



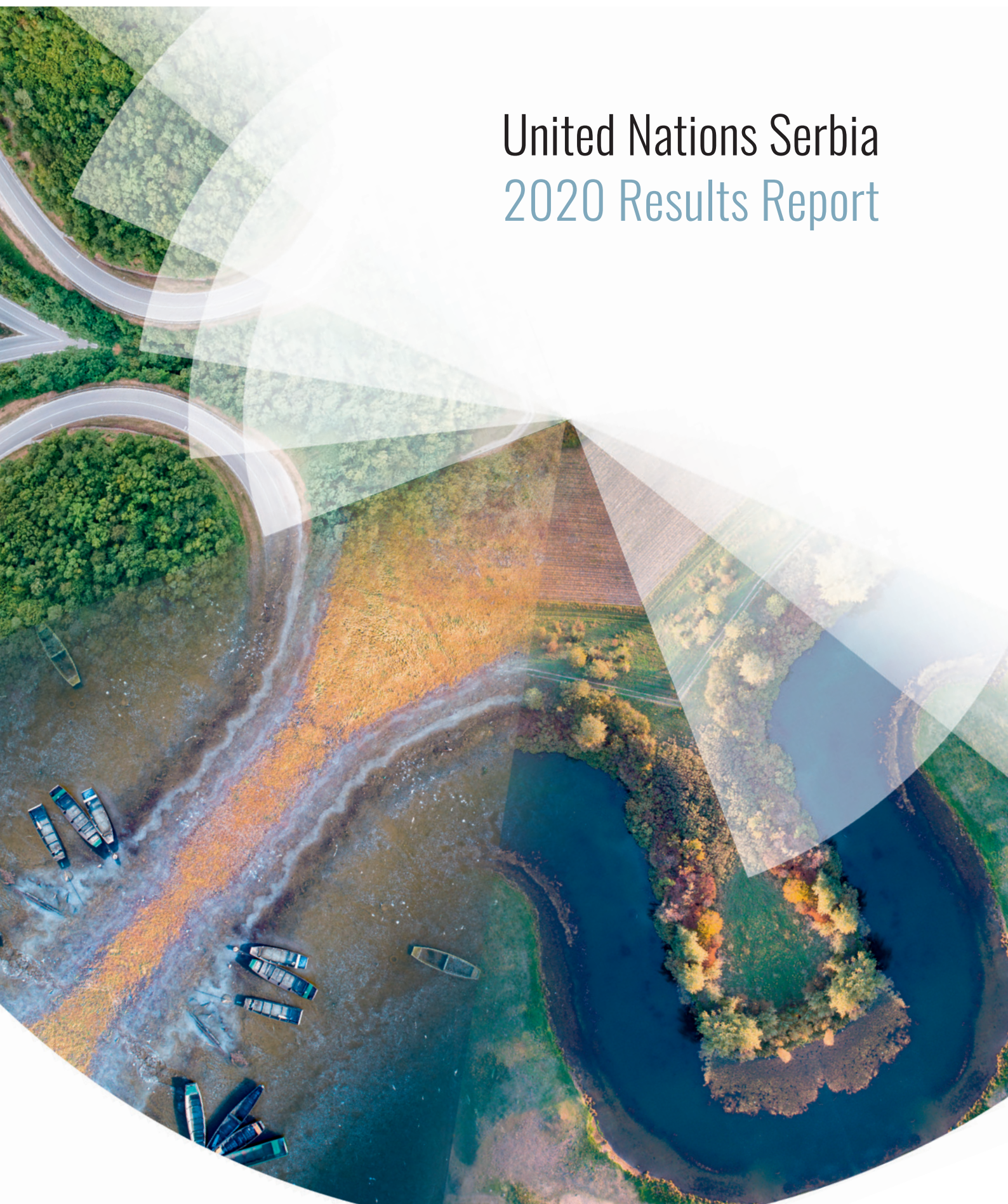
Government  
of the Republic  
of Serbia



