OECD countries in 2016, and an average of 32,000 per year since 2004.** In 2015, 66 per cent of all Serbian migrants left for Germany<sup>25</sup>.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) also reports that the migrant stock<sup>26</sup> of Serbians living outside the country increased from 846,196 persons in 2010 to 956,455 persons in 2017 (13 per cent increase/difference in 110,259 persons). It is estimated<sup>27</sup> that **by 2017 around 14 per cent of the total population of Serbia were living abroad.** Around 51 per cent of emigrants from Serbia were female (based on migrant stock). Three main destination countries for Serbian citizens based on migrant stock in 2017 were Austria, Switzerland and Germany.

According to the 2011 census data, among registered emigrants, 57.8 per cent originate from non-urban settlements compared to 42.2 per cent from urban settlements. Several municipalities in central and eastern Serbia<sup>28</sup> and south-west Serbia<sup>29</sup> showed higher shares of emigrants in their total population. When viewed by region and level of education, the **highly educated populations from the Belgrade and Vojvodina regions account for the highest number of emigrants**, while the population with incomplete or primary education is migrating abroad from the south of the country<sup>30</sup>.

**The annual costs Serbia has for the departure of young and educated people abroad is up to EUR 1.2 billion** and equals the value of exports of the Serbia's IT sector. In a situation where the natural unemployment rate is reached and the actual and potential GDP are equal, Serbia would lose manoeuvring space for raising potential GDP via the human capital factor, all due to the extensive departure of skilled and educated people<sup>31</sup>. According to research on student migration (2018), one in four students wish to continue education abroad, of which two thirds plan to continue living there<sup>32</sup>.

In 2014, there were approximately 1.2 per cent of children age 0-17 years with at least one parent living abroad (1.8 per cent among children living in Roma settlements)<sup>33</sup>. Migration of both parents occurs in the case of 0.1 per cent of children and **children left behind in Serbia are mostly adolescents (age 10-14 years)**. Migration of parents is **more prevalent in Southern and Eastern regions of Serbia** (2.2 per cent of children left behind)<sup>34</sup>.

**Conclusion: The unfavourable demographic and contextual situation will in the long term need to be continuously mitigated through strategic measures and interventions for children, youth and families with children.**

#### **Relates to SDG indicators:**

**17.14.1** Number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development

<sup>25</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'International Migration Outlook 2018', <[https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2018\\_migr\\_outlook-2018-en#page1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2018_migr_outlook-2018-en#page1)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>26</sup> 'International migrant stocks are estimates of "the total number of international migrants present in a given country at a particular point in time". United Nations data on migrant stock are based mostly on the country's population that is born abroad, and (where this information is not available) on holding a foreign citizenship.' UNDESA, 'Trends in International migrant stock (The 2017 Revision)', <[www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.asp](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.asp)>, accessed 2 September 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Calculated by consultant based on the migrant stock in 2017 and total population in Serbia in 2017.

<sup>28</sup> The following five municipalities: Novi Pazar, Priboj, Prijepolje, Sjenica and Tutin.

<sup>29</sup> Fourteen municipalities: Bor, Despotovac, Golubac, Kladovo, Kučevo, Majdanpek, Malo Crniče, Negotin, Petrovac na Mlavi, Požarevac, Svilajnac, Veliko Gradište, Žabari and Žagubica

<sup>30</sup> Bobić, Mirjana, Vesković Anđelković, and Kokotović Vlasta Kanazir, 'Study on External and Internal Migration of Serbia's Citizens with a Particular Focus on Youth, 2016'. International Organisation for Migration, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 'The Cost of Youth Emigration, 2019'. Institute for Development and Innovation (Institut za razvoj i inovacije), <[www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Cost-of-youth-emigration-Serbia.pdf](http://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Cost-of-youth-emigration-Serbia.pdf)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Office of the Minister without Portfolio responsible for demography and population policy, Ministry of Science, Education and Population policy, and Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. 'Student Migration', 2018.

<sup>33</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roman Settlements Multiple Indicator Survey 2014, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

## 4. DRIVERS OF INEQUITIES

### 4.1 Regional economic disparities

In order to build a comprehensive picture of the situation of children in Serbia, it is important to understand regional disparities in the economy. For example, the population of **Belgrade district (39.8 per cent) and Vojvodina (26.2 per cent) jointly contribute to 66 per cent of GDP**<sup>35</sup>. When regional GDP is expressed in purchasing power standard (PPS)<sup>36</sup> and compared to EU28 (the 28 member countries of the EU), all regions in Serbia are below 75 per cent of GDP per capita in the EU. The leading region, Belgrade, is at the level of 61 per cent, while the south and eastern regions of Serbia are below 25 per cent of the EU28 average. In 2016, the Belgrade district had a 2.56 times larger GDP per capita than the south and eastern regions. The most economically vulnerable districts in Serbia are Podunavlje, Pčinja, Jablanica, Raška, Rasina, and Toplica — for all these districts, the regional GDP per capita is less than 300,000 dinars per year.<sup>37,38</sup>

Lower regional GDP values impact children primarily through lower spending for services financed from local budgets, creating local and regional inequities that cannot be fully compensated through e.g. earmarked transfers. In addition, local administrative capacity remains weak. Responsibilities continue to be borne at the local level without proper analysis of the capacity and resources required<sup>39</sup>. A new strategic framework on decentralisation is anticipated<sup>40</sup>.

For the purpose of contributing to the reform and professionalization of the Serbian public administration and improvement of skills and efficiency, the National Academy of Public Administration was established in 2017. This will open up new opportunities for introducing child rights to local governance administration.

<sup>35</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Regional Gross Domestic Product in 2016', 2018, <[www.stat.gov.rs/media/2746/rd-103-rbdp2016-srb.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.rs/media/2746/rd-103-rbdp2016-srb.pdf)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Purchasing power standard (PPS) is an artificial currency unit. Theoretically, one PPS can buy the same amount of goods and services in each country. However, price differences across borders mean that different amounts of national currency units are needed for the same goods and services depending on the country. PPS are derived by dividing any economic aggregate of a country in national currency by its respective purchasing power parities (PPP). Purchasing power parities are obtained by comparing price levels for a basket of comparable goods and services that are selected to be representative of consumption patterns in the various countries.

<sup>37</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Regional Gross Domestic Product in 2016', 2018, <[www.stat.gov.rs/media/2746/rd-103-rbdp2016-srb.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.rs/media/2746/rd-103-rbdp2016-srb.pdf)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

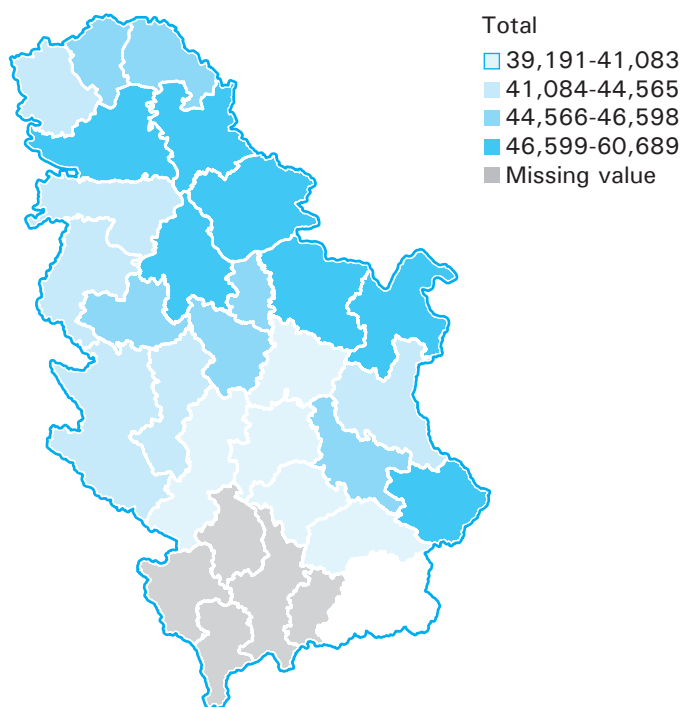
<sup>38</sup> In addition, the Law on Regional Development (2009) defines indicators for classifying local self-governments based on their level of development and describes the characteristics of undeveloped and devastated self-government units (Law on Regional Development, <<http://privreda.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ZAKON-o-RR.pdf>>, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> European Commission, 'Serbia 2018 Report', <<https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-serbia-report.pdf>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, 'Reform of Local Self-Government System', <<http://mduls.gov.rs/reforma-javne-uprave/reforma-sistema-lokalne-samouprave/?script=lat>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

**Figure 3. Average annual net salaries and wages across districts of Serbia (RSD, Total), 2018**

(Source: SORS, 2018)



**Conclusion: Well targeted measures at the local level need to systematically take into account the macro- and micro-fiscal considerations and local capacity and resources.**

## 4.2 Income inequality

There are significant income inequalities in Serbia. A comparison of 20 per cent of the population that has the highest income and 20 per cent of the population with the lowest income, shows that the incomes of the first group are ten times higher, which makes for the **highest income inequality ratio in Europe**<sup>41,42</sup> The Gini coefficient<sup>43</sup> also demonstrates a similar trend (in Serbia it was highest in 2015 — 40, while in 2017 it was 37.8<sup>44</sup>). Global evidence suggests that children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including low-income families, have a disproportionately high probability of being malnourished at birth, suffering ill health and having lower educational outcomes, which in turn is likely to result in lower income levels later in life<sup>45</sup>. Data from Serbia's PISA test (2012) confirms that socio-economic status is a consistent predictor of performance<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, the consumption-based Gini coefficient and consumption quintile share ratio have low values in Serbia — implying that consumption inequality is quite moderate in Serbia and places Serbia among countries with relatively equal distributions of consumption.

Another way to understand disparities in Serbia is to look at the structure of income. On average, only 49 per cent of household income is acquired from permanent employment, with significant differences between urban areas (where 55 per cent of household income comes from permanent employment) and

<sup>41</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs/Opstine/libraries.aspx/Home.aspx>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>42</sup> The Gini coefficient is a measure of the deviation of the distribution of income among individuals or households within a country from a perfectly equal distribution. A value of 0 represents absolute equality, a value of 100 absolute inequality (World Bank (2013).

<sup>43</sup> World Bank, 'World Bank Development Indicators, 2013', <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/449421468331173478/World-development-indicators-2013>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs/>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>45</sup> UNICEF, London School of Economics and Political Science, Intergenerational Equity, 'Understanding the linkages between parents and children: a systematic review, 2013', <[https://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/LSE\\_Capstone\\_Intergenerational\\_Equity.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/LSE_Capstone_Intergenerational_Equity.pdf)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

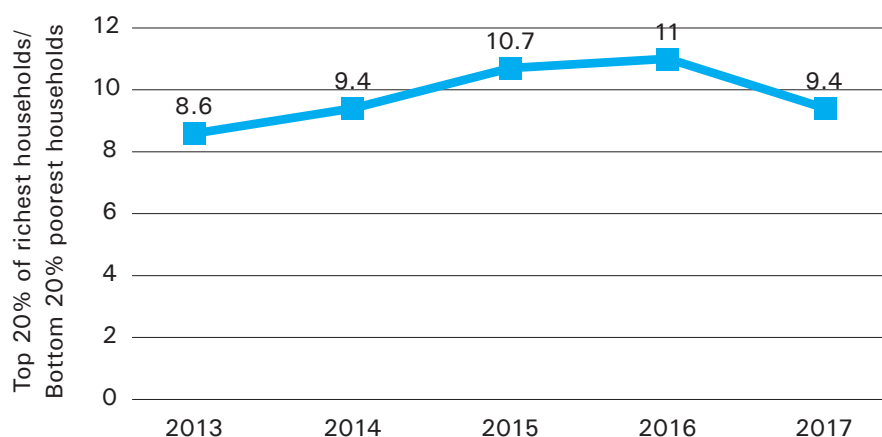
<sup>46</sup> World Bank, 'PISA: The Bottom 40%', <[www1.worldbank.org/poverty/visualizeinequality/PISA/bottom\\_40.html](http://www1.worldbank.org/poverty/visualizeinequality/PISA/bottom_40.html)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

other areas (37.1 per cent). In Eastern and South Serbia, it is only 30 per cent whereas in-kind income and agriculture make up 23.8 per cent of household income<sup>47</sup>. On average, pensions form 31 per cent of household incomes in Serbia.

When working with children and families in local environments, care will need to be taken to continue assessing the needs of those who are in lower income quintiles.

**Figure 4. Disparities in income within the population of Serbia, S80/S20 income quintile share ratio, 2013-2017**

(Source: SILC)



### 4.3 Poverty

Due to challenging economic conditions, many households in Serbia live at subsistence level, bearing in mind that 1.44 average wages are needed to cover the average consumer basket<sup>48</sup>. Understanding the dynamics of poverty in Serbia is critical to understanding the situation of children, as it is one of the key structural causes of child rights deprivation. There are two basic measures of poverty: absolute poverty (based on consumption),

which represents the inability to satisfy minimal needs, and relative poverty (based on income), which relates to the inability to reach a standard of living that is adequate for the society in which one lives<sup>49</sup>. Both are important, not just for monitoring the dynamics of the number of people who are impoverished, but also for formulating public policies to reduce poverty.

<sup>47</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Household Income in Money and in Kind', <<http://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/01010101?languageCode=en-US>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, Purchasing power of the population, Consumer basket December 2018, <[mtt.gov.rs/download/kupovna.pdf](http://mtt.gov.rs/download/kupovna.pdf)>, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, 'Merenje Siromaštva – Teorijski Koncepti, Stanje i Preporuke Za Republiku Srbiju', <<http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/POJAM-I-MERENJE-SIROMASTVA.pdf>>, accessed 3 September 2019.



### 4.3.1 Absolute poverty

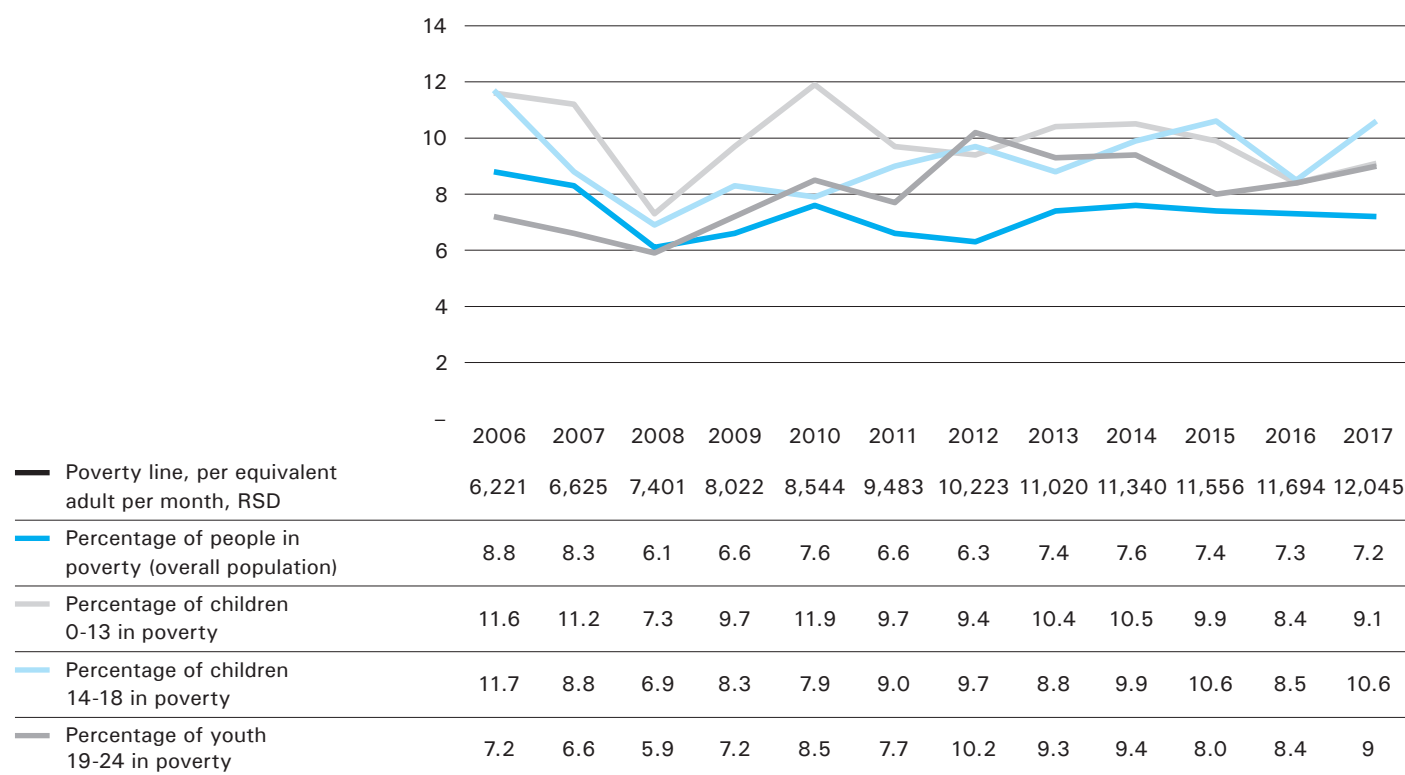
People in absolute poverty are those who have consumption below the poverty line — the level at which it is deemed impossible to satisfy basic needs. In 2017, the poverty line for Serbia stood at 12,045 dinars per equivalent adult per month, and 7.2 per cent of Serbia's population had consumption below this level<sup>50,51</sup>.

Over time, absolute poverty in Serbia shows a stable trend at around 7 per cent of people who cannot satisfy basic needs. This means that basic needs cannot be fulfilled by approximately 500,000 people. Data indicates that poverty is twice as common in non-urban areas (10.5 per cent versus 4.9 in urban areas), vulnerability is visible particularly in South-Eastern Serbia, among children up to 14 years of age, youth (15-24 years), persons living in households headed by someone with a low education level or by someone who is unemployed or inactive<sup>52</sup>. **Therefore some 120,000 children (aged 0-18 years) and 40,000 youth (aged 19-24 years) lived in absolute poverty in 2017.**

**Figure 5.**

**Trend of absolute poverty in Serbia, 2006-2017**

(Source: SIPRU, 2017)



<sup>50</sup> Whether a person is absolutely poor or not is determined by comparing his spending (or spending of a consumer unit) with an absolute poverty line. The absolute poverty line is defined as fixed consumption necessary to meet minimum living needs, which is adapted over time only to price changes. Consumer units are defined according to the OECD scale (the first adult member of the household = 1, other adults = 0.7, children under 14 = 0.5).

<sup>51</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit. 'Absolute Poverty', <<http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/en/social-inclusion-in-rs/data/absolute-poverty/>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

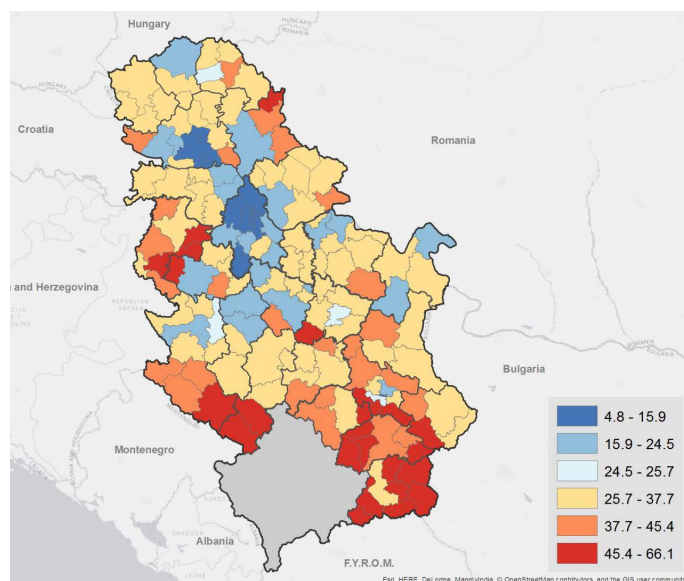
<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

### 4.3.2 Relative poverty (at-risk-of-poverty rate)

The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the proportion of persons whose income per consumer unit after social transfers is less than 60 per cent of the median of the national income per consumer unit<sup>53,54</sup>. These individuals are not necessarily poor but are at a higher risk of becoming poor. In Serbia, there is a stable trend of around 25 per cent of the population at risk of poverty (25.7 in 2017, in comparison to 25 in 2014), while the EU28 average is 16.9 per cent<sup>55</sup>.

The following map provides estimates of the at-risk-of-poverty rates at local self-government unit (municipality) level.

**Figure 6. At-risk-of-poverty rates in Serbia per municipality, per cent, 2016**  
(Source: World Bank and SORS, 2016)



Individuals in **households composed of two adults with three or more dependent children have the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate (55.8 per cent)**. More children are at risk of poverty than among the general population (30.2 per cent in 2017), and this trend is stable, with a low increase rate (e.g., in 2014, there were 29.7 per cent children at risk of poverty)<sup>56</sup>. Children who live with a single parent and children with two or more siblings are at the highest risk of poverty<sup>57</sup>.

Disaggregated data show that **in the 19-24 year age group, the at-risk-of poverty rate reduces to 26.8 per cent for males but remains high for females (30.8 per cent)**. It also reduces to 24.6 per cent for the 19-24 year age group living in urban areas but remains at 34.7 per cent in non-urban areas<sup>58</sup>.

### 4.3.3 Government response to poverty

The key cash benefits targeting people living in poverty in Serbia's social and child protection system are financial social assistance and child allowance.

#### Financial social assistance

The coverage of financial social assistance (FSA) targeting poor families has not changed substantially since 2013. In 2017, over 104,000 households received this assistance, covering over 260,000 adult and child beneficiaries (3.7 per cent of the total population), with a 0.33 GDP ratio. Approximately 46 per cent of families that are recipients of FSA have children. Approximately 18 per cent of FSA recipient families are single-headed households<sup>59</sup>. The breakdown of FSA recipients by sex is balanced.

<sup>53</sup> Income per unit of consumption is obtained by dividing the household income with the number of consumer units (equivalent adults) living in the household.

<sup>54</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, 'Merenje Siromaštva — Teorijski Koncepti, Stanje i Preporuke Za Republiku Srbiju', <<http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/POJAM-I-MERENJE-SIROMASTVA.pdf>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Database DevInfo 7, Serbia', <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold and household type', <<http://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/0102020103?languageCode=sr-Cyrl>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, SILC data calculated for the purpose of this report.

<sup>59</sup> Republic Institute for Social Protection, 'Деца у систему социјалне заштите 2017', <<http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/1416/deca-u-sistemu-socijalne-zastite-u-2017.pdf>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

There is a high share of children (36.3 per cent compared to 17.3 per cent in the total population) – 94,783 in 2017.

The Law on Social Protection recognises foreigners and stateless individuals as users of the social protection system. The social assistance for persons who have requested asylum and those to whom asylum has been granted is regulated through the Rulebook on social assistance to individuals seeking asylum and individuals to whom asylum has been granted. The social assistance is meant to be accessed in the form of monthly cash assistance, and a new rulebook on this is in the procedure of being adopted.

While vertical efficiency of this cash benefit is very good (with **60 per cent reaching the poorest quintile**), coverage of the most vulnerable population has been low, reaching **only 11 per cent of the poorest quintile**, according to World Bank data.<sup>60,61</sup> The coverage rate of the vulnerable Roma population was higher (according to MICS, in 2014 almost half of Roma households received FSA, including 63.8 per cent of Roma households in the poorest quintile). Active inclusion programmes for financial social assistance recipients have not gained ground yet, which affects the overall efficiency of assistance.

**Benefit adequacy is also unsatisfactory** when assistance amounts are assessed from the perspective of ability to meet basic needs, i.e. being lifted out of absolute consumption poverty. This means that families with financial social assistance as the sole income source received half or 40 per cent fewer funds compared to the amount needed to reach the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

**Table 2. Monthly FSA amounts for certain household types, absolute poverty threshold and at-risk-of-poverty threshold (RSD), net FSA income as proportion of at-risk-poverty threshold (%), 2015**  
(Source: Calculation based on Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, SORS and SIPRU)

	Basic amount	Augmented amount	Absolute poverty threshold	At-risk-of-poverty threshold	Net FSA income as a proportion of at-risk-of-poverty threshold*
Individual	7,843	9,412	11,556	15,416	0.51-0.61
Single-parent family with two children (0-13)	–	15,059	23,112	24,666	0.61

Note: Single-parent families always receive the augmented amount.

\* The data on the at-risk-of-poverty threshold are based on SILC (2016), which refers to income in 2015.

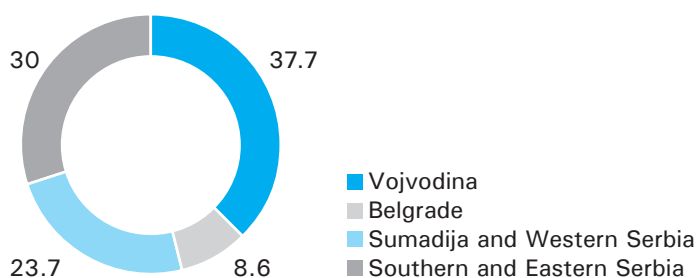
<sup>60</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Under the conditions of perfect targeting (if assistance were provided only to those who are poor and to none of the more affluent), the coverage rate of poor people by the absolute consumption poverty criterion could be 53%.

The **geographical breakdown of FSA recipients** would need to be further analysed as numbers indicate there may be a disparity in rates of recipients across the four regions compared to reported levels of poverty.

**Figure 7. Number and breakdown of FSA recipients (individuals) by statistical regions, 2017**

(Source: MoLEVSA)



According to World Bank findings, in terms of cost efficiency, financial social assistance is the best performing of the social schemes funded from the state budget. The cost-benefit ratio, showing the reduction in (at-risk-of-) poverty depth for every dinar spent on the given scheme, stood at 0.85<sup>62</sup>.

**Financial social assistance recipients are also eligible for additional benefits**, e.g. the status of protected energy customer, in other words a reduction in monthly electricity or gas bills, health care and, as a rule, also child allowance if the child attends school regularly. Other types of assistance may vary between local government units; in most cities and municipalities, financial social assistance recipients are entitled to different types of one-off cash assistance or in-kind benefits such as free-of-charge meals in soup kitchens, free-of-charge textbooks, clothing and footwear for children, reduction in utility bills etc.

No further information is currently available about the profile of financial social assistance recipients and characteristics of households in which they live, or about the reasons preventing their exit from extreme poverty.

### Child allowance

Child allowance is the second key benefit targeting poor households in Serbia. It is awarded in equal amounts to the first four children in the family, is subject to a means test and conditional upon regular school attendance. As of 1 June 2018, children in single-parent families receive a 30 per cent higher amount while children with disabilities receive a 50 per cent higher amount. The age limit for child allowance is set at 19 years and, as an exception, 26 years for children with disabilities. The entitlement is funded from the national budget and administered by local government services.

In 2017, the child allowance was received by approximately 342,000 children and youth, of whom approximately 72,000 received the augmented amount. The overall **coverage rate of children stood at approximately 21 per cent, which points to a steadily declining trend** since 2014 (23.6 per cent)<sup>63</sup>. According to SILC data, the child allowance coverage rate of children at risk of poverty (0-17 years) stood at approximately 45 per cent. The coverage is considerably lower for secondary-school-age children and youth owing to the regular school attendance requirement and higher level of secondary school drop-out. The coverage of children from Roma settlements is high for primary-school age (over 70 per cent in 2014).

In 2017, on average, the basic child allowance amounted to RSD 2,734 (44 PPS), while the augmented allowance amounted to RSD 3,554 (57 PPS). In terms of adequacy, the basic child allowance amounted to about one half of the

<sup>62</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Under the conditions of perfect targeting and without the regular school attendance requirement, the coverage should be 30 per cent if the goal of the scheme were to award the allowance to all children at risk of poverty

consumption attributed to children, while for older children the allowance amounted to only one third of the relevant amount<sup>64</sup>.

SILC (2016) data show that over 70 per cent of the total funds for this scheme were received by the population in the first (poorest) and second quintiles, which means it is well targeted in terms of vertical efficiency. As is the case with the financial social assistance scheme, a slight deterioration in targeting occurred in recent years.

**Table 3. Number of child allowance recipients, coverage (%), monthly allowance amounts (RSD) and annual expenditures (RSD million and % of GDP), 2014-2017**

(Source: Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, SORS)

Year	No. of recipients			Monthly amount (basic)	Expenditure	
	Children and youth	Families	Coverage rate (0-18)		Total (RSD million)	Ratio to the GDP
2014	384,315	204,818	23.6	2,595	12,997.3	0.33
2015	370,718	196,801	22.8	2,641	12,768.5	0.32
2016	359,411	189,509	22.1	2,662	12,428.5	0.30
2017	342,248	178,591	21.0	2,734	12,343.4	0.28

Note: The coverage is calculated with reference to the 0-18 cohort, since the entitlement is granted to children and youth up to the age of 19.

### One-off cash assistance

According to the reports from centres for social work, there was an increase in requests for one-off cash assistance in 2017 and this increase continued into 2018, when 190,964 requests were submitted, of which 159,428 were approved. One-off cash assistance is awarded from the financial resources of local self-governments.

**Conclusion:** Child poverty is a fundamental area of concern that affects child well-being. There is need to assess the additional fiscal space to lift the majority of children out of poverty through increasing coverage and adequacy of cash assistance programmes.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

In its Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>65</sup>, the CRC recommends that Serbia:

- Strengthens support to children living below the poverty line, in particular single-parent families, families with four or more children and families with children with disabilities, and ensures that social protection measures provide for the real costs of decent living of the children, including expenses relevant to their right to health, nutritious diet, education, adequate housing and water and sanitation;
- Reviews the adequacy of cash benefits for children from the point of securing a minimum standard of living and ensures access in terms of information, outreach and user-friendly procedures;
- Simplifies the administrative procedures and provisions of support to access cash benefits for families living in the most vulnerable situations
- Ensures that children living in rural areas have access to quality education, adequate health care and housing.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1.2.1 | Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age  |
| 1.2.2 | Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions  |
| 1.3.1 | Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable |
| 1.a.1 | Proportion of domestically generated resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programmes  |

#### Key development partners, among others:

The **World Bank** aims to reduce poverty and increase prosperity in Serbia in a sustainable manner. The **IMF** monitors economic and financial policies. **UNICEF** advocates for the reduction of child poverty.

<sup>65</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.



## 5. HUMANITARIAN, ENVIRONMENTAL AND DISASTER RISK PROFILE

Conflicts and political instability are a risk in Serbia and the region at-large, and could critically threaten child wellbeing in the country. Over the past three decades, the country has been deeply affected by conflict in the region, the disintegration of the Social Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, an influx of 538,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia and 200,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) from Kosovo (in accordance with UN SC Resolution 1244 (1999)), the NATO bombing, violent political discourses across the region and widespread social conflicts. The resolution of the situation in Kosovo (in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999)) is still a major political topic in the country. Serbia scores 1.851 on the Global Peace Index<sup>66</sup>, ranking it 54<sup>th</sup> out of 163 countries.

**Conclusion: Peace and reconciliation efforts need to be maintained to secure more amicable relationships of children with their peers in the region, as well as developing children's skills in conflict prevention and peace-building.**

### 5.1 Children on the move

Since 2015, Serbia has been experiencing a significant influx of migrants and refugees coming in as an effect of the disastrous Syrian war, but which soon transitioned into a population on the move coming also from other Asian countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan) and African countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Nigeria, etc.), characterizing the current influx as a mixed migration flow of people and children.

In Serbia, administrative data on children on the move is either incomplete or unavailable and not systemically collected by national authorities. The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) estimated that in 2018 around 18,000 individuals transited through the territory of Serbia (around 40 per cent being children)<sup>67</sup>. The same trend is expected in 2019 — new arrivals continue to be observed, of which approximately one-sixth are unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)<sup>68</sup>. Serbia is still perceived as a transit country, with very few people lodging a formal asylum request; in 2018, only 10 UASC filed a request for asylum<sup>69</sup>.

Children on the move is an umbrella term for children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement, while potentially opening up opportunities, may also place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence.

Apart from data on children left behind obtained through the MICS survey in 2014 and service-based data from the social protection system, national systemic and disaggregated data and administrative data systems about children on the move are yet to be collected and developed. For instance, it is known that during 2017 almost 4,000 Serbian citizens, mostly from Germany, were returned to

<sup>66</sup> Vision of Humanity, 'Global Peace Index, 2019', <<http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/global-peace-index/>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Republic of Serbia, 'Migration Open House, Obrenovac,' March 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Republic of Serbia, 'Monthly Statistics', March 2019.

<sup>69</sup> UNHCR, 'Snapshot, January 2019', <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67819.pdf>>, accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

Serbia, however, data are not fully disaggregated<sup>70</sup>. A survey of readmitted families living in informal settlements in Belgrade highlights the multiple vulnerabilities faced by children in these households and the need for strengthening support services that would ensure their well-being<sup>71</sup>.

Serbia has a Strategy for Migration Management (2017-2022) and a Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings. Three new laws relevant for managing the refugee and migration situation were adopted in 2018 — a Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, as well as laws on Foreigners and on the Protection of State Borders. The new Asylum Law aligned Serbian legislation with international and EU standards by including an improved refugee definition, and enhanced provisions for unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking children. Serbia continues to meet the needs of transiting individuals through its migration response and has endorsed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and Global Compact on Refugees in 2018.

**Conclusion: A comprehensive profiling of children on the move has yet to be developed. Data collection on migration needs to be improved. It is important to continue addressing the multiple deprivations of children on the move, as well as children in families returned to Serbia under the readmission agreement with the EU.**

### Root causes of migration for children on the move

In the early stages of the migration movement towards Europe in 2015, the root causes of migration for children on the move entering the country with no proper visa or documents were generally of political nature: they fled war, displacement, forced recruitment, immense human loss, and prosecution because of political, religious and sexual orientation reasons. In the case of girls and women, they also fled because of forced marriage and sexual violence. Political reasons also drive returnees back to Serbia: their asylum not being approved, legal re-entry into their presumed country of origin. In recent years, the increasing numbers of people entering the country from elsewhere may be driven by a more complex set of reasons, such as poverty, climate change, global family movements, with economic factors being a stronger driver. A relatively consistent percentage is also coerced into migrating and are victims of criminal networks and human trafficking — especially girls and women coming from Africa. Migration dynamics are also not fully known, and especially since the closure of the borders in March 2016 new routes are continually being explored. Returnees and family reunification are regulated by special agreements and migration-related laws. Internal migration within Serbia is driven by social and economic factors, e.g. studies, job hunting, seasonal work and other reasons related to urbanization. However, a comprehensive profiling of children on the move has yet to be developed.

<sup>70</sup> Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, 'Migration profile, 2017', <[http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Eng/Migration\\_profile\\_of\\_the\\_Republi.pdf](http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Eng/Migration_profile_of_the_Republi.pdf)>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019.

<sup>71</sup> Center for Youth Integration, 'The legal-social position and vulnerability of readmitted families and children who live in informal settlements in Belgrade, 2019', <<http://cim.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/research.pdf>>, accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>72</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child draws attention to target 13.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals on promoting mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management, and recommends that the State party:

- Establish fair and efficient asylum procedures which are carried out in a child-sensitive manner, in both procedural and substantive aspects, and which systematically identify and refer unaccompanied or separated children for appropriate protection and support, and consider amending relevant national legislation, including the Law on Asylum, in this regard;
- Ensure full inclusion of asylum-seeking and refugee unaccompanied or separated children into the existing child protection system; provide accommodation in foster families or other accommodation facilities adequate for their age, gender and needs in line with best interest assessments conducted on an individual basis; and, establish specialized services for children with emotional, psychiatric and behavioral problems;
- Ensure that all asylum-seeking children are systematically provided with information on their rights and obligations, asylum procedures and available services to prevent them from resorting to sleeping without shelter for fear of deportation, and take the necessary steps to protect unaccompanied children from smuggling rings;
- Ensure full respect of the principle of non-refoulement and facilitate access to the asylum system for children in need of international protection in line with Articles 6, 22 and 37 of the Convention;
- Guarantee the right to acquire Serbian citizenship for all children currently residing in the State party, who would otherwise be stateless regardless of their own, or their parent's legal status.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 4.1.1 | Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex                            |
| 4.2.1 | Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex   |
| 4.2.2 | Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex  |
| 4.3.1 | Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex   |
| 4.4.1 | Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill   |
| 4.5.1 | Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated |
| 5.2.1 | Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age                     |
| 5.2.2 | Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence   |
| 5.3.1 | Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18  |

<sup>72</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

- 5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location
- 5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care
- 10.7.2 Number of countries that have implemented well-managed migration policies
- 16.1.2 Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause
- 16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation
- 16.2.3 Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18
- 16.3.1 Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms
- 16.b.1 Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law

### Key development partners, among others:


**IOM** supports Government efforts to manage migration-related challenges by promoting international migration law, policy debate and guidance, protection of migrants' rights, migrant's health and addressing gender dimensions of migration. **UNHCR** focuses on protecting refugees in mixed-migratory flows faced during sudden emergencies that require immediate response. **UNICEF** works with the Government of Serbia and partners to meet children's immediate needs, including safety, protection, health care, adequate nutrition and education. The work of **GIZ** that is focused on displacement and migration combines short-term assistance with medium and long-term projects, by supporting refugees and internally displaced persons. **UNDP**, **WHO**, **IOM** and **UNOPS** have implemented the joint United Nations project "Open Communities — Successful Communities, Support to Health, Communal and Social Services in Serbian Municipalities Hosting Migrants and Refugees", which aims to encourage the acceptance and understanding of issues of migrants and refugees in the communities and areas most exposed to their arrival. **USAID** is engaged in reconstructing kindergartens and asylum centres for migrant and IDPs children in Serbia. **The Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)** provided financial assistance for "Serbia: Full-time aid delivery system to migrant population in Serbia". The Government of **Switzerland (SDC)** has announced a programme on strengthening regional cooperation on migration in the Western Balkans (2020-2027) to promote coherent and effective regional governance of migration in all its multifaceted dimensions, contributing to greater social cohesion and regional integration in the Western Balkans.

## 5.2 Environmental and disaster risk

A complex set of stresses and shocks comprised of disasters caused by natural and man-made hazards, including climate change, have substantial implications for Serbia's sustainable development, negatively affecting various sectors of the economy and human development. Yale's Environmental Performance Index<sup>73</sup> (EPI) places Serbia in 84<sup>th</sup> place, i.e. in the first half of the total number of ranked countries, however, the government is also regularly criticised for its **poor funding of environmental protection and lack of transparency in environmental policy-making**. With regards to disaster risk reduction (DRR), an open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters classifies **Serbia as a medium risk country<sup>74</sup> with considerably higher vulnerability, hazard, exposure and risk indices compared to the neighbouring countries in the region** (see table and map below).

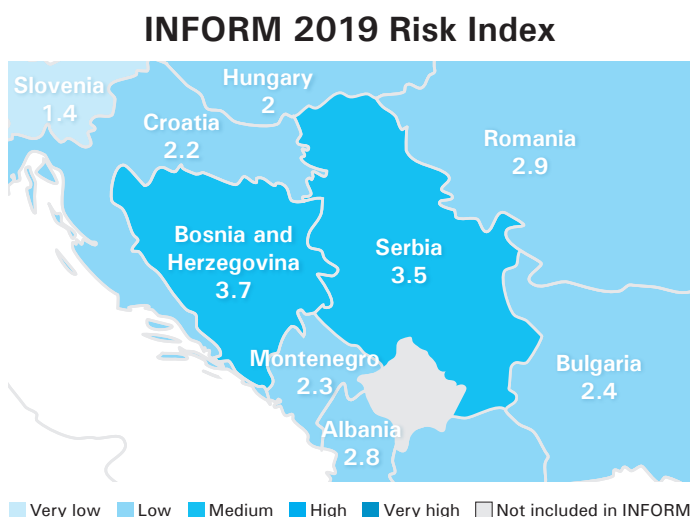
**Table 4. Risk, hazard, vulnerability and lack of coping capacity value and rank, 2019**

(Source: Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy and Center for International Earth Science Information Network, Colombia University)

<b>Southern Europe</b> <b>Upper middle income</b>			
<b>SERBIA</b> 			
	Value	Rank	Trend
INFORM Risk	3.5	99	–
Hazard & Exposure	4.4	66	–
Vulnerability	2.5	118	–
Lack of Coping Capacity	3.9	119	–

**Figure 8. Inform Risk Index, 2019**

(Source: Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy and Center for International Earth Science Information Network, Colombia University)



<sup>73</sup> Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy and Center for International Earth Science Information Network, Colombia University, 'Environmental Performance Index, 2018 Report', <<https://epi.envirocenter.yale.edu/downloads/epi2018policymakerssummaryv01.pdf>>, accessed 5 March 2019. The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) ranks countries' performance on high-priority environmental issues on the protection of human health and the protection of ecosystems, scoring national performance in nine issue areas comprised of 24 indicators and showing how nations compare to one another.

<sup>74</sup> INFORM, 'Country Risk Profiles', <<http://www.inform-index.org/Countries/Country-profiles/iso3/SRB>>, accessed 27 March 2019.

The extensive floods in central and west Serbia in 2014 (affecting 20 per cent of Serbia's population and with an estimated economic impact worth 4.8 per cent of Serbia's GDP)<sup>75</sup> highlighted the vulnerability of the country's energy system, which relies heavily on coal from open-pit mines in electricity generation. Energy and carbon intensity in Serbia are high due to the intensive use of coal in electricity production and heating, outdated energy infrastructure and low energy efficiency among end-users. **Poor air quality**, mainly due to the coal power generation, is a serious concern, especially in urban areas, and Serbia is in the top five among 41 European countries in terms of the PM 2.5<sup>76</sup> concentration<sup>77</sup>. According to WHO data, some 6,500 people died of respiratory ailments in Serbia in 2016, indicating a high level of air pollution.

The majority of natural hazards faced by Serbia are of a transboundary nature, but there is **limited research on vulnerabilities** and the impact of disasters on most at-risk groups, including urban and rural children at wider regional and country level. While the existing normative framework in education is supportive of the introduction of DRR and climate change adaptation into school curricula, and guidebooks and reference materials are available, only a small number of teachers have been trained. A recent UNDP Human Development Report for Serbia highlighted that social capital is a central element of community resilience to natural and climate change-related hazards<sup>78</sup>. Given

the particularly high stakes for youth in the future of the environment agenda, there are evident barriers for **youth engagement and participation on environmental policies and action**, including to start with, clear data on their short and long-term implications for children and youth.

A recent survey among young people 15-30 years (2018) indicates that 69 per cent of young people **consider themselves unready to react in an emergency situation**, 93 per cent consider other young people unready, and 92 per cent consider young people would require additional training on how to react in emergency situations<sup>79</sup>.

### 5.3 Government response to environmental and disaster risk

The National Programme for Environmental Protection (NPEP) is the environmental sector's overarching framework strategy, although there are a number of other more specific policy documents. Preparations are currently underway for Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. Chapter 27 in the EU accession process on the environment and climate change was opened in December 2016. Despite a comprehensive policy framework, several challenges remain. Currently, estimated environmental expenditures from the Government budget for the Republic, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and towns and municipalities are about **0.3 per cent of GDP, which is low compared to need**, as well as compared to EU member states allocations. In addition, a shadow report on EU accession Chapter 27 highlights that most local governments spend less on environmental policy than they collect through environmental fee revenue<sup>80</sup>. Administrative capacities for the absorption of available funds are also a recognised weakness.

<sup>75</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 'Serbia Diagnostics: Assessing Progress and Challenges in Developing a Sustainable Market Economy', December 2017, <<http://ebrd.com/documents/strategy-and-policy-coordination/serbia-diagnostic-paper.pdf>>, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>76</sup> PM2.5 refers to atmospheric particulate matter (PM) that has a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres, which is about 3 per cent the diameter of a human hair. Since they are so small, fine particles tend to stay longer in the air than heavier particles. This increases the chances of humans inhaling them. Studies have found a close link between exposure to fine particles and premature death from heart and lung diseases. Fine particles are also known to trigger or worsen chronic diseases such as asthma, heart attack, bronchitis and other respiratory problems.

<sup>77</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 'Serbia Diagnostics: Assessing Progress and Challenges in Developing a Sustainable Market Economy', December 2017, <<http://ebrd.com/documents/strategy-and-policy-coordination/serbia-diagnostic-paper.pdf>>, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>78</sup> UNDP, 'Human Development Report, 2016, Social Capital: The Invisible Face of Resilience', <[fault/files/ndhr\\_serbia\\_2016\\_eng\\_digital\\_version2.pdf](http://files/ndhr_serbia_2016_eng_digital_version2.pdf)>, accessed 20 March 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Stojanovic Boban, 'Alternativni izveštaj o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji 2018', Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije — KOMS, <[koms.rs/istrazivanja/alternativni-izvestaj-o-polozaju-potrebama-mladih-u-republici-srbiji-2018-godina](http://koms.rs/istrazivanja/alternativni-izvestaj-o-polozaju-potrebama-mladih-u-republici-srbiji-2018-godina)>, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Koalicija 27, 'Chapter 27: No-Progress Report, November 2016 — February 2018', Belgrade 2018, <[https://www.mis.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/izvestaj\\_K27\\_2018\\_ENG\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.mis.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/izvestaj_K27_2018_ENG_WEB.pdf)>, accessed 27 March.



The National Strategy for DRR and Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations (2011) promotes linkages between DRR and other sectors and is aligned with the global strategic framework (Sendai Framework for DRR) and the SDGs. In December 2014, the Government of Serbia passed a National Disaster Management Programme. This was followed by the establishment of a new government body, Public Investment Management Office (PIMO) for the overall coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Disaster Risk Management Programme (2016-2020). A new Law on Natural and other Hazard Risk Reduction and Emergency Management was passed in 2018, introducing a further shift from response to risk reduction, risk awareness and preparedness, and shifting towards the **primary role of local self-governments in DRR** and emergency management. A national risk assessment was adopted in 2019, although it makes little specific reference to human vulnerabilities, including those of children. There is interest among relevant government stakeholders to further explore cash assistance as an efficient and cost-effective form of humanitarian assistance.

