

UNICEF's Programme of Cooperation with Serbia, 2026–2030

UNICEF in Serbia



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Since UNICEF began its work in Serbia in 1946, the country has made important progress for children.

Together with partners, UNICEF has helped strengthen the systems children and families rely on every day, contributing to expanded access to health care, early childhood services, education and social protection.

Many reforms supported by UNICEF are now part of national systems.

However, not all children benefit equally. Inequality continues to affect how children access services and opportunities.

While Serbia has expanded access to many essential services, significant disparities remain for children living in poverty, Roma children, children with disabilities and children in rural areas.

Children are also increasingly affected by violence, mental health challenges and environmental risks, including pollution and climate-related shocks.

Closing these gaps is essential not only for children's rights, but also for Serbia's future. When children have equitable access to quality services, from early childhood through adolescence, they are better able to develop their full potential and contribute to society.

UNICEF focuses on strengthening national and local systems so that services for children are sustainable, well financed and able to reach those who need them most.

Through policy advice, technical expertise, data and evidence, and partnerships, UNICEF helps ensure that proven solutions for children become part of national laws, policies and public budgets.



Focus areas



Best start in life

More children access quality health, nutrition, early childhood development and parenting support services.



Quality education and skills

Children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from inclusive, modern education and opportunities to develop skills for the future.



Safe and supportive environments

Children grow up protected from violence, with stronger mental health support, child protection systems and safer digital, social and physical environments.



What UNICEF does

UNICEF works with government institutions, local authorities, civil society, academia, media, and the private sector to strengthen systems that support children and families.

The focus is on ensuring that services for children are inclusive, effective and sustainable.

UNICEF contributes by:

- providing policy advice and evidence aligned with national reforms
- strengthening institutional capacity to deliver services
- supporting the generation and use of data to improve decision-making for children
- advocating for child-focused laws and public budgets
- supporting local governments to reach the most vulnerable families
- mobilizing partnerships and resources for children



Health and early childhood development

UNICEF works with the Ministry of Health and other partners to strengthen maternal, newborn and child health services and expand access to quality early childhood development programmes.

This includes promoting vaccination and nutrition, improving maternal and newborn care, supporting parents through home visiting programmes and expanding early childhood intervention services for children with developmental difficulties.

UNICEF also supports efforts to ensure that health, education and social services work together to provide families with the support they need during the early years of a child's life.



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By 2030:

80%

of children under six years of age are reached by early stimulation, nurturing care and parenting support services

95%

measles vaccination coverage is achieved, ensuring herd immunity and stronger protection for children against preventable diseases



Education

UNICEF supports the Ministry of Education and national efforts to expand access to preschool education, strengthen inclusive education and improve learning outcomes for all children.

This includes working with teachers, modernizing teaching approaches and helping schools better support children who are at risk of exclusion.

UNICEF also contributes to the transformation of special schools into resource centres that help mainstream schools provide inclusive education.

Efforts also promote digital skills, innovative learning approaches and environmental education.

By 2030:

83%

preschool enrolment is achieved among children aged 3 to 5.5 years, with improved access for children from vulnerable families

75%

of students achieve minimum proficiency in reading, mathematics and science

Child protection

UNICEF works with national partners to strengthen child protection systems so that risks can be prevented, identified early and addressed effectively.

This includes strengthening family support services, improving foster care and promoting family-based care for children without parental care.

UNICEF also supports efforts to ensure that justice systems respond to the needs of children and protect children who come into contact with the law.

Support is also provided to protect refugee and migrant children and ensure they receive appropriate care and protection.



By 2030:

15%

of children in conflict with the law benefit from diversion and non-custodial measures that prioritise rehabilitation and reintegration

≤400

children live in residential institutions, down from 566, reflecting stronger family-based care

9,500

children affected by violence receive support services through strengthened protection systems

Adolescents and youth

UNICEF works with national and local partners to expand opportunities for adolescents and young people to develop skills, participate in decision-making and successfully transition from education to employment.

We support programmes that promote mental health and well-being among adolescents and young people, helping ensure that young people have access to the support they need.

This includes strengthening youth participation, youth services and non-formal learning opportunities.



By 2030:

9.1%

of young people aged 15 to 29 are not in employment, education or training, down from 15.2%, reflecting stronger pathways from education into skills development and decent work

Environment and climate change

UNICEF supports the Government of Serbia in strengthening environmental and climate policies, improving climate resilience, and promoting sustainable practices that protect children and vulnerable populations from the impacts of pollution and climate change.

This includes supporting stronger systems for monitoring environmental risks, improving the availability of data related to children's environmental health and well-being, and promoting climate and environmental education.



By 2030:

- **Children's needs and perspectives** are systematically integrated into environmental and climate policies
- **Stronger national and local systems** for addressing pollution and climate-related risks are in place, **improving children's environmental health**
- **Improved availability of environmental and climate data** related to children's well-being
- **Greater integration of climate and environmental education into education** systems, resulting in improved climate and environmental literacy among children

Social policy and public investment for children

UNICEF supports the Government of Serbia in strengthening child-focused policies, improving public spending for children and strengthening data systems that monitor children's well-being.

This includes promoting child-responsive budgeting and supporting the use of evidence and data to inform policies and investments for children. Together, these efforts help public policies and financing better reach the children and families who need them most.

By 2030:

■ Stronger national and local systems for **child-responsive budgeting**

■ Improved availability of **data and indicators on children's well-being**





Partnerships and national ambassadors

Partnerships, public support and advocacy all play an important role in advancing children's rights in Serbia.

UNICEF works with companies, foundations, media organizations and business networks to mobilize resources, innovation, expertise and public engagement for children and families.

Thousands of individual donors contribute through regular giving and public fundraising campaigns, helping sustain programmes that improve children's lives.

UNICEF also works with businesses and media partners to promote responsible practices and strengthen public awareness of issues affecting children and young people.

UNICEF National Ambassadors and supporters help raise awareness about children's rights, amplify our advocacy and messages, support public engagement and encourage people to take action for children.

UNICEF, for every child