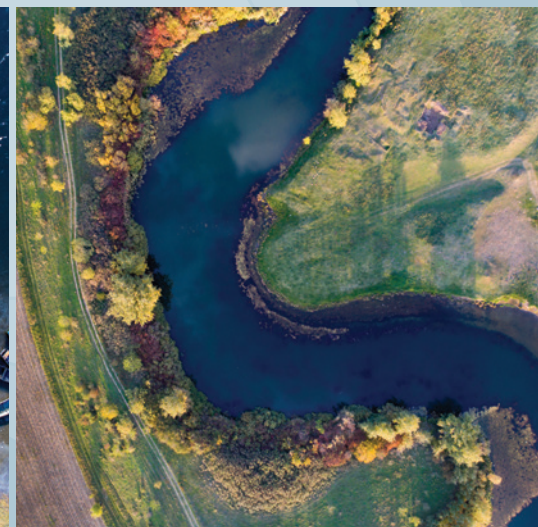
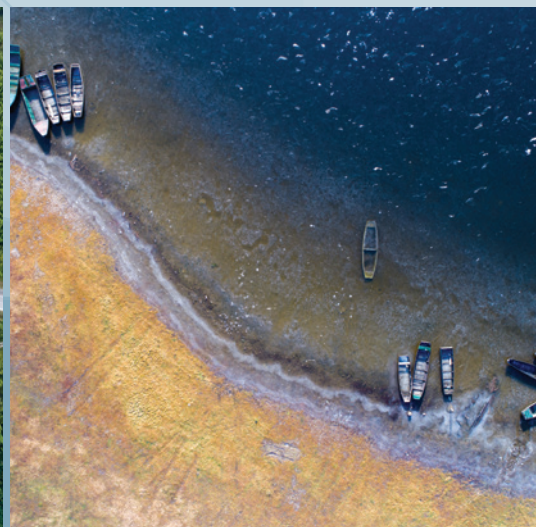
UNITED NATIONS  
SERBIA



# United Nations Serbia 2020 Results Report







**Cover Images:**  
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# Foreword by the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Serbia

Much has been said about 2020. While we are already deep in the challenges of 2021, I look back at 2020 with both relief and curiosity. If I had to describe this year in Serbia with three words, they would be commitment, resilience, and creativity. **Decisive commitment** from the highest level, and into the most remote corners of the country, to address the crisis and its multiple consequences quickly and effectively. **Resilience from the people**, to cope with the rippling effects of the health pandemic on the economy, livelihoods, individual freedoms, families, and the forgotten ones. **Creativity, from so many individuals, communities, companies, and institutions** to find solutions to the most unexpected situations. I still remember how impressed I was by so many of us moving to alternative online work and study modalities, within a matter of days, into what became known as “the new normal.”

**Speed and close coordination between key stakeholders proved critical** in the initial response to the crisis. Serbia responded decisively to the pandemic, both on prevention and clinical treatments, and later, in planning the vaccination campaign. Procurement was initiated and executed quickly, with the health system showing commendable agility and responsiveness. Public and private partners were flexible and generous. The United Nations contributed extensively with policy guidance in the early stages of the pandemic response, with vaccination campaign preparations, and with logistical and operational support.

Very quickly, we realised that not everybody would have equal access to both essential services and information, even if COVID-19 posed a risk for all. **The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups**, including older people, people with disabilities, poor households in neglected settlements, and workers in the informal sector. Those on the fringes of poverty were also heavily impacted, while migrants and refugees faced an even more precarious situation. The United Nations was particularly attentive to, and active in, mitigating the impacts of restrictive measures on the rights and freedoms of those least empowered: those losing jobs and revenues, lacking basic water and electricity infrastructure, and deprived of protection services, among others. These efforts were an essential complement to the universal lumpsum provided to citizens and the stimulus packages targeting the private sector, which the Government of Serbia issued, the most generous in the region.

Other agendas were delayed or suspended during 2020, which was also a general election year for Serbia. The crisis

brought back to the forefront fundamental questions of structural and long-term levers of neglect or discrimination, and of shaping a better future for all. **While inequalities widened, awareness, ideas, and efforts increased to reshape social protection schemes, strengthen the health system, fast track strategies to accelerate gender equality and combat gender-based violence, and sow the seeds for a greener recovery.** The United Nations faced a challenge similar to many governments: respond to and support the emergency while maintaining core functions, within the operational constraints of restrictive measures. We had to weigh the unknowns with practicality and proactiveness.