**Conclusion:** Youth participation should be seen as a necessary and critical element of environmental and DRR planning and monitoring and environmental action, including through innovation. More data is required on specific vulnerabilities that are a potential impact of disasters and climate change. DRR and environmental resources should be made more widely available both through formal and non-formal curricula. Energy efficient lighting, solar or other renewable energy solutions should be explored, particularly in schools and other locations where children spend extended periods of time.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>81</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child draws attention to target 13.5 of the SDGs on promoting mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management, and recommends that the State party:

- Collect disaggregated data identifying the types of risk faced by children to the occurrence of a variety of disasters.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| 3.9.1  | Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution  |
| 7.1.2  | Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology  |
| 7.2.1  | Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption  |
| 7.a.1  | International financial flows to developing countries in support of clean energy research and development and renewable energy production, including in hybrid systems                          |
| 7.b.1  | Investments in energy efficiency as a proportion of GDP and the amount of foreign direct investment in financial transfer for infrastructure and technology to sustainable development services |
| 9.4.1  | CO2 emission per unit of value added  |
| 9.5.1  | Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP   |
| 11.5.1 | Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population  |
| 11.5.2 | Direct economic loss in relation to global GDP, damage to critical infrastructure and number of disruptions to basic services, attributed to disasters  |

<sup>81</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

- 11.6.1 Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities
- 11.6.2 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)
- 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
- 12.2.2 Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP
- 12.8.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development (including climate change education) are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment
- 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
- 13.1.3 Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies
- 13.2.1 Number of countries that have communicated the establishment or operationalization of an integrated policy/strategy/plan which increases their ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development in a manner that does not threaten food production (including a national adaptation plan, nationally determined contribution, national communication, biennial update report or other)
- 13.3.1 Number of countries that have integrated mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning into primary, secondary and tertiary curricula
- 13.3.2 Number of countries that have communicated the strengthening of institutional, systemic and individual capacity-building to implement adaptation, mitigation and technology transfer, and development actions
- 13.a.1 Mobilized amount of United States dollars per year between 2020 and 2025 accountable towards the \$100 billion commitment
- 15.6.1 Number of countries that have adopted legislative, administrative and policy frameworks to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits
- 15.b.1 Official development assistance and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems

### Key development partners, among others:

UNDP addresses greenhouse gas emissions at local level and financing, supports reporting against relevant conventions and promotes the use of agriculture biomass. The **Government of Switzerland** has financed the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction Project (MDRRP) and the Disaster Risk Financing and Insurance Program II. The **World bank** has provided a Disaster Risk Management Development Policy Loan with a Catastrophe-Deferred Drawdown Option towards increasing the resilience of Serbia to the adverse impact of natural hazards. **OSCE** aims at developing a sustainable partnership between the authorities and civil society on environmental issues. The **European Investment Bank** and **EBRD** support the upgrade and rehabilitation of local water supply and irrigation infrastructure. The **KfW Development Bank (Germany)** supports small and medium-sized cities in building up efficient water and waste water networks and waste water treatment.

## 6. GENDER INEQUITY

Serbia has a relatively high Gender Development Index 0.969 (global average: 0.924), and a Gender Inequality Index of 0.185 (a higher index indicates higher inequalities)<sup>82</sup>. Inequalities persist in women's and girls' reproductive health, education, political participation and employment. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in public finance was introduced by the Government in 2015, and the aim of the initiative is to have all budget users applying GRB by 2020 (53 national, 25 provincial and all local budget users) through improved services at local level. This means that budgets must be gender-sensitive and allocate some resources for improving gender equity (e.g. financial support for higher enrolment rates of Roma girls into secondary and tertiary education)<sup>83</sup>.

Serbia has adopted a National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2016-2020 as an overarching policy document, with a related action plan for the period 2016-2018. The Coordination Body for Gender Equality of the Republic of Serbia is mandated to coordinate the implementation and monitor the process and achievements of the national action plan (NAP). The evaluation of the NAP in 2019 notes changes in attitudes representing norms and values

related to gender roles and gender equality that are slow but visible, with **patriarchal values in decline, but still prevailing in the society**. It notes good strides in system-wide changes induced by the introduction of gender mainstreaming and recommends two important areas are further addressed: preventing and combatting gender-based violence and economic empowerment of women<sup>84</sup>.

**Domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence are still widespread**, including a worrying frequency of femicide (at least 26 cases in 2017 and 30 in 2018<sup>85</sup>). The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, which entered into force on 1 June 2017, has brought changes into the existing practices of the institutional response to violence and provided urgent protection and support to victims of domestic violence. However, not all aspects of the Istanbul Convention have been incorporated into the law. According to data on domestic violence from the Ministry of Interior, there were 31 women victims of murder in 2017, 34 in 2018 and 27 till mid-October 2019. From 1 June 2017 till 15 October 2019, 61,164 emergency measures were proclaimed, while courts prolonged 35,340 emergency measures.

According to OSCE's regional survey on violence in 2018, 10 per cent of women aged 18-74 years are subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by their current partner. Three out of 10 women believe domestic violence is a private matter<sup>86</sup>. The IMAGES study on men and gender equality completed in 2018 reveals that one in 10 adult men have been exposed to unwanted sexual touching during their childhood

<sup>82</sup> The Gender Inequality Index measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development—reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and economic status, expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older. UNDP, 'Gender Inequality Index', <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>>, accessed 25 March 2019

<sup>83</sup> Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is the application of gender analysis when budgeting at national, provincial or local self-government level for programs, program activities and projects that are financed by citizens' money. The effect is reflected in the redistribution of resources to the lives of women and men, girls and boys in society, considering gender, but can also inform policy and other decision-making around socio-economic and other important characteristics that puts a person or group into a potential unequal position, and as defined by anti-discrimination regulations. It became part of Budget System Law (Official Journal of the Republic of Serbia, No. 95/2018) (UN Women, 'Rodno odgovorno budžetiranje (ROB) — nova praksa i zakonska obaveza u sistemu upravljanja javnim finansijama u Republici Srbiji', September 2017, <[www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/serbia/docs/Publications/Prirucnik%20za%20uvodjenje%20ROB.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/serbia/docs/Publications/Prirucnik%20za%20uvodjenje%20ROB.pdf)>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>84</sup> UN Women and Coordination Body for Gender Equality, 'Evaluation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Serbia National Strategy for Gender Equality — Final Report, 2016', Belgrade, 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Network of Women against Violence, 'Femicid — Ubistva žena u Srbiji, January 1-December 31, 2018', <[www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/images/pdf/FEMICID\\_Kvantitativno-narativni\\_izvestaj\\_za\\_2018\\_godinu.pdf](http://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/images/pdf/FEMICID_Kvantitativno-narativni_izvestaj_za_2018_godinu.pdf)>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>86</sup> OSCE, Well-being and Safety of Women Survey. Serbia Results Report, 2018, <[www.osce.org/secretariat/419750?download=true](http://www.osce.org/secretariat/419750?download=true)>, accessed 20 March 2019.

or youth<sup>87</sup>. Gender-based violence is also widespread in schools, as 69 per cent of primary school students and 74 per cent of secondary school students in 2015 reported they had been exposed to at least one form of gender-based violence. Boys, more often than girls, express views justifying gender-based violence against women<sup>88</sup>. During conflict and displacement, several forms of gender-based violence are experienced especially by women and girls — while no prevalence study has been carried out, one small-scale survey clearly points out that 33.1 per cent of the women and girls accommodated in reception and asylum centres in Serbia experienced sexual or physical violence<sup>89</sup>. Overall, very few perpetrators are sentenced.

Preventing domestic and gender-based violence is of ultimate importance for a child's wellbeing, particularly due to the **interconnectedness between intimate partner violence and violence against children**<sup>90</sup>. Domestic violence that children witness, violent disciplining methods to which they are exposed, but also strict upbringing practices with limited nurturing care are linked with higher risks of violent behaviour towards peers, in physical forms as well as through manipulative social abuse. Research on women who experienced domestic violence indicated that in three quarters of cases children witnessed that violence and in almost half of the cases the father was the perpetrator during that incident<sup>91</sup>.

**Conclusion: Positive gender socialisation is needed from an early age in all settings. Preventing domestic violence is particularly important to curb inter-generational violence. Offering survivor-centred specialised comprehensive care is needed in addition to preventive efforts.**

## 6.1 Child marriage

According to MICS data from 2014, 16.8 per cent of Roma girls were married before the age of 15 (among the general population, 0.8 per cent of girls married before 15 years), and 57 per cent of Roma women were married before reaching 18 years (compared to 6.8 per cent among the general population). Child marriage is also more frequent in the general population among women in rural areas and women living in the poorest households<sup>92</sup>. **Root causes of child marriage** in the Roma population can be found in the patriarchal structure of their communities, the importance attached to virginity, perceptions of marriage and restrictive gender roles, a lack of value attributed to girls' education, economic incentives etc.<sup>93</sup> Early marriage is also a widespread practice in some of the cultures of refugees and migrants residing in Serbia<sup>94</sup>. As a result, girls often leave school, bear children at an early age and are economically dependent due to a further inability to earn income. Consequently, they are likely to be exposed to higher levels of violence.

A National Coalition for Eliminating Child Marriage was established in February 2019, with the aim to strengthen the determination of all stakeholders at national level to respond to the issue of child marriage in Serbia, and to ensure that Roma women and men, boys and girls start to change their practices in this regard. In May 2019 MoLEVSA issued an *Instruction*

<sup>87</sup> Hughson, M, Men in Serbia: Changes, Resistances and Challenges, IMAGES Serbia, 2018, <<http://images.edu.rs/en/executive-summary/>>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Čeriman, J., Duhaček, N., Perišić, K., Bogdanović, M., & Duhaček, D., Istraživanje rodno zasnovanog nasilja u školama u Srbiji, Belgrade, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> ATINA, 'Violence against women and girls among refugee and migrant population in Serbia', Belgrade, 2017, <<https://serbia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Vilence%20against%20women%20and%20girls.pdf>>, accessed 20 March 2019

<sup>90</sup> UNFPA and UNICEF, 'Making the Connection, 2018', <[www.unicef.org/eca/media/3321/file/Making%20the%20connection%20exec%20summary.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eca/media/3321/file/Making%20the%20connection%20exec%20summary.pdf)>, accessed 20 March 2019.

<sup>91</sup> Ignjatovic, T, Consequences of intimate partner violence against Women on Children and the Response of Public Services, Radunic Printing House, Belgrade, 2015, <[www.unicef.rs/files/Uticaj\\_nasilja\\_u\\_partnerskim\\_odnosima\\_na%20decu.pdf](http://www.unicef.rs/files/Uticaj_nasilja_u_partnerskim_odnosima_na%20decu.pdf)>, accessed 1 March 2019.

<sup>92</sup> UNICEF, 'Child Marriage Country profile of Serbia', 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Roma Women's Centre BIBIJA, Ethnographic Institute SASA, and UNICEF, Child Marriage Among the Roma Population in Serbia: Ethnographic Research, UNICEF Belgrade, November 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Kisić, M. and Petrović, A., Room for Women and Girls: Female Voices from Refugees and Migrants in Serbia, ADRA Serbia Belgrade 2019.

for Action of centres for social welfare concerning child, early and forced marriages, and prepared changes and additions to the Family Law through which the legal possibility of marriage with a minor will be eliminated.

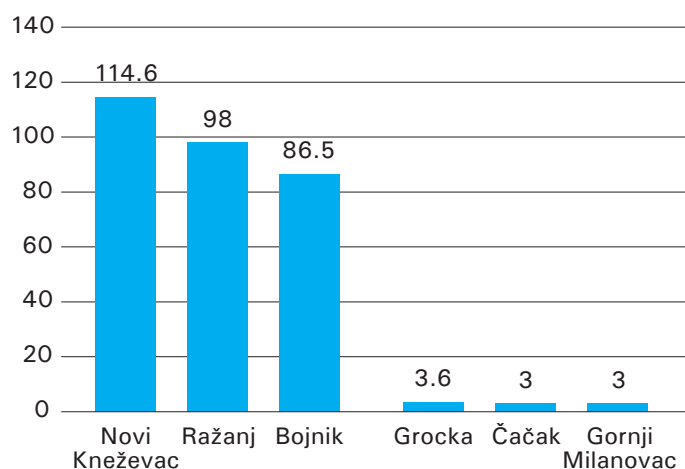
**Conclusion:** The depth of deprivation experienced by girls in child marriage warrants a continued high level of wide community mobilisation and resources dedicated to preventing child marriage and mitigating its effects.

## 6.2 Adolescent pregnancies

There has been a decline in the fertility rate among girls 15-19 years of age from 25.4 live births per 1,000 girls in 2002 to 14.4 per 1,000 girls in 2017. It is important to note that there are marked differences between municipalities at the local level (see graph below). MICS data from 2014 additionally show that while 4 per cent of women in the overall population had given birth before age 18, this was the case for 40 per cent of women in Roma settlements.

**Figure 9. Number of underage births per municipality in 2017 — top 3 and bottom 3 municipalities that reported underage births**

(Source: SORS, 2017)



## 6.3 Sexual and reproductive health

About 23 per cent of first-grade high school students (14.5-15.5 years) have had sexual relationships (36 per cent of boys and 8 per cent of girls), and the majority of them (44 per cent) had their first sexual relationship at the age of 15<sup>95</sup>. According to MICS data in 2014, more than half of women aged 19-24 years who were currently married or in a union were not using any method of contraception; 32 per cent of them used traditional methods, and only 16.6 per cent used modern methods of contraception. The prevalence of usage of modern contraceptive methods was more frequent in women with higher education and women with the highest socio-economic status, indicating discrepancies in knowledge or availability of modern methods. Women in Roma settlements used contraceptive methods less than the women in the general population. About 70 per cent of women aged 15-19 years did not use any contraceptive methods, as well as 47 per cent of women aged 20-24 years. On the other hand, one in five women aged 19-24 years has an unmet need for contraception. This result is the same for women in the Roma settlements. In the 18-24 years age group of men surveyed in the IMAGES study, one in five agreed with the statement that he would feel offended if his partner asked him to use a condom<sup>96</sup>. More research on the prevalence of HPV is needed<sup>97</sup>. Among girls and women on the move, many obstacles are observed with regards to sexual and reproductive health, including embarrassment to talk with male doctors and translators, the taboo nature of reproductive health and a lack of adequate knowledge on this subject<sup>98</sup>.

<sup>95</sup> Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Health Behaviour in School Age Children, 2018. Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade Serbia 2018. Available at: <<http://www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2018osnovniRezultatilstrazivanjaHBSC.pdf>>

<sup>96</sup> Hughson, M, Men in Serbia: Changes, Resistances and Challenges, IMAGES Serbia, 2018, <<http://images.edu.rs/en/executive-summary/>>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>97</sup> Institute of Public Health of Vojvodina, 'HPV', <<http://izjzv.org.rs/?lng=lat&cir=&link=3-17-378>>, accessed 1 April 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Kisić, M. and Petrović, A., Room for Women and Girls: Female Voices from Refugees and Migrants in Serbia, ADRA Serbia Belgrade 2019.



According to the data collected by the Institute of Public Health, only 38 primary health care centres in Serbia have counselling services for youth that address reproductive health and other adolescent health issues. An integrated national programme for protection and advancement of sexual and reproductive health was adopted in 2018.

**Conclusion: There is need to improve access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, particularly in remote or socially excluded communities, and to ensure that these services are adolescent-friendly and tailored to the different needs of girls and boys.**

## 6.4 Maternal health

Maternal mortality is directly related to the quality of antenatal and perinatal care. Based on data from European Health For All Database, the maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births in Serbia was 12.04, while in the EU the average was 4.72 with a continued downward trend<sup>99</sup>.

While 98 per cent all women aged 15-49 years in Serbia receive antenatal care and 94 per cent receive it at least 4 times, only 29 per cent receive a home visit by a patronage nurse during pregnancy. The lowest coverage of women is in the Belgrade region (9 per cent) while the highest is in Southern and Eastern Serbia (53 per cent). Much more importance is given to postnatal home visits, where 94 per cent of women were visited by a patronage nurse within a week of delivery. The average number of postnatal visits by a patronage nurse after birth is 4.3. For women living in Roma settlements, 96 per cent receive antenatal care, provided by medical doctors in 95 per cent of cases. Only 74 per cent received antenatal care at least four times. Differences in care received can also be observed between wealth quintiles.

Only 14 per cent of women with live births in the last two years attended a childbirth preparation programme or parenting education in primary health facilities. The main reasons for low utilization were: 51 per cent of women stated they did not need it, 20 per cent reported that no such programme was organized in their neighbourhood, 13 per cent had no time and 9 per cent did not know that such a programme existed. The percentage of women in Roma settlements with live births in the two years preceding the survey that attended a childbirth preparation programme is very low, at 3 per cent.

Almost all births in Serbia (98 per cent) are delivered in a health facility<sup>100</sup>. One third of pregnant women (almost 34 per cent) had a caesarean section. The high percentage of caesarean section is present across Serbia and beyond tertiary clinics, which calls for additional analyses of the quality of antenatal and perinatal care<sup>101</sup>.

The nutrition status of women during pregnancy, including micronutrients, has a significant impact on the health outcomes for both mother and new-born. According to WHO, Global Health Observatory Data Repository/World Health Statistics, anaemia in pregnant women in Serbia remains prevalent, although it has declined from 36 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent in 2016. A survey on the biological impact of universal salt iodization, conducted in 2007, has shown that 45 per cent of pregnant women had median urinary iodine below expected levels, although this was significantly higher among pregnant women who used supplements. Unfortunately, more recent data and data on the use and status of other micronutrients during pregnancy is not available. The situation among pregnant women with different socio-economic-status is also not known.

According to the recommendations of the experts in the field of antenatal care, it is necessary to revise the existing National Guide for Pregnancy, which was adopted in 2005.

<sup>99</sup> WHO, 'European Health for All database (HFA-DB)', <<http://data.euro.who.int/hfad/b/>>, accessed 20 March 2019.

<sup>100</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roman Settlements Multiple Indicator Survey 2014, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>101</sup> Institute of Public Health of Serbia



**Conclusion:** There is a need for increased attention to the antenatal period and further analyses of the quality of antenatal and perinatal care that can affect persisting high levels of still-births, poor nutrition or other negative outcomes in both women and newborns.

## 6.5 Rights and provisions for parents and families with children

Two population policy measures in Serbia support birth promotion in line with the Government's Birth Promotion Strategy: the birth grant and parental leave for the third and every next child, as the leave is for two years. Birth grants are paid for the first four children in the family, and their amount increases with birth order. In 2017, the number of birth grant recipients was over 62,000 and the expenditures totalled 0.17 per cent of the GDP. Conditionalities were introduced to ensure that all children in the recipient family are vaccinated and enrolled in a preparatory preschool programme or primary school. There is currently no evidence on how this conditionality may be affecting Roma families with children.

Employed mothers are entitled to four months of maternity leave, and either parent is entitled to childcare leave for a period of one year for the first and second child, or a period of two years for the third and any subsequent child. The number of birth-related leave benefit recipients continued to grow in recent years, exceeding 42,000 in 2017 and reaching 0.73 per cent of GDP in the same year<sup>102</sup>.

The new Law on Financial Assistance to Families with Children introduces a new right to other benefits related to the birth and care of a child and includes women who have their own business, bearers of agricultural land and those on short-

term work contracts. It also includes unemployed women who were employed within the last 18 months prior to birth and those who were users of agricultural insurance. The Law defines conditions for the realisation of the rights of foster parents and guardians of children, as well as employed women who were employed after birth.

**Freelancers** represent a very active workforce in the Serbian market, with a growing trend from the student segment. However, they are not recognized in the Labour Law and are mostly left without social, health and pension security and financial services. This is indirectly influencing their plans to establish a family.

(Andjelkovic, B. 2019)

The new Law introduced several disputable provisions that are, based on the opinion of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, in collision with Serbian anti-discrimination regulations and the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (e.g. provisions for women who are insured agriculturalists)<sup>103</sup>. It also does not provide adequate compensation for some other categories of women. Another disputed provision of the Law is that the parent of a child in need of special care must make a choice between wage compensation during absence from work and the right to allowance for taking care of and assisting another person. In that way, parents must choose between the child's right relating to their physical or sensory impairment, disability or changes in health status and the parent's right as an employed person to receive compensation during childcare leave. New legal provisions are expected to remove part of these weaknesses and be complemented by community services in support of parenting.

<sup>102</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>103</sup> Poverenik za zaštitu ravnopravnosti, Inicijativu za izmenu člana 12. stav 7. Zakona o finansijskoj podršci porodici sa decom, <<http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/rs/inicijativa-za-izmenu-zakona-o-finansijskoj-podrci-porodici-sa-decom>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

The modality of exercising the right to childcare leave does not yet recognise flexible forms, such as combining the benefits with part-time work, the possibility of choosing a longer leave with lower benefit level etc.

In practice, very few men opt for paternity leave. Data also tells us that parenting at an early age is still predominantly the obligation of the mother. Activities that fathers do more frequently than do mothers with their children are physical exercises and playing outdoors<sup>104</sup>. According to MICS data, only 37 per cent of fathers of children 36-59 months engage in learning activities with their young children compared to 90 per cent of mothers. Engagement of fathers is significantly lower in the poorest quintiles, among Roma and in regions beyond Belgrade and Vojvodina. As global research has shown, paternal support is of importance for the cognitive development of children and children who had an engaged father scored better in language tests, educational attainment and other areas. Fathers' engagement in childbearing has shown positive outcomes for the child, father and the whole family. It reduces the risks for family violence and prevents behavioural and other mental health problems.

As an additional pro-natality measure, the Tax Department provides means-tested tax returns on VAT for baby food and baby equipment, up to a value of around RSD 79,000. With the recent adoption of the changes to the Law on Financial Assistance to Families with Children, this measure has been converted to one-off cash assistance in the amount of 5,000 RSD (VAT refunds are still available for children born before 1 July 2018).

**Conclusion:** It is important to continue encouraging flexible working arrangements, paternity leave, adequate childcare provision, enforcing equal pay for both genders, and ensuring equitable representation of women in senior/decision-making positions. The Labour Law should recognize the positive business practices of responsible companies from the private sector on achieving work-life balance and flexible work models, as well as development of services that support late hours at work and align with parental duties, school and kindergarten working hours. Employees are spending less time with their families and children, and a change in the legislation could indirectly affect the reduction of digital violence against children and child obesity, and positively contribute to early childhood development and healthy lifestyles.

In its **concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>105</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Establish a system to track all cases involving child marriages among ethnic groups, particularly Roma girls, and provide child victims with shelter as well as appropriate rehabilitation and counselling services, and develop awareness raising campaigns highlighting the harmful consequences of child marriage;
- Develop comprehensive, age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health, including information on family planning and contraceptives, the dangers of early pregnancy

<sup>104</sup> Hughson, M, Men in Serbia: Changes, Resistances and Challenges, IMAGES Serbia, 2018, <<http://images.edu.rs/en/executive-summary/>>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>105</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases;

- Ensure unimpeded access to sexual and reproductive health services, including confidential counselling and modern contraception for adolescent girls and boys.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

3.1.1	Maternal mortality ratio
3.1.2	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel
3.7.1	Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods
3.7.2	Adolescent birth rate (aged 10-14 years; aged 15-19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group
3.8.1	Coverage of essential health services (defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population)
3.8.2	Proportion of population with large household expenditures on health as a share of total household expenditure or income
3.c.1	Health worker density and distribution
5.1.1	Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex
5.2.1	Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age
5.2.2	Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence
5.3.1	Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18
5.4.1	Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location
5.5.1	Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments
5.5.2	Proportion of women in managerial positions
5.6.1	Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care
5.6.2	Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education
5.b.1	Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex
5.c.1	Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment
16.1.1	Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age

### Key development partners, among others:

**UN Women** currently works on gender responsive budgeting, gender equality in disaster risk reduction, combating violence against women and advancing women's economic empowerment, gender and climate change. The Office also assists in the implementation of projects supported by United Nations funds, such as the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Fund for Gender Equality of United Nations Women. **UNFPA** is the United Nations' sexual and reproductive health agency that supports gender equality and combating gender-based violence; strengthening access and quality to family planning and reproductive health services for all; data analysis and population projections and ageing. **The Swiss PRO Programme** financed by the Government of Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in Serbia provides support to the local self-governments for establishing and/or strengthening local mechanisms for gender equality. **OSCE** runs a number of activities to mainstream gender equality in policy and practice. **USAID** supports women in business. **UNDP** in Serbia works to address the main gaps in social inclusion and to improve employment opportunities and services for socially excluded and vulnerable populations, including women, and supports the creation of a social and institutional environment that contributes to reducing violence against women in Serbia. **UNICEF** supports local stakeholders in addressing child marriage at national, local and community level and health system strengthening in the area of maternal health.

## 7. SOCIAL NORMS

### 7.1 Discrimination

#### 7.1.1 Public opinion and attitudes towards discrimination

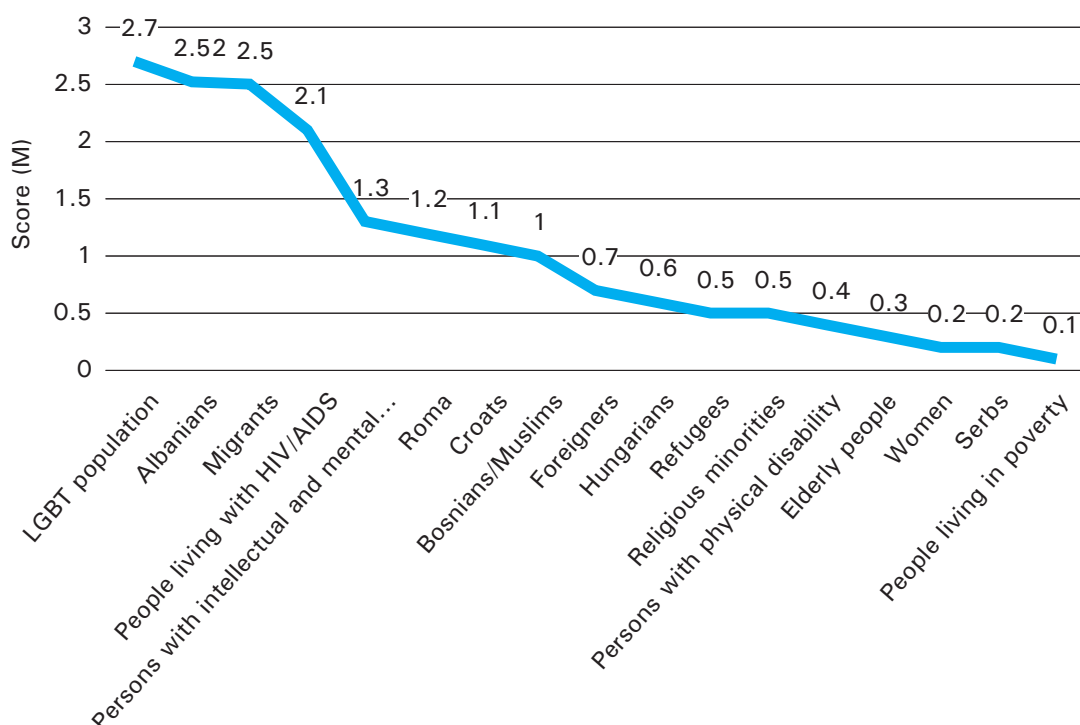
A 2016 public opinion poll on citizen's attitudes towards discrimination in Serbia by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality shows some positive trends, however, compared to 2013, concrete results in reducing discrimination have not yet been achieved; public perceptions of the presence and acceptability of discrimination have remained the same. Most participants observe that discrimination in Serbia is not sanctioned, and the majority of citizens do not have the necessary knowledge to recognise discrimination. Citizens see Roma, the LGBT population and people living in poverty as groups that are **most discriminated** in Serbia, with employment as the area where discrimination is most evident. **Social distance**<sup>106</sup> is greatest toward the LGBT population, the Albanian ethnic minority and migrants, as well as towards people living with HIV, people with an intellectual or mental disability and the Roma ethnic minority. Citizens see the Government and media as potentially the most important actors that can contribute towards reducing discrimination, although media are also perceived as an actor that often displays discrimination in its reporting<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>106</sup> Social distance is a measure of perceived or desired closeness or remoteness towards a particular social or ethnic group as evidence by the level of intimacy tolerated between them.

<sup>107</sup> Commissioner for Protection of Equality in the Republic of Serbia, Public Opinion Survey Report "Citizens' Attitudes towards Discrimination in Serbia", Equal Protection Commissioner, Ludwig Boltzmann, Institute for Human Rights, December 2016.

**Figure 10. Perceptions of social distance, 2016**

(Source: Commissioner for Protection of Equality, 2016)



In a separate poll with media representatives in 2018, most journalists felt there had been no change in the extent of discrimination in Serbia over the past five years. Most of those who did identify change believed discrimination had declined, but a significant 20 per cent claimed that discrimination had grown in the past five years. Interestingly, editors were more critical of the current magnitude of discrimination than journalists. The vast majority of journalists believed hate speech was present in Serbia<sup>108</sup>.

An earlier survey of government body representatives on attitudes towards discrimination revealed that almost 70 per cent hear belittling or insulting comments about groups of citizens at their workplace (although there are significant regional differences, with discriminatory attitudes perceived less frequently

in Vojvodina government bodies — 50 per cent). Overall, discriminatory action is less frequent than the expression of discriminatory attitudes (present in 50 per cent of cases). Of concern, 40 per cent of government body representatives consider the discriminated groups as responsible for their own position, although two thirds believe that the state is not doing enough to counter discrimination and that the National Assembly and Government have the greatest role to play. They also see the media, political parties and government institutions as actors that encourage discrimination to the greatest extent<sup>109</sup>. These perceptions are coupled with an **overall lack of confidence and trust in public sector governance**,

<sup>108</sup> Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, 'Media Attitudes towards Discrimination in Serbia, November 2018,' <[http://ravnopravnost-5bcf.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Media-research-brief\\_ENG.pdf](http://ravnopravnost-5bcf.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Media-research-brief_ENG.pdf)>, accessed 2 September 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Ipsos, UNDP, Attitudes of Government Body Representatives towards Discrimination in Serbia, 2014, Ipsos Strategic Marketing, Belgrade, Serbia, <[avopravnost-5bcf.kxcdn.com/wp-content/download/izvestaj\\_odnos\\_predstavnikajavnevlasti\\_prema\\_diskriminacijiji\\_u\\_srbiji\\_final.pdf](http://ravnopravnost-5bcf.kxcdn.com/wp-content/download/izvestaj_odnos_predstavnikajavnevlasti_prema_diskriminacijiji_u_srbiji_final.pdf)>, accessed 25 March 2019.

according to a survey by EBRD<sup>110</sup>. In most Western Balkan countries in transition, confidence in the public sector is low and declining in recent years, both at the national level (where around 40 per cent of citizens place their trust in institutions) and at the local level (where around 20 percent of respondents say they trust their regional or local authorities). Representatives of public services and institutions are often perceived as corrupt.

Discrimination towards social and ethnic groups is consistently reflected in attitudes towards children, particularly Roma children, children with disabilities, refugee and migrant children, children in street situations, as documented through MICS and other studies. In its Concluding Observations to Serbia in February 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child therefore recommended that the country ensures full implementation of relevant existing laws prohibiting discrimination, including by strengthening public education campaigns to address negative social attitudes.

### 7.1.2 Government response to discrimination

Serbia has a Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the period 2014-2018, and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality acts as an independent body that monitors discrimination and works on awareness-raising. A cross-sectoral Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Roma Women in the Republic of Serbia for 2016-2025 is also being implemented and is monitored by the Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy. Sectoral legal and strategic frameworks also address discrimination.

**Conclusion: Social norms do not depend only on the Government's response to discrimination, but the Government and media are nevertheless perceived as the main influencers. There is, therefore, a need for more systematic and consistent messaging by Government through media and other channels, on the need for a tolerant and inclusive society where socially excluded groups are embraced through principles and action. Serbia faces a demographic change in the coming decades in favour of an increase of Roma and minority population rates, therefore apart from the point of view of respecting human rights and child rights, this is also important from the viewpoint of preventing future rifts in society.**

### 7.1.3 Inclusive education

In 2019, Serbia is marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of quality and inclusive education reforms. In the past 10 years, the Government has undertaken extensive changes and reforms in the education system with a comprehensive focus on improving the equity, quality and efficiency dimensions of education.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) passed a Law on the Foundations of the Education System, which provided the legal framework for inclusive education. The Law supported the enrolment of all children within the regular school system and defined additional support in education for students with disabilities, students with learning difficulties and students with disadvantages. Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. Inclusive education was also a foundation for enabling the inclusion of refugee and migrant children into formal education due to the additional support they needed (e.g. addressing challenges

<sup>110</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 'Life in Transition, Corruption and Trust', ch. 4 in Life in transition Survey II, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, June 2011.



such as a possible lack of knowledge of the language of instruction, discontinuity in education, lack of experience of formal education etc.).

The inclusive education policy is wide and linked with overall reform of the education sector, including education quality and teacher competencies. While there are many challenges remaining in the implementation of inclusive education, with adequate financing reforms, the necessary support provided to schools (through exchange and management of knowledge and data, professional development of staff etc.) and a strong monitoring system in place, inclusive education could further significantly contribute to overcoming structural discrimination, decreasing inequity and increasing the quality of education.

**Conclusion: There is a need for a clear and sustainable financing and governance structure that will enable the inclusive education agenda to move ahead.**

## 7.2 Violent behaviour and violence as an accepted means of conflict resolution

Years of war in the region, violent political discourses and widespread social conflicts have increased tolerance to violence and created an atmosphere in which new generations of children and young people have come to perceive violence as legitimate means to an end<sup>111</sup>.

According to data from the Ministry of Interior, the average annual rate of criminal activity where the victim is a minor among the total number of crimes where an individual is a victim is between 5 and 6 per cent. Annually an average of 3,170 crimes are recorded in which 3,300 minors are victims. Based on the number and type of crimes, it is mostly noted that children are most at risk in traffic, on the street/

in public space, and thirdly, in a dysfunctional family, in places of entertainment, cafes and other places where youth gather, including schools. During the last 11 years (2008-2018), the total number of criminal acts committed by youth of 14 to 19 years of age (peers) was unstable, with a declining trend. Male adolescents dominate the structure of both victims and those committing the crimes.

A study on adverse childhood experiences (ACE)<sup>112</sup> has shown their unfavourable effects to be long-term, and affect physical health, mental health, personality traits and educational outcomes. It shows that out of every 100 adults in Serbia, about 70 have experienced at least one form of ACE repeatedly during childhood, and about 20 have experienced four or more. Adverse childhood experiences were found to be more common among those living in urban areas, those not in a partner relationship, among males, among younger people (18-29 years), those with lower education and those who dropped out from school.<sup>113</sup>

**Table 5. Number of families where children were victims of violence as recorded by the social protection system, 2013-2017** (Source: Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2017)

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number	3,637	4,938	6,520	7,036	8,297

Exposure of children to peer and other forms of violence in schools is also an emerging issue for the education system. In 2019, 370 situations of third-

<sup>112</sup> An adverse childhood experience (ACE) describes a traumatic experience in a person's life occurring before the age of 18 that the person remembers as an adult. The following are examples of ACEs: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, alcoholism in the family, drug abuse in the family, depression or any other mental illness in the family, suicide in the family, incarceration of a family member, abuse of mother by her partner, abuse of father by his partner, parent separation, psychological neglect, physical neglect, bullying, involvement in physical fight, community violence, and collective violence.

<sup>113</sup> UNICEF, Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, UNICEF Serbia, March 2019.

<sup>111</sup> UNICEF, Violence against Children in Serbia — Determinants, Factors and Interventions. A National Study, UNICEF Serbia, 2017.

level violence (that includes e.g. physical injury, fear-mongering, threats, psychological abuse, sexual violence etc.) were reported in all levels of education — from preschool to secondary school level. Data show that combined forms of violence are most common<sup>114</sup>. According to data from the Ministry of Interior, on average 5,000 security incidents in schools and their vicinity are reported by police annually.

The increasing trend of reporting of all forms of violence in recent years, including VAC, jointly with poor system capacity to answer the complex needs of all victims, results in high urgency and sets a priority for the Government. Bearing in mind the multi-layered and complex nature of violence against children, interventions targeting multiple factors will be critical, providing high returns on investments in the long term. There is also increasing professional consensus that measures aimed at parents should be emphasized as one of key aspects for the implementation of change.

Reported cases of violence against children comprise 27 per cent of all cases of family violence in 2017.

### 7.2.1 Children at multiple risks of violence

It is also important to acknowledge that adequately addressing the most complex cases of violence that occur due to multiple vulnerabilities of children and their families must remain a high priority — this includes sexual violence, violence towards children with disabilities, child victims and witnesses of crime, children in street situations and children living in residential institutions, and child victims of trafficking.

### Child labour

Child labour for children under 15 years is prohibited in Serbia and specific safeguards exist in law for working children aged 15-18 years. MICS data from 2014 indicate that 10 per cent of children in Serbia are engaged in child labour, while 3 per cent work under hazardous conditions. Some 12 per cent of children aged 5-11 years and 2 per cent of children aged 12-14 years were engaged in child labour through economic activities during the week preceding the survey date.<sup>115</sup>

The Labour Force Survey from 2016 indicates 2.8 per cent of children aged 15-17 years were engaged in economic activity. Over half of all child labour in Serbia is found in the agriculture, forestry and fishery sector (56.5 per cent) and 60 per cent occurs on family farms. Children in Serbia also engage in forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation, as well as other forms of street work.<sup>116</sup>

MICS data indicate that boys, children from other (rural) areas, and the poorest children are more frequently involved in economic activities. Due to the gendered division of labour, boys are more often engaged in economic activities while girls are more often engaged in household work. Therefore, boys are more exposed to agricultural work hazards, while girls are withdrawn from activities that ultimately generate income and are thus deprived of a specific dimension of labour socialization.

A Government Regulation on Hazardous Labour of Children came into effect in 2018. It includes prohibited occupations deemed to be hazardous for children in the formal economy, including in vocational education, such as mining, construction, collecting hazardous waste, and animal production. The Regulation designates responsible

<sup>114</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Serbia, 2019.

<sup>115</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roman Settlements Multiple Indicator Survey 2014, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015

<sup>116</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2016, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2016.

agencies for combatting child labour. A Protocol for Action by the Labour Inspection, as well as an Instruction on Action by centers for social welfare in protection children from child labour were adopted. A Roadmap for Eliminating Child Labour Including its Worst Forms in Serbia 2018-2022 was finalised, and includes activities for more efficient prevention and elimination of the consequences of child labour. The Child Rights Council also monitors the situation in this area.

According to the “Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour” of the Bureau of International Labour Affairs Biroa za međunarodna pitanja rada<sup>117</sup>, Serbia is placed into the group of countries that achieved “significant progress” both in 2017 and 2018. The report includes 131 countries and assesses the activities that the Government of Serbia undertook to improve efforts to eliminate child labour. In 2018 Serbia was one of 12 countries that received the “significant progress” mark and a positive assessment of the legal framework, implementation of relevant legal acts and the training of labour inspectors, police officers and social workers.

According to data from the centres of social welfare, in 2018 there were 11 children victims of child labour (5 boys and 6 girls). Six of the children were not enrolled in school although they were of primary school age. Nine children are recipients of some form of financial assistance. All 11 children were under parental care, and 10 were of Roma nationality. According to the type of harm, the greatest number of children were exposed to excessive noise (5), unfavourable climate conditions (4), physical/psychological strain (1) and physical harm and tobacco smoke (1). According to the type of dangerous labour, three children were found in plant cultivation and six in begging. Apart from these, data on those committing the offence of child labour, the source of the report and the child protection measures taken are also monitored.

From June 2019, the project “Measuring, awareness-raising and policy engagement for advancing the fight against child labour and forced labour (MAP 16)” is being implemented in Serbia. It is led by the International Labour Organisation in Serbia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, Republic Prosecution Office, Union of Employers of Serbia, Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia and the United branch union “Nezavisnost”, and with support of the US Labour Department.

### **Trafficking in human beings**

The total identified number of victims of human trafficking in Serbia declined from 2013 (92) to 2017 (43), although with a sharp increase in 2014. In 2018, the number of identified victims of human trafficking reached 76. The vast majority of victims are Serbian citizens (more than 90 per cent), recruited and exploited nationally (around 70 per cent). Children are often victims of trafficking at the national level, with their share in the total number of trafficked persons ranging from 38 per cent to 65 per cent (with the exception in 2014 when it was 15 per cent) – predominantly girls (75 per cent – 95 per cent). The most common forms of exploitation among children (girls) are trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced marriage and combined forms of exploitation. The majority of the victims have been discovered by public services (mainly police), with Centres for Social Welfare being the predominant referral institution for minors. The Centre for Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking is a national social welfare institution founded in 2012 by the Serbian Government, with a mandate to identify victims of trafficking, coordinate referral and institutional support that is provided to victims, as well as monitor the phenomenon of trafficking and the government system’s response.

<sup>117</sup> US Department of Labor’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2018 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, 2019. [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labor\\_reports/tda2018/ChildLaborReportBook.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2018/ChildLaborReportBook.pdf)

## 7.2.2 Government response to violence

Policies and protocols to respond to violence exist, and although procedures are clearly defined, their implementation is somewhat weak. New updated special protocols for each sector are expected to be aligned with the future strategic framework (Strategy of Protection from and Prevention of Violence against Children — in adoption) and the latest legislative changes (Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence).

Cross-sectoral coordination to identify, refer and respond to cases of violence against children functions in one in four municipalities (38 municipalities out of 136 that responded to a request for information) and in other municipalities it is mainly coordinated as part of the response system to violence against women<sup>118</sup>. In terms of the sensitive and effective response to cases of violence against children, there is evidence that intersectoral collaboration at local level in violence against children cases is inadequate to respond to the needs of all child victims, especially considering complex cases of victims with multiple vulnerabilities, and cases that demand complex and continuous intervention or treatment (sexual, violence experienced by children with disabilities, child marriage, violence against children in residential institutions, violence against children among children on the move etc.). Rehabilitation and specialized services for child victims are lacking, especially outside the main regional centres, e.g. shelters and mental health services are available only in big cities, leaving behind a significant number of children in need of rehabilitation and overcoming trauma that live in rural areas. Hidden types of violence have also been neglected in terms of interventions aimed at changing attitudes, values and norms.

When the work of police is concerned, 24-hour availability is provided to over 2,000 policemen trained in the area of child rights and juvenile justice, as well as 1,350 policemen for prevention and suppression of domestic violence. An average of 350 policemen (so-called “school policemen”) are engaged annually in the area of advancing the security of school pupils and schools in the Republic of Serbia, in around 680 primary and secondary schools. From September 2017, the Ministry of Interior in collaboration with MoESTD is implementing the programme “Basics of child security”, with the aim of informing pupils of the first, fourth and sixth grade of primary school on topics of security that covers approximately 55,000 pupils in each school-year. With the support of the OSCE mission in Serbia, numerous visual materials, guidebooks and an electronic application have been designed and disseminated in schools.

**Conclusion: There is dire need for systematic and urgent investment in the prevention of violence, including a need to strengthen services for intensive support to families and children experiencing multiple deprivations with the aim of preventing the child’s separation from the family in accordance with the child’s best interests. Parenting competencies need to be strengthened by introducing a parenting support programme that would be widely available from a very early stage. Specialised services could be funded and more systematically organised on a regional basis. At the local level, it is important to continue strengthening local inter-sectoral cooperation and have clear referral pathways to regional specialized services, as needed.**

<sup>118</sup> Network of Organisations for Children Serbia, MODS, ‘Zastita dece od nasilja’, <<http://mapa.zadecu.org/>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

## 7.3 Child-specific social norms

### 7.3.1 Violent disciplining

Although there is a **consensus among the general population of parents (93 per cent) in Serbia that violent disciplining is not good for child development, it is still commonly applied (43 percent)** and is underpinned by certain values and norms. According to these norms, corporal punishment is considered a legitimate and even advisable practice in childrearing. Findings indicate that younger children (2-4 years) are more often exposed to psychological aggression than older children (5-14 years), children in Roma settlements more often than children in the general population and children from urban areas more often than children from rural areas. While the gender gap in the general population is absent among children aged 1-4 years, it reaches 3.2 percentage points among children aged 5-14 years, with girls more frequently exposed to severe physical punishment than boys. Furthermore, there are indications that parents do not perceive 'mild' physical disciplining, like slapping as corporal punishment, but rather as 'justifiable and reasonable' disciplining methods.<sup>119</sup>

Currently, mainstream programs and capacities aimed at supporting violence against children do not seem to have enough impact on the transformation of existing norms. The high-level decision-makers' commitment to addressing this issue is demonstrated through a willingness to amend the Family Law to ensure an explicit ban on violent (corporal) punishment at home. This is considered as an important facilitator of more comprehensive measures aimed to target behaviour change.

<sup>119</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Survey 2014, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.

**Conclusion:** There is increasing professional consensus that parenting practices should be emphasized as one of the key aspects for implementation of change, and practical support should be made easily available to parents, along with information through appropriate communication channels.

### 7.3.2 Attitudes towards child and youth participation

Serbia is generally a country with so called slow transition to adulthood, where young people stay in the nucleus family home for a longer period of time. Close to 70 per cent of young people between 18 and 34 years live with their parents (the EU average is 47.9 per cent)<sup>120</sup>. For the majority of young people, the structural features of transitioning to adulthood are more restrictive than enabling, particularly in terms of employment and employability, and this negatively reflects on and divorces adolescents from participation and decision-making on issues that matter to them.

Available data also indicates that resistance of young people to policy and decision-making processes occurs due to the perception of a lack of clear rules, a lack of predictability of the system, as well as a sense that ordinary people cannot sufficiently influence decisions and processes. There is a dominant feeling among young people that things are done without their knowledge and approval and this leads to (self) exclusion<sup>121</sup>. The latest Youth Progress Index results<sup>122</sup> confirm that Serbia scores poorly on a number of indicators, including personal freedom and choice.

<sup>120</sup> Stojanovic, Boban, 'Alternativni izveštaj o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji 2018', Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije – KOMS, 2018. Available at <[koms.rs/istrazivanja/alternativni-izvestaj-o-polozaju-potrebama-mladih-u-republici-srbiji-2018-godina](http://koms.rs/istrazivanja/alternativni-izvestaj-o-polozaju-potrebama-mladih-u-republici-srbiji-2018-godina)>

<sup>121</sup> S. Tomanović, D. Stanojević, Young people in Serbia 2015 – Situation, perceptions, beliefs and aspirations, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Belgrade 2015, Available at: <<http://secons.net/files/publications/14-Young%20People%20in%20Serbia%202015.pdf>>

<sup>122</sup> European Youth Forum, 'Youth Progress Index by Country', <<https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/page-pdfs/Youth%20Progress%20Index%20Results.pdf>>, accessed 10 June 2019.



While the Government's National Youth Strategy clearly outlines participation as a key pillar, and there are institutional exceptions where children's perspectives are actively invited (e.g. Council for Child Rights, Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Ombudsman), in practice children and youth face barriers in the form of social norms where their opinion is less valued, not sought or is taken into account as part of tokenistic participation processes.

**Conclusion:** There is a need for further mainstreaming of child and youth participation in policy-making, implementation and monitoring processes at national and local levels. The readiness of governance systems to facilitate meaningful and relevant child participation require improvements through developing greater understanding of child rights among civil servants, professionals and governance bodies, and creating opportunities for youth participation in planning and monitoring of policy implementation.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>123</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Give special attention to the participation of children in the dissemination of their rights;
- Ensure full implementation of relevant existing laws prohibiting discrimination, including by strengthening public education campaigns to address negative social attitudes towards Roma children, children with disabilities, minority children, refugees and asylum seeking children, migrant children, children in street situations, LGBT children and children with HIV/AIDS;

- Ensure the availability of sufficient human, technical and financial resources for the effective implementation of the National Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination 2013-2018;
- Conduct campaigns at all levels and in all provinces aimed at addressing the negative attitudes towards the Roma in society at large and take effective measures to prevent violence and hate speech against Roma;
- Assess the particular situation of Roma children and take measures to facilitate their access to social protection measures and social integration programmes, including by improving cultural sensitivity of services provided and readjusting the scope of social programmes.

In relation to inclusive education, it recommends that Serbia:

- Strengthen efforts to promote inclusive education for all children, particularly the most vulnerable, and ensure that adequate human, financial and technical support are available to implement the provisions outlined in the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System;
- Guarantee all children with disabilities the right to inclusive education in mainstream schools independent of parental consent and train and assign specialized teachers and professionals in integrated classes providing individual support and due attention to children with learning difficulties, and address the shortage of speech therapists and qualified professionals for children with mental and psychosocial disabilities.