The pandemic was a wake-up call for all humanity. A year later, we are still struggling to regain our balance, as individuals and as societies, on grounds still shaking. We have experienced deep collective suffering, albeit in many different ways. We have endured the harsh reality of a global health crisis while facing multiple socio-economic crises. The mental health impacts of the crisis, bubbling under the surface in many communities and families, remain relatively unassessed.

On the positive side, in Serbia, an immense effort of solidarity within and between communities emerged, and I believe this truly contributed to keeping the country out of the woods for most of the crisis. Many private sector initiatives sprung up to address new challenges – often arising from small enterprises, an essential part of community resilience. Finally, the crisis has returned the green agenda to the top of our development priorities.

The pandemic is teaching us, now more than ever, that **we need to embrace uncertainty as part of our life and continue to fight ignorance and cynicism with education, ethics, collaboration, and optimism.** Solidarity, empathy, and committed actions based on facts and science are the greatest tools to address inequalities. This is what the unique principle of Leave No One Behind in Agenda 2030 is about: promoting equality and non-discrimination. We will reach our common global goals only if we are able to create equal opportunities for all and if we consider the planet and our minds as our greatest and most valuable assets for nurturing and advancing, now and in the future. Going forward, each investment in Serbia, by Serbia, should ensure that social, economic, and environmental impacts are considered – always in the best interests of all.

Françoise Jacob

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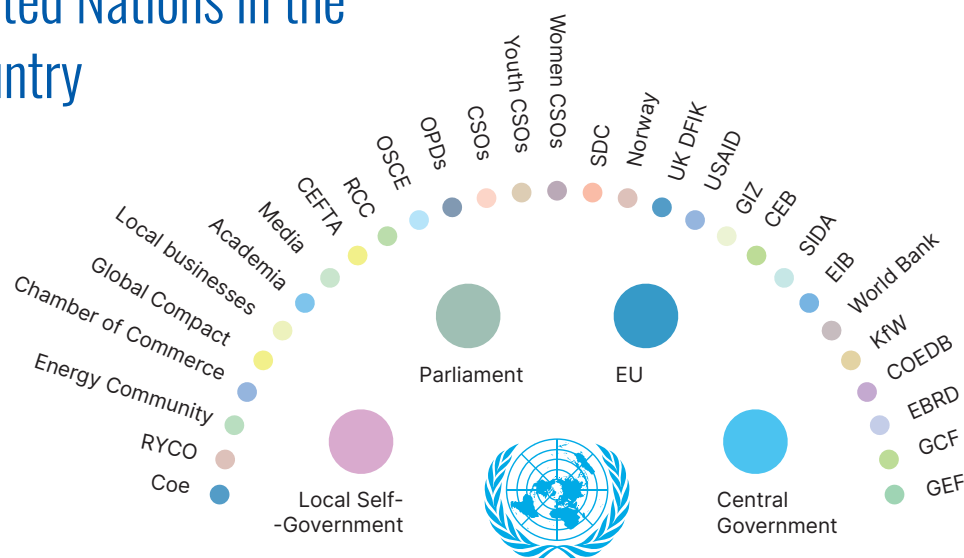


# The United Nations Country Team in Serbia

The following agencies are members of the UNCT in Serbia:

Agencies with a Country Office <sup>1</sup>	Project Offices with in-country presence	Non-Resident Agencies <sup>2</sup>
      	    	       

## Key partners of the United Nations in the country



<sup>1</sup> UNFPA operates as a Country Office under UNDP

<sup>2</sup> OHCHR has national programmatic capacity embedded within the Resident Coordinator's Office

## Chapter 1

## 1

## Country and regional context

In 2020, the work of the United Nations in Serbia was heavily influenced by the trajectory of the coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 was first and foremost a health crisis, resulting in unprecedented human suffering. It was also a socio-economic crisis that amplified existing inequalities and structural challenges, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable. The Government responded quickly and effectively to this manifold crisis, allocating resources, introducing restrictive measures – initially under a state of emergency – and equipping medical personnel. The Serbian economy proved relatively resilient, at least in the short term, contracting only 1.4% against an EU projected fall of 7.6%, due to overall macroeconomic stability, a large government stimulus package (estimated at EUR 5.8 bn or 12.5% of GDP), and structural factors. The United Nations mobilized its full capacity in support, swiftly repurposing funds and expertise to healthcare, humanitarian, and socio-economic responses.

The pandemic delayed general elections to June 2020. A new Cabinet was appointed by the end of October. New priorities were declared, including: health system strengthening; combating organized crime; rule of law and European integration; economic growth; and a green transformation. A new Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue was established, dedicated to addressing the human rights agenda. The Minister publicly committed to addressing structural levers of discrimination and social exclusion and enhancing existing framework implementation, while advancing equality and rights for all. Serbia's current government is led by a woman Prime Minister, and gender parity was reached in the new Cabinet. The population decline continues, partly due to negative natality trends, outmigration, and the youth's disenchantment towards the future. Against this background, the potential of migration in responding to development priorities must be further exploited.

New climate ambition was announced, with the President committing to a 33.3% reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030<sup>3</sup>, alongside a new legislative framework in energy, the finalization of overdue projects in waste and wastewater, and reforestation. Economic growth continued to show limited decoupling from environmental and societal pressures. Energy intensity in Serbia remains high and is nearly twice the EU 28 average, with carbon intensity also significantly higher than EU 28 average. Air quality standards were breached throughout 2020, many cities recording over 100 days exceeding PM<sub>10</sub>, against a 35-day legally prescribed limit. Progress on the green transformation remains limited, yet a window of opportunity is opening in Serbia to embrace this agenda as a positive development pathway. There is a greater awareness and willingness to act amongst both citizens<sup>4</sup> and leaders at the central and local levels, with the private sector ready to seize the myriad of opportunities towards such transformation.

Serbia and its regional partners renewed their commitment to – and took concrete steps towards building – a democratic, prosperous region based on shared values, trust, and the rule of law, within the overall ambition of accession to the EU. European integration remains a key government priority although no new Chapters were opened in the negotiation process in 2020. In November, the Sofia Summit marked a milestone towards regional integration. Among other pledges, leaders committed to a Green Agenda and to building a Common Regional Market with a free flow of people, goods, and capital by 2024. The United Nations – through programmatic initiatives and in close cooperation with the EU, EU Member States, and other regional partners such as the Council of Europe, the Regional Cooperation Council, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe – continued to support dialogue, trust-building, and social cohesion.

<sup>3</sup> Climate Ambitions Summit, 12 December 2020

<sup>4</sup> UN75 survey



Figure 1: Country Context



## Geographical area

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

## Population

**6,945,235**

(2019)



## Life expectancy at birth

**76 years**

(2019)



## Average monthly net salary

**518 EUR**

(Jan-Dec 2020)



## Democracy index

**6.22**flawed democracy  
(2020)

## GINI coefficient

**33.3**

(2019)