In relation to violence against children it recommends that Serbia:

- Establish legislative and other measures to ensure mandatory compliance with the General Protocol and the Special Protocols on the Protection of

<sup>123</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

Children from Abuse and Violence, and ensure that sufficient human, financial and technical resources are available to ensure implementation;

- Ensure that preventative mechanisms are established to protect children with intellectual, and other psychosocial impairment, from any kind of physical or sexual violence and establish compulsory training courses on violence against children for all relevant professionals;
- Strengthen national programmes to address violence in schools with support from the Ministry of Education and teacher training agencies to establish standards, mentoring and peer review violence in schools, and provide training, including for parents on the risks of (cyber) bullying;
- Develop a public awareness campaign as a means of changing prevailing attitudes in relation to violence against children and move towards zero tolerance;
- Ensure efficient cooperation, coordination and data sharing between child protection services, the police and justice system;
- Establish a national database on all cases of domestic violence against children, and undertake a comprehensive assessment of the extent, causes and nature of such violence;
- Encourage community-based programmes aimed at preventing and tackling domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, including by involving former victims, volunteers and community members, and providing training support to them
- Explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in legislation; and promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline through awareness campaigns;
- Assess the number of children living and/or working on the streets, and update studies on the root causes of their situations; and ensure that support, particularly reintegration with family or placement in alternative care, are provided with full respect for the child's best interests and giving due weight to their views in accordance with their age and maturity.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| 16.1.1 | Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age   |
| 16.1.3 | Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months   |
| 16.1.4 | Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live  |
| 16.2.1 | Proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month   |
| 16.2.2 | Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation  |
| 16.2.3 | Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18   |
| 16.3.1 | Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms                                |
| 16.7.1 | Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions |
| 16.7.2 | Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group   |
| 16.a.1 | Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles  |
| 16.b.1 | Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law   |

### Key development partners, among others:

The **UK Government (Good Governance Fund)** provides technical support to the Commissioner for Protection Equality. **OSCE** supports Serbia's anti-discrimination institutions and works with the authorities and civil society to help implement the legal framework in support of equality for all. Through its 50 million USD loan, the **World Bank** supports access to quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, in particular for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The **Council of Europe** supports Roma empowerment at local level (Romacted). The **Government of Japan** provides assistance to preschools and primary schools through reconstruction of school facilities. **Roma Education Fund (REF)** is the lead organization for Roma education with the goal of closing the gap in education outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. **UNHCR**, in accordance with its mandate, is supporting access to education of refugee, migrant and children from internally displaced families. **OHCHR** is monitoring the achievement of human rights, including the right to education and combating discrimination. The **European Delegation** monitors policies in the area of human rights and social inclusion, influence on policy development and support to their implementation. Inclusive education will be one of the components of the IPA 2019-2020. **Pestalozzi Children Foundation** promotes intercultural education and works to combat discrimination and exclusion of children from vulnerable groups. **GIZ** supports the implementation of antidiscrimination policies in education. The **Open Society Foundation** works with municipalities and within local communities on social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. **UNDP** supports the skills development and employment of 30 young Roma within local-level institutions to develop, implement and monitor Roma inclusion policies at the local level.

## 8. MEDIA

Serbia has a diverse media scene. According to the data from the Media Register of the Serbian Business Register Agency (APR), there is a total of 2,034 registered media outlets, which include 863 print media (daily and periodic papers), 309 radio stations, 211 TV stations, 432 Internet portals, and 57 "editor-formatted websites" and 25 news agencies.

In order to improve the public information system, a new Public Information System Development Strategy was launched to strengthen the transparency of media ownership, monitor the effects of media privatization, prevent media control, strengthen media pluralism and media literacy and eliminate weaknesses in self-regulation. In the financing of the public media service, the budget is still the dominant source of funding. The Regulatory Body for Electronic Media occasionally faces public criticism for selective protection of the rights of children and youth from inappropriate content.

News and entertainment content is not balanced, with broadcasters airing far **more entertainment and reality programs than informational and educational programming and news**. The younger population consumes media offered on the Internet, including over-the-top media services and subscription video on-demand. Some media outlets conduct investigative and specialized journalism, but overall, specialized reporting is slowly disappearing, leaving the Internet as the primary way to disseminate investigative journalism stories. Reporting on social issues, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation is scarce<sup>124</sup> and stereotyping (particularly gender stereotyping) is common.

According to the 2018 Report by the Centre for Media Professionalism and Literacy (CEPROM), the Serbian **media rarely report on children**. TV stations and the print media have less than one story on children a day on average. More than half of the stories about

<sup>124</sup> Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, 'Media Attitudes towards Discrimination in Serbia, November 2018,' <ds/2018/12/Media-research-brief\_ENG.pdf>, accessed 2 September 2019

children in all media are negative, reporting child abuse, accidents, violence and drug abuse, while successes achieved by children are rarely reported. The CEPROM 2018 Report found that every tenth newspaper story about children violates the Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics<sup>125</sup>.

**Conclusion:** There is need for quality and age-appropriate media content that is in line with ethical standards and meets the educational needs of children and youth. Media content regulations and the protection of children's rights in the media require stronger enforcement. At the same time, the number of positive media reports on children and youth should be systematically increased (with an emphasis on portals). When seeking opinions about local and national government policies (especially about welfare, education or infrastructure projects which directly affect children in the short-term), the opinions of children and youth should be sought, encouraging them to express their views.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>126</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Give special attention to the participation of children in the dissemination of their rights;
- Encourage the media to ensure its sensitivity to children's rights as well as the inclusion of children in the development of these programs.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- 16.10.1 Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months
- 16.10.2 Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information

#### Key development partners, among others:

Since 2000, the **EU** has supported media in Serbia with more than €33 million.

## 9. DIGITAL DIVIDE

### 9.1 ICT

#### Owning a computer

In 2018, 72.1 per cent of households in Serbia owned a computer (compared to 87 per cent in the EU28). Urban/rural differences are evident: 78.2 per cent of urban households own a computer compared to 61.8 per cent of rural households. The gap has slightly increased compared to 2017. In addition, **almost half of all households with less than 300 EUR monthly income do not own a computer**<sup>127</sup>.

#### Internet connectivity

**At the same time, 72.9 per cent of households had an internet connection (compared to 85 per cent in EU28 countries<sup>128</sup>). The internet is most present in Belgrade (82.2 per cent), compared to approximately 70 per**

<sup>125</sup> Center for Media Professionalization and Media Literacy, 'Medijska slika dece u Srbiji', Belgrade 2018. Available at: <<https://docdro.id/nSIYP6O>>

<sup>126</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.)

<sup>127</sup> Kovacevic, Miladin, Pavlovic, Kristina and Sutic, Vladimir, Usage of information and communication technologies in the Republic of Serbia, 2018, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2018. Available at: <<http://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2018/Pdf/G201816013.pdf>>

<sup>128</sup> Republic Agency for Telecommunications (RATEL), 'An overview of telecom and postal services market in the Republic of Serbia in 2017', RATEL, Belgrade, 2018.

cent of households in the rest of Serbia. Among the households that do not have an internet connection, one in five cite a lack of skills as the reason, and one in three do not have it due to lack of financial means<sup>129</sup>.

### Computer and internet use

In 2018, 3.75 million people in Serbia used a computer within the last 3 months. There are evident **differences in the rate of computer use against educational background** — 93 per cent of highly educated individuals, 80.5 per cent of individuals with secondary education and only 41.1 per cent of individuals with less than secondary education used a computer within the last three months. There is also a **difference in internet use between males and females** — with 76.8 per cent of male computer users and 70.1 per cent female computer users within the last 3 months<sup>130</sup>. Almost half of all internet users have never bought/ordered goods or services over the internet<sup>131</sup>.

### Mobile phone penetration

The penetration rate of mobile phones is higher than internet use — 93 per cent of households have a mobile phone<sup>132</sup>. For every 100 inhabitants, there are 122 mobile phones in use<sup>133</sup>.

## 9.2 Social media

In line with global trends, 96.4 per cent of the internet population aged 16-24 years have a social media account. Serbia is also the regional leader in Facebook usage, bearing in mind that almost half of the population (or 3.5 million users) owns an account. High usage, especially among young people, is also

recorded on YouTube (3.5 million users), followed by the fastest growing social network in Serbia, Instagram (2.2 million users)<sup>134</sup>.

According to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), which tracks the progress of EU member states in digital competitiveness, Serbia ranks 27<sup>th</sup>, placing it among the cluster of relatively low index countries.

RATEL, 2018

**Conclusion: Serbia is facing a digital divide in terms of ICT access and use, both economic and geographical, and this is likely to reflect on the ability of children, particularly from poor and rural households, to develop digital skills and access information. Digital innovations are an unused resource that could potentially benefit the most deprived communities.**

## 9.3 Digital skills and education

According to data of the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications (MoTTT) from 2018, 51 per cent of people aged 15 and above are computer illiterate. According to latest research, children in Serbia are **digitally skilled but are not digitally competent**. The contribution of schools to the development of students' digital competences is negligible, with less than 3 per cent of variances in student achievements attributed to school-based differences. A very small percentage of students use digital devices for activities that require more complex digital competencies, e.g. only 5 per cent of children made their own website and 18 per cent created their own video or music. Eighty three per cent of students at the end of compulsory education have not used a programming language in school, 81

<sup>129</sup> Kovacevic, Miladin, Pavlovic, Kristina and Sutic, Vladimir, Usage of information and communication technologies in the Republic of Serbia, 2018, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2018. Available at: <<http://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2018/Pdf/G201816013.pdf>>

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Republic Agency for Telecommunications (RATEL), 'An overview of telecom and postal services market in the Republic of Serbia in 2017', RATEL, Belgrade, 2018.

<sup>134</sup> Direct Media, 'Direct Media United Solutions', <<https://directmedia.biz/rs/>>, accessed 7 April 2019.



per cent have not used web applications or websites for learning, and 74 per cent have not created tables in programmes for spreadsheet and graphic representation of data (e.g. Excel). Interestingly, 82 per cent of fourteen-year-olds believe they know more about digital devices and the internet than their parents. In order to ensure that young people in Serbia become digitally competent, it is necessary to provide adequate learning opportunities through formal education to provide them with the skills to use digital technologies competently and safely<sup>135</sup>.

Serbia also faces a **gender gap in digital skills**, as women have lower IT-literacy and few enrol in IT faculties<sup>136</sup> and this is an area that will require further attention. Their perceptions of proficiency and employability in the IT sector may be shaped by an evident bias in the sector generally, which is predominantly male, and this is a perception that may potentially also be held by teachers and parents.

The **digitalization of education is prioritized by the Government** through the investment of 100 million EUR of government and EIB funding for 10,000 digital classrooms in 500 schools in 2019. The Petlja Foundation has created a repository of free textbooks and practicums for fifth and sixth grade pupils who are taking programming lessons in school, with 800 IT teachers trained for their use. The Law on Foundations of the Education System also defines digital competencies among the aims and expected educational outcomes of students. Digital textbooks have also started being introduced into schools since 2018. Over the past few years, the MOTTT has provided computers and internet connectivity to a number of schools across Serbia. It is also developing a Strategy on Digital Skills.

Integration of digital technologies into education requires significant educational innovation and implies a process of planning for change on three fundamental levels: pedagogical, technological and organisational. There is a need to support the development of the digital learning policy framework in Serbia and promote its links with education reforms. In addition, it will help the effective uptake of digital learning technologies by educational organisations seeking to improve education quality and learning outcomes, especially for the most vulnerable students including girls.

## 9.4 Online safety of children

As one of the basic digital skills, understanding online safety is of importance for both children and their parents. Digital violence is widespread and children access the internet from an increasingly younger age, often without adequate parental oversight and digital competencies. Data from 2016 show that **every third child in the past year faced some form of content or event on the internet that upset them**, and that the majority of these episodes were related to online aggression.<sup>137</sup> The level of face-to-face violence stays approximately the same with age but the level of online violence increases. Children with greater exposure to offline and online violence are more prone to be violent offline and online. Somewhat less than half of the children have communicated with unknown people on the internet, and somewhat more than half of those children went on to meet strangers. In other words, 30 per cent of children have met somebody in person with whom they had first been in touch with online (presenting a clear risk of violence). Meeting new contacts online and meeting new contacts offline is more frequent among boys and older children. The establishment of the National Centre for Safe Internet has strengthened the response to digital violence,

<sup>135</sup> Kuzmanovic, Dobrinka, 'Empirical Validation of Digital Literacy Construct and Analysis of Predictors of Achievement, 2017', Belgrade 2017. Available at: <<http://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/bitstream/handle/123456789/9324/Disertacija.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>

<sup>136</sup> Bradić-Martinović, Aleksandra and Banović, Jelena. 'Digital Skills in Serbia', Journal of Women's Entrepreneurship and Education, No. 1-2, 2018, pp. 54-67.

<sup>137</sup> Popadić, D., Pavlović, Z., Petrović, D. and Kuzmanović, D. Global Kids Online Serbia: Balancing between Opportunities and Risks. Results from the Pilot Study, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, 2016.

but there is still **need for improved intersectoral coordination at the local level**. The Ministry of Interior is responsible for suppressing the abuse of minors in child pornography over the internet.

As part of the programme “**Basics of child security**” pupils of the fourth and sixth grade of primary school are informed of the topic: “Secure use of the internet and social networks”. In the last two school-years (2017/2018 and 2018/2019) a total of 12,961 lectures were organised, with approximately 55,000 pupil attendees from the fourth and sixth grade.

**Conclusion:** As an area where trends change quickly, it is important to have timely data and analysis about the internet habits of children and youth to inform policy and programming, and in particular to respond rapidly to any emerging risks. It will also be important to equip children and parents with the skills to use the internet safely.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>138</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Ensure that preventative mechanisms are established to protect children with intellectual, and other psychosocial impairment, from any kind of physical or sexual violence and to establish compulsory training courses on violence against children for all relevant professionals;
- Strengthen national programmes to address violence in schools with support from the Ministry of Education and teacher training agencies to establish standards, mentoring and

peer review violence in schools, and provide training, including for parents, on the risks of (cyber) bullying.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- 4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex
- 4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill
- 4.a.1 Proportion of schools with access to: (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)
- 9.c.1 Proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology
- 17.6.1 Number of science and/or technology cooperation agreements and programmes between countries, by type of cooperation
- 17.6.2 Fixed Internet broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, by speed
- 17.7.1 Total amount of approved funding for developing countries to promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies
- 17.8.1 Proportion of individuals using the Internet

#### Key development partners, among others:

Through the ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools’ education programme (10 million GBP over three years), the **British Council** aims to equip 1 million students aged 10-15 years across the Western Balkans with the critical thinking and problem solving skills. **EIB** is supporting an initiative to improve educational quality through digital learning in preschool institutions, primary and secondary schools in Serbia. **UNICEF** supports the development of digital and other skills and competencies of both teachers and pupils in the education system.

<sup>138</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.





**Situation  
Analysis  
of Children  
and Adolescents  
in Serbia**

# 03

## CHILD RIGHTS — STRATEGIC AND GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Every child has inalienable rights, irrespective of their ethnicity, gender, religion, abilities or any other status. Serbia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2001, committing the government to actively advancing child rights in the country. This chapter explores the status of Serbia's strategic and governance framework for child rights, current levels of public spending on children, as well as engagement with the private sector and civil society in upholding and advancing child rights.

### 10. STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT ORIENTATION

Serbia's principal strategic policy priority is the **EU accession and integration** agenda. Chapters 23 and 24 of the EU Accession Negotiation Positions and their accompanying action plans are directly related to child rights, while a number of other chapters may benefit from an increased child-rights focus.

At the same time, Serbia is committed to the achievement of the **SDGs**, which are both

complementary to, and mutually reinforce the accession agenda. The SDG Inter-Ministerial Working Group (chaired by the Minister without Portfolio in charge of Demography and Population Policy and comprised of 27 national government offices and other bodies) coordinates the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The realization of child rights directly contributes to many of the SDGs, particularly SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 13 and 16. While the EU has committed to implement the SDGs both in its internal and external policies, the incorporation of SDGs into monitoring indicators for EU assistance is currently not ensured. A new Law on the Planning System outlines a framework for national, regional and local strategic planning have been adopted, which may allow for greater integration of SDGs into development and investment plans.

**Conclusion:** It will be important to identify key entry points that can emphasize the complementarities of EU accession and SDGs. New planning documents are an opportunity for integration of SDG targets.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>139</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Ensure that children's views are given due consideration, in the family, in school, in court and in all relevant administrative and other processes concerning them through, inter alia, the adoption of appropriate legislation, the training of professionals, the establishment of specific activities at schools and general awareness-raising. The Committee further encourages the State party to work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to disseminate the Convention and to strengthen the creation of meaningful spaces through which children can influence public policy.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| 17.14.1 | Number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development  |
| 17.18.1 | Proportion of sustainable development indicators produced at the national level with full disaggregation when relevant to the target, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics |

#### Key development partners, among others:

The **EU** provides extensive technical and financial support to Serbia's EU accession process. All **United Nations agencies** contribute towards the achievement of the SDGs. **GIZ** and other bilateral and multilateral donors provide support to national and local government in funding planned measures and reforms.

## 11. GOVERNANCE

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia guarantees the enjoyment of human rights by children in line with their age and mental maturity, while leaving the detailed regulation of children's rights to laws. Serbia has ratified all key international treaties pertaining to the exercise and protection of children's rights including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and two optional protocols. Over the past decade, many laws affecting children's rights have been enacted or amended, and a range of strategic documents in this area have been adopted.

The National Plan of Action for Children (NPA), a government strategic document that was to operationalise the commitments in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and MDGs, which was adopted in 2005 and expired in 2015, and has not been revised. A comprehensive evaluation of its achievements was never finalised, although there are plans to adopt a new one in 2019.

The NPA was intended to be overseen by the **Council for Child Rights**, a counselling body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, but this did not entirely materialize in practice. Nevertheless, the Council has been meeting regularly since 2017, and has supported the realisation of a number of child-centred initiatives and the adoption of some key strategic documents (e.g. Call for Action on ECD). In order to realise its full potential, it would benefit from a greater level of administrative and organisational support, as well as a regular budget. Its mandate as a consultative body to the Government also somewhat limits it from exercising full leadership on child rights issues.

The **Deputy Ombudsman for Children's Rights and Gender Equality** is tasked with monitoring the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with the Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia, and the same institutional mechanism exists in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, in the office of the Provincial Ombudsman.

<sup>139</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.



Around 100 laws, which are not always mutually consistent, are relevant to the area of child rights, and there are also legal voids, leading to legal uncertainty. This is influenced by the process of legislative alignment and improvement, which is conducted piecemeal rather than in a coordinated and comprehensive manner; in designing legal provisions, the impact of laws on children and the fulfilment of the basic principles of child rights are insufficiently taken into account.

Ombudsman Special Report on the Status of  
Children, 2018

The **Commissioner for Protection of Equality** monitors all forms, types and cases of discrimination including based on age, to improve the realization and protection of equality.

The **Office for Human and Minority Rights** chairs a governmental Council for Monitoring the Implementation of Recommendations of United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The parliamentary **Committee on the Rights of the Child** was established by the National Assembly of Serbia in 2012, with the task of monitoring the compliance of laws and strategies with child protection policies and assessing how various laws and policies affect the position of children and their families, although at present relevant laws have not been scrutinized through a child lens by the Committee for years<sup>140</sup>.

A number of **line ministries** and governmental institutions are accountable for the implementation of the strategic and normative framework related to child rights (table of line ministries attached as

annex). Local self-governments are also mandated with a number of child-related policies at local level.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, the Public Policy Secretariat, provincial secretariats and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration also have indispensable roles in **data collection and monitoring of child-related policies**. Civil society organisations and networks play an important role in monitoring and advocating for child rights policies although they face limitations in sustainability of funding and maintaining the space required for being an independent voice.

Opinions of government institutions are currently being collected on a draft Law on Child Rights and Child Ombudsman with its adoption anticipated in 2019.

**Conclusion: The child rights monitoring system in Serbia is fragmented and complex, with occasionally overlapping mandates between different bodies. There is a frequent delink of policies once they expire which creates gaps in momentum and implementation. Within Government, child rights are often seen as the business of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. Greater strategic alignment as well as greater administrative support to existing monitoring bodies are needed for increased effectiveness. Capacity-building of local self-governments is in the field of child rights and planning and monitoring of child policies is also needed.**

<sup>140</sup> The Evaluation Report on Serbia for 2015 (p. 3), drawn up by the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), underscores that the National Assembly "does not exercise proactive and meaningful control functions" and that it "mainly operates upon governmental initiatives".

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>141</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Strengthens its efforts to ensure that the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration is appropriately integrated and consistently interpreted and applied in all legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings and decisions as well as in all policies, programmes and projects that are relevant to and have an impact on children. In this regard, the State party is encouraged to develop procedures and criteria to provide guidance to all relevant persons in authority for determining the best interests of the child in every area and for giving it due weight as a primary consideration.
- Enact a comprehensive children's Act and introduce a child rights impact assessment procedure for all new legislation adopted at the national level;
- Adopt a consistent policy framework that will replace the National Plan of Action for Children and serve as a basis for effective budgeting and monitoring of respective policies;
- Ensure that any new Plan is supported with the appropriate elements for its application including sufficient human, technical and financial resources and that the effectiveness of its implementation is regularly assessed.
- Strengthen the role of the Council for Child Rights as the principal institutional coordinating mechanism at the inter-ministerial level and ensure it is provided with the necessary human, technical and financial resources for its effective operation;
- Encourage systematic scrutiny of the adoption and implementation of policies and recommendations of the Committee on Child Rights of the National Assembly of legislation relevant to children.
- Expedite the adoption of the Law on the Ombudsperson for the Rights of the Child to specifically deal with children's rights and ensure that such a body has a mandate to receive, investigate and address complaints by children in a child-sensitive manner and allocate sufficient human, financial and technical resources to support the work of the office;
- Ensure the privacy and protection of child victims, particularly when monitoring and follow-up visits to institutions are undertaken within the Ombudsman's role as National Preventive Mechanism;
- Ensure continuous capacity building and training for staff of the Ombudsman's office on issues related to children's rights.

#### **Relates to SDG indicator:**

16.a.1 Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles

<sup>141</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

## 12. PUBLIC FINANCE

The recent positive fiscal trends in the country are not yet translating into benefits for children and more scrutiny will be required to ensure that child-related policies result in clear budgetary allocations.

**Table 6. Summary of national budget expenditures by sector**

Sector	Education	Health	Social protection
% of GDP	3.98% GDP <sup>142</sup>	8.5% GDP (2016) <sup>143</sup>	1.75% GDP on cash benefits only <sup>144</sup>
Out-of-pocket spending	UNESCO estimate of “out-of-pocket” expenditures on education: 0.91% GDP <sup>145</sup>	40% relates to “out-of-pocket” spending	–
Breakdown by level	71% at national level 27.9% at local level 0.4% by AP Vojvodina <sup>146</sup>	–	–
Other	16.4 per cent is allocated to preschool education 43.2 per cent to primary education, 18.8 per cent to secondary education 14.5 per cent to higher education <sup>147</sup>	Insufficient allocation on innovative therapies and drugs, 50% of budget on salaries of medical and non-medical staff  EHCI – 18 <sup>th</sup> out of 35 countries <sup>148</sup>	Around 50% of expenditures are for leave of absence (maternity leave, childcare leave) <sup>149</sup>  Approximately 7% on top is spent on residential institutions <sup>150</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Vasic, Milena et al., Odabrani zdravstveni pokazatelji, 2017, updated 2019, Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade, 2019. Available at: <www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2017OdabraniPokazatelji.pdf>, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>144</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>145</sup> UNESCO ‘Welcome to UIS.Stat’, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>146</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Bjornberg, A. et al. Euro Health Consumer Index 2018, Health Consumer Powerhouse, February 2019. Available at: <https://healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI-2018/EHCI-2018-report.pdf>, accessed 11 Sept 2019

<sup>149</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>150</sup> Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2017.

## Education

According to the Ministry of Finance, total public education expenditures in 2017 amounted to 3.98 per cent of GDP (according to EU and UNESCO methodology it was slightly lower in the previous two years). Although comparable to EU countries as a percentage of GDP (5.09 per cent of GDP), the outcomes of public spending on education in terms of skills and key competences are weaker<sup>151</sup>. Of the total public expenditures intended for education, the largest part is spent at the state level, or 71.7 per cent of expenditures, 27.9 per cent at the level of local self-government, and only 0.4 per cent at the level of the Alternative Province of Vojvodina. Observed by the level of education, 16.4 per cent of total education expenditure is allocated to preschool education, 43.2 per cent to primary education, 18.8 per cent to secondary education and 14.5 per cent to higher education. Compared with the previous reporting period (2012), primary education expenditure increased at the cost of preschool expenditure, while the share of expenditure for secondary and higher education was almost unchanged<sup>152</sup>. In addition, UNESCO's estimate of out-of-pocket expenditures for education in Serbia is 0.91 percent of GDP<sup>153</sup>.

## Health

In 2014, the total expenditure on health was 10.4 per cent of GDP. However, the structure of expenditures is inadequate, considering that around 40 per cent is "out of pocket spending" by patients and 60 per cent is spending through the State Health Insurance Fund (RFZO). This indicates that financial protection as a measure of health policy is not in alignment with the aims of the WHO on achieving universal health coverage and protection from out-of-pocket payments

for health<sup>154</sup>. An insufficient part of the state budget is allocated to innovative therapies and drugs, and nearly half of the State Health Insurance Fund budget is spent on salaries of medical and non-medical staff. Based on the European Health Consumer Index, Serbia ranked 18<sup>th</sup> out of 35 countries in 2017, with a slow upwards trend due to the improvements in waiting times<sup>155</sup>.

## Social protection

The total expenditures on all cash benefits awarded in the social and child protection system amounted to approximately 1.75 per cent of the GDP in 2017. In 2017, compared to 2014, expenditures for these purposes decreased in real terms by 4.5 per cent, and only the subcategory child protection saw a real expenditure growth of 3 per cent. This increase is primarily caused by the increase in expenditure on salary compensation during leave of absence for the birth of a child, which in 2017 reached around RSD 32.7 billion or 0.73 per cent of GDP. However, the Republic of Serbia belongs to the group of countries that allocate the least PPS per capita for social protection in Europe, as much as 3.3 times less than in the EU-28<sup>156</sup>.

**Conclusion: There is currently scattered evidence on government expenditures for children. There is need to conduct a detailed public expenditure review focusing children and greater oversight of budget planning and monitoring, including ex-ante and ex-post cost-analyses of policies and legislation.**

<sup>151</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 'Serbia Diagnostics: Assessing Progress and Challenges in Developing a Sustainable Market Economy', December 2017, <[ebrd.com/documents/strategy-and-policy-coordination/serbia-diagnostic-paper.pdf](http://ebrd.com/documents/strategy-and-policy-coordination/serbia-diagnostic-paper.pdf)>, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>152</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>153</sup> UNESCO, 'Welcome to UIS.Stat', <<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>154</sup> Boerma, T., Eozenou, P., Evans, D., Evans, T., Kieny, M. P., & Wagstaff, A. (2014). Monitoring progress towards universal health coverage at country and global levels. *PLoS medicine*, 11(9), e1001731.

<sup>155</sup> Health Consumer Powerhouse, "Euro Health Consumer Index 2018 Report", Björnberg, Arne and Phang, Ann Yung, 25 February 2019, ISBN 978-91-980687-5-7

<sup>156</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

## 12.1 Local self-government expenditures

Serbia has a vertical separation of powers and local self-governments are accountable for a number of areas relevant for children, including preschool education, support mechanisms for inclusive education, social protection services at the local level etc. In practice, however, the number and quality of child-focused policies depends on the financial means of local governments and their commitment to child rights, while budget reporting at the local level is generally inconsistent and lacks transparency.

The national budget also allocates funds to local self-governments in some selected areas. For example, earmarked transfers in social protection provide additional funds for social care services at the local level. In 2016, support for these purposes totalling 400 million dinars was provided by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs to 122 local government units, and in 2017, support totalling 710 million dinars was provided to 123 local government units. However, the **earmarked transfers are poorly monitored and reported on**. Public-sector institutions prevail among service-providers at the local level, although non-state providers are common for the provision of day care for children with developmental and other disabilities, child home care, personal attendant and supportive housing for persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, many of the non-state providers are presently unlicensed due to limitations in government capacity to respond to licensing requests.

In 2019, the Government, through the Cabinet of the Minister responsible for Demography and Population Policy, allocated 650 million dinars in grants to local self-governments for co-funding population policies at the local level, including support to preschools, early childhood interventions and parenting support. Additional technical support to local self-governments was welcomed to maximise the effect of the funding and encourage inter-municipal sharing of good practices.

The Ministry of Youth allocates grants to local self-governments for the implementation of youth policies at local level. The Cabinet of the

Minister for Innovation and Technology allocates grants for increasing the innovative capacity of local self-governments, for start-ups, innovative entrepreneurship and women's innovative entrepreneurship. Through a World Bank loan for preschool education, the MOTTT is planning the allocation of grants to 35 local self-governments (40,000 EUR per LSG) for the implementation of projects improving coordination and collaboration between relevant actors in the provision of high quality preschool education services to parents and children from birth to 6.5 years, with a focus on the most vulnerable social groups.

Funds for environmental protection at municipal level are collected through local revenues, although not all of these are spent on environmental protection.

The needs at the local level are by and large far greater than available funding and capacities in many areas. **Decentralisation has not been fully implemented.** Sustainable decentralisation is particularly crucial for ensuring the availability, sustainability and quality of services and support to children, and ensuring a child-sensitive approach in local development planning. In Serbia, horizontal cooperation between various central authorities and vertical inter-governmental cooperation in the process of delegating new and changing existing functions and revenue sources for financing local government would need to be improved, so that policies at central level are adopted after adequate ex ante or ex post financial analyses and consultations with local government.

The Law on Public-Private Partnership and Concessions was adopted in 2011, introducing for the first time the concept of **public-private partnerships (PPP)** into the Serbian legal system. The Serbian market, however, has yet to see the realization of any large PPP projects in the field of education, social protection or public health.



According to latest available data from 2016, local self-governments received allocations of approximately 84 million USD to support civil society, roughly half of all government funding to civil society organisations (CSOs). The national budget of 70 million USD forms another 44 per cent of allocations to civil society organisations and the rest is covered by the provincial government in Vojvodina. While sports makes up roughly a quarter of these expenditures for CSOs at local level, children, social protection and social inclusion also figure among the top expenditures<sup>157</sup>.

In addition to these allocations from central government, local governments in some urban areas (e.g. Belgrade) have been subsidizing preschool education for families whose children are attending private kindergartens, in order to increase access to preschool education. This practice is taking place in municipalities where public kindergartens lack space for more children, and there is private sector willingness to set up pro-profit kindergartens. There are **opportunities to strengthen the private sector's role in education, health and social services through public-private partnerships (PPP), as a complement to traditional public delivery**, although it will be important to ensure that adequate measures are in place to guarantee both equity and quality of services.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>158</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Ensure transparent and participatory budgeting through public dialogue, especially with children, and for proper accountability of the authorities, including at the local level;

<sup>157</sup> Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, 'Annual cumulative report on expenditures to associations and other civil society organisations from the budget of the Republic of Serbia in 2016 as support to programme and project activities', Belgrade, 2018. Available at: <nji%20zbirni%20izveštaj%20za%202016.%20god.pdf>

<sup>158</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the budget needs for children and allocate adequate budgetary resources, increase the budget allocated to social sectors, in particular in the areas of education and social assistance, and address disparities on the basis of indicators related to children's rights.

**Conclusion: Capacities of local self-governments to cater to the needs of children must be further developed and systematically supported. Options for public-private partnerships should be explored for delivery of services, along with ensuring a regulatory and quality assurance role of Government.**

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| 1.3.1  | Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable |
| 1.4.1  | Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services  |
| 1.a.1  | Proportion of domestically generated resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programmes  |
| 1.a.2  | Proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection)  |
| 1.b.1  | Proportion of government recurrent and capital spending to sectors that disproportionately benefit women, the poor and vulnerable groups   |
| 8.1.1  | Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita  |
| 8.2.1  | Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person   |
| 10.4.1 | Labour share of GDP, comprising wages and social protection transfers  |
| 16.5.1 | Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months  |

- 16.6.1 Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar)
- 16.7.2 Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group
- 17.13.1 Foreign direct investments (FDI), official development assistance and South-South Cooperation as a proportion of total domestic budget
- 17.17.1 Amount of United States dollars committed to public-private and civil society partnerships

#### Key development partners, among others:

The **World Bank** supports strengthening of public sector management and public service delivery. The **IMF** monitors Serbia's economic and financial policies. **GIZ** aims to strengthen the public finance system in terms of transparency, efficiency, citizen orientation and policy coordination for implementing the 2030 Agenda, in line with the principles of good financial governance.

## 13. PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector interacts with children daily and has a crucial role in advancing children's rights. In recent years, there has been a growth in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, there is increasing recognition of the potential for shared interests between business and human rights agenda, and a growing impetus to establish shared value partnerships that address the key challenges that children in Serbia face. Additionally, **the private sector has enormous power to advocate for, support and protect the rights of children**, through the way it operates facilities, treats its employees, develops and markets its products, provides services and exerts influence on economic and social development. Finally, it is not just about the impact that the private sector can make on children, but the integration of a

business operating model that has a wider social and environmental impact, which can yield returns for children in the long term.

**Table 7. Serbian rankings in major global business climate indices**

Index	Source	Ranking
Ease of Doing Business Ranking	World Bank, 2019 <sup>159</sup>	48 <sup>th</sup> place out of 190 countries
Global Competitiveness Index	World Economic Forum, 2018 <sup>160</sup>	65 <sup>th</sup> place out of 137 countries
Global Innovation Index	Cornell University, INSEAD, WIPO, 2018 <sup>161</sup>	55 <sup>th</sup> place out of 128 countries
Corruption Perceptions Index	Transparency International, 2018 <sup>162</sup>	87 <sup>th</sup> place out of 140 countries
Index of Technological Readiness	World Economic Forum, 2017 <sup>163</sup>	75 <sup>th</sup> place out of 139 countries

**Conclusion:** There is need to raise understanding among organizations, institutions and government bodies supporting children's rights about the opportunities for and value of working with business associations, and with private sector coordinating regulatory sectoral bodies and platforms.

<sup>159</sup> World Bank, Doing Business 2019 — Economy Profile Serbia, 16<sup>th</sup> Edition, World Bank, 2019. Available at: < [www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/s/serbia/SRB.pdf](http://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/s/serbia/SRB.pdf) >

<sup>160</sup> World Economic Forum, The Global Competitiveness Report 2018, World Economic Forum, Geneva, October 2018.

<sup>161</sup> Dutta, Soumitra, Lanvin, Bruno, and Wunsch-Vincent, Sacha, eds., Global Innovation Index 2018: Energizing the World with Innovation, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, Cornell University, INSEAD and World Intellectual Property Organization, Geneva, 2018.

<sup>162</sup> Transparency International, 'Corruption Perceptions Index: Serbia', < [www.transparency.org/country/SRB](http://www.transparency.org/country/SRB) >, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>163</sup> Baller Silja, Dutta, Soumitra, and Lanvin, Bruno, eds., The Global Information Technology Report 2016: Innovating in the Digital Economy, World Economic Forum, Geneva, 2016.

The private sector accounts for around 70 per cent of total employment in Serbia, although its profitability is low compared to Serbia's Central and South-East European peers. Thus, the private sector's productivity growth is the most important driver of long-term economic growth. When it comes to competitiveness, the Serbian economy is comparable to other Western Balkans countries, but lags the EU standards and is negatively affected by skills mismatches, as the levels of education and training do not fully match the needs of the private sector. In order to boost its productivity, Serbia would need to focus on technology transfers through foreign direct investments (FDIs), creating an improved business environment for investments and SMEs, applying more inclusive employment practices, enhancing the quality of education and infrastructure, along with raising energy efficiency<sup>164</sup>.

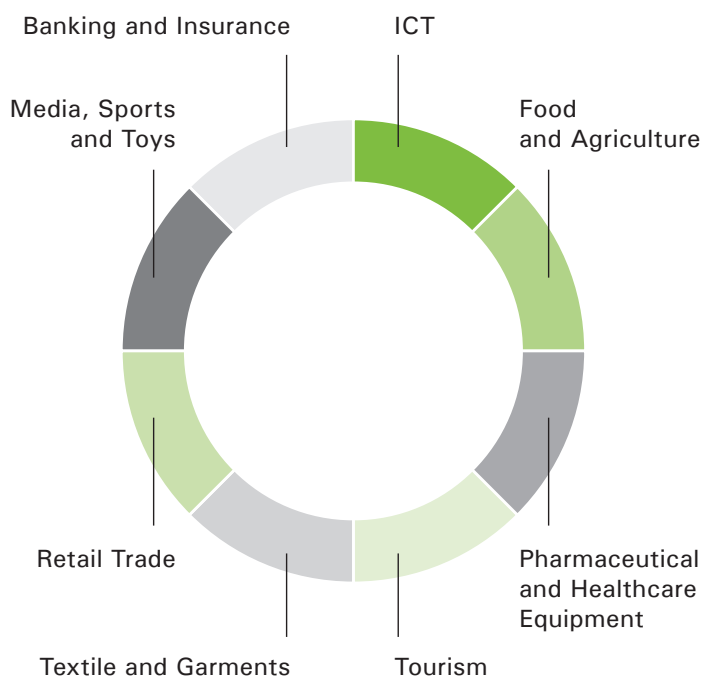
Attracting FDI is a focus of the Serbian government, and Serbia remains one of the leaders in attracting FDIs,<sup>165</sup> ranking first in the world measured by the estimated number of jobs relative to the size of the population<sup>166</sup>. Furthermore, foreign investors<sup>167</sup> and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) enjoy favourable subsidies and state incentives, albeit **small and medium-sized companies** (SMEs) represent the major force of the Serbian economy and are of key importance for its future growth potential.

**Conclusion:** Bearing in mind that the SME sector represents the largest part and driving force of the Serbian economy, it is necessary to develop a tailor-made approach to the promotion of child rights in business (CRB), with the advocacy and programmatic support of business associations.

In line with Serbia's strong ICT sector performance (in terms of GDP and export contribution), **digitalization** is the top priority of the Prime Minister's agenda. Other priority and/or important sectors include the automotive industry, creative industries, tourism, agriculture, food and beverages, textile industry, wood and furniture (forest-based industry), chemical industry, electronics and metalwork<sup>168</sup>.

**Figure 11. Eight strategic sectors with a strong intersection with children's rights and/or the potential to amplify their reach for children through core assets, 2019**

(Source: UNICEF, 2019)



<sup>164</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 'Serbia Diagnostics: Assessing Progress and Challenges in Developing a Sustainable Market Economy', December 2017, <[ebrd.com/documents/strategy-and-policy-coordination/serbia-diagnostic-paper.pdf](http://ebrd.com/documents/strategy-and-policy-coordination/serbia-diagnostic-paper.pdf)>, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>165</sup> Deloitte, 'Guide for investing in Serbia, April 2018', Belgrade 2018; and Serbian Chamber of Commerce, 'Key economic indicators of Republic of Serbia 2012-2017', Belgrade, 2017.

<sup>166</sup> IBM Institute of Business Value, Global Location Trends 2018 Annual Report: Getting ready for Globalization 4.0, IBM Corporation, UDA, July 2018, Available at: <[public.dhe.ibm.com/common/ssi/ecm/93/en/93017793usen/93017793usen-00\\_93017793USEN.pdf](http://public.dhe.ibm.com/common/ssi/ecm/93/en/93017793usen/93017793usen-00_93017793USEN.pdf)>

<sup>167</sup> The FDI calculation does not consider the price to attract FDI through various tax breaks and other incentives offered to foreign investors. Any analysis of price and impact of measures to attract FDI is hampered by the fact that there is no comprehensive and efficient state aid control. Moreover, it is estimated that foreign companies receive several times more subsidies than those available to domestic SMEs, which is only partially justified by higher productivity of FDI (European Commission, 2018).

<sup>168</sup> Deloitte, 'Guide for investing in Serbia, April 2018', Belgrade 2018; and Serbian Chamber of Commerce, 'Key economic indicators of Republic of Serbia 2012-2017', Belgrade, 2017.

A global mapping of economic sectors in view of their **direct intersection with children's rights** (e.g. impact of business operations, products, services for children) and/or the potential to amplify their reach for children through core assets has shown that the profiles of eight strategic sectors emerge (Figure 11).<sup>169</sup>

These sectors were further assessed in terms of their overall performance and potential for the Serbian economy and the existing levels and types of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Finally, the sectors were evaluated based on:

- their direct and indirect impact on children's rights across the entire value chain<sup>170</sup>,
- risk posed to children and communities, and
- opportunities to engage in creating partnerships that have a shared value for both children and business.<sup>171</sup>

**Conclusion: Entry points for shared-value partnerships with the business sector should be explored, utilised and further adapted.**

## 13.1 Harnessing child rights through corporate social responsibility

Despite the challenging business environment over the last decade, several studies on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability trends in Serbia show a high level of awareness on CSR amongst Serbian companies, although some of them lack strategic orientation. For many Serbian executives, CSR has become an integral part of the business strategy, mostly focused on areas closely related to the company's core business, assets and expertise<sup>172</sup>.

In the last decade, there has also been a noticeable shift in corporate transparency, as most companies are now publicly providing information on financial results, ownership and management structure and their business impact to the society. However, in domestic companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises<sup>173</sup>, there remains a lack of awareness of how CSR can generate reputational gains, as well as economic benefits in terms of enhanced ability to attract, motivate and retain a quality workforce, and create a culture of innovation and improved supplier relations.

The results of the UNICEF research on CSR<sup>174</sup> focusing on Children in Serbia in 2017<sup>175</sup> indicated that the business sector highly values children-oriented activities and projects<sup>176</sup>, even though investment in CSR is not seen as a way of achieving financial gain.

<sup>169</sup> Based on 'Prospecting companies for UNICEF Priority Shared Value Partnerships (PSVPs) — a bit of history' (draft, 2018). The term 'sector' is used to address a collection of industries under a shared area of economic activity; as an example, under the Food and Agribusiness sector, the agricultural production, hunting and accompanying service activities and production of food products are analysed.

<sup>170</sup> Key impact areas: workplace (key ways businesses can promote children's rights in the workplace), marketplace (ensuring healthy, positive and appropriate products and marketing for children), community (managing community impacts of operations, networks, products and services) and supply chain (ensuring children rights are protected throughout a company's supply chain).

<sup>171</sup> Until recently, corporate engagement in society has often been viewed as a business cost, to be traded off against profitability. Increasingly, companies are becoming more aware that by creating shared value they can benefit society and boost their competitiveness at the same time. UNICEF defines shared value as partnerships that achieve social impact at scale and deliver strategic economic value for business (Win-Win).

<sup>172</sup> Responsible Business Forum, 'Forum Za Odgovorno Poslovanje', <<http://odgovornoposlovanje.rs/>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

<sup>173</sup> SMEs are interested in CSR for two main reasons: some are exporters (and complying with responsible and/or sustainability standards is a requirement of the international partner, or they get a competitive advantage through it), and some are in the supply chain of a big corporate organization (with supplier code of conduct, audit, policies etc).

<sup>174</sup> CSR within UNICEF refers to efforts towards positively changing business behaviour and practices as they affect children in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including companies, governments, civil society, children and young people.

<sup>175</sup> UNICEF's research involved 42 companies in Serbia from different sectors and ownership. The aim of the research was to monitor the degree to which individual corporate business principles were applied in the Serbian business sector, philanthropic activities and goals in the field of CSR directed towards children.

<sup>176</sup> 89 per cent of the companies stressed the value of CSR focused on children and 38 per cent believed it is a priority in their CSR activities. Forty-two per cent of the CSR budgets were allocated for CSR focusing on children.

**Conclusion:** While many businesses are interested in supporting child rights within their sustainability strategies, this is often not explicitly incorporated into their reporting principles, internal strategies and policies. To foster this integration, a sectoral approach towards CRB should be established, supported by tailor-made workshops, reference tools, guidelines and methodology, to help companies increase their positive impact on children's welfare and integrate child rights into corporate policies, business processes and non-financial reports. Furthermore, an Advisory Board on child rights and corporate social responsibility towards children could be established as a multi-stakeholder platform that supports the realization of child rights in the context of the workplace, labour market, community and supply chain.

Business associations in Serbia also represent untapped potential for awareness raising and promotion on children's rights in business, considering their strong voice, reach and influence within the business community and low risk for collaboration. There is a strong opportunity to raise awareness about children's rights in business by proposing and introducing improvements in business standards, policies and procedures (e.g. on decent work, protection and safety of children in all business activities and facilities, promotion of child rights through products and services, in relation to the environment and to land acquisition, in security arrangements), by reinforcing government efforts to protect and fulfil children's rights through formal and informal education and by conducting advocacy activities.

## 13.2 Philanthropy

When it comes to individual philanthropy, the World Giving Index (2018) ranks Serbia 129<sup>th</sup> in individual giving, out of 146 countries<sup>177</sup>. Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are the only countries in Europe that have no tax incentives for individual donations<sup>178</sup>.

The Serbian Philanthropy Forum is the umbrella organization of foundations in Serbia, informally active since 2010 and formally registered in 2017, established to inspire strategic approaches to investing in society, creating an environment that stimulates giving and promoting philanthropy as a social value.

Corporate donations are recognized as expenses in amounts of up to five per cent of the total revenues (Law on Corporate Income Tax, Article 15), but in reality, companies do not use this incentive due to complicated administrative procedures<sup>179</sup>. Recently, the Council of Philanthropy was established at the Cabinet of the Prime Minister to work on amending the law in order to facilitate and stimulate the donations for both private individuals and businesses (primarily related to in-kind donations).

**Conclusion:** Individual and corporate giving remains an important source of support for child-related initiatives. In line with the efforts of the Council of Philanthropy, donations in-kind (products, services) should be VAT exempted if related to the support and wellbeing of children in Serbia. For

<sup>177</sup> Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), 'CAF World Giving Index 2018, A global view of giving trends', October 2018, Available at: <cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2018-publications/caf-world-giving-index-2018>, accessed 30 March 2019.

<sup>178</sup> South-East European Indigenous Grantmakers Network — SIGN, 'Improving Corporate Philanthropy in Serbia: Advancing the legal framework', Belgrade, October 2016, <catalystbalkans.org/DownloadFile.axd?strategy=contentitemdocument&fileName=7865fd68-a5ae-4582-9227-85dee6cd5e6b.pdf>, accessed 14 March 2019; Srbija Daruje, 'Three things we will do at the Philanthropy Council to make Serbia a land of charity', post from 10 March 2017, <givingbalkans.org/srbija/content/savet-za-filantropiju>, accessed 28 March 2019.

<sup>179</sup> In most cases, companies pay VAT on donated goods, even if they are of common good such as food for shelters, medical devices for hospitals or personal computers for schools.



this relief to be used by responsible companies, it is necessary to establish some evidence of their sustainability and responsibility, such as the revitalization of the CSR Index Serbia, improved with child rights in business.