## GDP per capita

**6,619 EUR**

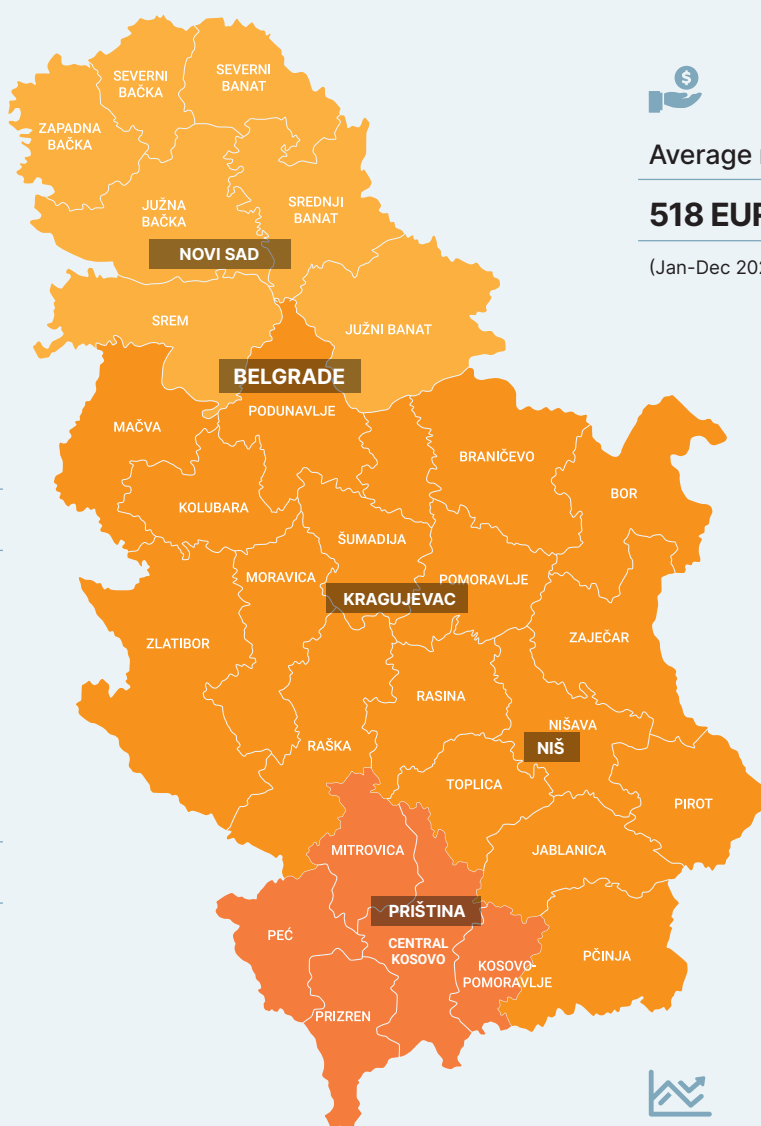
(2019)



## Economic freedom

**Moderately free**

(2020)



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

## Chapter 2

## 2

# United Nations Serbia 2020 results under the Development Partnership Framework

## 2.1. Overview of achievements

In early 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General (SG) called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a Decade of Action on three levels: **global action** to secure greater leadership, more resources, and smarter solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG); **local action** embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions, and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities, and local authorities; and **people action**, including youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia, and other stakeholders to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations. The 2030 Agenda is considered an enabler to the realisation of EU accession. Serbia had already committed to Agenda 2030: an Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IMWG) of senior officials from 27 ministries oversee SDG implementation strategies, utilizing the Statistical Office. The IMWG's dedicated work was halted by the pandemic and the elections, but SDG implementation remained at the core of our efforts in 2020, despite, and in response to, COVID-19. **While the pandemic hindered progress on SDGs, it has also re-invigorated broad advocacy and action towards the Human Rights Agenda and the Green Transformation.**<sup>5</sup>

The United Nations in Serbia continued to implement the SG's prevention vision, both nationally and regionally. The joint multi-country programme Dialogue for the Future (DFF) fosters dialogue and social cohesion in and among Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia. Sensitive work around missing persons has continued, efforts to fight violence against women and girls increased, and awareness around hate and divisive speech raised – crucial to protection activities for refugees and migrants. The United Nations also continued to advocate for, and support, wider civic space, for sustained engagement of all people in social and political processes, for engaging with and monitoring state and non-state actions, and for strengthening accountability.

**2020 also saw the Leave No One Behind agenda (LNOB) take centre stage:** The United Nations technical and expert support to the Government and civil society in policy making, advocacy, and outreach prioritized at-risk groups and

inequality, in line with human rights standards and priorities. Recommendations from human rights reviews are regularly included in programming, advocacy, and policy actions. The United Nations applies the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) and the LNOB principle in cooperation with its partners, and instrumentalizes global and system-wide agendas for advancing accountability, inclusion, and equality (such as the C2A for Human Rights, United Nations Disability Strategy, COVID-19 global framework). The United Nations in Serbia also successfully implemented the 2019 UNCT-System Wide Action Plan for Gender Equality Scorecard. In December 2020, the team was commended by UN Women Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director for meeting or exceeding gender mainstreaming minimum requirements for 13 out of the 15 performance indicators.

\$ **82.2**  
million  
spent in 2020

\$ **TOTAL DPF  
2016-2020  
DELIVERY: 330.3**  
million

2016: **\$63.2 million**

2017: **\$66.1 million**

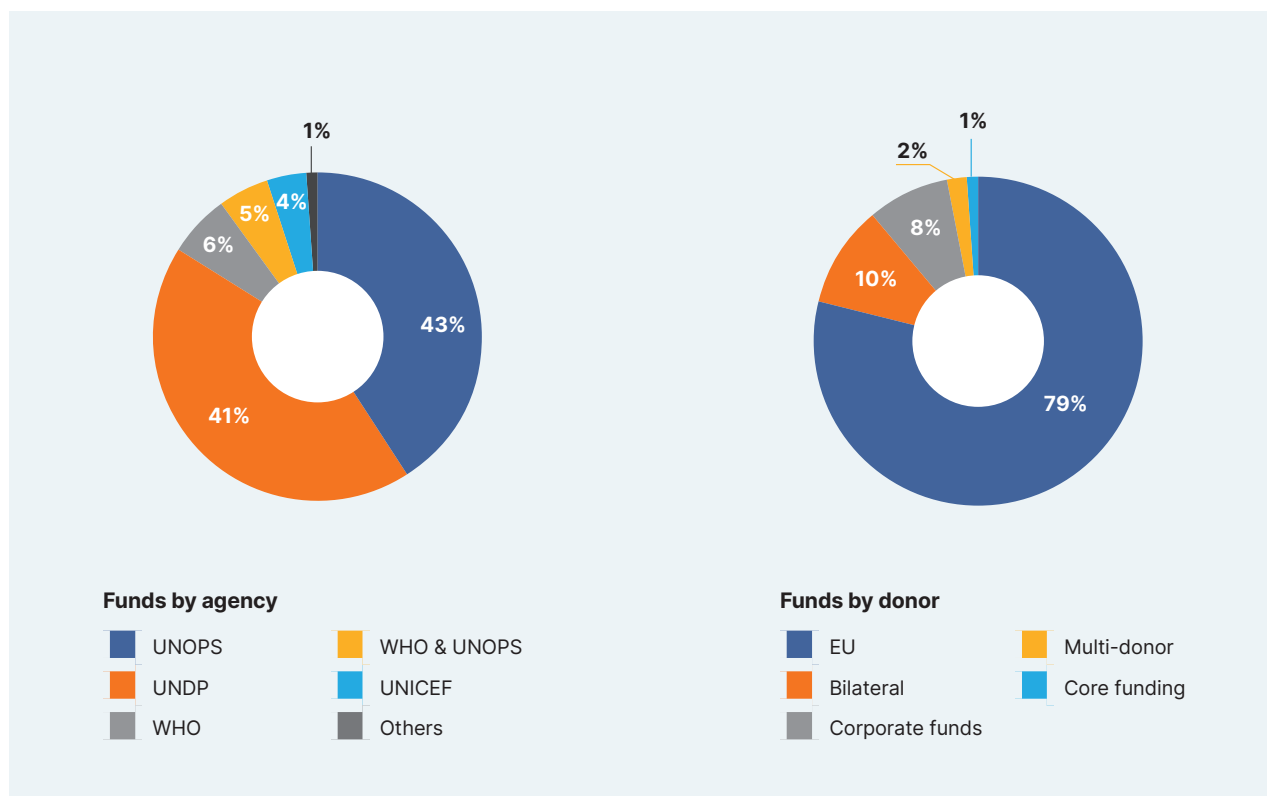
2018: **\$63.3 million**

2019: **\$55.5 million**

**Strategic flexible financing and new partnerships were critical in navigating the pandemic response, all while staying committed to achieving the planned development agenda.** Examples of the United Nation's key partnerships in 2020 are provided in Section 2.3.

<sup>5</sup> See Annex 1 for the United Nations Resident Coordinator's public interventions on core Agenda 2030 topics.