### 13.3 How youth see the business sector

In order to better understand the opinion of children and youth about business responsibility in Serbia, an electronic survey through the U-Report platform<sup>180</sup> was conducted in April 2019. According to this survey, **two-thirds of the surveyed children believe that the business sector can help and support young people in their future development**, although they are aware that the business has its own goals and agenda. Children in Serbia consider the workplace as the major area of support to Children's Rights and Business Principles (CRB), by providing decent working conditions for young workers and caregivers in terms of job security and decent wages. The second area of importance is providing security and protection to children in the business chain, through products, services, in business premises and with suppliers. Granting donations and sponsorships to organisations and institutions which are supporting children and preserving the environment are also highly ranked on the children's agenda. Finally, in order to bridge the gap between the business sector and young people, the business sector **could be incentivised and supported to share their expertise and business practice more openly**, including by enabling and supporting mentoring, volunteering, internships and by providing scholarships. Some of the participants surveyed pointed out that the business sector should be more open to **listening to their voice in order to better understand the needs and deliberations of children in Serbia**, as they will someday become a part of the business sector, thus their creativity and innovation potential should be challenged and encouraged.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>180</sup> U-Report is an online tool that empowers young people around the world to engage with and speak out on issues that matter to them. The tool is free, anonymous and easy to use.

<sup>181</sup> U-Report, 'Srbija, Tvoj glas je važan', <<https://serbia.ureport.in/polls/>>, accessed 25 March 2019.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>182</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Continue and strengthen its efforts to increase the awareness of the Convention throughout the country, in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders and by paying particular attention to remote and rural areas and children from minority groups.

#### Relates to SDG indicator:

- 17.17.1 Amount of United States dollars committed to public-private and civil society partnerships

## 14. ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Acting independently and representing a critical public are the essential characteristics of the civil sector. Concerns have been raised over a perceived increase in state-affiliated civil society organisations. Serbia currently features on the Civil Society Index as **a country where there are threats to civic space**<sup>183</sup>. The European Commission report (2019) highlights that no progress was made towards establishing an enabling environment for the development and financing of civil society and that further efforts are needed to ensure systematic cooperation between the government and civil society.

<sup>182</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

<sup>183</sup> CIVICUS, Monitor, Tracking Civic Space', <<https://monitor.civicus.org/>>, accessed 24 March 2016.

While child rights organisations in Serbia are linked into a number of networks and platforms, during a capacity assessment in 2016 many of them expressed a need for better visibility, provision of support, better access to resources and further capacity development<sup>184</sup>.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>185</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Continue and strengthen its efforts to increase the awareness of the Convention throughout the country, in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders and by paying particular attention to remote and rural areas and children from minority groups

#### Relates to SDG indicator:

17.17.1 Amount of United States dollars committed to public-private and civil society partnerships

## 15. DATA ON CHILDREN

Effective monitoring of child rights depends on high-quality, timely and reliable data. The Eurostat 2017 Peer Review of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) found Serbia **compliant with the European Statistics Code of Practice** and further stressed the need to strengthen coordination within the official statistical system. The Statistical Office has independently implemented two rounds of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and will be completing the fieldwork for a new survey round in 2019. This will provide Serbia with data for measuring over 20 SDG indicators, as well as those of several national policies. This is complemented by other efforts of the government to generate disaggregated data, such as through the new register on children with disabilities that is based on a functional assessment, as well as a national education information system. **More needs to be done however to capacitate administrative data collection systems for data disaggregation**, advance data collection through innovation, and leverage the potential of evidence-based policy making.

**Gaps in data on adolescence and children on the move** are evident and would require attention in the coming years.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>186</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Expeditiously strengthen information management and data collection systems at both central and local government levels to cover all areas of the Convention. Data should be disaggregated by, among others, age, sex, disability, geographic location, ethnic and national

<sup>184</sup> Network of Organisations for Children Serbia, MODS, 'Capacity Assessment' (Internal document), 2016.

<sup>185</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

<sup>186</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017). Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3).

origin and socioeconomic background in order to facilitate analysis on the situation of all children, particularly those in situations of vulnerability;

- Ensure that the data and indicators are shared among relevant Ministries and used for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects for the effective implementation of the Convention.

#### Relates to SDG indicator:

- 17.18.1 Proportion of sustainable development indicators produced at the national level with full disaggregation when relevant to the target, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

#### Key development partners, among others:

The **EU** is providing substantial funding for the advancement of the statistical system in Serbia. **UNECE** and **EUROSTAT** provide support in meeting data needs through methodological guidance and capacity development. The **Swedish International Development Agency** builds statistical capacity to produce and disseminate statistics, adapted to EU standards, and enable authorities to monitor for example poverty trends.





**Situation  
Analysis  
of Children  
and Adolescents  
in Serbia**

# 04

## BEING A CHILD IN SERBIA — THE FIRST DECADE OF CHILDHOOD

A child's ability to thrive and to enjoy their basic rights is affected by a range of complex and often interconnected factors. Windows of opportunity to reach each child with support and protection will span different sectors and vary over the course of childhood. This chapter looks at access to and use of essential services for children during their first decade of life, starting from birth and the early stages of care and learning through to primary school, including protection from harm and support for safe living environments for children. The second decade of life and early adulthood will be addressed in Chapter V. Adolescence in Serbia.

### 16. BIRTH REGISTRATION

According to Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to be registered without discrimination. Having a child's birth registered is important in officially recognising their existence under law and provides a foundation for guaranteeing many of their fundamental rights.

The project 'Baby, Welcome to the World', which was successfully introduced in 2016, simplified procedures for birth registration, registration of permanent residence and health insurance in the maternity hospital, in cases when the mother possesses personal documents. However, children of parents who do not possess personal documents still face obstacles. According to UNHCR unofficial estimates, in 2019 there remain approximately 300-400 persons who do not have birth registration (according to previous surveys, situated mostly in Roma settlements, in households internally displaced from Kosovo (in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999))<sup>187</sup>, including women part of reproductive age.

It would be possible to resolve the obstacle of **birth registration of children of parents without personal documents** through a change of two by-laws (regulated by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government<sup>188</sup>) or alternatively through

<sup>187</sup> Cvejic, Slobodan, 'Persons at Risk of Statelessness in Serbia: Progress Report 2010-2015', UNHCR, Belgrade, 2016.

<sup>188</sup> Praxis and UNICEF, 'Determining the Date and Place of Birth, Right to Citizenship and Permanent Residence Registration — Analysis of Remaining Obstacles', Belgrade, 2018. Available at <<https://www.praxis.org.rs/index.php/sr/reports-documents/praxis-reports/item/1404-review-of-the-remaining-obstacles-in-exercise-of-the-right-to-birth-registration-acquisition-of-citizenship-and-permanent-residence-registration>>, accessed 10 April 2019.



an instruction for such cases where the mother's documentation would be issued through an urgent procedure as a first step, followed by the child's.

**Conclusion:** It is important to ensure the timely birth registration of all children, including those of parents without personal documentation, in alignment with the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to Serbia (2017)<sup>189</sup>, Human Rights Committee (2017)<sup>190</sup> and CEDAW (2019)<sup>191</sup>.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- 16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age
- 17.19.2 Proportion of countries that (a) have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years; and (b) have achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration

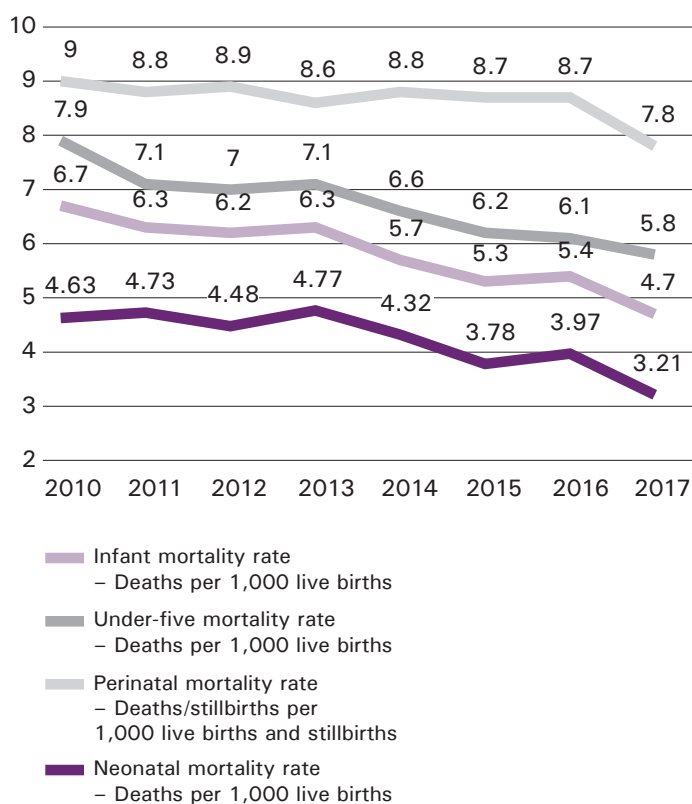
#### Key development partners, among others:

**UNHCR** monitors the situation of statelessness and together with **UNICEF** monitors and advocates for birth registration for all children.

## 17. HEALTH, NUTRITION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

**Figure 12. Infant, neonatal, perinatal and under-five mortality rates, 2010-2017**

(Source: SORS, 2017)



#### Infant mortality

In the period 2010 to 2017, the infant mortality rate in Serbia (deaths 0 to first year per 1,000 live births) **decreased from 6.7 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 4.7 per 1,000 live births in 2017**. There are notable **regional differences** — in Vojvodina the IMR was 4.4 per 1,000 live births in 2017 and 4.9 in Western Serbia, compared to 5.7 in Southern and East Serbia<sup>192</sup>, emphasising the need for a more detailed analysis of the state of health care for children. In

<sup>189</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

<sup>190</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the 3<sup>rd</sup> periodic report of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/3), 10 April 2017.

<sup>191</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the 4<sup>th</sup> fourth periodic report of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/4), 14 March 2019.

<sup>192</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Database DevInfo 7, Serbia', <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

2014, infant mortality was two times higher among children living in Roma settlements than in the general population, although it has reduced overall compared to data from 2010<sup>193</sup>.

### Neonatal mortality

Neonatal mortality rate (deaths between birth and 28 days of life — NMR) has shown a steady decline from **4.63 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 3.21 in 2017**. As with the infant mortality rate, there are marked regional **variations**, with NMR in Vojvodina at 2.62 in 2017, compared to 3.73 in the Southern and East Serbia and 3.82 in Western Serbia<sup>194</sup>. Early and late neonatal mortality rates per 1,000 live births in EU countries were 2.5 per 1,000 live births in 2016<sup>195</sup>.

### Perinatal mortality

Against the backdrop of overall improvement in infant and child morbidity and mortality, **slow progress in reducing perinatal mortality rates** (number of stillbirths and infant deaths age 0-6 days per 1,000 live births and stillbirths — PMR) is concerning. The rate of still births and deaths during the first week after birth was 8.2 per 1,000 live births in 2018 (having reduced from 9 in 2010), and regional disparities are observed.<sup>196</sup> Perinatal mortality is relatively high compared to EU28 countries EU28 (6.7 in 2016)<sup>197</sup>.

A necessary measure for a reduction of the stillbirth rate, and thus a reduction of perinatal mortality in Serbia is the analysis of foetal death according to the methodology applied in all countries with a developed perinatal and neonatal health care system (e.g. perinatal audit). Particular attention needs to be given to social determinants of health. Efforts are ongoing by the Ministry of Health to improve the organisation of perinatal healthcare by strengthening four perinatal centres and improving staffing capacities, equipment and transportation.

### Under-five mortality

In order to get more information on the social, economic and environmental conditions in which children live, including their health status, the under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births between 0 and 5 years — U5MR) is often used to identify particularly vulnerable populations. The U5MR captures more than 90 per cent of global mortality among children under the age of 18, and in Serbia was 5.8 per 1,000 live births in 2017. The rate among Roma children in the 2014 MICS survey was almost two times as high, albeit lower than in previous MICS surveys.

Three in five newborns do not have mothers' milk as their first meal.

Preterm birth is one of the main causes of neonatal/ infant and U5 mortality and morbidity. Approximately 5 per cent of children are born premature in Serbia each year (3,000) of which half require intensive neonatal care. There is a need to further explore system capacities to respond to increased perinatal risk in utilisation of in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and increased survival of sick and low-birth weight newborns due to advances in medicine, and to make the necessary system investments.

**Conclusion: Due to inconsistency in implementing recommended measures for establishing an effective model of perinatal care at the national level, and new challenges caused by an increased requirement for intensive neonatal care of sick and prematurely born children, there is need to strengthen standardized reporting, strengthen regional perinatal centers in terms of equipment, invest education of medical staff, and ensure efficient and safe medical transport for prematurely born children.**

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Eurostat, 'Eurostat, Your Key to European Statistics', <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>>, accessed 10 April 2019.

<sup>196</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Database DevInfo 7, Serbia', <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>197</sup> Eurostat database

## Breastfeeding

Based on MICS data from 2014, **47 per cent of infants (0-5 months) are predominantly breastfed**. With only 13 per cent of child exclusively breastfed, it is evident that water-based liquids are to a large degree wrongly considered as required in feeding. By age 12-15 months, one in four children are breastfed and by age 20-23 months only 9 per cent are breastfed. The prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding is much higher for boys than girls (22 per cent compared to 4 per cent respectively). Also, there is a higher percentage of boys (30 per cent) than girls (20 per cent) aged 12-15 months who are still breastfed. It is evident that the percentage of children that are exclusively breastfed is much higher in households in the top two wealth quintiles (19 per cent) than in households in the bottom three wealth quintiles (only 5 per cent). At the same time, the percentage of children that were breastfed at 2 years of age is higher among children from the poorest households (12 per cent) than from the richest households (6 per cent).

The reasons for low breastfeeding rates vary but an important factor has been the extensive marketing of breastmilk substitutes. Serbian legislation is not yet fully aligned with the International Code for Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes, and there is need for greater application of existing normative guidelines. There are ongoing national efforts to ensure alignment of the legislation and enforcement of its implementation.

The promotion of breastfeeding in maternity wards had deteriorated since 2000, when the effective implementation of the baby friendly hospital initiative ended<sup>198</sup>. In 2016, the Government adopted new accreditation standards for maternity wards and neonatal units that fully promote and support breastfeeding and baby/mother and family-oriented developmental care. In July 2018, the **National program for breastfeeding promotion and**

**developmental care of newborns was also adopted**<sup>199</sup>, reflecting the Government's strong commitment to breastfeeding promotion, as well as to tackling child overweight and obesity. Through the program, there has been intensive engagement to increase capacities of the health system, particularly maternity wards and primary health centres to support breastfeeding. New regulations will also provide improved on-site documentation and evidence on breastfeeding and support readiness.<sup>200</sup>

Serbian legislation is not yet fully aligned with the International Code for Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes, and more determination is also needed to ensure compliance with the existing normative guidelines.

**Conclusion: National efforts for support to breastfeeding should continue under the leadership of the National Coordinator for Breastfeeding, appointed in 2018. Positive attitudes, skills and standards for paediatric and other professionals to support initiation of breastfeeding in the first hour after birth through skin to skin contact and exclusive breastfeeding up to the sixth month with continuous breast-feeding up to 24 months or beyond should be reinforced. It is necessary to raise public awareness that with adequate support 95 per cent of mothers are able to breastfeed.**

**It is necessary to ensure full compliance with the International Code for Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes.**

<sup>198</sup> Becker, Genevieve and Zisovska, Elizabeta, 'Evaluation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative in Serbia for the Period 1995-2008: Final Report of Consultants' (external evaluation), Ministry of Health and UNICEF External, Belgrade, 2009.

<sup>199</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, Law on Ministries, No. 53/2018.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

## Nutrition

**Table 8. Key nutrition indicators, 2014**

(Source: MICS, 2015)

Indicator	Serbia	Serbia — Roma settlements
Nutrition (%)		
Underweight prevalence of children under age 5		
- Moderate and severe	1.8	9.5
- Severe	0.2	1.9
Stunting prevalence of children under age 5		
- Moderate and severe	6.0	18.5
- Severe	2.3	5.3
Wasting prevalence of children under age 5		
- Moderate and severe	3.9	4.8
- Severe	1.1	1.9
Overweight of children under age 5	13.9	5.1
Low-birthweight (%) <sup>201</sup>	5.1	14.7
Vaccination (full coverage) <sup>202</sup>	80.6	44.1
Antenatal care coverage (4 times)	93.9	74.4

According to the 2014 MICS survey, among children under five years of age, 1.8 per cent were underweight, including 0.2 per cent who were severely underweight. Six per cent were stunted and 3.9 percent were wasted. These levels had changed little since the MICS 2005/06 (underweight was 1.6 percent, stunting was 5.9 per cent and wasting was 3.3 per cent in 2005/06).

Among children aged 7 to 14 years in the general population, there has been a stable trend in undernourishment compared to 2006, although a greater percentage of undernourished (8.6 per cent)

and moderately undernourished (15.7 per cent) was observed in the 7-10 year age group.<sup>203</sup>

Obesity is developing into a major health risk for children; 13.9 percent of children under five years are obese. The Ministry of Health has launched a special programme to address this growing challenge, but there is a need to work in an integrated manner with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development to address issues like the concentration of fast-food restaurants in the vicinity of school compounds, or Ministry of Trade when it comes to marketing of unhealthy products etc.

All nutrition indicators (other than obesity) are less favourable for children living in Roma settlements<sup>204</sup>. In 2014, 9.5 per cent of Roma children were underweight, 18.5 per cent were stunted and 4.8 per cent were wasted. A study on nutrition of Roma children found that the coping strategies of the poorest families are often not sufficient to ensure adequate nutrition. Good nutrition is also affected by caring and health-seeking practices. To improve the nutritional practices among the Roma population, there is need to strengthen health education and health systems. More broadly, the overall socio-economic status of Roma families needs to be improved — by educating parents, extending their schooling, preventing early marriage and strengthening family planning<sup>205</sup>.

**Conclusion: Regular monitoring of children's nutritional status is required for improved planning of initiatives targeting of children under five and school-age children. Recognising that the risk of obesity in later years of childhood and adolescence are often set in the early stages of life, it is important to give due attention to obesity**

<sup>201</sup> Percentage of most recent live births in the last 2 years weighing below 2,500 grams at birth

<sup>202</sup> Percentage of children age 24-35 months who received all vaccinations recommended in the national immunization schedule by their first birthday (by their second birthday for measles)

<sup>203</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, 2005/06 and 2014, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2005/06 and 2015.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> UNICEF, 'Qualitative Research on Malnutrition in Children under Five Years of Age in Poor Roma Settlements in Serbia using Positive Deviance in Nutrition Approach', Belgrade 2018.

occurring in infants. A multi-sectoral approach, and particularly collaboration between the education and health systems, is needed to tackle obesity and to deliver better services for children.

Undernutrition for Roma children requires further attention beyond the health system, to address the issue of food and micro-nutrient availability, hygiene, social determinants affecting nutrition outcomes, as well as healthy practices. With growing obesity in the general population, Roma children will in time also be affected by a double burden of nutrition.

## Immunization

There was **significant drop in vaccination rates in Serbia between 2010 and 2016**, primarily against Measles Mumps Rubella (95.7 per cent in 2010 to 81 per cent in 2016) that can be attributed to two major factors: growing negative public debate about vaccines fuelled by vocal anti-vaccination groups and frequent shortages of essential vaccines in the public health supply chain between 2010 and 2014. The decline in vaccination rates revealed the need to strengthen the coordination of response and address the knowledge and attitudes of parents and health workers towards immunization. This was documented by a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices study on immunisation of children. The study indicated that 18 per cent of parents were hesitant about immunizing their children<sup>206</sup>.

Consequently, a major measles outbreak was reported in October 2017, with close to 6,000 cases and 15 deaths reported by May 2018. The vast majority of cases (91 per cent) were non-vaccinated, incompletely vaccinated, or persons with an unknown vaccine status. In response to the outbreak, the Institute for Public Health recommended accelerated routine MMR vaccination of all eligible and non-vaccinated

children. A number of communication actions followed, including the development of the national communication strategy for immunization.

After the beginning of the outbreak, a **significant increase in uptake of MMR vaccine** was observed, with reported coverage for 2018 of 93.4 per cent at national level, 98.7 per cent in Belgrade and 95.4 per cent in Niš — the two regional and urban centres worst hit by the outbreak. Between January and May 2019, only seven new cases of measles were reported. The significant increase in uptake can be attributed to increased fear of infection due to outbreak combined with improved vaccine availability and a reduction in vaccine hesitancy. However, there are 12 districts with MMR coverage lower than 95 per cent and two lower than 80 per cent<sup>207</sup>.

The measles outbreak resulted in reduction of negative public debate around vaccines immunization and in activity of prominent anti-vaccine lobbyists. However, stricter legal measures introduced against anti-vaccine lobbyists and some parents' refusals revived debate on the appropriateness of mandatory immunization. A strong communication response to the measles outbreak and vaccine hesitancy is needed to further reduce risks of measles transmission, along with more efficient and persistent search and identification of non-immunized children. The existence of an electronic immunization data system in Serbia would facilitate real-time data availability and appropriate measures.

On a positive note, Serbia introduced the PCV vaccination in the routine calendar in 2018 and HPV vaccination started to be offered as of 2019. Moreover, after some initial delays, immunization campaigns are also covering children on the move.

**Conclusion: To avoid repeated outbreaks of preventable diseases, continued monitoring is needed in order to maintain vaccination levels above expected targets and ensure satisfactory**

<sup>206</sup> UNICEF, Knowledge, attitudes and practices on immunization in Serbia, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2018. Available at <[www.unicef.org/serbia/media/9146/file/Knowledge,%20attitudes%20and%20practices.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/9146/file/Knowledge,%20attitudes%20and%20practices.pdf)>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>207</sup> Dr Milan Jovanović Batut, 'Report on Immunization', Institute of Public Health, Belgrade, 2019.



coverage at national, district and municipal level. It would be of essential importance to collect, monitor and analyse immunisation data through an electronic system that is aligned with the health information system. Vaccine availability needs to be maintained and in addition, social and behavioural change communication should be pursued to counter vaccine hesitancy and parental attitudes that lead to non-vaccination, including a specific focus on the Roma community.

### Vaccine availability

The drop in immunisation rates in Serbia over the last several years are partly attributed to occasional vaccine stock-outs. Over the past three years, the flow of vaccines in Serbia has been regular, with no major stock outs at national level, but as with a number of other middle-income and non-GAVI<sup>208</sup> countries in Central and Eastern Europe, it is impacted by the volatility of the current vaccine market.

Serbia would benefit from mainstreaming processes, timelines and defined roles for vaccine procurement. The forecasting and planning process is the weakest link in the procurement process in Serbia. There is high political commitment for financing and procurement of vaccines; however, there is not a well-set plan and process for budgeting of vaccines. The development of a fully costed five-year vaccine plan would allow better allocation of funding and send a powerful message to suppliers. Serbia may also need to diversify options for suppliers in order to improve vaccine supply security and affordability of prices.

**Conclusion: Revised mechanisms and procedures for vaccine procurement and management would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of vaccine availability.**

### Early childhood development, developmental risks and disability

There is no official record of the total number of children at risk of developmental delays and disability due to a lack of official procedures and criteria for recording data on child development and the lack of registry on children with disabilities. In addition, data on Early Childhood Interventions (ECI) provided to children and their families is also not regularly analysed at national and local level.

Based on 2018 research on child development (carried out as part of the standardisation of the developmental screening instrument: Ages and Stages Questionnaire<sup>209</sup>), **between 8-12 per cent of young children in the 0-6 year population** have developmental risks, while an additional 5 per cent already show some developmental delays or disability. Similar estimates are given by health professionals from primary health care centres, indicating as many as 12.5 per cent of children were exposed to developmental risks and children with disabilities in Serbia in 2017. Unfortunately, estimates from primary health care centers that do not have developmental counselling units are much lower (7 per cent), suggesting that children with developmental risks and disabilities from areas without such units are not being reached through existing services. The following groups have higher likelihood of developmental delays or disability: families living in poverty, families living outside urban settings, children of mothers with lower education and children not accessing preschool education. The most common disorders treated through ECI services in 2017 were speech and communication difficulties<sup>210</sup>.

With the new registry on children with disabilities and increased capacities for developmental screening and assessment on the primary level, data on early childhood development will be more accessible and used for service and policy planning within health and other systems.

<sup>208</sup> Based in Geneva, Switzerland, Gavi is the Vaccine Alliance, which brings together public and private sectors with the shared goal of creating equal access to vaccines for children, wherever they live.

<sup>209</sup> Association of Pediatricians of Serbia and Institute of Psychology of the University of Belgrade

<sup>210</sup> Research on provision of health services within Primary Health Centers (PHCs) and Developmental Counselling Units (DCUs), Institute for Public Health "dr Milan Jovanovic Batut", 2017. (Unpublished)

Compared to 95 per cent of children age 36-59 months in the general population that are developmentally on track for their age, in the Roma population this percentage is significantly lower, at 83 per cent<sup>211</sup>. Additional analyses using a developmental score indicates that children from the poorest quintile are lagging 8 months behind children from the highest quintile. The two factors that have the strongest association with child development are attendance of ECE programmes (positive effect) and use of violent disciplining in the household (negative effect), which have a strong effect from a young age. Similarly, wealth is a strong determinant, and the developmental score increases with each wealth quintile<sup>212</sup>.

## Health system response

### Access to healthcare

In Serbia, access to healthcare through health insurance is wide, making **health services available to the entire population**, including all vulnerable population groups defined in the article 11 of newly adopted Health Care Law<sup>213</sup>. Based on official data of Republic Health Insurance Fund 2017<sup>214</sup> 6,901,482 citizens are covered by obligatory health insurance (98 per cent of the total population). However, a high rate of the population (10.5 per cent) has unsatisfied health needs (compared to the EU average of 4.5 per cent)<sup>215</sup>, and inequities in health protection among vulnerable groups compared to the general population persist. Differences can be noticed in the utilisation of

healthcare, resulting in inequities in health status and satisfaction with services<sup>216</sup>.

The share of the population of children aged from 0 to 6 years in the total population of Serbia did not change from 2013 to 2017, amounting to 6.5 per cent. Infants (children aged 0-365 days) accounted for approximately 0.9 per cent of the total population.

(Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade, 2019)

### Health workforce

Primary health care services for children from 0 to 6 years of age are provided through the Primary Health Care centres (PHC). In 2017, primary health care for children aged 0-6 was provided by 690 medical doctors, out of which 87.5 per cent were doctors specialists — **paediatricians** employed in 158 PHCs around Serbia. The average number of children aged 0-6 years per doctor in the period 2012-2017 varies from 626 (2012) to 664 in 2017, which exceeds the national standard of 850 children per paediatrician. The average number of visits to a doctor for a child aged 0 to 6 years annually ranged from 9.1 in 2016 to 9.8 in 2017<sup>217</sup>.

The **polyvalent visiting nurse service (PVNS)** is an important part of the Serbian health care system, providing a direct link with the population. Through this service, nurses conduct visits to families directly, especially those in vulnerable groups of the population, including pregnant women, new mothers, new-borns, infants (especially infants at risk), young children, people with disabilities and people suffering from chronic diseases. An analysis of the work of the PVNS by the Institute of Public Health of Serbia in 2017 suggests that improvements in the work of

<sup>211</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Survey 2014, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>212</sup> UNICEF, 'Early Childhood Development: The Analysis of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey Data, Serbia', UNICEF Belgrade, 2015. Available at: < [www.unicef.org/serbia/media/1201/file/MICS%20ECD.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/1201/file/MICS%20ECD.pdf) >, accessed on 2 September 2019.

<sup>213</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, Law on Health Care, No. 25/2019.

<sup>214</sup> National Health Insurance Fund, 'Number of Insured Persons in Serbia, as of 31.12.2017', < [www.rfzo.rs/index.php/broj-osiguranika-stat](http://www.rfzo.rs/index.php/broj-osiguranika-stat) >, accessed on 2 September 2019.

<sup>215</sup> Eurostat, 'Share of Persons aged 16 and Over Reporting Unmet Needs for Medical Examination or Treatment', < [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Share\\_of\\_persons\\_aged\\_16\\_and\\_over\\_reporting\\_unmet\\_needs\\_for\\_medical\\_examination\\_or\\_treatment\\_by\\_detailed\\_reason\\_2016.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Share_of_persons_aged_16_and_over_reporting_unmet_needs_for_medical_examination_or_treatment_by_detailed_reason_2016.png) >, accessed on 2 September 2019.

<sup>216</sup> Popović, N. Terzić-Šupić, Z. Simić, S., 'Nezadovoljene potrebe za zdravstvenom zaštitom stanovnika Republike Srbije', SIPRU, Belgrade, 2017.

<sup>217</sup> Vasic, Milena et al., Odabrani zdravstveni pokazatelji, 2017, updated 2019, Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade, 2019. Available at: [www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2017OdabraniPokazatelji.pdf](http://www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2017OdabraniPokazatelji.pdf) >, accessed 27 March 2019.

PVNS should be oriented to renewal of PVNS staff due to turnover, consistent implementation and improvement of the relevant by-law legislation, and further capacity-building of PVNS staff, including on early child development, parenting, and program monitoring and evaluation.

The role of **health mediators** involves visiting individuals and families from vulnerable groups living in substandard Roma settlements, conducting basic health education in the family, linking the health system and vulnerable groups from informal settlements, providing support to individuals from vulnerable groups in exercising rights to health care, health insurance, social protection and the right to legal personality. From 2013 to November 2017, they performed 22,296 first-time visits and 61,908 second-time visits. According to a survey conducted in 2017, 47 per cent of health mediators stated that they mostly performed healthcare activities on a monthly basis, 13 per cent mostly dealt with the collection of identity documents, while 35 per cent conducted activities from all domains, i.e. health care, social protection, education and obtaining identity documentation, equally<sup>218</sup>. While health mediators are currently employed through the health system, their employment status is unfavorable and uncertain.

**Conclusion: There is continued need to empower mothers and fathers of all backgrounds to exercise appropriate maternal and child healthcare, as well as to address gender-related barriers to care. The sustainability of outreach services, such as health mediators, needs to be strengthened.**

While early childhood development education and practice of pediatricians and nurses had been quite limited to monitoring psycho-motoric development, in 2016 this was expanded to include the introduction of developmental screening in preventive check-ups, increased orientation to developmental risks in the family and the environment etc.

Developmental counselling units (DCUs) exist in some primary healthcare centres (PHCs) and serve children with delays and disabilities and their families. While the formal criterion is that a municipality must have at least 8,500 preschool-age children in order to open a DCU, in practice due to low birth rates, many PHCs do not have enough children to fulfill this criteria. Several PHCs nevertheless try to extend support to children with developmental risks<sup>219</sup>. According to data from the Institute of Public Health, in 2017, 36 out of 158 PHCs have a DCU (the criteria being that a DCU must have at least a pediatrician, psychologist and speech therapist). Of these, eight are structured as organizational units (with dedicated space) and 24 are structured as functional units (in which staff perform duties but do not have a dedicated space for the DCU)<sup>220</sup>. While the current DCUs do not necessarily fulfil all the needs of the population within their district or municipality, they are certainly a basis for provision of support. In rural area, where paediatricians generally serve all children aged 0-19 years, they are often not in position to systematically assess and identify early signs of developmental risks and delays among children in their early years.

DCUs were designed to provide a range of services, including the comprehensive assessment of motor, psychosocial, sensory, speech and communication, and cognitive needs of children. The DCU team evaluates the existing strengths of the family in meeting their child's needs and develops and implements an individualized intervention plan for each child. DCUs also work with other institutions in the community such as preschool institutions and the centre for social work to ensure support for children with disabilities and their families is in place. The DCU refers children to more specialized services for consultation and intervention and they cooperate with the local inter-sectoral commission on the assessment of each child to determine the need for additional educational, health, and social support services. The

<sup>218</sup> Centre for Social Policy, 'Proposal of the Models for the Sustainable Institutionalization of Health Mediators', Serbia, 2018.

<sup>219</sup> According to estimates of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia, every eighth child in Serbia is provided with Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services through Developmental Counselling Unit.

<sup>220</sup> Institute of Public Health of Serbia, 'Research on Capacities of Primary Health Care Centres with Developmental Counselling Units, 2017 (Unpublished), Serbia, 2017.

National Programme on Early Childhood Developed, adopted in 2016, states that each district should have a DCU that services all children and families in need. Efforts are ongoing to develop system capacities to respond to this need.

Within the PHCs without DCUs, early childhood intervention (ECI) services to children with developmental delays and disabilities are provided by one employed associate (psychologist, speech therapist or special educator). This significantly decreases opportunities for these children to be provided quality ECI services.

A survey among 184 parents of children with developmental delays revealed that in 74 per cent of cases their child accessed ECI services, but over half are not aware of the range of services that exist and how to access them. In particular, parents do not understand the exact pathways within the system and services at primary as well as secondary and tertiary levels are limited and/or concentrated in big cities. With the increased requirement for ECI, private practice is expanding to fill gaps, but quality assurance is inadequate in the private sector and, therefore, service quality is not always up to standard. The same analysis also indicates that while policies in Serbia are very advanced and networks of services quite developed, there is a need to modernise practices to ensure they are evidence-based, better integrate a social model of care, are family-centred in approach and focus on providing care through the child's natural environments where appropriate (home or preschool)<sup>221</sup>.

### Palliative care

According to available data published in Serbia, 10 to 16 out of 10,000 children aged 0-19 years are in need for palliative care. In order to improve the quality of life of the sick child and his/her family, particularly to: eliminate pain and other symptoms; provide "rest"

to family members (temporary separation of persons, usually parents directly involved in child palliative care); and to ensure special support to family members during the grief in case of child death, the Government of Serbia has adopted the National Program for Palliative Care of Children.

("Official Gazette No. 22/2016")

**Conclusion:** There is need to further strengthen the DCU network. It will be important to reconsider the norms for DCUs so that they are more aligned with existing needs and fulfil the requirement of at least 1 DCU per district serving all children and their families in need for that district. Further attention is required to advance the knowledge and practice of professionals, to align them with international principles of early childhood interventions, and to ensure inter-sectoral collaboration in order to increase human and other resources available to children with developmental delays and disability.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>222</sup>, the Convention on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Improve regional organization of neonatal services to ensure access to adequate institutional and professional capacities in line with the OHCHR technical guidelines on eliminating preventable mortality and morbidity of children under 5 years of age;
- Strengthen efforts to ensure that access to adequate health care and neonatal services are extended to the most vulnerable families,

<sup>221</sup> UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Babies and Small Children with Developmental Delays in the Republic of Serbia, 2018, UNICEF Serbia, Belgrade, 2018.

<sup>222</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

including Roma families and those living in marginalized and remote areas;

- Strengthen the health care of Roma women and children through effective outreach services, and ensure that the Health Mediators Project 71 has sufficient human, technical and financial resources to effectively carry out regular home visits.
- Ensure availability of and equitable access to quality primary and specialized health care for all children in the country, and strengthen efforts to ensure that access to adequate health care, including pre-natal care for uninsured pregnant women, is extended to families living in the most vulnerable situations, particularly those living in marginalized and remote areas;
- Allocate adequate human and financial resources to ensure full implementation of the Ordinance on National Healthcare Programme for Women, Children and Youth;
- Ensure equal access to counselling and other health related support services for children with developmental difficulties;
- Support public advocacy and media engagement that address knowledge, attitudes and practices to encourage immunization;
- Fully implement the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, and develop a national program for the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding through comprehensive campaigns. Mothers should be appropriately supported through counselling structures in hospitals, clinics and community and the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative should be implemented throughout the country.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- 3.2.1 Under-five mortality rate
- 3.2.2 Neonatal mortality rate
- 3.8.1 Coverage of essential health services (defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population)
- 3.9.2 Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (exposure to unsafe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) services)
- 3.c.1 Health worker density and distribution
- 4.2.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex

#### Key development partners, among others:

**WHO** is engaged in strengthening health systems for: prevention and control of non-communicable diseases; full implementation of International Health Regulations (IHR); and enhancing country response in emergency situations. The **World Bank** is contributing to improving the efficiency and quality of the public health systems through strengthening: (i) health financing, purchasing, and maintenance systems; and (ii) quality improvement systems and management of selected priority non-communicable diseases. **UNICEF** is prominent in monitoring and protecting child rights, with strong focus on most vulnerable children — with disabilities and developmental delays, those who live in Roma settlements and disadvantaged families. Assistance from the Embassy of **Japan** strives to improve the health care system and to provide better quality medical services. The **Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)** is a multilateral development bank that actively promotes social cohesion and strengthens social integration in Europe, including through a project loan to part-finance the construction of a new building for the University Children's Hospital in Belgrade.



# 18. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

## Support for early learning

Children from deprived households receive less support for early learning at home — in 2014, only 12 per cent of Roma children under five had access to three or more books for children, compared to 72 per cent in the general population. Only one in three children in the general population and one in five in the Roma population have their father's support for learning in the early years.<sup>223</sup>

**Table 9. Factors associated with responsive care-giving, 2014**

(Source: MICS, 2015)

	Serbia (%)	Roma Settlements (%)
3 or more books at home	71.9	11.9
Two or more types of playthings	75.0	53.2
Childbirth between age 15-19	2.8	32.8
Mother's education less than secondary	12.6	91.9
Father's support for learning	36.5	17.3

**Conclusion: Skills-building of parents and support for early childhood care should continue to be provided in formal and non-formal settings. Culturally sensitive and innovative learning aids should increasingly be made available to children living in deprived households.**

## Pre-school education

The system of preschool education in Serbia in 2017 included 212,719 children aged 6 months to 6.5 years (109,808 boys and 102,911 girls), which represents 20,714 more children than in 2014. Pre-school education in 2017 was organized in a total of 403 preschool institutions (162 public and 241 private institutions) and 2,784 facilities, which is an increase of 292 compared with 2014 (of which 60 are state facilities and 232 are private facilities)<sup>224</sup>.

The national Strategy for Development of Education until 2020 had outlined the target value for preschool coverage of children aged 6 months to 3 years at 30 per cent. This target is close to being accomplished, with coverage of 27.6 per cent in 2016/2017, a significant increase relative to 2012 when the Strategy was adopted, when it stood at 15.8 per cent.

Preschool education coverage of children aged three to 5.5 years in the country is 61.8 per cent<sup>225</sup>, leaving more than a third of children without this form of education (and these children are often among those most in need). Access to quality preschool education programmes for children therefore remains a central issue and an urgent deprivation, affecting other key education challenges such as school readiness, on-time enrolment in primary education, retention, and future learning.

Children from vulnerable groups who are most in need of additional support for early development and learning are the least involved in preschool education. According to MICS data from 2014, only 9 per cent of the **poorest children** attend preschool, 6 per cent of **Roma children**, and 27 per cent

<sup>224</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia', <[www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/oblasti/obrazovanje/predskolsko-vaspitanje-i-obrazovanje/](http://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/oblasti/obrazovanje/predskolsko-vaspitanje-i-obrazovanje/)>, accessed 31 May 2019.

<sup>225</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'РЕПУБЛИКА СРБИЈА', <[http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs/SerbiaProfileLauncher/files/profiles/sr/1/DI\\_Profil\\_Republika%20Srbija\\_EURSRB.pdf#page=6](http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs/SerbiaProfileLauncher/files/profiles/sr/1/DI_Profil_Republika%20Srbija_EURSRB.pdf#page=6)>, accessed 31 May 2019.

<sup>223</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roman Settlements Multiple Indicator Survey 2014, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.

children from rural areas attend preschool. There is no reliable data on participation of children with disabilities in preschool education, although a study from 2012<sup>226</sup> estimates it to be only one per cent. According to data on the number for pedagogical profiles (PP) or individual education plans (IEP) from 2017/2018, 0.89 per cent of children had either PP or IEP in preschool. Although there are officially no preschool institutions/facilities for the education of children with disabilities<sup>227</sup>, the data indicate that there were 39.5 active developmental groups in 30 preschool institutions, attended by 364 children (0.17 per cent) in the school year 2017/2018<sup>228</sup>. While no comprehensive and real-time data are available on children on the move, pedagogical documentation shows that some migrant and refugee children have access to preschool.

Non-attendance in preschool can further exacerbate life-long inequity for these vulnerable groups of children. A significant share of the progress made in expanding preschool enrolment has benefited families from wealthier quintiles, in some cases expanding the income gap and increasing disparities between rural and urban populations. In the most developed municipalities, there are twice as many children are enrolled in the non-compulsory age group (0.5-5.5 years) as in the least developed municipalities<sup>229</sup>.

According to MICS data, an important reason for this disparity is that while the regulations recognize the preschool facility as an essential for child development, a space for support to the educational upbringing function of the family and holistic development and well-being of the child or preschool age, in practice it is still perceived as a service that allows parents to go to work. Hence, if one or more parents or family members are available at home to care for the child, preschool is often not seen as a necessity. This partly explains the higher enrolment in areas with higher employment levels.

In addition to attitudes of families, there are major **economic obstacles**, such as local self-governments lacking the necessary resources to ensure adequate support for the provision of early childhood education and care, and **practical obstacles**, such as inadequate space within early learning facilities, long distances to reach preschools and a lack of transportation. The preschool system does not offer opportunities for all children and families who need or want it. Thus, there is an apparent gap between legislation (the law and by-law on enrolment priority give priority to vulnerable children) and practice in admission criteria in preschool institutions. Local self-governments pay up to 80 per cent of the total cost per child, and the full price for children from families living in resource-constrained settings, after putting them on a priority list for enrolment. In practice there are often no free spaces available, because parents with jobs are given priority for enrolling children.

The funding of preschool education is dependent on its economic price, which is calculated by the local self-government for each program, including nursery, kindergarten, preparatory preschool (PPP) following a method determined by law. This economic price is then covered in the following way<sup>230</sup>

<sup>226</sup> UNICEF, 'Investing in Early Childhood Education in Serbia, September 2012', UNICEF Serbia, Belgrade, 2012.

<sup>227</sup> The Savski Venac preschool institution, which only enrolls children with developmental impairments is an example of this, as well as schools for the education of children with developmental impairments and disabilities implementing preschool education programmes.

<sup>228</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017-2018.

<sup>229</sup> Aggio, C. et al., Analytical Review of Governance, Provision and Quality of Early Childhood Education Services at the Local Level in Countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), Yale University, 2018.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

**Table 10. Overview of funding for preschool education, 2018**

(Source: Yale University, 2018)

Program	Age	Majority of children	Children from deprived families <sup>231</sup>	Children without parental care, with disabilities, in hospital treatment and from household receiving financial social assistance
Nursery	6 months to age 3	80% covered by LSG and remaining 20% by parents* *Since 2017 up to 80%	100% by LSG From 1 July 2018: LSG decides on cost reduction based on household material deprivation	100% by National Government
Kindergarten	Ages 3 to 5.5	80% covered by LSG and remaining 20% by parents* *Since 2017 up to 80%	100% by LSG From 1 July 2018: LSG decides on cost reduction based on household material deprivation	100% by National Government
PPP (Compulsory)	Ages 5.5-6.5	Teachers' salaries and operational costs for the realization of the programme covered by National government for 4 hours per day and 9 months per year. Any additional hours/months: 80% by LSG and 20% by parents	Teachers' salaries and operational costs for the realization of the programme covered by National government for 4 hours per day and 9 months per year. Any additional hours/ months 100% by LSG	100% by National Government

An increase in enrolment in private preschool institutions, such as in Belgrade, can be attributed to an incentive stemming from contractual arrangements between parents and the City of Belgrade — involving parents who send their children to private kindergartens in a **subsidised system**. However, the regulatory role of government and monitoring of private preschool education is not yet fully ensured, and the measure was not aimed to increase enrolment but to decrease waiting lists, therefore mostly benefiting wealthier families.

At national level, in spite of the progress in coverage by preschool education, Serbia is still far below the national goal **of covering 75 per cent of children**

from 3-7 years with preschool education (61.8 per cent in 2017) as set in the Strategy of Development of Education in Republic of Serbia by 2020. The EU Strategy 2020 sets a goal of 95 per cent of children participating in early childhood education.

The MoESTD project **“Inclusive pre-school education”** financed through a World Bank loan<sup>232</sup>, anticipates an improvement in the accessibility of pre-school education (through providing for around 17,000 new seats for children aged 3 to 5.5 in new, renovated or adapted objects in at least 30 cities and municipalities in the Republic of Serbia), as well as advancement in the quality of inclusive pre-school education (through support to the introduction and application of the

<sup>231</sup> Article 50. of The Law on Preschool Education proscribes that the children without parental care, children with disabilities and children from economically deprived families are excluded from participation in financing of all day and half day programs, according to the legislation in the area of financial support to families with children.

<sup>232</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, ‘Expert Meeting on Planning and Construction of Preschool Facilities Apr 16, 2019 | Inclusive Preschool Education’, < [www.mpn.gov.rs/strucni-skup-o-planiranju-i-izgradnji-objekata-predskolskog-vaspitanja-i-obrazovanja](http://www.mpn.gov.rs/strucni-skup-o-planiranju-i-izgradnji-objekata-predskolskog-vaspitanja-i-obrazovanja) > accessed 16 April 2019.

new Framework programme for pre-school education) and improved equity of pre-school education by supporting children and families from vulnerable social backgrounds. The newly adopted Framework programme for pre-school education ("Years of Ascent"<sup>233</sup>) provides a common basis for developing a real programme in creches (with children 6 months to 3 years of age), pre-school (children from 3 to 5.5 years of age) and preparatory pre-school programme (children from 5.5 to 6.5 years of age in the year prior to school). It promotes an integrated and holistic approach to learning and development of small children from their enrolment into pre-school education till primary school. The Framework programme nurtures an child-centred approach based on integrated learning, research, organising activities through play-based learning in which children are the main actors in their own learning process. The training of pre-school teachers for its application is starting in 2019 and is intended to include 70 per cent of employees (nurses, pre-school teachers, professional associates) in pre-school facilities. Support to priority enrolment of children from vulnerable families is provided by MoLEVSA. The European Union is also financially supporting the pre-school education reform and inclusive practices, including through **equipping pre-school institutions, professional support to 50 self-government units in planning and managing pre-school education** — in the domain of developing local strategies and action plans, optimisation of the pre-school facility network and developing promotional materials on the importance of including children into pre-school education, as well as through supporting the professional competencies of practitioners for quality inclusive pre-school education<sup>234</sup>.

The Government has announced that a **Unique Education Information System** will be introduced in 2020. Through a unique education number, children's progress through the education system will be monitored from preschool onwards.

**Conclusion: Enrolment of children from deprived families in preschool remains a high priority that impacts their chances of succeeding in higher levels of education. Access to preschool must be equitable and affordable for all children. In addition, evidence-based planning will be required in the coming years in order to continue optimising the preschool network and staffing.**

### Preparatory preschool programme

Despite a gradual decrease of the absolute number of children in Serbia, data from 2018 shows that participation in compulsory preparatory preschool programme (a preparatory year prior to starting primary school, for children 5.5-6.5 years) is close to universal for children in the general population, at 97 per cent (65,067 children of which 31,378 are girls). Yet, equity remains an issue. Regionally, there are notable disparities, with coverage at 94.1 per cent in the Belgrade region compared to 99.6 per cent in South and Eastern Serbia<sup>235</sup>. According to the MICS, there was a decrease in Roma children of PPP age attending a preparatory programme from 70.6 per cent in 2010 to 62.9 per cent in 2014<sup>236</sup>. The survey found that the key barriers included costs, physical access and **parental attitudes**. Challenges relating to the preschool network were also identified, given that almost every third child from the general population attends PPP in school facilities and almost every fourth child from Roma settlements lives **more than 2 kilometres away** from a PPP facility. Moreover, more than 77 per cent of Roma walk to the facility, while only 18 per cent use organized transport<sup>237</sup>.