**Figures 2 and 3:** United Nations procurement of medical and non-medical equipment and supplies to the COVID-19 response in Serbia

**As part of the United Nations reform, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) accelerated efforts in Business Innovation and Operational Effectiveness. COVID-19 presented a testing ground for greater integration of actions, procurement, and logistics.** The UNCT also set up the UN Info platform to report against the Global COVID-19 indicators and will use UN Info 2.0 for the implementation of the 2021-2025 Co-operation Framework. The UNCT was selected as one of 10 countries to pilot a new Common Back Office modality, which aims to improve effectiveness and cost efficiency.

**The United Nations pandemic response is featured in most of the following sub-sections and was carried out closely with the Government of Serbia.** WHO was already working with the Ministry of Health and the crisis response team on COVID-19 preparation by February 2020, a month ahead of Serbia's first recorded case. Immediately upon the COVID-19 outbreak, nine United Nations agencies<sup>6</sup> coordinated through a COVID-19 UN Inter-Agency Group, established in early March 2020 and spearheaded by the United Nations Resident Coordinator. This collaboration quickly expanded from health to socio-economic responses, drawing in key institutions and line ministries. Speed and coordination with key government counterparts and partners were crucial: within three weeks of the first case, the United Nations met requests from the Prime Minister's office, securing critical medical and non-medical equipment and international transportation. Regionally,



*Triage containers procured by UNOPS and funded by the EU*

<sup>6</sup> WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNOPS, UNHCR, IOM, UNFPA, UN Women, UNODC and RCO /OHCHR



COVID-19 support - one of the many EU-funded cargo planes procured by UNDP, carrying medical equipment

Serbia was first to access such equipment, later supporting its neighbours. The United Nations team also guided its response with assessments, many co-developed with line ministries and Serbia's Public Investment Management Office (PIMO). These assessments were published in September 2020 under the socio-economic impact assessment (SEIA), followed by a socio-economic response plan (SERP<sup>7</sup>). The SEIA focused on the mid- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on health, the economy, social protection, resilience, and the

environment. **The SERP provided short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations for multiform interventions, highlighting those most at risk**, while championing a proportional and inclusive approach to COVID-19 related measures, and a wider participation of democratic institutions and civil society.<sup>8</sup> **These recommendations have been integrated into the new United Nations Cooperation Framework 2021-2025, to:** i) leverage the pandemic response in addressing long-term structural inequalities, ii) move away from unsustainable eco-