<sup>233</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, 'Основе програма предшколског васпитања и образовања', <<http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/OSNOVE-PROGRAMA-.pdf>> accessed 16 April 2019.

<sup>234</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, 'Component 3: Support for children and families from vulnerable social groups', <[www.mpn.gov.rs/komponenta-3-podrska-deci-i-porodici-iz-osetljivih-drustvenih-grupa/](http://www.mpn.gov.rs/komponenta-3-podrska-deci-i-porodici-iz-osetljivih-drustvenih-grupa/)>, accessed 16 April 2019.

<sup>235</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Database DevInfo 7, Serbia', <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>236</sup> UNICEF, 'Education in Serbia in Light of the MICS Data', UNICEF Serbia, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

**Conclusion:** Barriers such as physical access limitations, parental attitudes and norms need to be addressed to improve preparatory preschool programme enrolment, particularly for Roma children.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Serbia** regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>238</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Ensure equal access for all children, particularly from vulnerable groups, to early education programmes regardless of their parent's employment status, and
- Provide the necessary funding to ensure that preschool facilities are adequate, with appropriate training provided for teachers and education assistants.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 4.2.1 | Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex |
| 4.2.2 | Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex                                    |

#### Key development partners, among others:

The **World Bank** provides a loan to improve access, quality and equity of preschool education, with the aim of proving access to quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, in particular for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The **European Commission** — IPA on inclusive preschool education — “Support to

the Education System Reform in Serbia” (SUPER) is an EU funded project 2019-2021 to support preschool education in 50 municipalities. The **Novak Djokovic Foundation (NDJF)** is focused on Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Early Childhood Development (ECD).

## 19. RIGHT TO LIFE IN A FAMILY AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Most children in Serbia grow up with their parents as their primary and best carers. In cases where parents are unable to fulfil their inherent responsibility to adequately care for their children, the State is mandated to intervene under the provisions of the Family Law, the Law on Social Welfare and the Law on Financial Assistance to Families with Children. The child protection system includes several measures and services for children and families in need that are intended to **address vulnerability and promote social inclusion**. These include case-management (assessment, care-planning, referral to services, including statutory functions, such as guardianship), community-based services and financial schemes<sup>239</sup>. In spite of such measures, the number of children entering formal care continues has grown, reaching a total of 6,177 children in formal care in 2017.

Children make up 27 per cent of all social welfare beneficiaries, compared to their 17 per cent share in the overall population.

(Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2018)

<sup>238</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

<sup>239</sup> A more detailed overview of financial schemes is provided in the chapters: Drivers of inequities and Being a child with a disability



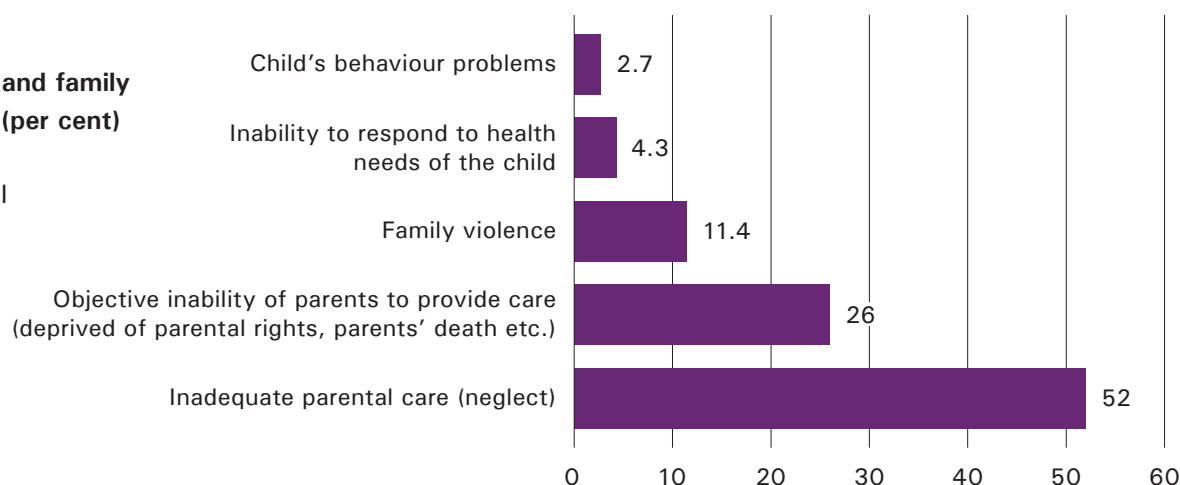
**Conclusion: Every 6<sup>th</sup> child in Serbia is in contact with the social welfare system, which speaks about children's high vulnerability and the need for an adequate and timely response through diversified, integrated, high quality services and measures.**

### Children at risk of entering care

Children at risk of neglect, abuse, separation from their families and communities and of being socially excluded are often girls and boys from families facing complex and multiple problems and deprivations, including poverty. Deprivation increases the risk of **neglect**, as parents lack the resources necessary for needs satisfaction and early development of their children. A lower education level of parents increases the risk of violence against children, as do factors such as dysfunctional family relations, drug or alcohol abuse by parents, domestic violence, and participation of family members in past war conflicts.

In 2017, 1,093 children were separated from their families and placed into formal care due to the following reasons<sup>240</sup>.

**Figure 13.**  
**Reasons for child and family separation, 2017 (per cent)**  
(Source: Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2017)



<sup>240</sup> Republic Institute for Social Protection, ДЕЦА У СИТЕМУ СОЦИЈАЛНЕ ЗАШТИТЕ 2017, <<http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/1416/deca-u-sistemu-socijalne-zastite-u-2017.pdf>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

Of particular concern is the separation rate of young children. Of all children separated, 24 per cent were aged 0-2 years and 16 per cent were 3-5 years. Forty five per cent were children aged 6-14 years.

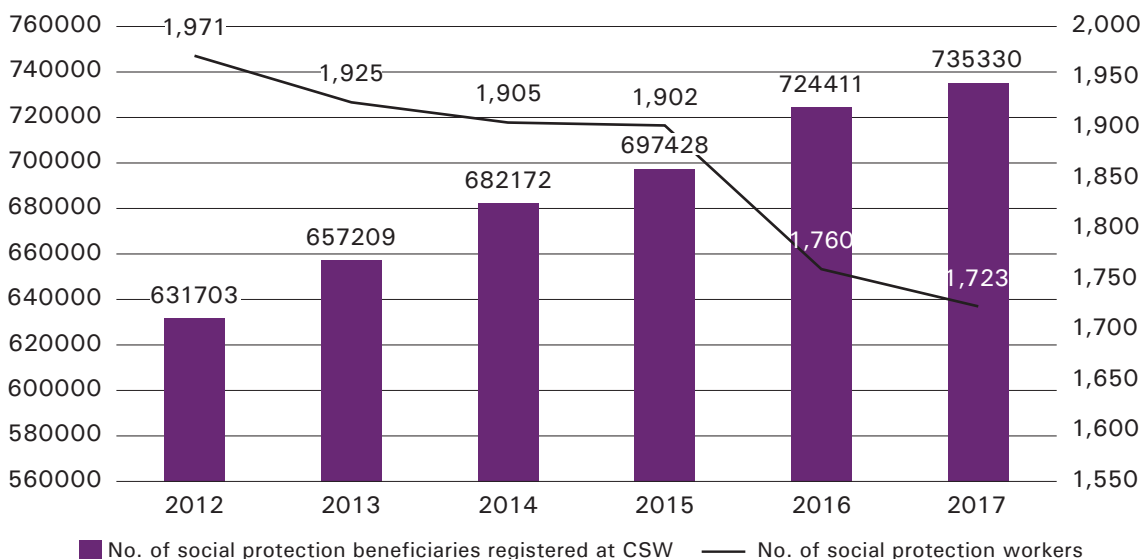
### Social welfare system response

There is a continual decrease in the number of employees in all 140 **centres for social welfare**. Between 2013 to 2017, the total number of **all employees** decreased by 16.4 per cent, **professional staff** by 16 per cent and **case-managers** by 15 per cent<sup>241</sup>. On the other hand, the number of beneficiaries of the centres has continued to increase. Even before 2013, the staffing structure was not in line with the required standards. In addition, those standards have not been revised to reflect the changing needs and roles of centres for social work. It is estimated that no more than half of centres for social work have specialized teams for children and youth, while case-managers in other centers work with all beneficiary groups and are frequently rotated. This raises concerns about their capacity to perform in timely and quality manner.

<sup>241</sup> Republic Institute for Social Protection, ИЗВЕШТАЈ О РАДУ ЦЕНТАРА ЗА СОЦИЈАЛНИ РАД У 2017, <<http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/1423/izvestaj-o-rad-u-csr-2017rzs.pdf>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

**Figure 14. Number of social protection beneficiaries versus number of social protection workers, 2012-2017**

(Source: Republic Institute for Social Protection)



**Community-based services (CBS)**, focused on family strengthening, play an important role in supporting vulnerable children, promoting social inclusion and prevention of child/family separation. They are part of a wider continuum of services seeking to address the set of challenges that often underlay the risk of neglect or violence. There is an evident lack of funding for social services at local level<sup>242</sup>.

A national Strategy on Social Welfare is in the process of adoption.

**Conclusion:** It is important to ensure the standardization of family strengthening services and the entire group of counselling, therapeutic and socio-educational services in the social welfare system, as well as to secure sustainable national financing for intensive family strengthening services aimed at families and children with complex and multiple deprivations and children requiring palliative care. It is important to retain a realistic balance of financing sources for these services so that an overburdening of local-self government is avoided.

### Right to participate in civil proceedings

In cases of civil and administrative proceedings (e.g. determination of a guardian, parent's divorce, or other situations under the purview of the Family Law), girls and boys often also face limitations in exercising their right to participate and **their voice is not heard**

<sup>242</sup> Matković, Gordana, Stranjaković, Milica, Mapping of Social Protection Services within the Mandate of Local Governments in the Republic of Serbia, SIPRU, Belgrade, December 2016.

to ensure that decisions reflect their best interest. This relates to children of all age groups and is particularly relevant for adolescents. Recent research results<sup>243</sup> indicate that judges and professional social workers in Centres for Social Welfare face numerous challenges in the implementation of family law proceedings concerning children, and there are numerous practical difficulties in exercising children's right to participation. Although the **principle of the best interests** of the child is understood as a guiding principle in the decision-making process, the content of this principle is not sufficiently clear, and there is no unified approach regarding elements based on which the best interests of the child are determined in individual cases, nor in terms of criteria for their assessment, which would ensure adequate individualization of decisions.

In order to provide reliable information about respect of rights of the child in civil and administrative proceedings under the purview of the Family Law, the **Ministry of Justice is updating its data collection system** in order to be able to better collect information in this regard.

**Conclusion: There is need to raise understanding and skills to ensure the child's best interest and enable age-appropriate child participation within the social welfare and judicial system. This will include putting adequate guidance and standards in place and providing necessary training and awareness-raising among decision-makers and other duty-bearers.**

### Children as victims and witnesses of crime

Girls and boys who are **victims and witnesses of crime** also lack adequate support throughout criminal proceedings, often exposing them to secondary victimization. The proportion of all victims of crime

who are children was relatively stable between 2013 and 2017. In cases where the perpetrators of such crimes are adults (11-12 per cent), the majority of those cases are related to failure to provide alimony, while in 3 to 5 per cent of cases children are victims or witnesses of more severe or violent crimes. In this group, the number of reported child victims of domestic violence is rising — in 2013 it was 15 per cent while in 2017 is 22 per cent.

In Serbia, the Law on Juvenile Offenders and Protection of Minors in Criminal Proceedings defines a set of measures aimed at protecting the child victim/witness from secondary victimization. Although some of these measures are implemented, such as the specialization of relevant professionals, some measures (e.g. ensuring efficient court procedures, limiting the number of questioning sessions, securing statements in an appropriate setting) are still not applied regularly. It is concerning that, in 2017, in 58.7 per cent of the cases where victims were children, the **duration of the proceeding was more than a year**. When it comes to limiting the number of questionings and ensuring that statements secured from children are taken in an appropriate setting with the assistance of a trained professional, anecdotal evidence indicates that this is still not part of the regular practice of courts and prosecution offices. Units for protection of child victims/witnesses were modelled in recent years, but not integrated into the system.

**Conclusion: A sustainable mechanism for quality and timely support to all child victims and witnesses in criminal proceedings must be ensured, in alignment with the new Strategy for protection of victims and witnesses of crimes.**

### Children in alternative care

Since 2013, the overall number of children in alternative care has increased, albeit at a slower pace than in the years prior to that. In 2017, 88 per cent of children without parental care were placed

<sup>243</sup> Petrušić N. and M. Petrović, 'Child-friendly judiciary: Research of efficiency, participation and determining the best interest of a child in civil proceedings', (unpublished), 2018.

in foster families and 12 per cent in residential institutions. Many girls and boys without parental care are therefore deprived of safe, trustful, stable and stimulating relationships which leads to their **unequal chances** to reach their maximum potential for an independent life.

While it is encouraging that the total number of children placed into institutions has decreased (from 961 to 761, or 17 per cent), the number of children placed into foster-care has increased in the same period between 2013 and 2017 (from 5,125 to 5,416 or 5.7 per cent)<sup>244</sup>. Despite challenging circumstances, clear progress has been made towards de-institutionalization. However, this process has not been felt equally by all children.

There is continuously a slightly **higher number of boys** in both residential and foster care than girls, and especially boys with disabilities.

It is concerning, that despite the introduction of a ban in 2011 on placing **children under-three years of age** in institutional care, this practice continues. Following a gradual decrease that started in 2012, it started to increase again in 2016, reaching a total of 44 children in residential institutions in 2017.

There is no recent data on the number of **Roma children** in formal care. However, it can be reasonably assumed that they still make up approximately a quarter of all children in formal care, compared to only 2 per cent of the national population that declared themselves as Roma at the last census (2011), given that there has been no recent substantial developments in terms of the system's capacities to address the needs of the most vulnerable children — most specifically to prevent child/family separation<sup>245</sup>.

The majority of unaccompanied and separated children are accommodated in an asylum and

reception center.<sup>246</sup> Residential care has capacity to accommodate approximately 50 unaccompanied and separated children, although there are no dedicated quality arrangement for girls. Alternative care arrangement possibilities for these children are not currently being fully exploited.

**Conclusion: Close monitoring of placement of children in care is needed. It is necessary to ensure that the ban on placing children 0-3 years into residential institutions is followed and that a suitable alternative is found for children in this age group who are currently in care. Culturally-sensitive alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children, based on their best interest and in collaboration with their guardians, should also be identified.**

**Although a shift towards family-oriented and family-like solutions has been recognised in the social welfare system, a genuine transformation of professional practices is yet to occur. This will require regulatory, financial, staffing, performance management preconditions, as well as the availability of services to support family-oriented solutions.**

**There is a need to increase the quality and capacity optimisation of foster family care as an alternative to residential care.**

**There is a need to revise the caseload of social workers and the size of the social protection workforce in order to improve its efficiency, efficacy and quality.**

<sup>244</sup> Republic Institute for Social Protection, 'Children in the system of social protection', (Serbian version available), Belgrade, 2018.

<sup>245</sup> Centre for Researching Social Policy and Social Work, 'Tracking the causes, decision-making processes and outcomes for children in care', University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Science, Belgrade, 2013.

<sup>246</sup> In the month of June 2019 the figure was 460 — according to official statistics of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Republic of Serbia

## Quality of residential care

Key challenges remain in reforming **residential care**. Although the Law on Social Welfare (2011) stipulates that a residential institution for children could not have more than 50 clients, data from 2016 reveal that 6 (out of 20 institutions) considerably surpass this number, i.e. are still considered as large-scale institutions specialized for children and youth with disabilities. In practice, four of them *de facto* function as institutions for adults, with only a small number of children, while two predominantly care for children and youth only. Overall, most of those institutions provide poor living conditions, including inadequate access to health, education and scarce rehabilitation programmes. Other residential institutions (child homes) ensure better quality of care (including access to education).

As with Centres for Social Welfare (whose role is critical in both preventing and referring children to formal care, including monitoring/reviewing individual care plans), there is a continual decrease in the number of employees in residential institutions. Moreover, only 50 per cent of residential institutions have professional capacity building plans.

Once placed into institutions, 36 per cent of children and youth stay in care for more than 5 years, while one in five children stay between 6 and 10 years.

**In large-scale institutions more than 73 per cent stay in care for more than 11 years.** Most children in institutions do not originate from the municipality where the institution is located, which makes keeping contact with biological family members and relatives very difficult. Although only 2 per cent of children in institutions do not actually have parents or relatives, one third of institutionalized children and youth have no contact with their parents or relatives. Only around a quarter of them are able to maintain regular contact<sup>247</sup>.

Data on exposure to violence of children and youth in residential institutions is not consistent and not reliable enough, with some institutions (predominantly large-scale institutions) not reporting on this at all and others almost exclusively reporting only about violence between children and youth (most often physical).

**Conclusion: There is an urgent need to accelerate work on the transformation of residential institutions, particularly large-scale ones, so that they meet the required international quality standards.**

## Quality of foster care

Detailed information on the characteristics and profile of children and youth in **foster care**, as well as foster families, are available only through the reports from Centres for Foster Care Adoption (CFCAs). However, the existing network of CFCAs reaches only 45 per cent of foster families and not more than 50 per cent of children and youth in foster care — the remaining children and foster families are only supported and monitored through Centres for Social Welfare. The existing CFCAs have 36 per cent fewer staff than required by national standards.

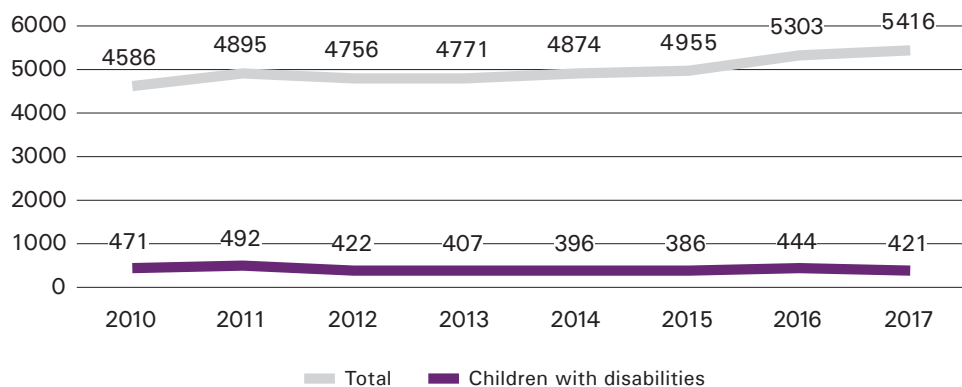
Although foster care (as well as institutional care) is defined as only temporary alternative care, 41 per cent of children stay with their foster families from 6-9 years and 17 per cent stay 10 years or more.

<sup>247</sup> Republic Institute for Social Protection, 'Report on Activities of Residential Institutions for Children and Youth', 2014, 2015, 2016, Belgrade.



**Figure 15. Number of children in foster care, 2010-2017**

(Source: Republic Institute for Social Protection)



Foster families are equally available in urban and other areas, while the vast majority of children originate from the municipality where the foster family resides.

There is an overall consensus that children are better-off in foster-care than in institutions, but recent research<sup>248</sup> reveals that when compared to their peers living with birth families, adolescents in foster care have lower school performance and almost predominantly attend vocational high-schools. Adolescents in foster care report on stigmatization and discrimination, particularly in the school environment, lack of trust in the child protection system and a lack of stimulation to develop to their full potential. Although there is a century old tradition of foster care in Serbia, foster families report feeling stigmatised and labelled as having only financial motivations.

No comprehensive data are available, but foster care has been used extremely rarely for unaccompanied and separated children.

**Conclusion: Comprehensive measures must be in place to ensure the long-term well-being of children in both residential institutions and foster care.**

### Being a child with a disability

Serbia signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability and the Optional Protocol in 2007 and ratified them in 2009. Its implementation report was last reviewed by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disability in 2016, while a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was completed in 2018.

Like in many countries, Serbia has no uniform definition and classification of disability in its normative and policy frameworks, making it difficult to collect precise data on children with disabilities. E.g. the education sector uses the OECD categorisation, the health sector uses ICD-10. The ICF classification according to functionality is increasingly being advocated for. In addition, data are often not disaggregated by sex, age, type of disability and other features, which makes monitoring of the status of children with disabilities,

<sup>248</sup> Žegarac, N. et al, Wellbeing of adolescents in foster care (in print), University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Science, Belgrade, 2019.

particularly those in the most vulnerable situations a demanding task (e.g. children in residential institutions, especially children with intellectual, mental and multiple disabilities, children living in poverty, unaccompanied minors and children working in the streets or on the move). The development of a **Registry of Children with Developmental Difficulties and Disabilities** based on the functional model of disability by the Institute of Public Health should help overcome some of these obstacles. It is expected to be fully functional in 2020.

The 2011 census introduced questions on disability based on the Washington Group recommendations for measuring disability, and there are a number of sectoral reports and databases. According to census data, **0.7 per cent of all children under 15 in Serbia have a disability**. This percentage is likely to be an underestimation (globally, the WHO estimates that 5 per cent of children have a disability and 0.7 per cent have developmental difficulties).

There are **no official data on poverty among children with disabilities**, and the methodological approach to calculating their poverty presents a particular challenge. Children with disabilities make up around 5 per cent of children benefiting from the social protection system (10,298 in 2017, of which 60 per cent are boys), most of them being recipients of disability cash allowance.

Among the children who receive child allowance, in 2012 around 4,000 children with disabilities received an **augmented child allowance**<sup>249</sup>. Recognizing the special vulnerability of children with disabilities, the new Law on Social Assistance to Families with Children (2018) introduces an augmented child allowance for children with disability (50 per cent higher than regular child allowance) and simplifies some administrative requirements for obtaining it. Apart from the child allowance, children with disabilities have the right to attendance allowance. In 2017, 4,842 children received attendance allowance, and 4,011 received augmented attendance allowance.

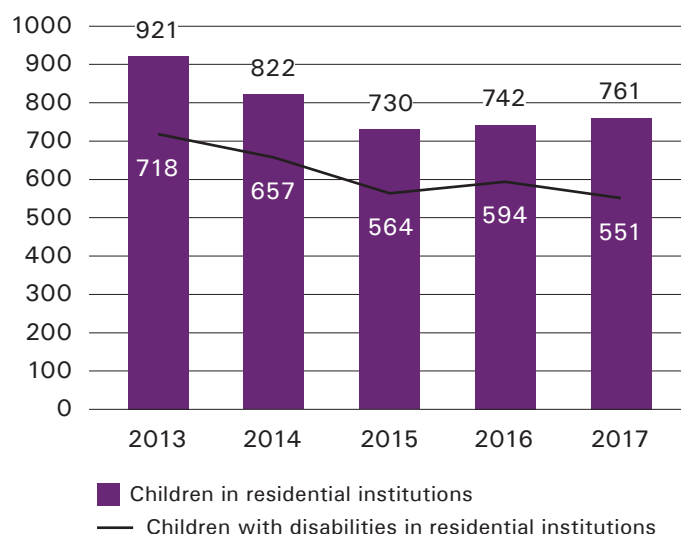
There is a continuously high share of children and youth with disabilities in formal care. From the social exclusion and quality of care perspective, it is concerning that **children with disabilities make up 72 per cent of all children in residential institutions**. Most of these are children with intellectual disabilities. Data from CFCAs indicate that the share of children and youth with disabilities in foster care has been increasing, reaching 25 per cent in 2017 (and therefore it is likely that this trend is similar for all foster families).

Data for unemployment amongst young people with disabilities is not robust.

**Conclusion: There is a need to further advocate for the use of international standards and definitions for data collection on disabilities in Serbia. Better data capture is also needed for children in institutions, their exposure to violence and exploitation, especially of children with disabilities.**

**Figure 16. Children with disabilities in residential institutions, 2013-2017**

(Source: MoLEVSA, 2018)



<sup>249</sup> Matković, G., Mijatović, B., Stanić, K. 'Cash assistance for children and families with children in Serbia', Belgrade, 2014.

In 2015, **day-care centres** for children with disabilities were available in only 68 out of 145 surveyed municipalities. Respite care, personal assistant and counseling services were available in large towns only. As they are financed from the local budget, their sustainability depends largely of local-level commitment and budget resources.

Due to gaps in the healthcare network, there are often long lists for therapeutic treatment in public healthcare centers, so parents often opt for out-of-pocket payment to private providers. In a recent survey of parents of children with disabilities, more than half think that their child's **access to healthcare** is difficult<sup>250</sup>.

There are no systematized data on the **accessibility of educational institutions**. Most educational institutions still have no access ramps or toilets, which means that children with disabilities who are educated in these institutions face additional difficulties<sup>251</sup>. According to the 2011 population census, the **educational profile** of persons with disabilities is unfavourable: 52.7 per cent of the persons with disabilities aged over 15 have completed primary education or below, whereas only 6.5 per cent have higher education. These differences further increase when observing data at the regional level<sup>252</sup>.

**Conclusion: Empowerment of children with disabilities and their families should remain a priority in all areas, embedding the best interests of the child and participation into all processes that concern and impact them. Stronger advocacy is need on the rights of children with disabilities.**

## Assistive technology

Children with disabilities in Serbia who could benefit from assistive technologies (AT) do not have sufficient access to them. A number of assistive technologies are financed through the health insurance fund, although these do not cover the entire spectrum of needs. While a normative framework is in place and the MoESTD developed the first Catalogue of Assistive Technologies in 2017, educational institutions have been found to lack adequate assistive technologies, and existing information and communication technologies (ICT) are rarely used as assistive technology<sup>253</sup>. The Law on the Foundations of the Education System<sup>254</sup> foresees the potential establishment of a Resource Centre for Assistive Technology in Education in order to support children, students and adults in need of assistive technology. Though not regulated yet, the funding would have to emerge from outside resources beyond the local community due to constraints local governments face and that have been confirmed by further studies.

AT should empower all individual with disabilities (focusing on unique needs of every individual regardless of diagnosis, and individuals with all types of impairments) to function and participate in all facets of life. The provision of AT will require new partnerships with private sector partners that produce and sell AT products as well as services. Their partnerships will be valuable for both funding, expertise and advocacy. National and local innovation can decrease costs and ensure adaptability and acceptability of products, while supporting adolescents as AT innovators can promote adolescents' empowerment.

<sup>250</sup> National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS), Situation analysis: Status of children with developmental difficulties and disability in the Republic of Serbia, NOOIS, Belgrade, 2017.

<sup>251</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>252</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2012.

<sup>253</sup> National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS), Situation analysis: Status of children with developmental difficulties and disability in the Republic of Serbia, NOOIS, Belgrade, 2017.

<sup>254</sup> Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia, The Law on Foundations of Educational System, No. 88/2017.

**Conclusion: Access for children with disabilities to AT that is adapted to their needs can be greatly accelerated by strengthening the national system of provision of assistive technologies and creating partnerships with the private sector and innovation hubs.**

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>255</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- In coordination with the office of the Ombudsman, in its capacity as National Preventive Mechanism, establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure that all children in institutions and alternative care are free from all forms of torture, inhumane or degrading treatment, and ensure that they have access to a confidential, safe and child-friendly mechanism for complaints related to their deprivation of liberty, conditions of detention/ internment and treatment;
- Further strengthen awareness-raising and education programmes – including campaigns – with the involvement of children, in order to formulate a comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating child abuse;
- Encourage community-based programmes aimed at preventing and tackling domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, including by involving former victims, volunteers and community members, and providing training support to them;
- Urgently reduce placement of children under the age of 3 years in residential care institutions, including those with disabilities, and expedite the placement in family-based care; and

ensure adequate safeguards and clear criteria, particularly for Roma children and children with disabilities, based on the needs as well as the best interests of the child, for determining whether a child should be placed in alternative care;

- Implement the provisions outlined in the 2011 Social Welfare Law that limits the number of children per residential institution to 50;
- Implement measures to reduce the numbers of children in large scale institutions for children with disabilities; and ensure that institutionalization is used only as a last resort, including by providing information to expectant parents and healthcare workers who advise new parents, on the rights and dignity of children with disabilities; Take immediate steps to ensure that the Rulebook on Prohibited Practices of the Employees in Social Protection is enforced so that children in institutions are free from all physical or psychological abuse and neglect and hold those responsible to account for such abuse or neglect; prohibit the use of seclusion, physical restraints, and isolation as a means of discipline; and ensure that the best interests of the child are respected when deciding on necessary and appropriate medical treatment and that the views of children are heard and taken into account; Ensure adequate legal safeguards and clear criteria for determining whether a child should be placed in alternative care, taking into consideration the views and best interests of the child, and enforce such criteria by raising awareness of family court judges;
- Strengthen support to children and young people leaving care, including those with disabilities, to enable them to reintegrate into society, by providing access to adequate housing, legal, health and social services, as well as educational and vocational training opportunities; and

<sup>255</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

- Raise awareness in society to counter the stigmatization and discrimination of children in alternative care;
- Enhance data collection on children with disabilities and conduct studies and analyses on the effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention and the existing laws and policies;
- Reform the system of social assistance for children with disabilities and their families in order to improve its coherence and coordination and avoid unnecessary institutionalization and undertake awareness-raising campaigns to combat the stigmatization of and prejudice against children with disabilities;
- Establish legislative and other measures to enable children with disabilities and in need of constant care and assistance to remain with their biological families through services for children and parents and/or through financial support and assistance to parents who are unable to work and generate income because they provide constant care and assistance to a child with a disability;
- Give priority to measures to facilitate the full inclusion of children with disabilities, including those with intellectual and psycho-social disabilities, in all areas of public life, such as leisure activities, community-based care and the provision of social housing with reasonable accommodation.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| 1.3.1   | Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable |
| 1.a.2   | Proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection)  |
| 10.3.1  | Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law                                   |
| 16.2.1  | Proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month   |
| 16.7.2  | Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group   |
| 17.17.1 | Amount of United States dollars committed to public-private and civil society partnerships   |

#### Key development partners, among others:

The **Government of Switzerland** contributes to the design, coordination and implementation of social inclusion policies of the Government of Serbia within the mandate of the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU), which is affiliated to the Prime Minister's Office. The Swiss PRO Programme is financed through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and enhances the capacities of local self-governments towards social inclusion and the improvement of social services. **UNICEF** supports social welfare and judicial reform particularly in the areas of alternative care options, family support and justice for children. **ILO** supports country-level engagement to reduce child labour. The **Government of Germany** (GIZ) supports social rights for vulnerable groups through social services. The **Norwegian Embassy** in Serbia works to improve access to employment, enhance social inclusion, improve living conditions and local



infrastructure, strengthen information security of the GoS. The **Government of Japan** provides assistance to improve the living conditions of socially disadvantaged groups.

## 20. PRIMARY EDUCATION

The overall rate of **participation in education in Serbia is high**. Enrolment in primary school for the general population decreased from 97.5 per cent in 2014 to 95.5 per cent in 2017. In 2017, the primary school completion rate overall was 94.3 per cent. At the beginning of the 2018/2019 school year, the first cycle of primary education (1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade) was attended by a total of 260,507 students, of which slightly more boys (51.6 per cent) than girls (48.4 per cent), while the second cycle — lower secondary education (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade) was attended by 267,327 students — 51.3 per cent of boys and 48.7 per cent of girls<sup>256</sup>, a total of 527,834 pupils attending 3,319 regular primary schools of which 1,132 central (main) schools and 2,187 regional school departments.

However, **children with disabilities, Roma children and children from very poor households and rural areas** are, to varying degrees, less likely to benefit from inclusion into mainstream education than other children in Serbia. The price of exclusion from education paid by children, families, communities and nations is severe, and is counted in children's unrealized potential, poorer health and wellbeing, reduced lifelong income, higher rates of child marriage and under-age pregnancies, lost productivity and innovation.

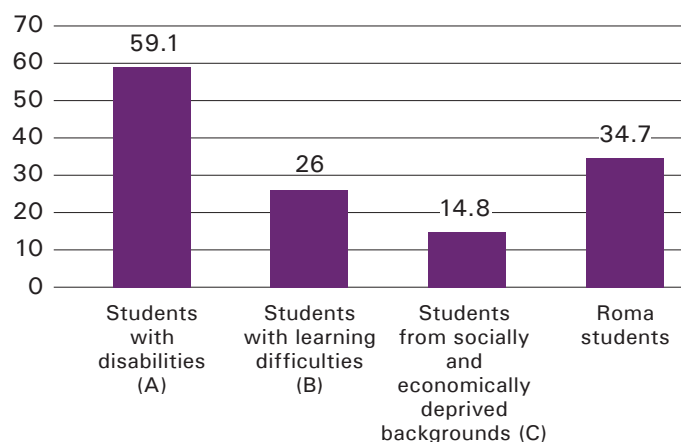
The most recent available data are available from MICS 2014, when primary school **enrolment** of children living in Roma settlements in was 69.1 per cent (boys 63 per cent, girls 76 per cent) and for

children living in the poorest households it was 91 per cent. Roma children's primary school **attendance** is significantly lower than among other children (85 per cent compared to 95.4 per cent for children from the poorest households and 98.5 per cent for the general population), while less than two-thirds of Roma children complete primary school (64 per cent)<sup>257</sup>.

It is also concerning that **Roma children are over-represented in special schools** (18 per cent) and special classes (32.7 per cent)<sup>258</sup>. The number of children attending special schools has reduced by 25.3 per cent since 2010. However, there are new forms of segregation emerging and there is evidence that a significant number of pupils attend special classrooms in mainstream primary schools, as shown in the below graph.

**Figure 17. Share of students from various vulnerable groups in classrooms for students with disabilities, 2016**

(Source: IPSOS, UNICEF, MoESTD, 2016)



Special classrooms in mainstream primary schools

<sup>256</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Primary Education', < [www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/oblasti/obrazovanje/osnovno-obrazovanje](http://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/oblasti/obrazovanje/osnovno-obrazovanje) >, accessed 30 May 2019.

<sup>257</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2005, 2010, 2014, UNICEF Serbia, Belgrade.

<sup>258</sup> IPSOS, UNICEF, MoESTD, 'Analysis of the quality of education in schools and classes for students with disabilities', Belgrade, 2016.

Children from poor families and Roma children encounter **substantial obstacles** concerning access to education, attendance, the quality of education they are offered and in their progression through the education system. Similar barriers may be faced by other groups of socially excluded children, such as

children on the move. As a result, many students fail to meet initial expectations and are then frequently directed into programmes and education plans intended for students with learning disabilities or they drop out from school.

	Obstacles
Access to education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdated network of preschool institutions and schools</li> <li>• Insufficient availability of information concerning enrolment and support measures for the most vulnerable</li> <li>• The perceived risk of segregated education</li> <li>• Language barriers</li> <li>• Economic, social family factors</li> </ul>
School attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of networking among bodies coordinating social assistance at the local level and unfulfilled obligations of the local authorities, e.g. regarding transportation to school.</li> <li>• A general lack of provision of the basic conditions for school attendance. For example, school meals, clothes and school supplies are not provided systematically to children living in poverty.</li> <li>• Peer discrimination and social isolation</li> <li>• Lack of value attributed to education in the family and community</li> <li>• The weak implementation of school-based mechanisms to identify children at risk of drop-out.</li> <li>• Weak cooperation between centres for social work and schools and the lack of defined implementation arrangements for ISC recommendations.</li> <li>• The lack of an integrated database on education limits reliable monitoring of school enrolment, class attendance, student attainment and progression by socio-economic status quintiles.</li> </ul>
Quality of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher standards of education for children at risk (e.g. engaging learning activities, well-trained teachers, remedial teaching, extracurricular activities, etc.) would need to be ensured through efficient use of resources at community level.</li> <li>• There is scope for introducing new ways of compensating for vulnerable children's adverse living conditions (e.g. parental education, libraries, information and communication technologies, etc.), although financial constraints are also apparent</li> <li>• Curricula and teaching methods do not promote inclusive learning and social tolerance</li> </ul>
Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grade repetition and/or below-average attainment, which limits vulnerable children's choice of secondary school or enrolment in university. This is particularly true for children from families that cannot afford additional education through private tuition or preparatory classes.<sup>259</sup></li> <li>• Some teachers still have negative attitudes toward inclusive education and lower expectations of students of the Roma minority.<sup>260</sup></li> <li>• Teaching and learning still do not correspond to modern educational concepts and the needs of diverse students which, together with insufficient system level support to students and schools, leads to students' under-achievement, drop-out and an unsatisfactory level of wellbeing.</li> </ul>

<sup>259</sup> Kovač-Cerović, Tinde et al., Policy Impact Analysis: Providing Additional Support to Students from Vulnerable Groups in Pre-University Education, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2013.

<sup>260</sup> MoESTD, 'Improvement of the Quality of Inclusive Education Based on Open Data', Belgrade, 2017.

An **evaluation** of the implementation of inclusive practices in the education system in Serbia (2016) finds that the inclusion policy has not achieved a significant move towards the elimination of the participation gap between the Roma and non-Roma children. The evaluation further finds that the inclusion policy has built a supporting “ecosystem” around the children of vulnerable groups, but this system does not work properly for the children in practice<sup>261</sup>.

**Conclusion:** To overcome the multiple barriers that children face, particularly in enrolment and school attendance, it is important to address the material deprivation they face as well as the social norms and attitudes that underpin failure at different stages. This may entail the need to work with both teachers and parents in novel ways, including through social and behavioural change communication, to systematically address each bottlenecks.

Since the introduction of inclusive education in 2009, the number of students in **special schools** decreased by 25.3 per cent (1,595 students)<sup>262</sup>, meaning that in the 2010/2011 school year, 1.09 per cent of the student population was educated in special schools, compared to 0.89 per cent 2018/2019. The structure of students in special schools has also changed since 2009, shifting from an approach that categorised children according the type of disability and excluded children with multiple disabilities towards greater inclusion of children with multiple disabilities. In 2018, around 35 per cent of children and students in special schools had multiple disabilities<sup>263</sup>.

A survey of pupils in special schools in 2018 found that among pupils with developmental disabilities, significantly more moved from mainstream schools to special schools (357 students), than from special schools to mainstream schools (21 pupils). The survey found no significant difference from the situation in 2014. It is evident that the greatest majority of children switch to schools for students with developmental disabilities when they transition to subject teaching — there is insufficient cooperation between subject teachers on individual education plans, and many subject teachers are more oriented towards the academic proficiency of pupils and lack competencies for teaching in diverse classrooms<sup>264</sup>.

Mainstream schools show an increase in the number of students educated according to an **individual education plan (IEP)** — an individualised plan of support to learning adapted to a child’s abilities. Official statistical data shows that the number of children educated based on IEPs increased from 4,826 (2014) to 8,332 for IEP1 (2017/2018) and from 3,018 (2014) to 5,025 (2017/2018) for IEP2. In total, only 2.12 per cent of students are educated based on an IEP, while it is estimated around 12 per cent of children need additional support<sup>265</sup>. There are also regional disparities in the number of children educated based on IEPs (for example 4.05 per cent in Zrenjanin and 0.58 per cent in Kraljevo)<sup>266</sup>, indicating differences in competencies of teachers to work in diverse classrooms.

While the new Law on Foundations of the Education System, 2017, introduces a number of improvements in regulating inclusive education, it also re-introduces special classes in regular schools, which is a step backwards compared to the earlier normative framework.

<sup>261</sup> Rado, P. et al., ‘Formative evaluation of implementation of inclusive practices in the education system in Serbia, 2009-2014’, Budapest, 2016. Available at <[www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_95026.html](http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_95026.html)>, accessed 2 September 2019.

<sup>262</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2018

<sup>263</sup> Institute for Improvement of Education, 2018

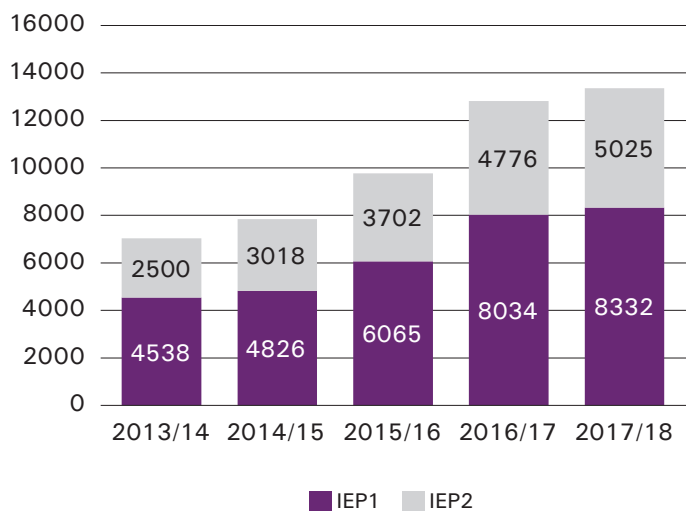
<sup>264</sup> Institute for Improvement of Education, Students in special schools and classrooms for students with developmental impairments and disabilities, 2018 (Unpublished research report, quoted in National report on inclusive education in the Republic of Serbia from 2015 to 2018, MoESTD and UNICEF, 2019)

<sup>265</sup> MoESTD, ‘Improvement of the Quality of Inclusive Education Based on Open Data, Report on Research Results’, Belgrade, 2017.

<sup>266</sup> MoESTD and UNICEF, ‘National report on inclusive education in the Republic of Serbia’ from 2015 to 2018, 2019, Belgrade.

**Figure 18. Number of pupils studying under IEP 1 and IEP2, by year, 2013/14-2017/18**

(Source: SORS, 2019)



A recent national report in 2019 summarises the **main achievements and challenges of inclusive education** to date, focusing on the period between 2015 and 2018:

1. The greatest progress was achieved in improving the normative framework for inclusive education and development of mechanisms and measures to support inclusion of vulnerable children in schools (Group for Social Inclusion within the Ministry of Education, Intersectoral Committees, Pedagogical Assistants etc.). Legislative changes however are not entirely followed through in practice. There are limitations in implementation mechanisms at the national, local and school level. At the local level there is a particularly striking lack of finances and capacities for supportive measures, while needs are increasing, especially in underdeveloped municipalities.
2. The sustainability of the established institutional and human resources at national, regional, local and school level to support inclusive education is weak due to insufficient staffing and project-based funding. The implementation of inclusive education measures requires system readiness

to provide funding that would enable equal availability of these services to all.

3. There is progress in acknowledging the value of evidence in decision-making, although there is further need to define indicators for monitoring the quality of inclusive education, and to collect data on children from vulnerable groups, so that equity of education can be monitored.
4. The education system has been open to innovations but has also struggled to accept them as systemic changes and ensure their financing so that they are made available to all children at scale.<sup>267</sup>

In recent years, the MoESTD took significant steps to include **refugee and migrant children** in the education system. Primary-school-age children accounted for a significant majority of those included in the education system, and their number varied between 464 in October 2017 and 373 in February 2018 (in line with the decreasing trend of children staying in Serbia). The highest **coverage of primary-school-age children** was recorded in December 2017 — 90 per cent of all registered refugee and migrant children were in education, while the lowest was in February 2018 at 80 per cent.

In 2017/18, 378 students (184 boys and 194 girls) and their families were returned from Western European countries under the **Readmission Agreement**. Most enrolled in the age appropriate class, while others enrolled in lower grades, based on the results of an assessment of their knowledge and abilities<sup>268</sup>.

<sup>267</sup> MoESTD and UNICEF, 'National report on inclusive education in the Republic of Serbia' from 2015 to 2018, 2019, Belgrade.

<sup>268</sup> MoESTD, 'Annual Progress Report for the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Development of Education 2020: Report for 2018, 2019', Belgrade.

**Conclusion:** The policy on inclusive education has successfully delivered on the primary school education of migrant children. The education system will need to continue ensuring the inclusiveness of education for all groups of vulnerable children. A stronger financial and human resource framework would be required for the same.

Primary schools provide an environment that is conducive for close monitoring of children's health status. Closer links could be established between the education and health system for regular and systematic observations of the status of a number of health indicators that are specific to school-aged children.

### Quality of education

Results from TIMSS 2015 show that fourth-graders from Serbia perform above the scale average. Nevertheless, these results also indicate that, among well performing countries, Serbia has the biggest percentage of students not reaching even the low international benchmark of mathematics achievement (9%) and science achievement (7%). The main evidence on the quality of the education process comes from the system of external evaluation of educational institutions. The results show that a quarter of primary and secondary schools do not meet the expected quality standards, with the biggest challenges in teaching and learning. They have shown the least success when it comes to teachers adjusting their work in class to the educational needs of the students, differentiated teaching combining different learning techniques and using student assessment procedures that are in the function of further learning.

TIMSS 2015 has shown that traditional, frontal teaching still prevails in mathematics as well in science classes where too often it happens that "the teacher explicitly explains new content while students read lessons from textbooks and memorize facts and

principles"<sup>269</sup>. With regard to the quality of teaching and learning in grades 5-8 of primary school, research shows that acquiring functional and applicable knowledge, stimulating higher order thinking processes and use of modern approaches of student assessment are fairly rare<sup>270</sup>.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>271</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Pay particular attention to the systematic inclusion of teaching of the Convention's principles and provisions, at all levels of the school curricula;
- Strengthen efforts to promote inclusive education for all children, particularly the most vulnerable, and ensure that adequate human, financial and technical support are available to implement the provisions outlined in the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System;
- Guarantee all children with disabilities the right to inclusive education in mainstream schools independent of parental consent and train and assign specialized teachers and professionals in integrated classes providing individual support and due attention to children with learning difficulties, and address the shortage of speech therapists and qualified professionals for children with mental and psychosocial disabilities;
- Further strengthen efforts to improve access to quality education in rural areas and in small towns, including access to preschool, secondary and higher education, particularly for vulnerable groups;

<sup>269</sup> Jablanović M., Gutvajn, N., Jakšić, I. TIMSS 2015 in Serbia, Institute of Pedagogical Research, Belgrade, 2017.

<sup>270</sup> Improving Educational Effectiveness of Primary Schools, [https://ieeps.edu.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Policy\\_brief\\_FINAL\\_2.pdf](https://ieeps.edu.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Policy_brief_FINAL_2.pdf)

<sup>271</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.



- Facilitate the participation and inclusion of Roma children in education at all levels, and raise awareness among teachers and staff members of psychological and pedagogical counselling centres on the culture of Roma people;
- Develop programmes, along with monitoring and evaluation of such programmes to reduce drop-out rates.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 4.1.1 | Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex   |
| 4.3.1 | Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex  |
| 4.4.1 | Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill  |
| 4.5.1 | Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated  |
| 4.6.1 | Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex  |
| 4.7.1 | Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment   |
| 4.a.1 | Proportion of schools with access to: (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions) |
| 4.c.1 | Proportion of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country  |

#### Key development partners, among others:

The **EU Delegation** has provided substantive funding for inclusive education practices. **UNICEF** provides technical assistance in implementing education reform.

# ADOLESCENCE IN SERBIA

## 21. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence and youth are complex periods of huge developmental changes, some of which are smooth and some abrupt, in every aspect of life. Improvement in cognitive functioning, emotional maturity and changes in social relations with peers and adults are accompanied by several important transitions in the life of young people: from school to secondary school and university or work, from the primary family to an independent life and starting a new family. All these new abilities, opportunities and challenges, together with new rights and obligations, make young people especially sensitive and vulnerable to diverse influences and unfavourable experiences. For girls and boys entering puberty, it means also often facing different challenges and social norms. For that reason, it is necessary to pay careful attention to the analysis of the situation, status and needs of the young generation. In this section, different aspects of young people's development in Serbia are explored, including their health, education and skills development, socio-economic situation and employment, youth participation and engagement.

### Definitions

According to the Law on Youth (2011)<sup>272</sup>, youth are defined as individuals 15 to 30 years of age. At the end of 2017, there was an estimated

1,268,702 youth 15 to 30 years of age in Serbia or approximately 18 per cent of the total population<sup>273</sup>.

For the purpose of this report, we propose the following definitions:

- Adolescents: 10 to 19 years
- Youth: 15 to 24 years
- Young people: 10 to 24 years

The estimated number of adolescents aged 10-19 years in Serbia in 2017 is 697,761 (9.9 per cent of the total population) and the number of youth 15-24 years of age is 749,666 (10.6 per cent). There are an estimated 1,091,826 young people aged 10-24 years (15.5 per cent)<sup>274</sup>.

### Strategic and institutional framework

In addition to the strategic and institutional framework for children, the key institutions responsible for the development of youth policies are the **Ministry of Sport and Youth** (since 2007) and its Sector for Youth (particularly the Department for Strategic, Normative, Legal and Operational-Analytical Activities)<sup>275</sup>, the Council for Youth, established in 2014 and tasked

<sup>272</sup> Pravna I Ekonomska Izdanja, 'Law on Youth'. Available at <[www.paragraf.rs/propisi\\_download/zakon\\_o\\_mladima.pdf](http://www.paragraf.rs/propisi_download/zakon_o_mladima.pdf)>, accessed on 2 September 2019.

<sup>273</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

<sup>274</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

<sup>275</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sport, 'Youth Sector', <[www.mos.gov.rs/o-ministarstvu/sektor-za-omladinu](http://www.mos.gov.rs/o-ministarstvu/sektor-za-omladinu)>, accessed 3 September 2019

with the advancement and coordination of youth policies and activities<sup>276</sup>, as well as the Provincial Secretariat for Sport and Youth (Vojvodina) and local youth offices. According to data from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in 2018 around 90 local self-governments had established youth councils, of which half were active, and 137 local self-government units had established a youth office. In 2016, a Network for Youth was established within the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SKGO), intended as a platform for exchanging services for youth between local governments, as well as a mechanism for creating and evaluating local youth policies.

The “**National Youth Strategy for the period from 2015 to 2025**” (NYS) was adopted in 2015<sup>277</sup> and is currently accompanied by an Action plan for Implementation of the National Youth Strategy from 2018 till 2020. It was previously accompanied by a three-year action plan for NYS implementation for the period from 2015 till 2017. which was evaluated<sup>278</sup>.

At a regional level, **RYCO** (Regional Youth Cooperation Office)<sup>279</sup> was established in 2016, functioning as an institutional mechanism founded by the six Western Balkans participants (WB6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\* (\* this does not preclude the status of Kosovo and is in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1244 and the opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo’s declaration of independence), Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The Regional Office is an institutional platform for cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experiences of youth, associations and institutions for youth from the Western Balkan region with the aim of responding to the real needs of youth, at the same time providing them an opportunity to develop and

advance, thus contributing to the overall development of the region.

Besides government institutions, there are several civic organizations for youth that act as partners in the planning and realization of youth policies, such as KOMS (Umbrella Organization of Youth Serbia)<sup>280</sup>, NAPOR (National Association of Practitioners of Youth Work)<sup>281</sup>, the National Association of Youth Offices<sup>282</sup> etc. In 2019, the city of Novi Sad was named the European youth capital and OPENS is an association of civil society organisations that are implementing a three-year programme for this in Novi Sad between 2018 and 2020, envisaged to include over half a million young people from across Europe.

According to the Law on Foundations of the Education System, **pupils’ parliaments** are formed in the last two grades of primary school and in secondary school, providing a platform for pupils’ participation in decision-making within the school and educational setting. They are not fully functional in all schools, but do provide a useful medium of two-way communication with school management through which pupils are provided a voice and consulted on school policies.

### Public financing

In 2018, approximately 220,000,000 RSD (cca US\$2.1 million) of the state budget (Ministry of Youth and Sports) was spent on support to local self-governments and civil society and other organizations towards projects and policies targeting youth<sup>283</sup>. A similar level of expenditure was reported for 2017<sup>284</sup>.

<sup>276</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sport, ‘Youth Council’, <[www.mos.gov.rs/savet-za-mlade-3](http://www.mos.gov.rs/savet-za-mlade-3)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>277</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sport, National Youth Strategy 2015-2025, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>278</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sport, ‘Evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan of the National Youth Strategy 2015-2017.’ <[https://www.mos.gov.rs/public/ck/uploads/files/lzvestaj%20o%20Evaluaciji%20AP%20NSM%202015-2017%20final\(1\).pdf](https://www.mos.gov.rs/public/ck/uploads/files/lzvestaj%20o%20Evaluaciji%20AP%20NSM%202015-2017%20final(1).pdf)>, accessed 5 November 2019.

<sup>279</sup> Regional Youth Cooperation Office, ‘Welcome to RYCO’, <<https://www.rycowb.org>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

<sup>280</sup> KOMS, <<http://koms.rs/>>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>281</sup> NAPOR, <<http://www.napor.net/sajt/index.php/sr-yu/>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

<sup>282</sup> Asocijacija KZM, ‘Nacionalna asocijacija Kancelarija za mlade’, <[www.asocijacijakzm.org/](http://www.asocijacijakzm.org/)>, accessed 3 September 2019.

<sup>283</sup> MoYS, Information bulletin, Belgrade, 2019. Available at: <[www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/sport/inspekcija/%20D0%BE%20D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%83-31.05.2019.%20D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0.pdf](http://www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/sport/inspekcija/%20D0%BE%20D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%83-31.05.2019.%20D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0.pdf)>, accessed 25 March 2019.

<sup>284</sup> MoYS, Information bulletin, Belgrade, 2018. Available at: <[www.mos.gov.rs/public/ck/uploads/images/2018\\_03\\_31\\_-Informator%20o%20radu%20pdf-31\\_03\\_2018-za%20objavlivanje\(4\).pdf](http://www.mos.gov.rs/public/ck/uploads/images/2018_03_31_-Informator%20o%20radu%20pdf-31_03_2018-za%20objavlivanje(4).pdf)>, accessed 2019.

A recent study of public expenditures on youth policies at local level shows that one in five local self-governments do not have any spending on youth policies, and that only a quarter spend more than 5 per cent of their budget on youth. In 2017, local governments spent only 0.17 per cent of their budgets on youth. A further analysis showed that there was a decrease of planned spending on youth from 3.26 per cent in 2017 to 1.8 per cent in 2018. One of the reasons for this could be an overall decrease in local self-government budgets in 2018 (1.7 per cent decrease compared to 2017)<sup>285</sup>.

**Conclusion:** Budget expenditures for youth programmes are exceptionally low, particularly at local level and this hampers youth participation, motivation and decision-making.

### Data on adolescents and youth

Although the evaluation of the previous National Youth Strategy<sup>286</sup> indicated the need to continuously collect data on youth through research on the situation and needs of young people, this has not yet been achieved. Information about young people in Serbia is sporadic, partial, and mostly generated as a result of individual and ad-hoc studies.

**Conclusion:** In the coming years, gaps in availability and use of data on young people will need to continue being addressed in a systematic manner, with a potentially important role for the official statistical system.

## 22. ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING

### Nutrition

The majority (83 per cent) of school-aged children (12-16 years old), both boys and girls, belong to the group of the normally nourished. As in most countries in transition, **obesity** of children and adolescents in Serbia is on the increase. In 2018, approximately 15 per cent of school-aged children were obese or over-nourished, with younger boys (fifth grade) showing the highest share of obesity and overweight.

Higher obesity levels can be tied to poor eating habits — a review of the **nutrition habits of young people** shows that less than 20 per cent of adolescents aged 13 to 15 years eat fruit at least once a day, while only around 25 per cent of them eat vegetables once a day. Additionally, more than 40 per cent of adolescents consume sweets at least once a day, while one quarter of them eat candies several times during the day. Almost one-fifth of adolescents drink soft drinks more than once a day. With age, the incidence of consumption of these beverages increases<sup>287</sup>.

There is also noticeable spending on **advertising** for non-alcoholic beverages, sweets and snacks.

There is a difference in the **self-perception of body appearance** between girls and boys: girls more often think they have an overweight body mass and state that they are on a diet or that they should lose weight. Compared to girls, boys are more likely to think they should gain body mass. Around 15 per cent of adolescents are on a diet or doing something to lose weight, girls more often than boys<sup>288</sup>.

<sup>285</sup> Divac Foundation, 'How much local governments invest in implementation of youth policy'. Available at [www.divac.com/upload/document/ybh4wbt\\_-\\_koliko\\_je\\_ulazu\\_u\\_sprovodjenje\\_omladinsk.pdf](http://www.divac.com/upload/document/ybh4wbt_-_koliko_je_ulazu_u_sprovodjenje_omladinsk.pdf)

<sup>286</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Serbia, UNFPA, Evaluation of the National Youth Strategy (2008-2014) in the Republic of Serbia and Action Plan (2009-2014), Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>287</sup> Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Health Behaviour in School Age Children, 2018. Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade Serbia 2018. Available at: <http://www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2018osnovniRezultatiIstrazivanjaHBSC.pdf>

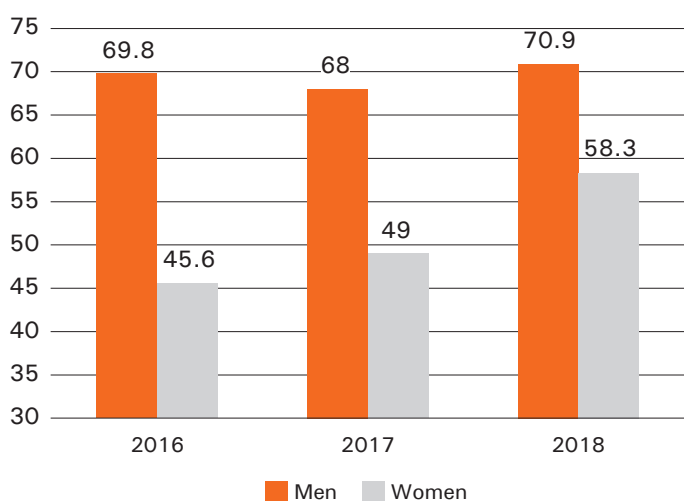
<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

**Conclusion:** Obesity and nutrition habits of youth are a particular health concern that are among other things fuelled by a strong advertising industry and physical inactivity. They need to be tackled through comprehensive behaviour change communication, greater availability of healthy food alternatives and role-modelling of active youth lifestyles. Another opportunity lies in the introduction of health education in primary and secondary education, as a part of the physical education and healthy lifestyles curriculum.

## Sport

According to recent research, about one half of young people regularly engage in sports activities. Boys are more engaged in sports than girls (57 and 28 per cent, respectively)<sup>289,290</sup>.

**Figure 19.** Percentage of youth (15-24 years) that engage in sports on a regular basis, 2016-2018  
(Source: NinaMedia Research, 2018)



<sup>289</sup> MoYS, Mental Health of Youth, Belgrade 2013, Available at <[www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/test/Mentalno%20zdravlje%20mladih.pdf](http://www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/test/Mentalno%20zdravlje%20mladih.pdf)>

<sup>290</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

Additionally, adolescents of lower socio-economic status (SES) engage in sports less often than their peers from the families with higher SES<sup>291</sup>. Regional disparities between young people engaging in recreational sports are also evident, with fewer youth engaged in recreational sports in South and Eastern Serbia, and Šumadija and Western Serbia<sup>292</sup>.

The rate of young people engaged in sports declines with age. The physical activity index of young people aged 15-30 years is 12.2 per cent (the number of young people engaged in different forms of sports activities out of the total number of the young population). By comparison, the physical activity index for children up to 14 years is 30 per cent<sup>293</sup>.

Out of the 31 per cent of young people (14-29 years) who reported having a role-model in life, approximately one in five named a role-model coming from the field of sports<sup>294</sup>.

**Conclusion:** Sports and physical activity are prerequisites not only of good physical health and stature but also a means of positive socialising and source for development of virtues. Sports activities also need to be used as an important medium for the social inclusion of children from vulnerable groups.

## Mental health

A survey on the health status of people in Serbia indicated that 4.1 per cent of the total population display symptoms of depression<sup>295</sup>. Nevertheless, mental health is a subject that is not easily spoken about, and there is significant social stigma attached to seeking professional help for mental health.

<sup>291</sup> MoYS, Mental Health of Youth, Belgrade 2013.

<sup>292</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sports, based on Ninamedia survey.

<sup>293</sup> MoYS, Analysis of physical activity of citizens in the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>294</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

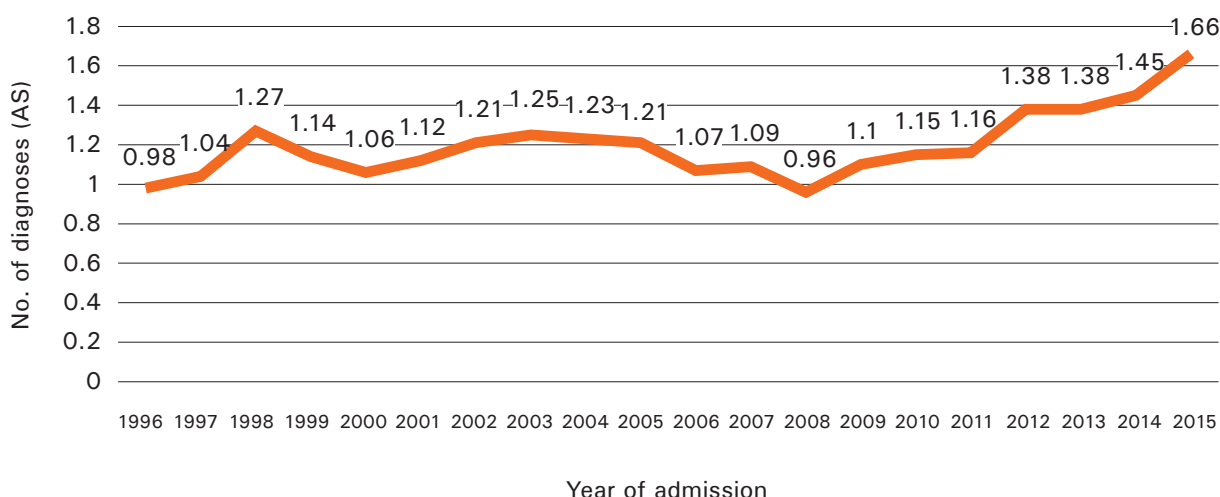
<sup>295</sup> The global average is 4.4%, source: <<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/254610/WHO-MSD-MER-2017.2-eng.pdf>>



A recent analysis on inpatient psychiatric care for children and adolescents in Serbia shows that the number of children hospitalised for mental health reasons has been steadily increasing, and that along with an increase in their number, the number of diagnoses per child patient is also increasing<sup>296</sup>.

**Figure 20. Number of diagnoses per patient, 1996-2015**

(Source: Pejovic-Milovancevic, M. et al., 2018)



In 2019, the total number of specialists for child and adolescent psychiatry is 32, roughly one per 40,000 children in Serbia, clearly insufficient to cover existing needs. The total number of doctors working on young people's mental health is 47.

There are no epidemiological studies on the mental health of children and adolescents in Serbia.

In a self-evaluation of school-aged children's health in 2018, a bad mood was reported at least once a week by 10.8 per cent of pupils, and nervousness by 21.9 per cent, with significantly higher percentages of

girls reporting these difficulties<sup>297</sup>. A survey on mental health of 16 to 17-year-old adolescents in 2013 indicated that about 16 per cent of those adolescents can be identified as vulnerable in terms of mental health, meaning they would need psychosocial help and support<sup>298</sup>.

Few reports point out that mental health problems are the third most common cause of health interventions (after respiratory diseases and physical injuries) among the refugee and migrant population. The most frequent mental health problems encountered include post-

<sup>296</sup> Pejovic-Milovancevic, M. et al., 'Inpatient care in Serbia: trends in hospitalization and diagnostics over time', *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 2018. Available at <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-018-1191-3>>

<sup>297</sup> Institute of Public Health of Serbia, *Health Behaviour in School Age Children*, 2018. Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade Serbia 2018. Available at: <<http://www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2018osnovniRezultatilstrazivanjaHBSC.pdf>>

<sup>298</sup> MoYS, "Support to mental health of youth in Serbia" project, Belgrade, 2013.

traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety symptoms. In terms of psychological vulnerability, there are also gender-related differences. A recent survey shows that 82.3 per cent of female refugees and migrants are psychologically vulnerable, while this percentage is somewhat lower for the male population at 63.9 per cent<sup>299</sup>. No specific age disaggregated data is available but a high majority people on the move are children and youth.

A new strategy on mental health that gives added attention to the mental health of children and adolescents is in the process of adoption.

**Conclusion:** The mental health of youth is an emerging area of concern. At the broader, social level, the promotion of mental health and psychological prevention is needed. Bearing in mind that most primary and secondary schools have psychological and pedagogical services, by strengthening these services in schools, stronger support and help for teachers could be provided to recognize the psychological problems of young people and provide early, timely and adequate interventions. This service could also support students, especially those from vulnerable groups, to handle the challenges of everyday school life more successfully. Additionally, support and early help for students in distress can be found in empowering peers as helpers and as a source of support for these students to seek psychological help. Establishing a network of adolescent mental health counselling units could further strengthen the response of the health system. Opportunities for sports and physical activities for youth also need to be strengthened.

## Suicide

The WHO has indicated that suicide is among the top three causes of death for youth between the ages of 15-29 years in many countries<sup>300</sup>. Serbia has 15.6 suicides per 100,000 citizens ranking it 26<sup>th</sup> out of 176 countries<sup>301</sup>. In 2017, the mortality rate due to suicide was 2.87 person for adolescents aged 15-18 years and 5.74 person for youth aged 19-24 years. The trends in mortality rates of youth due to suicide over the past five years are not clear, however the data do show a higher incidence of suicides in males than females, and in urban compared to rural populations of young people. The incidence of suicide is higher in the regions of Vojvodina and Belgrade than in the rest of the country<sup>302</sup>.

**Figure 21. Mortality rates due to suicide (number of suicides per 100,000) in 2017**  
(Source: SORS, 2017)



<sup>299</sup> Jovana Bjekić, "Mental health of refugees and migrants", Red Cross of Serbia, Belgrade, 2018. Available at: <[www.redcross.org.rs/media/5598/mental-health-of-refugees-and-migrants.pdf](http://www.redcross.org.rs/media/5598/mental-health-of-refugees-and-migrants.pdf)>

<sup>300</sup> WHO, Preventing suicide: A global imperative, WHO, Geneva, 2014.

<sup>301</sup> World Population Review, 'Suicide Rate By Country 2019', <<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/suicide-rate-by-country/>>, accessed 1 April 2019.

<sup>302</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

A national SOS-line for suicide prevention was set up in 2019, while several civil society organisations across the country also offer counselling and support in such cases.

**Conclusion: Peer support, social networks and friendly counselling referral pathways may provide meaningful alternatives to youth at risk. Tools for increasing mental resilience could also be made more readily available through both formal and informal channels.**

## Smoking, alcohol consumption and other forms of addictive behaviours

### Smoking

Several research studies (from 2014 to 2017) have indicated that more than **10 per cent of school-age children smoke** (in 2017, 11 per cent — at least once in the last 30 days)<sup>303</sup>, although high school children smoke far more (23.6 per cent)<sup>304</sup>. More than half of school-age children who smoke do it every day<sup>305</sup>, while 30 per cent of 16 to 17-year-olds smoke at least one cigarette a month<sup>306</sup>.

The age when children in Serbia start to smoke is reducing. A significant proportion (14.9 per cent) of school-age children who ever tried a cigarette did so at the age of seven or earlier<sup>307</sup>. The majority have had

their first cigarette when they were 14 and 15 years old (38 per cent), more girls than boys. More than 6 per cent of pupils use electronic cigarettes, and 9 per cent of them smoke narghiles. The percentage of smokers among pupils (11 per cent) is in slight decline since 2003 (12.8 per cent)<sup>308</sup>.

Although the Law on Tobacco prohibits the sale of tobacco products to persons under the age of 18, a high proportion of young people among those who smoke (82.6 per cent) were not prevented from buying them. Adolescents who smoke do that most often at social events (34.4 per cent) and in public places (23.1 per cent). Based on the statement that the first thing they want to do in the morning is to have a cigarette, more than half of all pupils who smoke show signs of smoking addiction<sup>309</sup>.

Although prohibited by the Law on Advertising, 4.6 per cent of pupils stated that representatives of the **tobacco industry** had offered them free tobacco products. A significant percentage of pupils (40.4 per cent) noticed advertisements and promotion of tobacco products at the point of sale<sup>310</sup>.

### Alcohol consumption

Alcohol consumption is far more prevalent than smoking in Serbia. Almost every other pupil aged 13-16 years (44.6 per cent) has tried an **alcoholic drink**, while 31 per cent of them had alcohol in the past month. Male and older pupils drink more often than female and younger pupils. One in five school aged children experienced heavy drinking at least once during their life, significantly more boys than girls. One in five pupils in the first grade of secondary school experienced heavy drinking within the last month<sup>311</sup>. Another survey reports 23.3 per cent of 16 to 17-year-olds drinking heavily once or multiple times

<sup>303</sup> Jovanovic, V., Global Youth Tobacco Survey, 2017, Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade 2018 and Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Health Behaviour in School Age Children, 2018. Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade Serbia 2018. Available at: <<http://www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2018osnovniRezultatilstrazivanjaHBSC.pdf>>

<sup>304</sup> Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Health Behaviour in School Age Children, 2018. Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade Serbia 2018. Available at: <<http://www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2018osnovniRezultatilstrazivanjaHBSC.pdf>>

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> MoYS, Mental Health of Youth, Belgrade 2013, Available at <[www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/test/Mentalno%20ozdravlje%20mladih.pdf](http://www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/test/Mentalno%20ozdravlje%20mladih.pdf)>

<sup>307</sup> Dr. Verica Jovanovic, Global Youth Tobacco Survey, 2017, Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade 2018. Available at: <[www.batut.org.rs/download/izdvajamo/Gyts%202017.pdf](http://www.batut.org.rs/download/izdvajamo/Gyts%202017.pdf)>

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Health Behaviour in School Age Children, 2018. Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade Serbia 2018. Available at: <<http://www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/2018osnovniRezultatilstrazivanjaHBSC.pdf>>

within one month<sup>312</sup>. The consumption of alcohol with energy drinks is fairly common — every fourth 16 to 17-year-old consumed at least one alcoholic drink mixed with some energy drink over the past 12 months, with no gender differences<sup>313</sup>.

### Other forms of addictive behaviours

When it comes to **cannabis**, 10.6 per cent of secondary school pupils in first grade have used it at least once<sup>314</sup>. A similar percentage is found in the 16-17 and 14-29 year age group<sup>315</sup>. Approximately between one and two per cent of 16 to 17-year-olds report having consumed other types of drugs (ecstasy, heroin, cocaine etc.) within the last 12 months<sup>316</sup>, while a survey of 15-30 year-olds from 2016 indicates 4 to 5 per cent<sup>317</sup>. More than half of young people in the same age group think it is easy to procure psychoactive substances at parties, in clubs, or places close to them.

The consumption of a **tranquilizer without a doctor's prescription** is also quite common. In a survey of 16 to 17-year-olds in 2013, 9.6 per cent stated that they consumed a medication without a doctor's prescription<sup>318</sup>, while in another survey among 15-30 year-olds in 2016, 5.2 per cent stated they used tranquilizers and 1.4 per cent used them often or daily<sup>319</sup>.

Twelve per cent of 16 to 17-year-olds report having at least once betted in large amounts. Boys report having betted more frequently than girls. One in 10 boys had found themselves in a situation where they

had to hide their **betting** amount from others. Those who bet are more likely to report other forms of risk and problematic behaviour such as violent behaviour, conflicts with their social surroundings etc. and are more likely to come from the group of adolescents with mental health vulnerabilities<sup>320</sup>. While they are prohibited from the vicinity of schools by law, in practice there have been reported cases of betting parlours located within less than the prescribed distance from schools (200 m).

With the aim of establishing efficient and effective intersectoral collaboration in prevention of addictive behaviours among children and youth, a **Commission for Combatting Addiction in Schools** was formed in June 2018 (comprised of representatives of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice). The Commission adopted an operational plan based on which it formed teams and in August 2018 organised training of their members for education of pupils, their parents and teachers in all schools in Serbia.

**Conclusion: Stricter application of laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol and cigarettes to minors and the control of pharmacies on selling of medicines to young people without prescription is needed. Also, it is necessary to implement stricter control of betting parlours and places where young people go out, in order to make drugs less available.**

### Children in conflict with the law

According to official statistics, there were 3,465 juvenile criminal reports and around 1,633 convictions in Serbia in 2017. Most reports and convictions were for boys<sup>321</sup>.

<sup>312</sup> MoYS, Mental Health of Youth, Belgrade 2013.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Health Behaviour in School Age Children, 2018. Institute of Public Health of Serbia, Belgrade Serbia 2018.

<sup>315</sup> MoYS, Mental Health of Youth, Belgrade 2013 and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>316</sup> MoYS, Mental Health of Youth, Belgrade 2013.

<sup>317</sup> MoYS, Survey on the position and needs of youth, 2016, NinaMedia Research, Belgrade 2016.

<sup>318</sup> MoYS, Mental Health of Youth, Belgrade 2013, Available at <[www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/test/Mentalno%20zdravlje%20mladih.pdf](http://www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/test/Mentalno%20zdravlje%20mladih.pdf)>

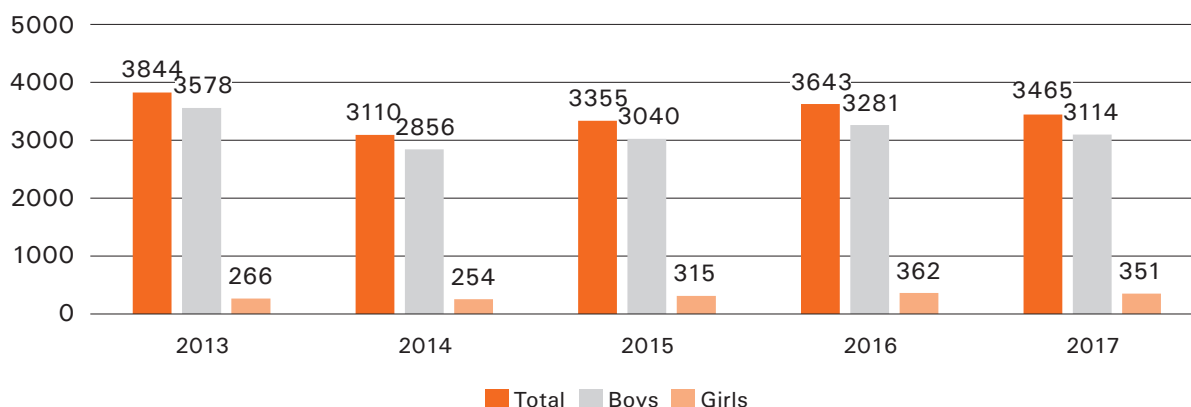
<sup>319</sup> MoYS, Survey on the position and needs of youth, 2016, Nina Media Research, Belgrade 2016.

<sup>320</sup> MoYS, Mental Health of Youth, Belgrade 2013, Available at <[www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/test/Mentalno%20zdravlje%20mladih.pdf](http://www.mos.gov.rs/public/documents/upload/test/Mentalno%20zdravlje%20mladih.pdf)>

<sup>321</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

**Figure 22. Number of juvenile criminal reports by gender, 2013-2017**

(Source: SORS, 2018)

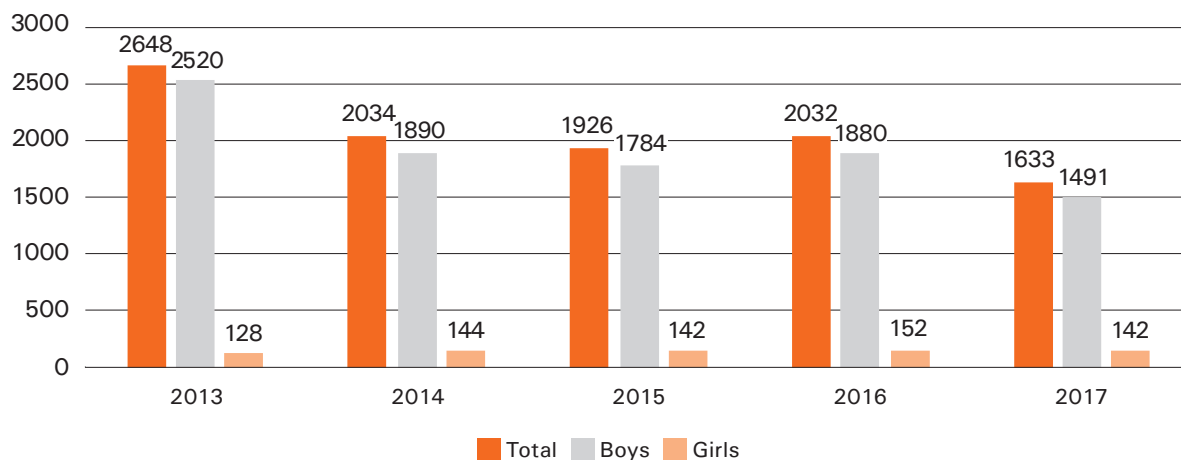


The trends in the number of reports and convictions since 2013 are not linear but are in decline overall (9.9 per cent decrease in reports since 2013). For juvenile criminal reports there is a small but continuing

increase in the number of girls (from 6.9 per cent in 2013 to 10.1 per cent in 2017). In cases where crimes are committed by juvenile offenders, 30 per cent of all victims are children below 18 years.

**Figure 23. Number of sentenced juvenile offenders by gender, 2013-2017**

(Source: SORS, 2018)

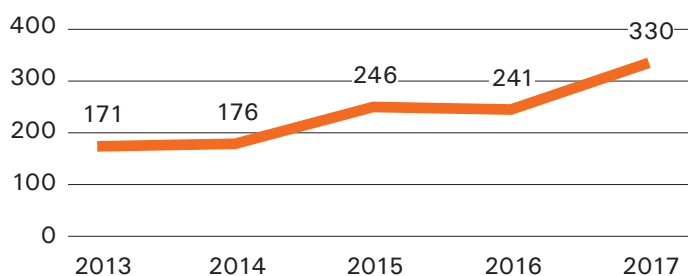




The application of diversion measures is on the rise (from 4 per cent in 2013 to 9.5 per cent in 2017), although there is scope for further increase. These measures could also be applied in an earlier phase, before a criminal or court procedure is initiated.

**Figure 24. Number of diversion measures applied for juvenile offending, 2013-2017**

(Source: Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2018)



According to data from the social protection system, the proportion of juvenile offenders (14-15 years old) in conflict with the law has been increasing in recent years; in 2013, 44 per cent of all juvenile offenders were children below 16 years, rising to 48 per cent in 2017. There is also an increase in the number of children with behavioural problems (under 14 years) registered by enters for Social Welfare, more than doubling since 2012 up to 1,195 in 2017<sup>322</sup>.

On the other hand, according to data from the Ministry of Interior, in the last five years, there is a decline in the number of crimes and juvenile offenders. Juvenile offending comprises 6.2 to 6.6 per cent of all crimes. On average, around 6,500 crimes by 3,500 juveniles are recorded. A little under a third are committed by juvenile offenders on the territory of Belgrade, around 35 per cent on the territory of Vojvodina and another 35 per cent in 19 other police districts (mainly in the south east of the country). Elder minors comprise 57 per cent, younger minors 33 per cent and children

under 14 comprise 11 per cent. Female juvenile offenders comprise between 6 and 9 per cent.

Children in Serbia that come into conflict with the law continue to find themselves in intimidating circumstances and are subjected to proceedings that are commonly too long, and in which the *best interests of the child* are not the primary consideration. Moreover, the need for the juvenile offender to make positive changes in their lives through supportive interventions is often overlooked. Increased application of diversionary measures is particularly important for socially excluded and vulnerable children, who are more likely to come into conflict with the law than other children.

Social protection institutions have highlighted that the failure to provide adequate training and financing has undermined the proper implementation of diversionary schemes. The Republic Institute for Social Protection highlighted in its 2016 report that the increasing use of diversionary measures creates additional workload for centres for social work (the Guardianship Authority), including the need to create community resources for the implementation of diversion orders and develop capacity for sending, tracking and reporting on the fulfilment of orders, cooperating with services providers, as well as children and parents. Further, it has been noted that community work programmes, which are the most frequently implemented type of diversionary measure, often lack adequate individual support by trained professionals. Prosecutors and judges across the country have also highlighted the need to improve the quality and timeliness of guardianship reports provided by local centres for social work.

**Conclusion: It is vital to develop and pilot tailored community-based interventions for children under 14 years, to avert the further increase in numbers of juvenile offenders. It is crucial to continue applying diversionary measures at all stages of proceedings, and to continue reducing the duration of juvenile justice proceedings, as well as to fill**

<sup>322</sup> Republic Institute for Social Protection, 'ИЗВЕШТАЈ О РАДУ ЦЕНТАРА ЗА СОЦИЈАЛНИ РАД У 2017.', 2018.

the responsibility and financing gaps between the judicial and social protection systems.

## Housing

In 2017, Serbia had the highest overcrowding rate and second highest housing cost overburden rate (where the total housing costs represent more than 40 per cent of disposable income) of youth aged 15-29 years in Europe.

Most young people (15-30 years) depend on their parents (59.1 per cent). Most of those who are dependent on their parents cite financial reasons (61.3 per cent)<sup>323</sup>. In 2017, youth aged 15-30 years on average reported starting to live in independent accommodation when they turned 22 years, while in 2018 they reported starting to live in independent accommodation at 24 years and achieving financial independence at 23 years<sup>324</sup>.

Another study shows that only 24 per cent of young adults (18-29 years) live independently. Marriage is usually the trigger for independent living. Out of those who still live with their parents, 31 per cent would live independently if they had the financial means although 45 per cent of them report being fully independent in their decision-making. While co-habitation with parents mitigates the negative effects of a 'frozen transition' on youth, families are thus effectively bearing the responsibility of a welfare state. This may be lowering the expectations of youth from the state and also reducing their own agency in bringing about social change, in addition to introducing certain demographic risks<sup>325</sup>.

Although subventions for youth housing were anticipated in the National Youth Strategy, these have not yet materialised. Bank credits remain a distant prospect for many young people who struggle with low wages in the early stages of their career.

**Conclusion: Housing is one of several critical conditions of independent living for youth. Support should be provided including through new models and co-living spaces to enable youth a wider spectrum of opportunities.**

## Leaving alternative care

Adolescents (15-17 years) comprise 15 per cent of children separated from their families in 2017. The total number of youth (18-25 years) in alternative care increased from 1,496 in 2013 to 1,574 in 2016<sup>326</sup>. Similar to children 0-18 years, the number of youth in residential care has been decreasing, although at a much slower pace (from 699 to 641, 8.3 per cent). At the same time, the number of youth in foster care increased (from 797 to 933, 17 per cent) thus contributing to decreasing the share of youth in residential care from 47 per cent in 2013 to 41 per cent in 2016 within the total number of youth in formal care.

In 2017, only four youth from specialized residential institutions for disability left care and started living independently, compared to 27 from 'regular' child homes and an estimated 200-250 from foster care<sup>327</sup>. There is a positive trend in child-family reunification for those in foster care — the number of children going back from foster care to their birth families increased by 46 per cent from 2013 to 2016<sup>328</sup>. It is

<sup>323</sup> NinaMedia Research, Survey on the position and needs of youth, 2016, NinaMedia Research, Belgrade 2016. Available at <[www.mos.gov.rs/public/ck/uploads/files/Istrazivanje%20polozaja%20i%20potreba%20mladih%20teren%20decembar%202016\\_ENG%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.mos.gov.rs/public/ck/uploads/files/Istrazivanje%20polozaja%20i%20potreba%20mladih%20teren%20decembar%202016_ENG%20(2).pdf)>

<sup>324</sup> Data provided by Ministry of Youth and Sports, based on Survey on the position and needs of youth, 2016, NinaMedia Research, Belgrade.

<sup>325</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>326</sup> Transmonee, 'Monitoring the situation of children and women in Europe and Central Asia', <<http://transmonee.org/database/>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

<sup>327</sup> Estimation based on data provided by Centres for foster care adoption (CFCA) — in 2017, a total of 124 moved to independent living, taking into account that CFCA cover 50% of all children in foster care.

<sup>328</sup> Transmonee, 'Monitoring the situation of children and women in Europe and Central Asia', <<http://transmonee.org/database/>>, accessed 2 September 2019.

possible that the foster care arrangement provides a better framework for working with birth families, but also this may be due to the most vulnerable children with the most complex problems usually being placed in residential care.

The high majority of unaccompanied and separated children in Serbia are either in residential care or in an asylum and reception centre, and almost 100 per cent of them are above 15 years old. No data is available on their continuum of care and support after leaving these accommodation modalities.

To understand the trends of leaving alternative care, better quality data is required. The quality and timeliness of leaving-care programmes would also require additional analysis, particularly to understand the struggles and insecurities children face and the coping strategies they use during that period.

**Conclusion: Substantive and timely supported living arrangements for children in alternative care at the time of their departure from care are an important requirement. Similar schemes could be considered for supported independent living of children on the move.**

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>329</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Community based mental health services are made readily available and that steps are taken to strengthen preventive work, particularly in the home environment and care centres. It further recommends that the number of child psychiatrists and psychologists be increased;

- Develop comprehensive, age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health, including information on family planning and contraceptives, the dangers of early pregnancy and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases;
- Ensure unimpeded access to sexual and reproductive health services, including confidential counselling and modern contraception for adolescent girls and boys;
- Address the incidence of drug use by children and adolescents by, inter alia, providing children and adolescents with accurate and objective information as well as life skills education on preventing substance abuse (including tobacco and alcohol), and develop accessible and youth-friendly drug dependence treatment and harm reduction services.
- Expeditiously establish specialized juvenile court facilities and procedures with adequate human, technical and financial resources, and ensure that specialized judges continue to receive appropriate training;
- Ensure the provision of qualified and free legal aid to children in conflict with the law at an early stage of the procedure and throughout the legal proceedings;
- Ensure that alternative measures to detention, such as diversion, probation, mediation, counselling, or community service, are fully implemented wherever possible, and ensure that detention is used as a last resort and for the shortest possible period of time and that it is reviewed on a regular basis with a view to withdrawing it;
- Take measures to harmonize the Criminal Procedure Code and the Code on Juvenile Crime Offenders and Criminal Protection of Juveniles and to exclude the possibility of questioning particularly vulnerable witnesses;
- Expedite the establishment of child sensitive procedures and ensure interviews are conducted in

<sup>329</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.

an appropriate manner, in the absence of the accused, and by adequately trained judicial staff to prevent re-victimization and traumatization of children.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- 1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable
- 3.3.1 Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations
- 3.4.2 Suicide mortality rate
- 3.5.1 Coverage of treatment interventions (pharmacological, psychosocial and rehabilitation and aftercare services) for substance use disorders
- 3.5.2 Harmful use of alcohol, defined according to the national context as alcohol per capita consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year in litres of pure alcohol
- 3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods
- 3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10-14 years; aged 15-19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group
- 3.a.1 Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older
- 3.c.1 Health worker density and distribution
- 5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex
- 5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education
- 16.1 3 Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months
- 16.1 4 Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live

#### Key development partners, among others:

**UNFPA** is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency and supports: enhancing gender equality and combatting gender-based violence; strengthening access and quality to family planning and reproductive health services for all; data analysis and population projections and ageing. **UNODC** supports drug demand reduction programmes. **UNOPS**, through the 2018 IPA, will support social housing and active inclusion. **WHO** is engaged in strengthening health systems for prevention and control of non-communicable diseases; full implementation of International Health Regulations (IHR); and enhancing country response in emergency situations. **UNICEF** provides technical supports in the social welfare and judicial reforms for the benefit of children. **OSCE** assists in the reform the judiciary and the prison system. A new round of the **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM)** is expected in Serbia from 2019-2021.

## 23. EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

Among European countries that measure the indicator of overall life satisfaction, the 16-24 year age group in Serbia currently has the lowest levels in Europe, after Bulgaria<sup>330</sup>.

### Secondary education

In the 2018/19 school year, pupils were enrolled in 506 regular upper secondary schools (454 public and 52 private schools). Regular upper secondary schools were attended by 252,108 pupils, i.e. 124,574 females (49.4 per cent) and 127,534 males (50.6 per cent). Most pupils were enrolled in and attended public schools (98 per cent) and approximately 2 per cent of pupils attended private schools. Around 66 per cent of pupils who chose private secondary school were from the Belgrade region and about 27 per cent were from the Vojvodina region, with only 7 per cent from the southern Serbia regions. In 2017, the **transition rate** from primary to secondary school was 99.3 per cent (no difference by gender)<sup>331</sup>.

In 2016/17 the secondary school **attendance rate** was 89.8 per cent. These figures consider only full-time secondary education students. Participation in secondary education is much lower among children from **vulnerable groups**, i.e. the poorest families (68.2 per cent) and Roma (22 per cent, only 15 per cent of girls)<sup>332</sup>. Only between 8 to 16 per cent of refugee and migrant children of secondary school age were included in education in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years<sup>333</sup>. In 2018, schools/classes for pupils with disabilities were attended by 1,993

students, 768 females (38.5 per cent) and 1,225 males (61.5 per cent)<sup>334</sup>. Barriers to enrolment and completion for vulnerable groups are similar to those they face in primary school, although some of the challenges in the form of social norms increase, particularly for Roma girls (child marriage, adolescent pregnancies, perceived gender roles etc.).

Around 25 per cent of students attended **gymnasiums and art schools** (gymnasiums focus on social and natural sciences, while art schools focus on music, visual arts and ballet; both last for four years). Vocational schools, which offer programmes lasting 2 to 4 years and focus on providing skills for work and/or further education<sup>335</sup>, were attended by around 75 per cent of pupils, with more than 80 per cent attending four-year programmes<sup>336</sup>.

In the 2017/18 school year, 56.3 per cent of girls enrolled in **four-year VET programs** (65 per cent of total pupils), and their completion rate<sup>337</sup> was 90.2 per cent. Data also indicate that 8.2 per cent of girls (13.8 per cent of total pupils) enrolled into **three-year VET programs**, with a completion rate of 81.2 per cent.

Given the prolonged secondary education reform and reform of the VET schools, their inherited **school network** has also not changed and in many places the network of VET schools does not reflect the labour market needs. Hence youth from these areas have to choose between enrolling in schools in their vicinity which do not lead to employment, or moving away from home depending on their means, where more attractive schools can be found. This choice can be particularly painful for youth from poor families.

<sup>334</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

<sup>335</sup> MoESTD, 'Education in Serbia: A brief description of structure of preschool (preparatory programme), primary and Secondary education system in Serbia', Available at: <www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Lieflet-Sistem-obrazovanja-u-Rep.Srbiji-1.pdf>

<sup>336</sup> Center for Education Policy, SORS data generated for preparation of 'Feasibility Study of Secondary Education in Republic of Serbia', Belgrade, 2019.

<sup>337</sup> Center for Education Policy, SORS data generated for preparation of 'Feasibility Study of Secondary Education in Republic of Serbia', Belgrade, 2019.

<sup>330</sup> EUROSTAT, 'Quality of Life Data: Background Information', <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/gdp-and-beyond/quality-of-life/data>>, accessed 11 August 2019.

<sup>331</sup> UNICEF, 'Feasibility Study on Secondary Education in the Republic of Serbia', Belgrade, 2019.

<sup>332</sup> UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roman Settlements Multiple Indicator Survey 2014, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>333</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, UNICEF, Thematic Report: School Support Systems, 2018.

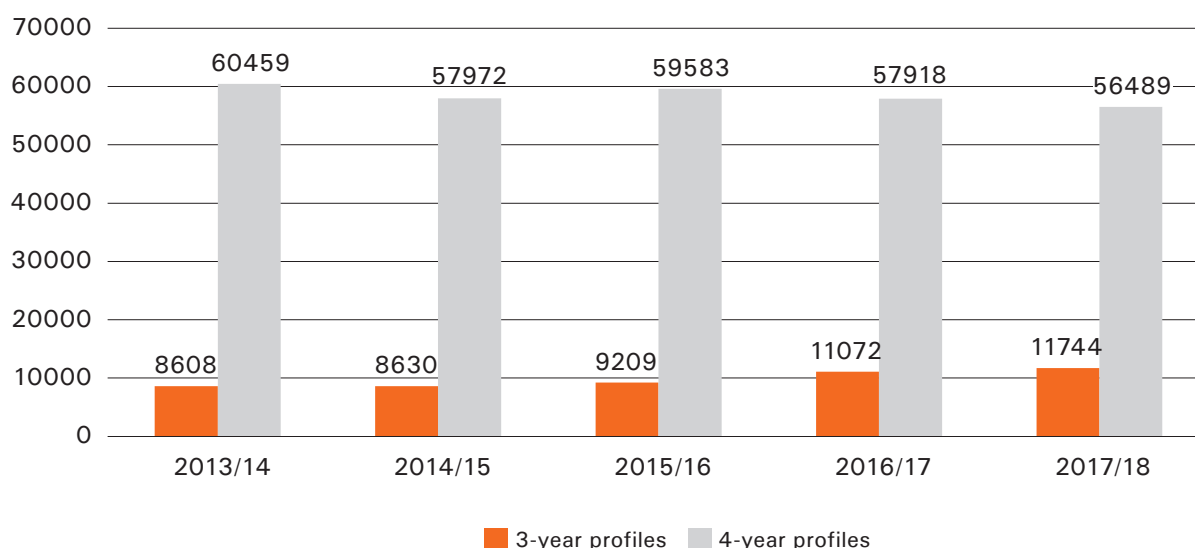


**Enrolment in secondary schools** and higher educational levels is based almost exclusively on previous academic performance and the performance at the school leaving/entrance examination, which is, at the same time, the principal criterion for the award of financial support to pupils and students (student loans and scholarships)<sup>338</sup>. Of the total scholarships and student loans, the MoESTD still allocates up to 10 per cent for pupils from vulnerable social groups<sup>339</sup>. Pupils from poor families who have the potential to complete tertiary education, are still three times less likely to go on to general secondary education than their peers who are equally

competent but come from wealthier backgrounds<sup>340</sup>. This would seem to indicate that there is unequal access to the different tracks of secondary education. It is very likely that the key reasons are related to the fact that students from poor families are often obliged to join the labour market as early as possible in order to support their families. As a result, they are often forced by circumstance to choose shorter education programs, despite having the potential for higher education.

There are significant **regional disparities** in the rates of secondary-school age children enrolled in secondary schools.

**Figure 25. VET enrolment per duration of programme/profile, 2013/14-2017/18**  
(Source: Centre for Education Policy, 2019)



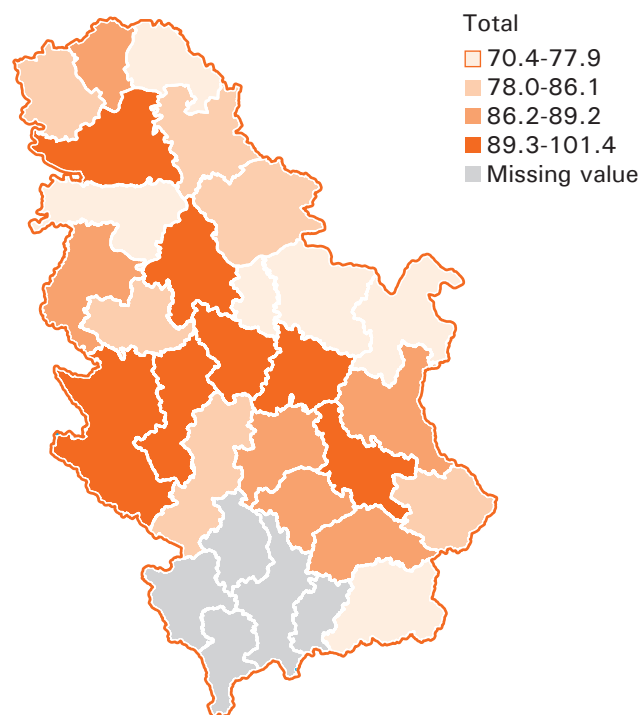
<sup>338</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, 'Employment and Social Reform Programme, Adopted 2016', <<http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/en/employment-and-social-reform-programme-esrp-adopted/>>, accessed 31 May 2019.

<sup>339</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>340</sup> Baucal, Aleksandar, 'Ključne kompetencije mladih u Srbiji u PISA ogledalu', Faculty of Philosophy, Institute for Psychology Belgrade and SIPRU, 2012. Available at <[www.researchgate.net/publication/233823373\\_Kljucne\\_kompetencije\\_mladih\\_u\\_Srbiji\\_u\\_PISA\\_2009\\_ogledalu](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/233823373_Kljucne_kompetencije_mladih_u_Srbiji_u_PISA_2009_ogledalu)>

**Figure 26. Coverage of children with secondary education in 2018**

(Source: SORS, 2019)



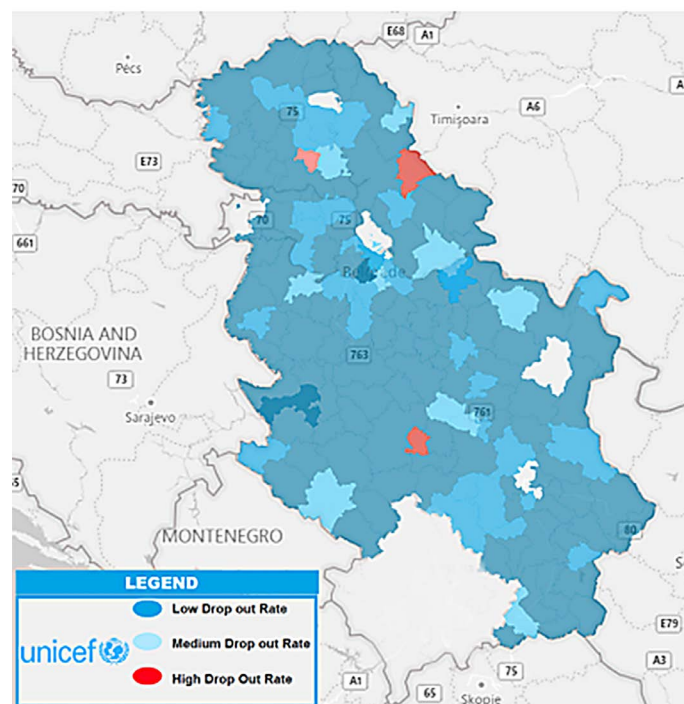
The completion rates of secondary education also show regional disparities. While the average completion rate of secondary education in Serbia is 85.5 per cent, in Toplica district it is only 67.3 per cent, while in Belgrade the completion rate is nearly 95 per cent<sup>341</sup>. Some of these disparities may occur as a result of migration and education costs. Regional disparities must be taken into account when planning for additional support, financing, future monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, school networks etc.

Schools with higher dropout rates in Serbia are usually those from less developed municipalities with higher poverty rates. Analysis has shown that even in the same school, some classes of particular education profiles have a higher number of students with high risk of drop-out. The dropout prevention model showed that certain educational profiles in

vocational schools tend to be enrolled by students of lower socio-economic statuses, and this is linked with deeper social factors (lack of awareness, information, etc.) that place students in the cycle of poverty. Key risks factors for dropping out are poverty, absenteeism, low school grades, low acceptance by peers, behavioural problems and other risk factors (such as neglect and abuse, traumatic experiences, early marriage and pregnancy etc.)<sup>342</sup>. Children who drop out can be enrolled again in school or they can start attending schools for adult education. In some cases, those schools are verified secondary schools and in other cases they are specialised schools for adult education<sup>343</sup>.

**Figure 27. Dropout rates at secondary education in municipalities of Serbia in 2017**

(Source: SORS, Pregled stanja i razvoja opština, 2018)



<sup>342</sup> Jovanović, V., Čekić Marković, J. (Editors and authors), Veselinović, Ž, Vušurović, A. & Jokić, T., How to be a Caring School: The Evaluation Study about Effectiveness of Model for Dropout prevention in Educational System of Republic of Serbia, Centre for Education Policy, Belgrade, 2016.

<sup>343</sup> MoESTD, 'Obrazovanje odraslih', <www.mpn.gov.rs/obrazovanje-odraslih/>, Accessed 31 May 2019.

<sup>341</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Database DevInfo 7, Serbia', <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

A study on the feasibility of compulsory secondary education is underway in 2019.

Data suggest that there are inequities in educational opportunities for young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. A young person with a university-educated father has ten times greater chance of finishing higher education than a person whose father only has a primary school diploma. In addition, 37 per cent of youth with the lowest SES aspire to complete only secondary education, compared to 8 per cent of those with the highest SES with similar aspirations<sup>344</sup>.

**Conclusion: Retaining secondary school pupils, particularly those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, in school must remain a key priority. Addressing the underlying causes of drop-out, such as poverty, social hardship, social norms (e.g. child marriage), limitations in remedial learning options etc. must go hand in hand with strengthening the delivery of quality inclusive secondary education.**

## Competencies

Among young people aged 15 to 29 years less than 1 per cent are illiterate (0.63 per cent in the age group 15 to 18 years; 0.73 per cent in the age group 19 to 24 years). This percentage is higher among women with just primary education (13 per cent) and among women from Roma settlements in both age groups (11 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively)<sup>345</sup>.

Serbia did not participate in the PISA 2015 survey,<sup>346</sup> so there are no recent data in this regard. Based

on the results from 2012<sup>347</sup>, 15 year-old pupils in Serbia have considerably lower levels of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy than their peers from OECD or EU countries (the gap corresponds to 1.5 years of schooling). Also, the PISA results indicate a lower impact of schooling on the development of these competencies in Serbia than in the OECD countries<sup>348</sup>. Almost 40 per cent of students in Serbia are categorized as “functionally illiterate”<sup>349</sup>, which is twice as high the EU average<sup>350</sup>. This number would be even higher if those who had left school before reaching ISCED 3 level were taken into account<sup>351</sup>. Results also point to inequities in our educational system because the share of the functionally illiterate students is much higher in the poorest group of students (from 60 per cent to 75 per cent<sup>352</sup>). Based on the findings of numerous existing studies, it may be assumed that “functionally illiterate” youth will experience significant difficulties with respect to their future education and employability.

## Curricula

The curricula in secondary schools are generally insufficiently flexible, and mainly consist of factual and fragmented knowledge. There is scope for improving teaching methods in order to practice innovative, more complex and differentiated approaches and be more focused on key competencies, skills and knowledge

<sup>344</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>345</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2012. and UNICEF and Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, *Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Survey 2014*, UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>346</sup> PISA is a worldwide study that measures 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance on mathematics, science, and reading.

<sup>347</sup> Government of Serbia, 'Economic and Social Reform Programme', 2016. Available at <<http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ESRP-en.zip>>

<sup>348</sup> Pavlović, D. and Baucal, I., PISA 2012 First Results: Inspire Me, Support me. Institute for Psychology, Belgrade, 2013.

<sup>349</sup> Within the context of the PISA test, “functional” literacy covers two aspects: appropriateness for current and later after-school participation in a culture and connectivity in the sense of continuous lifelong learning.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid. In the reading literacy domain, about 33% of fifteen-year-olds are functionally illiterate, in the mathematical literacy domain — 39%, and in the scientific literacy — about 35%.

<sup>351</sup> Since the PISA survey examines only the students aged 15 years who were included in the educational system at the time of the assessment, PISA does not offer information on the competencies of those students who have dropped out of education before the age of 15. If one assumes that these students (up to 15% according to some estimates) would most probably fall into the category of ‘functionally illiterate’, the percentage of the functionally illiterate would be higher than PISA estimates and could range between 40% and 50%.

<sup>352</sup> Baucal, A. & Pavlović Babić, D., Quality and Fairness of Education in Serbia: Educational Opportunities of the Poor, Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute for Psychology. Belgrade, 2009.

that are required by employers since external evaluation shows some weaknesses in these areas.

Serbia is predominantly using a traditional model of frontal teaching, with the teacher as a *transmitter* of knowledge, who functions within the limited modality of lecturing–examination–evaluation tasks. The role of teachers is seen as implementing the curriculum and grading, while more subtle areas of the professional engagement of teachers in fostering learning to learn, thinking skills, socialization, values, violence prevention, etc. are underestimated and not sufficiently supported. A key problem is the lack of appropriate skills that are taught in many vocational schools as a consequence of the outdated curricula the skills provided by vocational schools are obsolete and /or have not kept up with changing labour market needs. Practical training, either within school or in a local company as an intern or apprentice, is insufficient to provide a sound basis of vocational knowledge and experience.

The school system is currently undergoing a process of reform with the adoption of the new curriculum for primary and secondary education based on competencies and learning outcomes. The implementation of the curricular reform at the level of general secondary education (gymnasiums) has commenced in the 2018/2019 school year.

During UNICEF's consultations with youth in June 2019, participants highlighted the need for greater sensitivity and understanding for pupils amongst teachers, a need for greater adaptability of the teaching faculty to new situations, information, and a need for the secondary education system to help and encourage youth towards critical thinking. Education must also be used as a tool to include people and promote social inclusion.

## Dual Education

The Law on Dual Education adopted in 2017 introduced a model of education by which students acquire competencies in accordance with the standard of qualification and the curriculum of teaching and learning through school teaching and work-based learning in companies. Prior to its implementation 600 companies entered into the process of work-based learning, along with 84 schools (23 per cent of all vocational schools)<sup>353</sup>. Initial monitoring and evaluation data show high levels of interest among parents and students although it remains to be seen how suited the dual education model is to lower-performing economies.

## National Framework of Qualifications

The new Law on the National Framework of Qualifications (2018) and the renewed Register of Professions have been adjusted to the needs of the economy and the labour market in Serbia. For the register to remain current, it needs to be renewed on a regular basis in line with the evolving shape of the workforce and technological advancement. Good coordination among education institutions and companies is also needed. In addition to the qualifications acquired through formal education, the new National Framework also considers qualifications acquired through non-formal education and non-formal learning.

## Career information, guidance and counselling

According to the current legislation (Law on Secondary Education, 2013), individual school teams are responsible for planning and implementing career guidance activities in annual cycles. At a practical level, the types of activities provided within schools vary, but mainly include three general groups of services — career information, career counselling provided mainly by the professional associates and career education.

In January 2019, the Rulebook on Closer Conditions, Methods, Activities and Composition of the Career

<sup>353</sup> MoESTD, 'Zakon o dualnom obrazovanju', available at <[www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/dualno-zakon.pdf](http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/dualno-zakon.pdf)>

Guidance and Counselling Team in the Secondary School, which implements educational profiles in dual education, was adopted. The novelty in this Rulebook is the proposed new composition of the guidance and counselling teams, which now include not only teachers and a school psychologist but also the representatives of professional associations, local self-government units and employers.

Several civil society initiatives and those made available through bilateral assistance are dedicated to improving employability skills for young people (Belgrade Open School, Education to Employment E2E implemented by NIRAS and SDC, Youth Employment Project implemented by GIZ etc.). Foundation Tempus, through the activities of Europass and Euroguidance centres, also supports the improvement of employability skills of secondary school students (e.g. individual consultations for primary and secondary school students on topics such as making career choices, gathering information about career opportunities, self-evaluation of knowledge, interests, and skills, etc.). The National Employment Service also develops different programmes for young people, e.g. training seminars for active job seeking, entrepreneurship training, training seminars related to the improvement of ICT skills and foreign languages.

**Conclusion: Following the modernisation of the curriculum, it is important to focus on pedagogy and teaching, and advancing the education system's attention to the key competencies and learning outcomes of pupils in secondary education to equip them with the necessary know-how for future employment. An institutional and normative framework for education, including non-formal education that assists pupils in smoothly making their transitions of choice needs to be in place. Pupils need to have access to quality information and advice on educational and career pathways and be supported in the decisions that they make. Non-formal education needs to be promoted and made more readily available. Strong links between**

**the education system and the labour market need to be maintained and advanced.**

**Additionally, it is necessary to establish a dialogue with relevant stakeholders, and particularly with the functional human resource committees of selective business associations. This would gradually reduce the market gap between supply and demand for labour in certain professions and lead to the harmonization of university curriculums.**

### **Tertiary education**

According to the latest statistics from 2018, 477,700 (approximately 65 per cent) of young people aged 15 to 24 years are included in formal or non-formal education, with more women than men (70.4 per cent compared to 61.4 per cent) and more youth from urban than rural areas (72.3 per cent to 55.9 per cent)<sup>354</sup>. This pattern has not changed over the past 5 years. In 2017, 256,172 young people aged 19-24 years were enrolled in different levels of education according to ISCED 6-8, with most of them at the bachelor level (ISCED 6) — 77 per cent, then at the master level (ISCED 7) — 18 per cent, and at the PhD level — 4.5 per cent<sup>355</sup>.

In most countries worldwide, higher education is recognized as an important factor which supports social, cultural and economic development of both individuals and societies. Higher education has a crucial role in supporting lifelong learning, which is considered necessary for increasing the level of knowledge, competencies and skills on an individual and societal level for living in the twenty-first century. Young people who complete higher educational levels have a greater chance to prepare more adequately for numerous future professional challenges. A number of international strategic documents underline the social

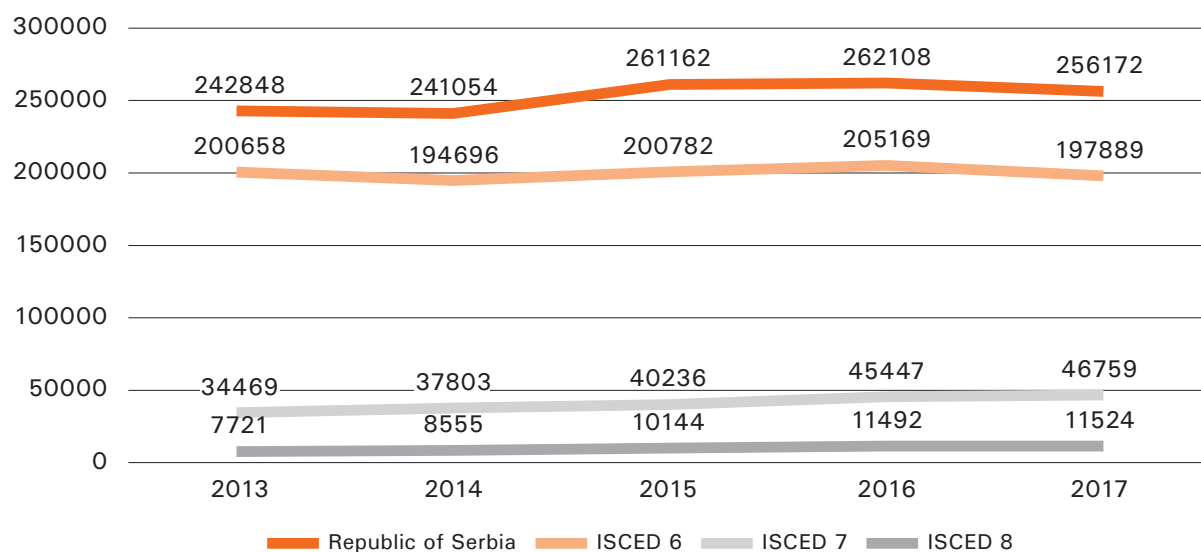
<sup>354</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Labour Force Survey in the Republic of Serbia, 2016, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2016.

<sup>355</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia



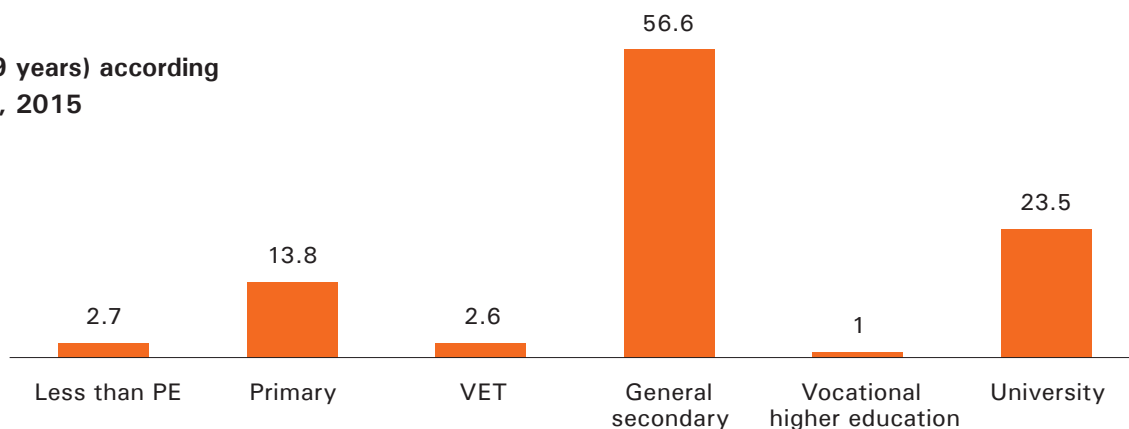
dimension of higher education, which has an important role in fostering social cohesion and, at the same time, reducing social inequalities.

**Figure 28. Number of students in ISCED levels 6 to 8, 2013-2017**  
(Source: SORS, 2018)



The educational level of young people aged 15 to 29 years in Serbia in 2015 can be seen in the following figure<sup>356</sup>.

**Figure 29. Young people (15-29 years) according to level of education, 2015**  
(Source: ILO, 2016)

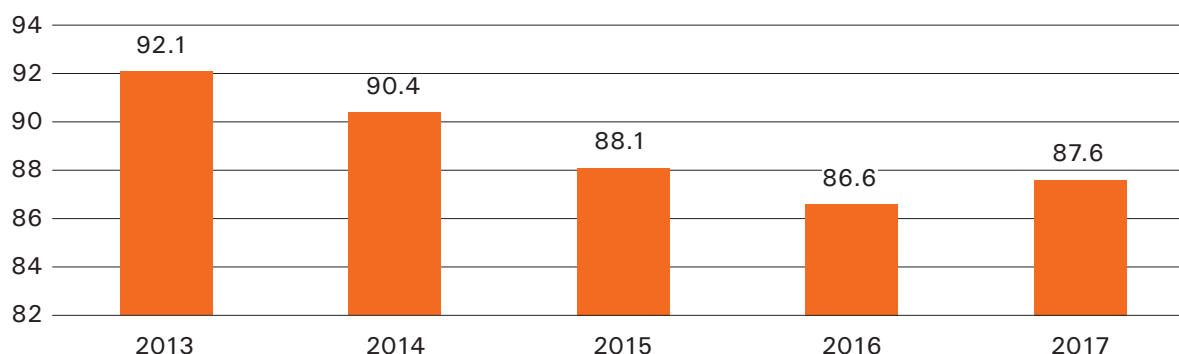


<sup>356</sup> Marjanović, Dragana, "Tranzicija mladih žena i muškaraca na tržištu rada Republike Srbije", International Labour Office, Geneva, 2016.

The transition rate from secondary to higher education in Serbia is high at around 87.6 per cent<sup>357</sup>. The number of young people who were enrolled in higher education in 2017 was 256,172, which is 6.3 per cent higher than in 2014<sup>358</sup>.

**Figure 30. Continuation of education after the completion of secondary school (per cent) from 2013 to 2017**

(Source: SORS, 2019)



The Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020<sup>359</sup> includes the goal of increasing coverage of higher education. While coverage has increased in the last five years, tertiary education attainment for the 30-35 age group (32.8 per cent) it remains lower than in the European Union (40.7 per cent) and lower than the projected aim of the Strategy (35 per cent)<sup>360</sup>.

<sup>357</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Database DevInfo 7, Serbia', <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs>>, accessed 3 September 2019.

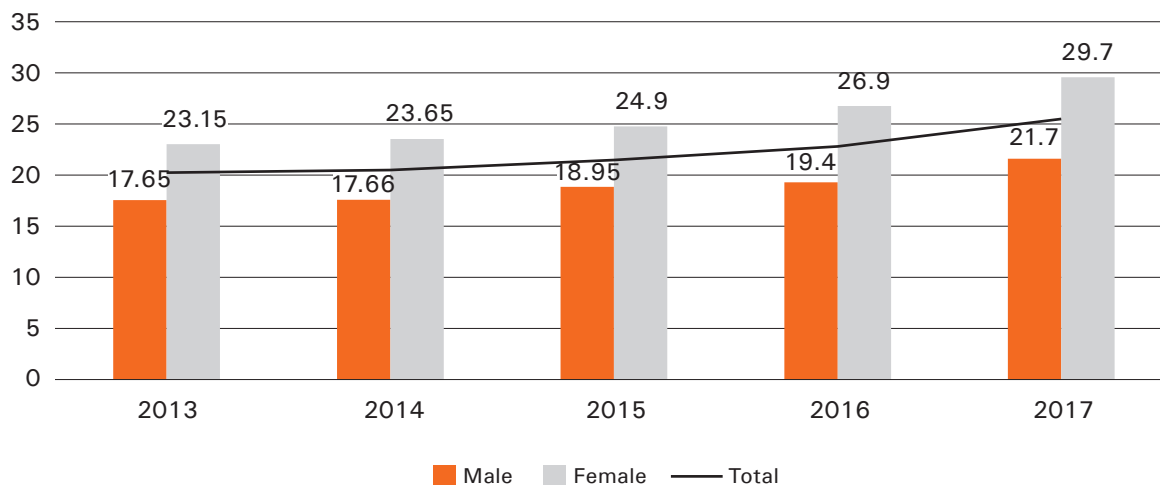
<sup>358</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>359</sup> MoESTD, Education Development Strategy in Serbia by 2020, published in "Official Glasnik RS", No. 107/2012, Belgrade, 9 November 2012. Available at: <[www.mpsn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/STRATEGIJA-OBRAZOVANJA.pdf](http://www.mpsn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/STRATEGIJA-OBRAZOVANJA.pdf)>

<sup>360</sup> Eurostat, 'Eurostat, Your Key to European Statistics', <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>>, accessed 10 April 2019.

**Figure 31. Higher education participation (19-30 years) by gender, 2013-2017**

(Source: SORS, 2019)

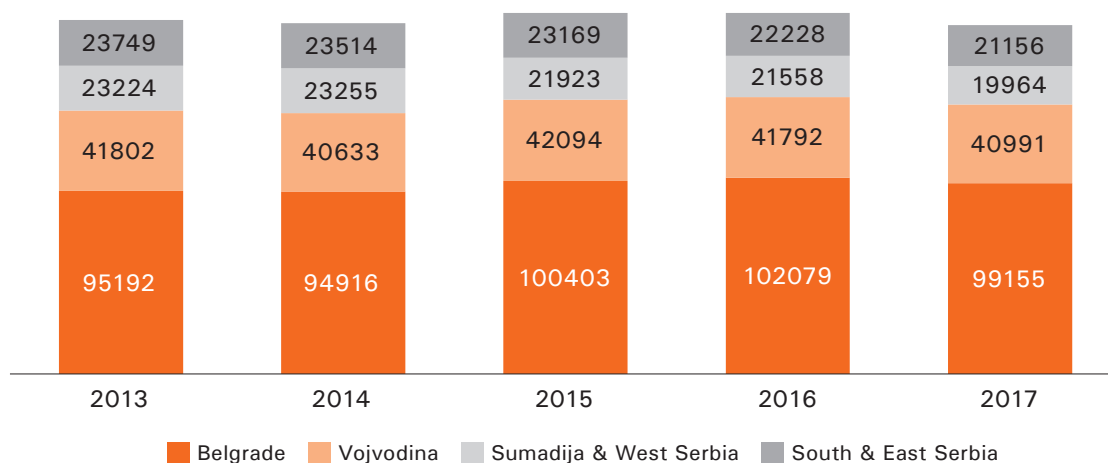


Data indicate differences between women and men enrolled in higher education. The net ratio of women and men aged 19 to 24 years enrolled in higher education has been stable over the last five years at around 1.3 (in 2017, higher education coverage was higher for women (29.7 per cent) than for men

(21.7 per cent). Also, studies indicate that there are approximately two times more young people from urban areas in higher education than young people from rural areas, which points to significant regional disparities<sup>361</sup>.

**Figure 32. Number of students (19-24 years) enrolled in higher education by region**

(Source: SORS, 2019)



<sup>361</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

Although higher education participation is significant, the completion rate of higher education is very low. In the age group 19-24 years, the completion rate was only 3.7 per cent in 2016, while for youth aged 22-30 years it was slightly higher, 4.5 per cent<sup>362</sup>. Roma students are underrepresented in higher education. In the total students' population, there is less than one Roma student in a thousand.

Around one-third of higher education students drop out before the completion of first-degree studies<sup>363</sup>. Lowering the dropout rate among higher education students is one of the main goals of the EU strategy for jobs and growth (Europe 2020<sup>364</sup>), as well as of the Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020. Nevertheless, state universities in Serbia do not have precise data on the dropout rate from higher education.

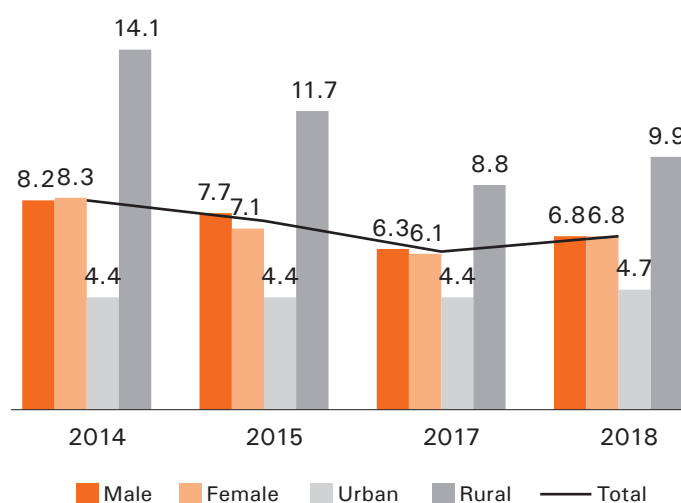
### Youth satisfaction with education

Young people's perceptions of satisfaction with the educational system in Serbia vary across different studies. While one study<sup>365</sup> found 42 per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied, in another study<sup>366</sup> the average grade on the scale from 1 to 5 was 2.8, with 41 per cent of participants unsatisfied compared to 30 per cent of the satisfied respondents. Only 20 per cent of young people believe that education is well adapted to the labour market, compared to the majority (53 per cent) who think that the educational system cannot respond adequately to the needs of the labour market<sup>367</sup>.

### Early school leavers

People aged 18-24 years who have terminated their education early and are not in training are considered early school leavers. The early school leaving rate in Serbia has decreased from 9.3 per cent in 2009, 8.3 per cent in 2014 to 6.8 per cent in 2018<sup>368</sup>. According to official data for 2018, around 35,000 young people aged 18 to 24 years are early school leavers, out of whom almost 21,000 come from a rural area.<sup>369</sup>

**Figure 33. Percentage of young people (18-24 years) who are early school leavers, 2014-2018**  
(Source: SORS, 2019)



**Conclusion: The completion rates of tertiary education students fall short of the desired targets. Additional supportive measures may be required for rural and other disadvantaged groups of youth who wish to pursue higher education. Existing scholarships require better targeting, because the specific circumstances of vulnerable**

<sup>362</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>363</sup> OECD, Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2010, OECD, Paris, <<http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/45926093.pdf>>

<sup>364</sup> European Commission, EU2020, A European Strategy for Smart, Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, European Commission, Brussels, 2010. Available at <[ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf)>

<sup>365</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>366</sup> Stojanovic, B., 'Alternative Report on the Situation and Needs of Youth in Serbia', KOMS, 2018.

<sup>367</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>368</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 'Database DevInfo 7, Serbia', <<http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs>>, accessed 3 September 2019

<sup>369</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Labour Force Survey in the Republic of Serbia, 2016, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2016.

groups of young people are not adequately considered.

Universities have an opportunity to include experts from the business sector in lectures in order to provide more practical experience and contacts with the business sector for students.

## Youth employment

Young people in Serbia identify unemployment and the lack and instability of jobs as the major problem of the country. In the last five years, there have been several changes in the legislative framework for employment which could contribute to positive changes in this regard. The Law on Employment was improved through amendments which enable a more efficient implementation of regulations in practice, the National Employment Strategy for the period 2011-2020 was evaluated, the regulations on taxes and contributions were amended in order to create more favourable conditions for doing business, etc. Since 2015, the rulebook about the criteria, methods and activities for implementing the measures of active policy employment has been introduced, as well as a range of measures to promote active job seeking (like job fairs, self-efficacy training, training for active job seeking). During 2017, measures were taken to encourage the employment and inclusion of hard-to-employ individuals in the labour market, including 53,100 young people, of whom 27,440 were women. Projects such as *"Encouraging the employment of young people"* (GIZ), *"From education to employment: the development of youth skills and private-public partnerships in Serbia"* (SDC) etc. are also being implemented.

One of the highest priorities of the Government and Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) is to improve the conditions for employability and self-employment of young people. Over the past 5 years, more than 2,500 young people aged 15-30 have been employed through projects and programmes supported by the MYS, and over 30,000 young people have been trained to increase employability, career management and professional practices.

"But at the state level, integrated services, including for vulnerable groups, are implemented with difficulty, a person is sent from door to door. Like that, on a partial level, you give one measure, but that's not enough, and thus you lose the young person. And there is no network of services for young people, this is one of the biggest problems. Each institution does some sort of favour, but the results are not sustainable, there is no continuity".

Representative of an international organisation

According to official statistics, all basic indicators of youth employment show positive trends in recent years. The activity and employment rate of young people aged 15 to 24 years has increased, while the unemployment rate has decreased. Nevertheless, the labour market situation for young people is still less favourable than in EU countries.

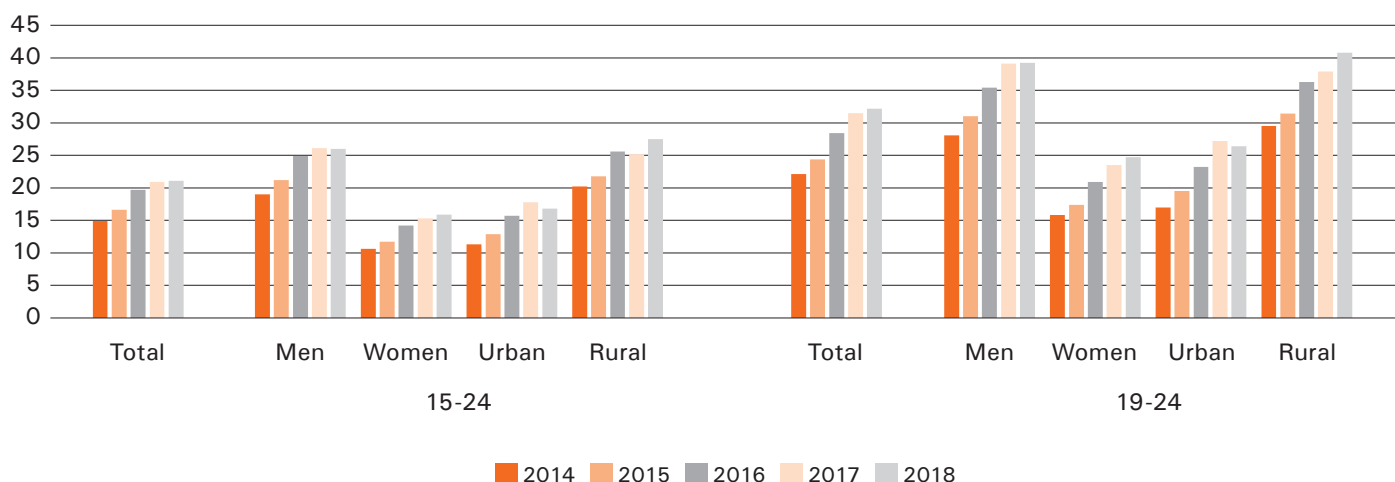
**The employment rate** of young people (15-24 years) in Serbia is very low, at 20.9 per cent<sup>370</sup>, almost 14 per cent lower than in the EU (34.7 per cent)<sup>371</sup>. The figures are slightly better in the age cohort 19 to 24 years, where the employment rate in 2018 was 32.2 per cent. However, there is still a significant gender gap; the employment rate is almost 15 per cent higher for males than females. There is also a significant disparity between urban and rural areas; young people in rural areas have an almost 15 per cent higher employment rate. Regional disparities are also present; Vojvodina has the highest employment rate for young people (39.7 per cent), while the lowest rate is in South and East Serbia (28.2 per cent).

<sup>370</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2019

<sup>371</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.



**Figure 34. Employment rate of young people by gender and urban/rural, 2014-2018**  
(Source: SORS, 2019)

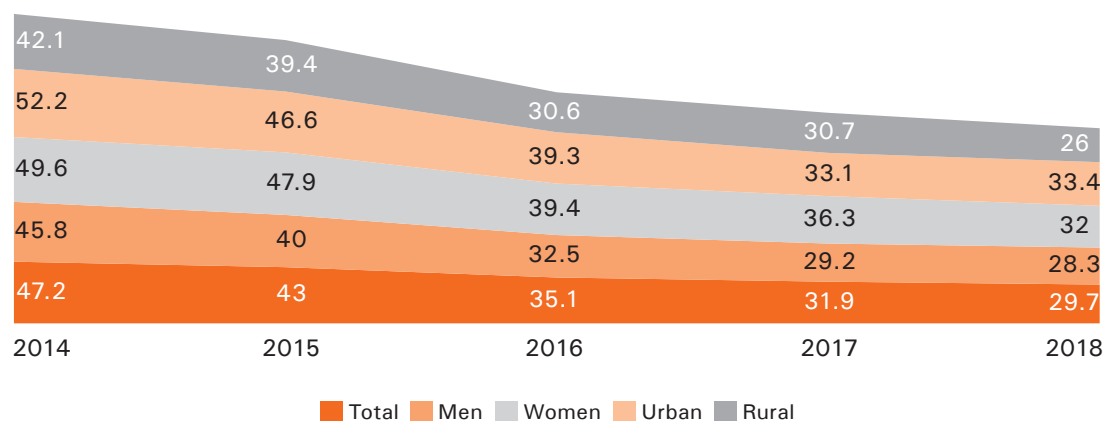


The unemployment rate of young people (15 to 24 years) has decreased by more than 15 per cent since 2014 to 32 per cent in 2017. Nevertheless, it is two times higher than in the working age population in Serbia (14 per cent), and almost two times higher than average for EU countries (16.8 per cent). Again, the data show significant disparities between the unemployment rate of young men (29.2 per cent) and women (36.3 per cent). Additionally, one-

third of unemployed Roma people registered at the National Employment Service are younger than 30 years. As with employment rates, the unemployment rate patterns show disparities at the regional and urban/rural level<sup>372</sup>.

Transition to work periods are particularly long for lower educational levels (up to 80 months) while on average they are around two years, and longer in the case of women<sup>373</sup>.

**Figure 35. Unemployment rate of young people (15-24 years) by gender and urban/rural, 2014-2018**  
(Source: SORS)



<sup>372</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2019

<sup>373</sup> Marjanović, Dragana, "Tranzicija mladih žena i muškaraca na tržištu rada Republike Srbije", International Labour Office, Geneva, 2016.

“The biggest problem in the employment of young people is that employers are demanding work experience and practical skills. First, the young people themselves cannot have working experience, and secondly, education does not provide working practices. Therefore, all young people are a difficult employable group. Then we have especially women because of the possibility that they will take maternity leave, they are discriminated from the beginning. Then Roma, young people with disabilities, and young people who are geographically discriminated because they do not have access to the labour market”.

Representative of an international organisation

Another indicator of employment and labour market is the **long-term unemployment rate**, which shows the percentage of people who have been seeking employment for more than two years in relation to the total number of the active population. Although there has been a decrease in the long-term unemployment rate of young people by more than 10 per cent since 2014, this number was 6.4 per cent in 2018 and is still higher than in the general population.

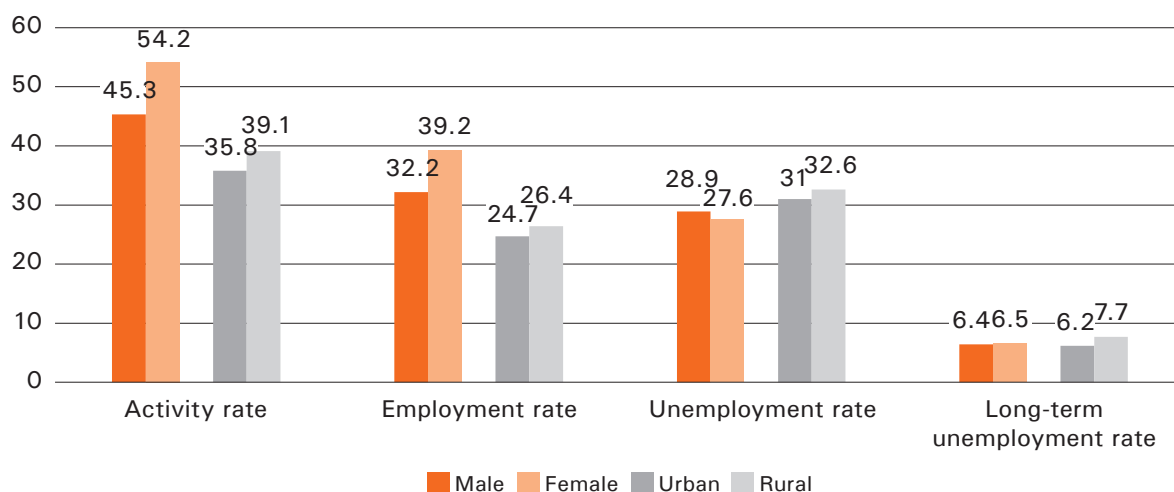
The chart below summarizes the basic indicators of the employment status for different age groups of young people in 2018.<sup>374</sup>

**Figure 36. Indicators of employment status, age 15-18 years, 2018**  
(Source: SORS)



<sup>374</sup> Activity rate presents the percentage share of active population in the total population aged 15 and over. Active population (labour force) includes all employed and unemployed persons.

**Figure 37. Indicators of employment status, age 19-24 years, 2018**  
(Source: SORS)



Further, if we consider the educational level of the unemployed, it can be concluded that young people with vocational education and training find jobs more easily than those with a vocational higher education or a university diploma, although remuneration and job security are lower.<sup>375</sup>

### Skills mismatches

Statistical analysis points to a double discrepancy between the work young people do and their level of education, on the one side, and the occupation they were educated for, on the other. Due to skills mismatches, 54 per cent of young people do not work in the occupation that they have been trained for, which is a higher percentage than the average for the Southeast Europe countries (42 per cent).

Almost 40 per cent work at the positions that require a lower educational level than the one they have, which is again among the highest rates in the region<sup>376</sup>. Almost one third of respondents in one study<sup>377</sup> thought that there is no need for their profession in the labour market. These discrepancies produce a significant economic and social loss at the level of the society.

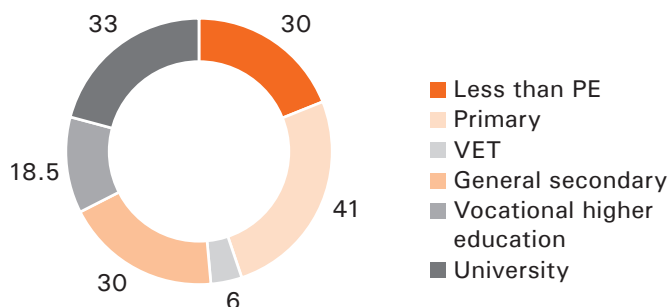
<sup>375</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Unit, Transition of women and men in the labour market of the Republic of Serbia, 2017, Social Inclusion and Poverty Unit, Belgrade, 2016. Accessible at <[http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Tranzicija\\_mladih\\_zena\\_i\\_muskaraca\\_na\\_trzistu\\_rada\\_Republike\\_Srbije.pdf](http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Tranzicija_mladih_zena_i_muskaraca_na_trzistu_rada_Republike_Srbije.pdf)>

<sup>376</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 38. Rate of unemployed young people by the level of education, 2015**

(Source: ILO 2015)



**Conclusion:** Unemployment and long-term unemployment can have a number of adverse repercussions for youth, affecting a person's confidence, making it harder for them to take the step into employment and leaving them increasingly excluded from society. More integrated support and referral, and a better skills-matching system, are required to ensure youth feel valued and motivated as they navigate the services that are intended to assist them in their search for jobs.

Higher budgets for youth employment programmes would be of additional help, as would the promotion of values and norms which decrease inequalities and barriers for women and young people, particularly those with a disability, those coming from poor or Roma households and from other vulnerable groups.

The sustainability of financing for projects aimed at increasing the employment of young people, especially those from vulnerable groups must be better ensured. Further continuous support, more visible and available for all young people, should be provided.

International and national financial institutions could be incentivised to offer specialised credit facilities and financing mechanisms for youth entrepreneurs, offered through commercial banks.

## NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training)

Besides being unemployed, a significant number of young people are not in employment, education or training (NEET). In 2018, around 122,000 of young people aged 15 to 24 years were NEETs. The percentage of NEETs, although decreasing in the last 5 years, is still high, at around 16.5 per cent, and is particularly high among adolescents on the move. There are no significant differences between young males and females, but data show significantly higher rates of NEETs in rural than urban areas. The NEET rates are higher in Vojvodina and South and East Serbia than in the rest of the country<sup>378</sup>.

The fact that a large number of young people are outside of education and employment has serious implications for the society. It carries enormous economic costs because of their lost potential contribution to the workforce. It can also contribute to a less coherent and inclusive society, as youth in this situation are at greater risk of becoming socially and politically disengaged and excluded, having less opportunity and interest in civic engagement, and losing trust in government institutions<sup>379</sup>.

**Table 11. NEET rates for young people aged 15 to 24 years, from 2014 to 2017, by gender and urban/rural**

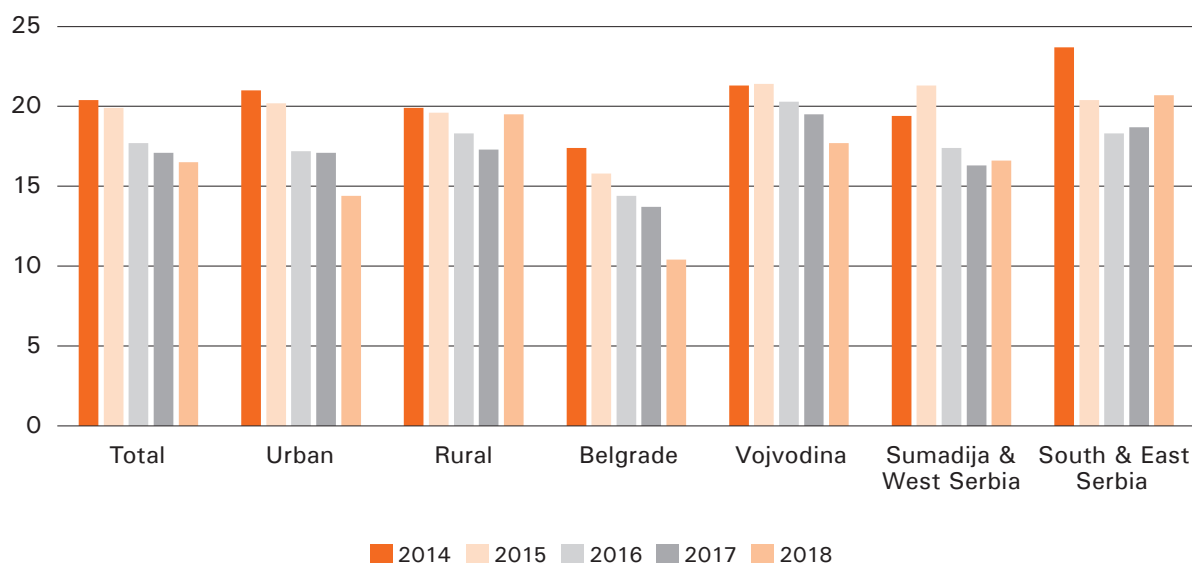
(Source: SORS)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total	20.4	19.9	17.7	17.2	16.5
Male	21.0	20.2	17.2	17.1	16
Female	19.9	19.6	18.3	17.3	17
Urban	17.4	17.3	15.8	14.8	14.4
Rural	24.8	23.5	20.5	20.5	19.5

<sup>378</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Labor Force Survey.

<sup>379</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019 and Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

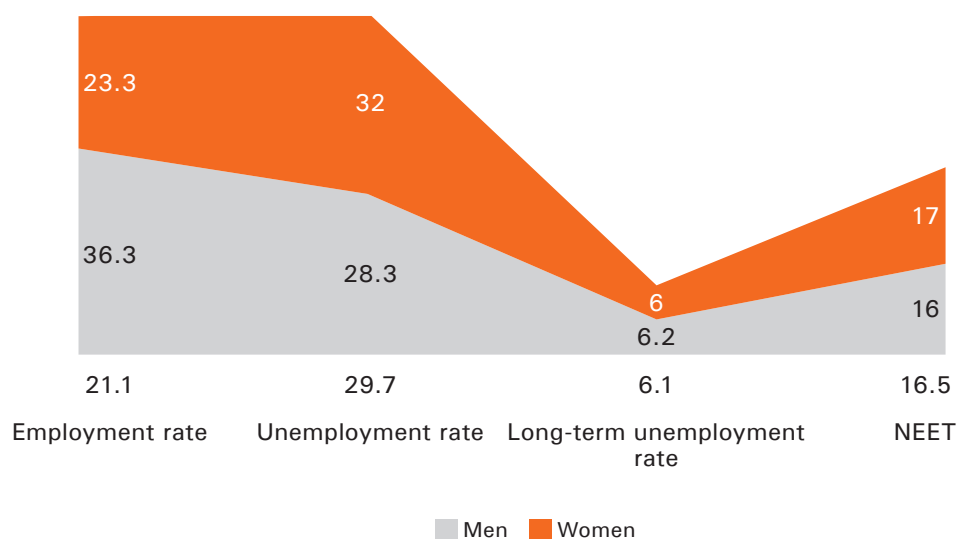
**Figure 39. Percentage of NEETs in urban/rural areas and different regions of Serbia, 2014-2018**  
(Source: SORS)



Among unemployed young people, approximately 14 per cent are not actively seeking employment although they have expressed readiness to work. According to one study, the reasons for not looking for a job include

not knowing how and where to look, an inability to find a job that suits their qualifications, having tried and been unsuccessful in finding a job, and not finding employment in their area<sup>380</sup>.

**Figure 40. Employment, unemployment, long-term unemployment and NEET of young people (15 to 24 years) in 2018, by gender**  
(Source: SORS)



<sup>380</sup> Dragana Marjanović, "Tranzicija mladih žena i muškaraca na tržištu rada Republike Srbije", International Labour Office, Geneva, 2016.



One more indicator shows the unfavourable position of young people in the context of the labour market. When the employment status of young people is analysed, it can be seen that the majority are **temporarily or informally employed**, and that the rate of temporary employment has increased in the last three years (from 29 per cent in 2015 to 52 per cent in 2018). Almost 80 per cent of the employees aged 25-64 years have contracts with indefinite duration but only 42 per cent of young workers have such contractual arrangements<sup>381</sup>.

Temporary, informal or precarious work is typical for young people in Serbia; 67 per cent of employed youth (47.4 per cent of the total number of the employed) work in informal employment<sup>382</sup>. That means their jobs are poorly paid, based on non-standard or temporary employment relationships (part-time contracts, occasional jobs), insecure, and unprotected (lack of access to social protection). Compared to other countries in Southeast Europe, Serbia is at the top of the list in the share of informal work in total youth employment<sup>383</sup>. Additionally, precarious work is more prevalent among males than females, among young people with a lower level of education, among those whose parents have a lower educational attainment, and those who come from the poorest families.

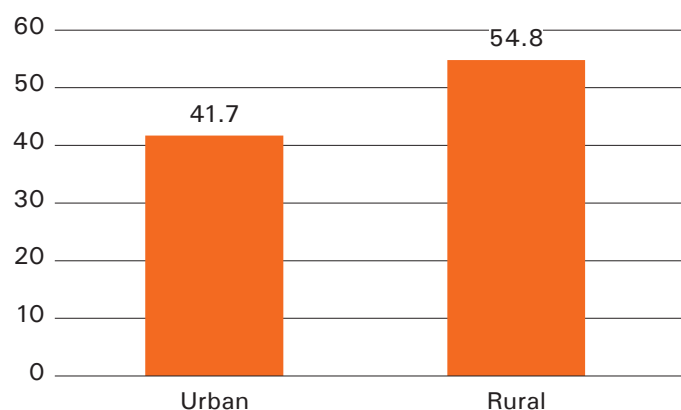
Given this context, the increase in employment since 2012, which is not correlated with the increase in GDP or life standard, has been possible only through an increase in low quality or non-productive jobs that have had little effect on production<sup>384</sup>.

"The fact is that when someone from a Roma community who graduates from college and decides to find a job, s/he must show at the very beginning that s/he is better than anyone else to get a job. And when there is no job, and s/he is educated, s/he must decide for the job of a pedagogical assistant or a medical mediator. These two jobs will soon become a "repository of educated Roma" because they are employed only in this profession, but not in public institutions, even though we have educated personnel".

Adolescent from a Roma community

**Figure 41. Rate of informal employment by type of community, 2015**

(Source: "Tranzicija mladih žena i muškaraca na tržištu rada Republike Srbije", ILO 2016.)



A recent survey highlights the necessity of introducing a new concept of 'educational-employment status', considering the fact that there are more and more young people who are **both studying and employed**. Compared to the results from 2015, the newest data indicate that the number of young people in this category has doubled in all age groups<sup>385</sup>.

<sup>381</sup> European Training Foundation, 'Skills mismatch measurement in the ETF partner countries (Serbia)', Belgrade, 2018.

<sup>382</sup> Dragana Marjanović, "Tranzicija mladih žena i muškaraca na tržištu rada Republike Srbije", International Labour Office, Geneva, 2016.

<sup>383</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019 and Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>384</sup> Milicevic, D, 'What is behind the apparent increase in employment in Serbia', < [www.makroekonomija.org/O-dragovan-milicevic/sta-se-krije-iza-navodno-povecane-zaposlenosti-u-srbiji/](http://www.makroekonomija.org/O-dragovan-milicevic/sta-se-krije-iza-navodno-povecane-zaposlenosti-u-srbiji/) >, accessed 1 June 2019.

<sup>385</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

**Table 12. The educational-employment status of young people according to research from 2015 and 2018**

(Source: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Youth in Serbia*, 2019)

	Age	2015 sample %	2018 sample %
Education only	15-19	88	80
	20-24	51	42
	25-29	12	14
Education and work	15-19	1	12
	20-24	9	23
	25-29	12	28
Work only	15-19	4	4
	20-24	21	8
	25-29	51	11

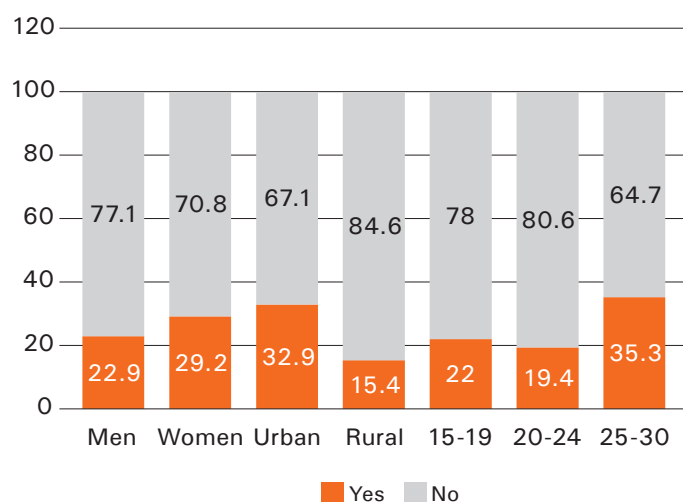
**Conclusion:** Temporary and informal employment options that can lead to unfair and exploitative working conditions and poor pay for youth who are at a vulnerable moment in their life should be avoided by employers. Just mitigation measures should also be put in place to lessen the risks faced by young people undertaking this type of employment.

### Non-formal education

In the Law on Youth of the Republic of Serbia, non-formal education is defined as “a set of organized and youth-oriented educational activities that are not envisaged by the formal education system, based on the needs and interests of young people, principles of voluntary and active participation of young people in the process of learning and promotion of democratic values, through which young people acquire the competencies necessary for the development of personal potentials, active participation in society and better employability”.

According to research, only 26 per cent of young people aged 15 to 30 years have finished some kind of non-formal education (courses or training outside the formal education institutions). The majority of them think that programmes of non-formal education contribute to the vocational and professional development of young people. More than one third of youth from the oldest age group (25-30 years) have completed some kind of non-formal education (35 per cent), more often than younger adolescents. The data also reveal disparities by gender and size of the community: women and youth from urban areas are more likely to have completed some form of non-formal education<sup>386</sup>.

**Figure 42. Completed additional courses and trainings not related to formal education, 2015**  
(Source: NinaMedia Research, 2015)



Almost one half of young people from Sumadija and West Serbia think that there is a lack of available non-formal education opportunities (43 per cent); youth from Vojvodina (37 per cent) and South and East Serbia (35 per cent), as well as from the Belgrade

<sup>386</sup> NinaMediaResearch, Istraživanje o položaju i potrebama mladih u Srbiji, NinaMedia Research, 2015, Belgrade 2015. Available at <<http://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Istraz%CC%8Cvanje-o-polo%CC%8Caju-i-potrebama-mladih-u-Srbiji-I-Novembar-2015.pdf>>

region (28 per cent), are of a similar opinion, although they stated this less often.

“Non-formal education includes teamwork, learning methods, project writing. This is much less represented in our formal education system. Our students have not learned to think critically”.

Adolescent

Further, both the young people and employers perceive a significant link between the competencies gained in non-formal education programmes and the competencies demanded by employers in the labour market<sup>387</sup>. In the process of personnel selection, employers positively evaluate competencies acquired in non-formal education.

The IT sector has recently showed willingness to cooperate with schools and provide non-formal opportunities for education, especially IT for girls in non-formal education, which would promote and support girls as a vulnerable group and increase their chances for employment.

UNICEF’s consultations with youth in June 2019 confirmed that youth too see the need for formal and non-formal education options to be made available.

**Conclusion: Non-formal education needs to increasingly match the skills needs of employers. Tools for the recognition of the skills acquired through non-formal education need to be developed and promoted among employers. Although there are a number of projects and programmes focused on providing different kinds of non-formal education for young people, there is still a problem of insufficient access to non-formal education for minority groups and young people from rural and the poorest families.**

### Youth entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship

In the Lisbon agenda from 2000, entrepreneurship was recognised as “the new basic competence” necessary for living and working in the knowledge-based society. Considering that 31 per cent of youth are unemployed and 16.5 per cent are NEET on the one hand, and that job opportunities are insufficient to meet demand on the other, entrepreneurship is one possible solution for the employment of young people. Almost one half of young people want to be entrepreneurs, but the majority of them perceive entrepreneurship as highly risky in the Serbian context, and only 20 per cent think about starting their own business. The Eurobarometer (2011) shows that almost twice as many young people in the EU are considering starting their own business.

Young people turn to self-employment, with or without financial support of the state. The number of persons between the age of 15 and 29 years who, during 2015, were self-employed stood at 39,664, which represents 3.2 per cent compared to the total number of young people during that year, and 10.8 per cent compared to the total number of employed young people during the same year. Out of the total number of self-employed during 2015, 25.6 per cent were young women<sup>388</sup>.

<sup>387</sup> NAPOR, Research on the Influence of Non-Formal Education in Youth Work on Gaining Competencies for Better Employability of Youth, NAPOR, Belgrade, March 2014. Available at <[www.napor.net/sajt/images/Dokumenta/istraivanje-uticaj-nfo-u-or-na-zapoljivost-mladih.pdf](http://www.napor.net/sajt/images/Dokumenta/istraivanje-uticaj-nfo-u-or-na-zapoljivost-mladih.pdf)>

<sup>388</sup> Youth Banks Hub for Western Balkans and Turkey, ‘Youth Participation Indicators, 2016’. (Draft), Available at <<https://ybhwt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Youth-Participation-Indicators-%E2%80%93-Serbia.pdf>>

According to the Serbian Business Registers Agency, 7,726 business entities were registered in November 2016, with 100 per cent of the founding capital coming from persons younger than 30 years. This represents 5.8 per cent of all business entities. Twenty three per cent of entrepreneurs (53,555) were younger than 30 years. Therefore, around 17 per cent of all business entity owners and entrepreneurs in Serbia are young people<sup>389</sup>.

One of the reasons young people are not sufficiently informed about entrepreneurship (45 per cent) is that there is no dedicated source of unified information on entrepreneurship. There are only a few websites and forums that focus on entrepreneurship and helping young entrepreneurs to start their own business, there is limited promotion of entrepreneurship in the media, and yet there are a range of administrative documents and processes that must be navigated in order to start a business. Young entrepreneurs (72 per cent) point to the need to have more online services on the websites of state institutions to inform young entrepreneurs. Only 6 per cent of young people learned something about entrepreneurship during their formal education<sup>390</sup>.

As a positive step, youth entrepreneurship has already been recognized within the Ministry of Economy through the “Strategy for Supporting the Development of SMEs and Competitiveness for the Period of 2015-2020”. In order to enable further development of entrepreneurship, it is necessary to make several changes: the development of entrepreneurial thinking and skills should be recognized as a basic skill in the education process; the entire business environment should be made stimulating; the possibility of occurrence of numerous risks should be reduced, and equal treatment of the state towards young entrepreneurs ensured.

During 2016 to 2017, some economic reforms were carried out, including simplifying the business start-up procedure, as well as shortening the time required for registration from 12 to 7 days. However, only 21 per cent of young people think that the procedure for starting a business is quick and efficient. SMEs still face a number of challenges, including an unpredictable business environment, high level of parafiscal costs and difficult and expensive access to financial resources. In the forthcoming period, Serbia must pay special attention to improving the quality of the educational system, as well as to a better regulation and reduction of the parafiscal costs, especially for SMEs.<sup>391</sup>

**Social entrepreneurship** refers to an economically active organization whose main priority is not profit, but to address one or more social problem(s). In Serbia, there is no law on social entrepreneurship and, hence, it has not yet been officially recognized. The vast majority of people do not even know what social entrepreneurship is. Different associations of citizens, foundations and the societies with limited liability are engaged in social entrepreneurship through various models: employment of persons with disabilities, provision of services or products for vulnerable groups, or through a 3P approach — the protection of people, sustainable development and the protection of the planet.

Young people have limited opportunities to learn about entrepreneurship through the formal education system, especially about social entrepreneurship. That is the main reason for the lack of knowledge and skills on social entrepreneurship among the youth in Serbia. There is also a lack of funding for and promotion of social entrepreneurship and an inadequate legal framework<sup>392</sup>.

<sup>389</sup> Youth Banks Hub for Western Balkans and Turkey, ‘Youth Participation Indicators, 2016’. (Draft), Available at <<https://ybhwbteu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Youth-Participation-Indicators-%E2%80%93-Serbia.pdf>>

<sup>390</sup> Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, Youth Commercial Forum, “Analiza rezultata istraživanja o potrebama potencijalnih i postojećih mladih preduzetnika u Republici Srbiji”, Služba za mala i srednja privredna društva Privredne komore Srbije i Privredni forum mladih, Belgrade, 2016.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Stojanovic, B., ‘Alternative Report on the Situation and Needs of Youth in Serbia’, KOMS, 2018.

**Conclusion: Strengthening opportunities to learn about and develop the skills for entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship through formal and non-formal education would be a welcome step. Youth initiatives in these areas should be financially and institutionally supported and enhanced through an adequate normative framework.**

In addition, providing privileges, access to information and simplification of the procedures for starting a business on the one hand, and encouraging entrepreneurs to hire young people on the other, are possible opportunities for increasing the employability of young people.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>393</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Develop programmes, along with monitoring and evaluation of such programmes to reduce drop-out rates.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- 4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex
- 4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex
- 4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill

- 4.5.1 Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated
- 4.6.1 Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex
- 4.7.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment
- 4.a.1 Proportion of schools with access to: (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)
- 4.c.1 Proportion of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country
- 5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex
- 5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location
- 5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment
- 8.1.1 Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita
- 8.2.1 Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person
- 8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities
- 8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
- 8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training
- 8.7.1 Proportion and number of children aged 5-17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age

<sup>393</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3), 7 March 2017.



### Key development partners, among others:

The **Government of Germany (GIZ)** supports youth employment through vocational skills and employment prospects. The **Government of Switzerland (SDC)** supports education to employment designed to create preconditions for a faster recruitment and transition to youth employment in the Serbian labour market and provides policy advice for efficient VET reform in Serbia. The **European Training Foundation** supports Serbia to develop education and training to boost employability, to increase access to employment opportunities and to promote social cohesion, particularly focusing on vocational education. **USAID** has supported organizations that link youth and local governments to promote youth-led community development solutions impacting more than 130,000 members in 97 local communities.

## 24. ADOLESCENT PARTICIPATION

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Youth Strategy for the period from 2015 to 2017 envisages active participation of young men and women in society as one of its strategic goals. Due to continuous support for programmes of inclusion of young people in the society, an increase in their active participation is visible, including of young people from vulnerable groups<sup>394</sup>. Since 2010, more than 1,500 volunteer projects were funded through the National Volunteering Program, “Youth are the Law”, reaching 92,000 youth<sup>395</sup>. Serbia’s Voluntary National Report to the United Nations High Level Political Forum in 2019 will have a strong focus on youth and SDGs.

<sup>394</sup> Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2014-2017, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, December 2018.

<sup>395</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sports

### Low youth participation

Nevertheless, **youth participation in Serbia is low** — political interest and engagement among young people is low (although these results vary in different studies)<sup>396</sup>. Less than 4 per cent of youth are engaged in a political party, while only 14 per cent volunteer or engage in civil society organisations, support online petitions etc<sup>397</sup>. Currently, only four members (1.6 per cent) of the current Parliament are younger than 30 years (with a generally decreasing trend since 2008).<sup>398</sup>

Moreover, out of the young people who are members of **civil society organisations**, the majority are in a youth organisation or organisation for youth (61.4 per cent). Only 21 per cent of youth in Serbia were engaged in an **unpaid voluntary activity** over the last 12 months. This number is similar to the average for Western Balkan countries and shows a decline since the 2015 survey in Serbia (down from 40 per cent to 21 per cent)<sup>399</sup>.

**Conclusion: The reduction of youth engagement in voluntary activities over the last three years is significant. It will be important to understand the causes of this shift as a basis for sound policy and programming to increase opportunities for youth engagement and to promote the values and benefits of volunteerism. Volunteerism could more strongly be promoted through schools, e-platforms etc.**

Understanding the **reasons for the poor engagement of youth** in Serbia may provide some indication of how their potential future participation could be promoted in order to support youth in setting and implementing their own agenda.

<sup>396</sup> Stojanovic, B., ‘Alternative Report on the Situation and Needs of Youth in Serbia’, KOMS, 2018.

<sup>397</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

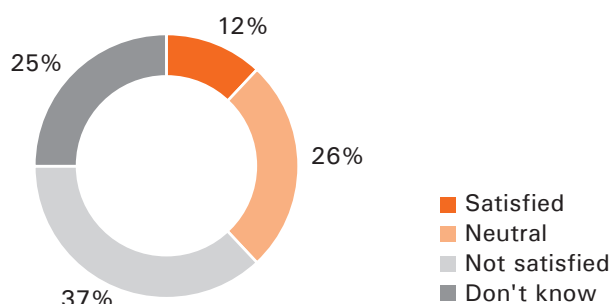
<sup>398</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019 and Stojanovic, B., ‘Alternative Report on the Situation and Needs of Youth in Serbia’, KOMS, 2018.

<sup>399</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

## Factors influencing youth participation

Youth do not have a clearly profiled and coherent ideological orientation towards the left or right of the political spectrum. However, they also do not strive to take control and act, instead youth of all backgrounds seem to be equally reliant on and prefer the **intervention of the state** (79 per cent think that the state should take more responsibility to protect its citizens)<sup>400</sup>. More than a third of young people in Serbia are dissatisfied with the **state of democracy**.

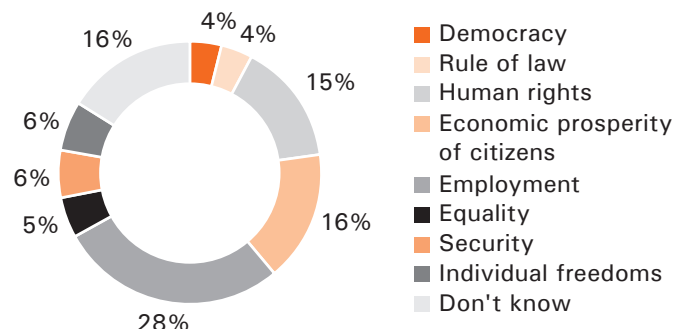
**Figure 43. Satisfaction with the state of democracy (youth 14-29 years), 2018**  
(Source: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Youth in Serbia*, 2019)



However, some preference towards strong leadership and a strong party that would represent the will of ordinary people is also observed among youth, leading to a mix of orientations. In summary, democracy is not strongly supported by youth in Serbia, although this is not necessarily linked to their preference towards non-democratic governance.

The dissatisfaction of youth with democracy is linked to the poor realisation of core **democratic values** in Serbia (as compared to the EU, for example), particularly in the areas of employment and economic prosperity. Unfortunately, youth do not place governance, democracy and individual freedom as their greatest personal values either, leading to the conclusion that youth do not recognise them as values that could ultimately lead to greater employment and economic prosperity<sup>401</sup>.

**Figure 44. Most important personal values (youth 14-29 years), 2018**  
(Source: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Youth in Serbia*, 2019)



In 2018, youth perceived unemployment and the system of values as their greatest personal fears and the greatest social problems in society. **Corruption and social injustice** also feature highly, along with low decision-making power<sup>402</sup>. In addition to these widely perceived social problems, there are also traditional values and **social and gender norms** that limit the development and exercising of rights and the satisfaction of the needs of some young people in terms of further education, employment and participation.

<sup>401</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>402</sup> Stojanovic, B., 'Alternative Report on the Situation and Needs of Youth in Serbia', KOMS, 2018, and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

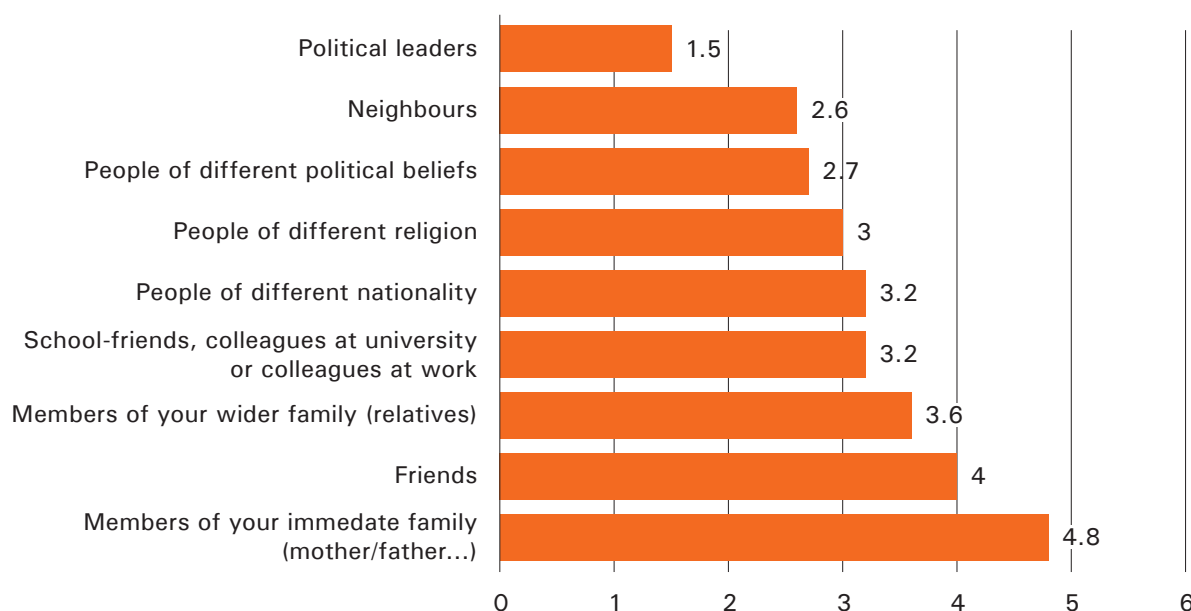
**Conclusion:** With the understanding that not all adolescents are a priori interested in participation, systematically providing them with accurate information that is understandable and usable by different ages and abilities, may increase the likelihood of generating and maintaining their interest.

Youth participation efforts need to clearly uphold and promote values that can empower youth to assume more leadership, participate in decision-making and address unwanted occurrences in society. A strength-based approach where adolescents are perceived as assets, creators and innovators as well as agents of democratic values and change also needs to be strongly promoted.

Skill development programmes for learning, personal empowerment (negotiation, communication, leadership), active citizenship and social innovation should be strengthened.

**Figure 45. Survey on levels of trust on a scale of 1 to 5 (youth aged 14-29 years), 2018**

(Source: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Youth in Serbia*, 2019)



Studies also agree on the striking **lack of young people's trust** in institutions, political parties and leaders, in particular. On the other hand, youth display a high level of **interpersonal trust** — especially towards family members, friends and relatives. Family values and solidarity rank highly among youth. Extending interpersonal trust to wider social networks and youth

movements could therefore be an important element of their potential success, although more evidence may be needed to enable its smooth facilitation<sup>403</sup>.

<sup>403</sup> Stojanovic, B., 'Alternative Report about the Status and Needs of Young People in the Republic of Serbia', KOMS 2018, and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

"I think that one of the main problems for young people is the very perception of society. I've noticed that more and more people take up defeatism because they think it's impossible for them to do something and change the situation. They think that the system is so rigid that they are not able to do something and make the right change. I think that's not true because each of us is capable of making a change".

Adolescent

**Conclusion:** Civic engagement is very important for the development of civic values, social trust and strengthening of democratic values, so it is particularly important to nurture the civic engagement of youth. Supporting youth to set up their own clear agenda considering their perceived priorities, placing these priorities in a context of social values and then linking this agenda to substantive solutions would be of crucial importance for the success of future youth participation initiatives. Building confidence in their own ability to influence the social setting and build increased trust of youth towards institutions could be important outcomes of such an approach.

Institutions need to make efforts to win the trust of young people by delivering on their commitments to youth, creating systematic opportunities to include youth in decision-making processes, hearing their views as well as clearly demonstrating the changes that ensue from youth participation. Two-way accountability needs to be embedded into all youth participation processes.

### Mediums for encouraging youth participation

Most youth may require prompting and encouragement to increase their participation. The majority of them **need peer support and positive experiences** to engage in such activities. This suggests the need for working more on the promotion of the idea of youth participation, using peer mentors and influencers and by promoting the examples of good practice.

"We recently had a survey pertaining to what we think is the problem in our municipality and what we would change. One question was whether I would like to be a part of an organization to change something, and most students said yes. But there was also a question of whether they would initiate an action to change something, and 95 per cent said no. So, I think we need some incentive, encouragement. A lot of students would follow someone older or some group, but if they need to do something alone, they are a little inert".

Adolescent

**Conclusion:** There is an opportunity to support young influencers and peers in setting a positive example, motivating youth to increase their participation and build confidence of wider youth networks. Using role model approaches to bring marginalized children into child participation forums with the help of peers whom they can trust and with whom they feel safe may be especially beneficial. Certain participation forums could be specifically tailored to vulnerable children, including adolescent girls or children with disabilities.

Pupils' parliaments could also be strengthened as a platform for youth participation and socialisation, as they have a strong potential for inclusion of youth from different social groups and backgrounds and promotion of unity and team

spirit. Establishing regular youth participation mechanisms in local governance structures would be an important factor in instilling a sense of mutual community ownership.

Almost half of all young people spend between three and five hours on the internet daily. Most of their online time is spent on socialising, entertainment, education and information search. However, their large online social networks most often do not reflect the number of close friendships in daily life<sup>404</sup>. There is also increasing evidence of intense pressure to live up to idealised images shared through these media.

“Online engagement is not necessarily perceived as real engagement by young people. I think we need to offer youth a way to engage in real life and complement that with online tools and networks where they can remain in touch. Otherwise they may be clicking online but I’m not sure that they interpret this as really participating in something”.

Adolescent

**Conclusion:** While online tools are an accessible and widely used medium by youth, they cannot replace real-life experience. Youth participation therefore needs to combine online and offline means. It will also be important to ensure that adolescents and youth with limited access to digital technologies are not left behind and fully included in opportunities for participation, activation and engagement.

## Barriers to youth participation

A recent regional study on parenting adolescents and youth has shown parents often lack skills and knowledge to communicate with and support adolescents and youth. Families also lack sufficient awareness of their rights and entitlements<sup>405</sup>.

A recent survey in Serbia revealed that more than half of youth do not know about the existence of a Law on Youth and 87 per cent believe that youth are not represented sufficiently in the media<sup>406</sup>. Youth organisations may not always have the means to publicise their work among peers.

There is insufficient availability and coverage of adolescent and youth-friendly services, particularly in remote areas, and a lack of qualified professionals with knowledge and skills to address the needs of adolescents and youth. Services and information are particularly scarce for adolescents and youth with disabilities, living in poor families, from Roma settlements, rural areas etc.

**Conclusion:** There is a need for systemic, continuous and long-term work to provide the necessary conditions for the development and achievement of all human rights and wellbeing of young people, including through the support that can be provided by parents. Adolescent parenting support programmes related to communication, decision-making, engagement etc. would be welcomed.

The scope and quality of tailor-make services for adolescent boys and girls requires further improvement. Spaces for greater social cohesion among adolescents would benefit their mutual learning and development. Consideration also

<sup>404</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Youth Study Serbia 2018/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2019.

<sup>405</sup> UNICEF, Parenting Adolescents, A regional study on parenting adolescents and parenting support programmes in Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro and Romania, UNICEF, Geneva, 2018.

<sup>406</sup> Stojanovic, B., ‘Alternative Report on the Situation and Needs of Youth in Serbia’, KOMS, 2018.



needs to be given to the current distribution of power that is largely on the side of service providers.

It is important to give more publicity to the work of youth organisations and networks in the media and to support the message of youth activities through formal and informal channels.

There is inadequate recognition and understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of young people in Serbia among decision-makers, as well as society at large<sup>407</sup>. Greater recognition of the fact that youth may be interested in engaging around a different range of issues than the older generations is required.

**Conclusion:** It would be important to plan for youth participation in all relevant policy-making and monitoring processes such as strategies, programmes laws, by-laws etc, giving youth a chance to influence the direction of the government's engagement on youth issues. It would be crucial to develop and monitor the usage of institutional mechanisms that support participation in different settings.

For those youth who are interested, there are **insufficient opportunities** for participation in the decision making that affects young people. According to the participants in a focus group, young people can rarely hear and learn about opportunities and possibilities to engage in different volunteer or similar activities, especially if they do not live in big cities.

"I wanted to engage in volunteering because I'm from a small village where there is nothing like that. Every summer break the time I spend at home I'm bored because I do not have opportunities to spend quality time when I can do a lot of things. I think some of these more interesting organizations are focused on larger cities. This may be a problem because they are not available in rural places".

Adolescent

According to reports of CSOs working on the migrant crisis, children on the move also generally do not participate in any meaningful decision-making process concerning their life, from the choice of accommodation to selection of their studies; while they seldom engage in social integration activities sporadically promoted by civil society actors.

**Conclusion:** It is important for issues of equity to be kept at the fore of policy and programming for youth participation. This requires strengthening data and analysis to better understand the symptoms and causes of exclusion, and employing a strong equity lens as policies and programmes are designed and implemented.

There is also need to promote cross-sectoral approaches that will enable vulnerable and disadvantaged youth to be reached through different entry points with opportunities for inclusion and participation. The network of youth organisations in remote and rural areas of the country would also need to be strengthened.

<sup>407</sup> UNICEF consultations with youth, Serbia, April 2019.

In its **Concluding Observations on the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Serbia regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>408</sup>, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that Serbia:

- Ensure that children's views are given due consideration, in the family, at schools, in the courts and in all relevant administrative and other processes concerning them through, inter alia, the adoption of appropriate legislation, the training of professionals, the establishment of specific activities at schools and general awareness-raising. The Committee further encourages the State party to work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to disseminate the Convention and to strengthen the creation of meaningful spaces through which children can influence public policy.

#### Relates to SDG indicators:

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| 11.1.1 | Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing   |
| 11.2.1 | Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities   |
| 11.3.2 | Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically   |
| 11.4.1 | Total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by type of heritage (cultural, n  |
| 11.a.1 | Proportion of population living in cities that implement urban and regional development plans integrating population projections and resource needs, by size of city   |
| 12.8.1 | Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development (including climate change education) are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment |
| 12.a.1 | Amount of support to developing countries on research and development for sustainable consumption and production and environmentally sound technologies  |
| 16.7.1 | Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions   |
| 16.7.2 | Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group   |

#### Key development partners, among others:

**OSCE** supports inclusive youth policies and their thorough implementation throughout Serbia. **UNICEF**, **UNDP** and **UNESCO** jointly implement a regional youth reconciliation programme, "Dialogue for the Future". The **Open Society Foundation** supports pupils' participation in schools.

<sup>408</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017). Concluding Observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3).

# Annex 1

## List of child-related SDG indicator values for Serbia

SDG indicator	Tier Classification	Child-focused indicators related to SDGs	Recent indicator value	Child value	Year	Source
1.2.1	I	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	25.7	30.5	2017	SORS, SILC
1.2.2	II	Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	36.7	38.5	2017	SORS, SILC
1.3.1	I	Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/ systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable	10.1		2017	SORS, SILC
2.2.1	I	2.2.1 Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 (%)		6	2014	2014 Serbia multiple indicator cluster survey and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)
2.2.2	I	2.2.2.a Prevalence of wasting among children under 5 (%)		3.9	2014	2014 Serbia multiple indicator cluster survey and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)
		2.2.2.b Prevalence of overweight among children under 5 (%)		13.9	2014	2014 Serbia multiple indicator cluster survey and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)
3.1.1	II	Maternal mortality ratio	12.04		2016	WHO, Eurostat
3.1.2	I	3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel (%)	98.4		2014	2014 Serbia multiple indicator cluster survey and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)
3.2.1	I	3.2.1 Under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)		5.8	2017	SORS, Vital statistics
3.2.2	I	3.2.2 Neonatal mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)		3.21	2017	SORS, Vital statistics
3.7.2	I	Adolescent birth rate (aged 15-19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group		15.1	2017	SORS, Vital statistics

3.b.1	I	3.b.1 Proportion of the target population covered by all vaccines included in their national programme — MCV2 (%)		90	2016	WHO/UNICEF coverage estimates 2016 revision, July 2017
		3.b.1 Proportion of the target population covered by all vaccines included in their national programme — DTP3 (%)		92	2016	WHO/UNICEF coverage estimates 2016 revision, July 2017
4.1.1	III	Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex		61.09 (mathematics) 66.87 (reading) — at the end of lower secondary	2012	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
4.2.1	I	4.2.1 Proportion of children 36-59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being (%)		95.1	2014	2014 Serbia multiple indicator cluster survey and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)
4.2.2	I	Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex		96.84	2017	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
5.2.1	II	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15-19 subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner (%)		9.2	2019	OSCE survey on VAW
5.2.2	II	5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15-19 subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner (%)		0.5	2019	OSCE survey on VAW
5.3.1	I	5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married or in union before age 18 (%)	3.2		2014	2014 Serbia multiple indicator cluster survey and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)
6.1.1	I	6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%)	88.14379		2015	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (2017)

6.2.1	I	6.2.1.a Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (%)	24.0219		2015	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (2017)
		6.2.1.b Proportion of population with a basic handwashing facility with soap and water available on premises (%)	97.71855		2014	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (2017)
		6.2.1.c Proportion of population practising open defecation (%)	0.07223		2015	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (2017)
7.1.2	I	Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology	76		2016	Global Health Observatory (GHO), World Health Organisation (WHO)
8.7.1	I	8.7.1 Proportion of children aged 5-17 engaged in child labour (%)		6.7	2014	UNICEF and ILO calculations
16.2.1	I	16.2.1 Proportion of children aged 1-14 who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month (%)		43.1	2014	2014 Serbia multiple indicator cluster survey and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)
16.2.3	II	16.2.3 Proportion of young women aged 18-29 who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (%)	1.11		2018	UNICEF, Adverse Childhood Experiences study
		16.2.3 Proportion of young men aged 18-29 who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (%)	1.33		2018	UNICEF, Adverse Childhood Experiences study
16.9.1	I	16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority (%)		99.4	2014	2014 Serbia multiple indicator cluster survey and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)



# Annex 2

## Mapping of governance framework related to child rights

SECTORAL  
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Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Health	Ministry of Justice	Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunication	Ministry of Culture and Information	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Innovation and Technological Development
National Strategy for Prevention of and Protection from Violence against Children (draft)	Strategy for Development of Education in Serbia (2011-2020)	Public Health Strategy "Healthy People, Health in all Policies" (2018-2026)	Strategy for the Development of the Criminal Sanctions Enforcement System in the Republic of Serbia until 2020	Strategy for Development of an Information Society till 2020	Strategy of Development of the Public Information System (draft)	Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development	Economic Reform Programme	Innovation Fund
National Strategy for Social Protection 2019-2025 (draft)		Strategy for Prevention and Control of HIV Infection and AIDS 2018-2025	EU Accession Chapter 23				Employment and Social Policy Reform Programme	
National Employment Strategy (2011-2020)		Strategy for Preventing Substance Misuse 2014-2021						
		Strategy for Development of Protection of Mental Health (draft)						
		National programme for early childhood development						
EU Accession Chapter 24		National programme for protection of breastfeeding and family oriented developmental care						
Strategy on Traffic Security on Roads in the Republic of Serbia (2015-2020)		National programme for immunization						
Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations		National programme for prevention of obesity among children and adults						
Strategy for Migration Management (2017-2022)		National programme for protection and advancement of sexual and reproductive health						
Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, especially Women and Children and the Protection of Victims 2017-2022		National Strategy for Youth					National Programme for Environmental Protection	
Strategy for Combating High-Tech Crime 2019-2023	Strategy of Professional Development of Employees in Local Self-Government Units	Strategy for Development of Sport 2014-2018	Pro-Natalist Strategy (2018-2020)	National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016-2020)	Strategy of Social Inclusion of Roma Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia (2016-2025)	Strategy for Protection and Prevention Against Discrimination (2013-2018)	Climate Strategy (draft)	National Priorities for International Assistance (INAD)
Ministry of Interior	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government	Ministry of Youth and Sports	Cabinet of Minister without Portfolio responsible for Demography and Population Policy	Coordination Body for Gender Equality (Deputy Prime Minister)	Coordination Body for Social Inclusion of Roma (Deputy Prime Minister)	Commissioner for Protection of Equality	Ministry of Environmental Protection	Ministry of European Integration

HORIZONTAL  
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# Annex 3

## Causal Analysis

### Causal Analysis — Education

**Core issue/problem: Education does not adequately contribute to the development of competencies needed for twenty-first century**

#### Immediate causes

- Teaching and learning do not correspond to modern education concepts and diverse students' needs
- Students' achievements and wellbeing are not at a satisfactory level, (especially achievements of children from vulnerable groups)
- Financing and governance do not adequately supporting quality and equity

#### Underlying causes

- Low teacher competencies due to outdated pre- and in-service teacher training
- Teacher polices are not fully functional and outdated (licencing, career advancement etc.)
- Preschool curriculum needs to be modernised and requires comprehensive support for implementation
- Competency-based school curriculum legally introduced, but still heavily relying on content
- Curricula and teaching methods do not adequately promote inclusive learning and social tolerance
- Insufficient system-level support to schools
- Systems greatly relying on external evaluation, lacking capacities for support to school improvement; self-evaluation not serving its purpose
- Lack of and/or inappropriate additional support to students (especially for children from socially deprived groups, at risk of drop-out and children with disabilities)
- Inconsistent implementation of other monitoring models and data collection to drive evidence-based policy making
- Low utilisation of private sector potential and inadequate regulation of private service preschool providers
- Inadequate mechanisms to promote parent participation in children's school and in their education more broadly

#### Root causes

- Education financing modalities do not contribute to equity, quality development and school autonomy. Financing system based on workforce load (maintaining existing workforce, regardless of demographic trends)
- Discriminatory attitudes among society, including within the education system, towards Roma and other minorities
- Lack of awareness and understanding of the important role of families in education, and lack of value attributed to education among some families and communities

## Causal Analysis — Early Childhood Health and Development

**Core issue/problem: Inequity in access, coverage and quality of health services for young children and mothers**

### Immediate causes

- Geographic limitations in access to quality neonatology services; outreach is not equally distributed across the country
- Inconsistency in vaccine availability
- Professionals' and parents' hesitance related to vaccination
- Perception of user-unfriendly approach of service provision to some minority groups, such as Roma communities

### Underlying causes

- Inadequate human resources and professional capacities for neonatal services, outdated approaches and practices used by health professionals
- Inadequate availability of equipment for quality neonatal care
- Inadequate monitoring systems, including data analysis to inform policy actions in timely manner for neonatology and immunisation (no routine data on Roma)
- Weaknesses in management, organisation and supply in neonatology and immunisation
- Parents not aware of and not requesting modernised services at neonatal units
- Inadequate intersectoral coordination, particularly in serving minority and vulnerable groups
- Lack of trust in health authorities and system and pharmaceutical industry (i.e. regarding immunisation)
- Systems of support to hesitant parents are inadequate (no credible information, weak capacities and rigidity of professionals to address these issues, no help-line for parents, lack of campaigns)
- Pre-service education system requires modernisation (medical approach oriented to survival, with inadequate focus on social issues, including gender)
- Lack of incentives for professional development to modernize practice and limited support to promote change
- Need for stronger, continuous monitoring of service quality

### Root causes

- Politicization of decision-making processes, lack of participatory approaches and lack of public (groups of interest) involvement in policy development
- Lack of knowledge and awareness of health and nutrition-related issues among some families and communities, including some minority populations. Cultural and gender barriers
- Discriminatory attitudes within society at large

## Causal Analysis — Child Protection

**Core issue/problem: Vulnerable children are not adequately protected so they can live in safe, loving and stimulating family environments**

### Immediate causes

- Children and families in need do not receive relevant and timely support to prevent separation
- Professionals lack awareness, skills, guidance and incentives to support prioritization of family strengthening
- Vulnerable families are not aware of services available / are hesitant to ask for support / do not trust service providers/ are not encouraged to seek advice/support
- Families and children are not aware of complaint mechanisms
- Roma children and children with disabilities are over-represented in formal care
- Family support measures/individualisation seen as an additional burden by professionals
- Children are not aware of their right to have a say /participate in child protection services Diversion orders and alternative sanctions are not consistently applied
- Participation and protection of children in civil proceedings is not prioritized / professional practice varies / child's view not taken into account

### Underlying causes

- Family support services are not sufficiently developed / not available to all children and families in need — continuum of services not established (from 'soft' parenting programmes to intensive family support services)
- Inadequacy of cash benefit programmes; not reaching all in need (coverage, targeting, amounts)
- Lack of awareness of harmful practices / discriminatory attitudes towards some groups
- Lack of advocacy and tailored support for children with developmental delays and disabilities, including support to their families
- Child protection services not sufficiently gender-sensitive
- Accountability of institutions/professionals not supported through adequate data/collection, monitoring, supervision and inspection
- Financing of diversions and alternative sanctions not resolved; division of roles and responsibilities between social and justice sector not clear
- Reform in the previous period focused more on juvenile offenders
- Specialized services for protection of child victims and witnesses are not available; system not in place (not regulated, financed, no professional capacities)

### Root causes

- Inadequate funding / public financing / lack of structural incentives to ensure availability of local child protection services
- Lack of ownership and prioritization of decision-makers
- Discontinuity of child protection reforms
- Social norms / beliefs that some (parental) practices and behaviours cannot be changed and that for the child it is better to be separated and cared for by professionals
- Child perceived as an object, not subject in decision making
- Child marriage perceived as part of culture/tradition that cannot/should not be tackled
- Poverty and deprivation increasing pressure at family level, including risk of abuse and neglect

### Core issue/problem: Lack of equitable access to child-friendly justice services

#### Immediate causes

- Civil and administrative proceedings are outdated — not focused on needs of children
- Inadequate reporting and prosecution of violence, including sexual violence, against children
- In civil and administrative proceedings, the child's opinion is often not taken into account when decisions are made, particularly if the child is under the age of 10 years
- Children are not sufficiently aware of their right to participate and express their opinions in civil proceedings

#### Underlying causes

- Poor understanding of child rights and failure to implement existing, often weak, regulations by the courts and Centres for Social Work
- As key duty-bearers, court and other officials are not adequately trained to interview children, while the premises used for this purpose are seldom appropriate and child-friendly
- Lack of diversionary measures (although this has been improving)
- Lack of gender-sensitive approaches, developed from evidence-based analysis (more boys come into conflict with the law than girls)
- Data on civil and administrative proceedings are not publicly available
- Weaknesses in the judicial system as a whole, in particular with reference to “excessive length of court cases and to non-enforcement of domestic judgments”
- Slow processes for decision-making, especially where custody and care decisions are being made
- Inadequate enforcement of court decisions
- Existing regulations on child participation are often ignored or poorly applied
- Lack of awareness of child rights among social workers, the judiciary, teachers and especially parents

#### Root causes

- Regulatory framework is weak, with a lack of standardized procedures for child participation and vague or contradictory roles assigned to the Centre for Social Work as the guardianship authority
- Reforms in relation to child justice have focused on the criminal justice system, while reforms in civil and administrative proceedings are lagging (e.g. working in family law matters requires certification for judges in all courts, while no such specialization is defined in civil law and administrative proceedings)
- Social norms/behaviours — prevailing attitudes about the child as a rights holder
- Historically, the focus of justice system was punitive, although there has been a gradual shift towards more rehabilitative and restorative approaches



## Causal Analysis — Adolescents and Youth

**Core issue/problem: The needs and roles of youth and adolescents, including those from vulnerable groups, are under-represented and under-developed**

### Immediate causes

- Lack of work opportunities for youth. Wide gaps in school-to-work transitions and low employability, in part due to:
  - lack of opportunities for acquiring qualifications, competencies and skills necessary to participate in the work force
  - lack of career guidance and counselling
  - lack of opportunities to gain experience
  - mismatch between educational profile and labour market demands
  - lack of scholarships
- Lack of activism, trust in and interaction with institutions from the youth side
- Lack of opportunities of various groups for travel, mobility, scope of international youth cooperation and support for young migrants

### Underlying causes

- Specific, gender-sensitive health and well-being needs of adolescents and youth, including mental health, have not been addressed as a priority of government
- Inadequate early detection of risk of education dropout
- Outdated education curricula, inequality of profiles offered in rural areas, teacher development does not go hand in hand with the industry priorities. Education curricula is not adequately building children's skills, including soft skills, entrepreneurship, leadership, civic education, critical thinking
- Education institutions, local self-governance and civic organizations do not include youth friendly options for decision-making and engagement processes
- Limited nonformal education opportunities and high levels of NEET, especially for vulnerable groups, limited access in rural areas. Lack of recognition of the skills acquired through nonformal education.
- Risk averse attitude towards entrepreneurship, limited access to finance and support for entrepreneurs
- NGOs and youth leaders not adequately linked to inactive youth, youth outside of networks and new youth audiences
- System for skills forecasting is not sufficiently developed
- Insufficient inter-sectoral collaboration between social services, education services, justice to protect those at risk
- Limited skills for inclusive teaching, limited use of assistive technologies, and broadly a lack of inclusive services for children with disabilities and developmental delays
- Inequity in access and use of digital media

### Root causes

- Stereotypes, gender norms leading to limited opportunities for girls and marginalized groups. Young people not typically recognized as actors of change
- Dominant social narratives not promoting values of civic participation and tolerance
- Unhealthy lifestyles, low health awareness (poor nutrition, alcohol and substance abuse etc.)
- High levels of migration contributing to brain drain
- Poverty, unemployment and lack of job opportunities
- Sexual exploitation and trafficking of migrant girls
- Society highly polarized and divided, lack of opportunities for interaction and dialogue

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