#### United Nations support to Covid-19 emergency response:



**250,000**  
vulnerable people  
protected during the  
pandemic



**750,000**  
students  
benefitted from tv  
classes



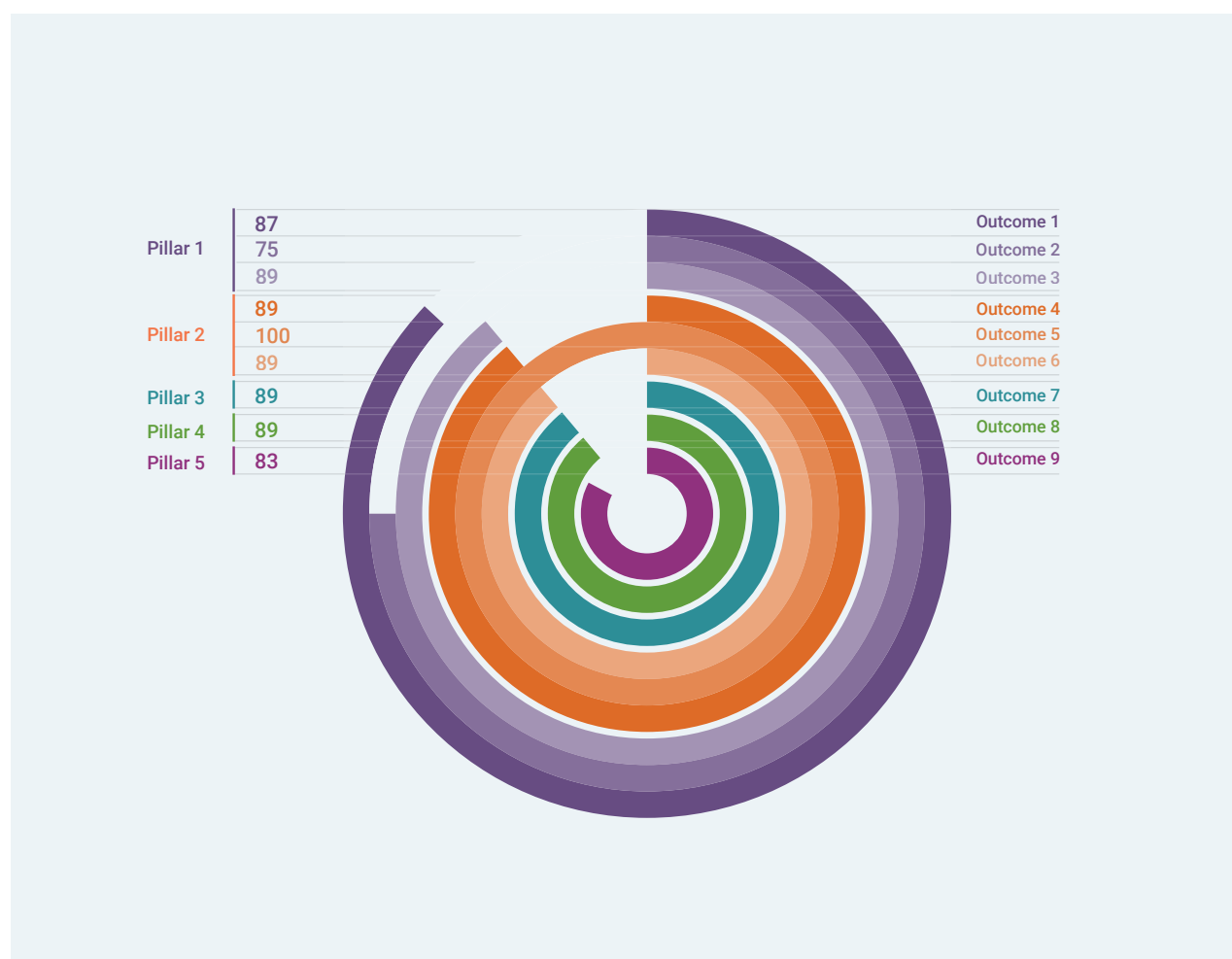
#### Procured:

170 respirators  
3,180,000 pieces of PPE  
100 containers  
15 international flights  
200 healthcare workers

<sup>7</sup> As part of the United Nations global effort to standardize the response to the crisis, and engage in a coordinated way with all stakeholders

<sup>8</sup> The SEIA and SERP reports are available on the website of the United Nations in Serbia <https://serbia.un.org/en>



**Figure 4:** Progress by outcome in %

conomic models, complete health and education reforms, iii) boost the digitalization agenda, and iv) spearhead the green transformation.

The initial response to COVID-19 was overwhelmingly focused on emergency procurement and contracting health staff, totalling USD 27.4 million.<sup>9</sup>

2020, the year of the great pandemic, was also the last year of the previous programming cycle in Serbia (2016-2020). This chapter presents key results achieved in 2020 under the Development Partnership Framework (DPF).

The DPF is structured around five key results areas:

- I. Governance and Rule of Law,
- II. Social and Human Resources Development,
- III. Economic Development, Growth and Employment,
- IV. Environment, Climate Change, and Resilient Communities, and
- V. Culture and Development.

The United Nations achievements in Serbia in 2020 are delivered in close cooperation with national counterparts and aligned with national development priorities, EU accession chapters, and the 2030 Agenda, as specified in Section 2.2.

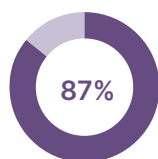
<sup>9</sup> Detailed procurement list available in the SEIA

## 2.2. Development Partnership Framework priorities, outcomes, and results

PILLAR 1 Governance and Rule of Law			
SDGs:	EU Accession Chapters:	National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD):	Contributing United Nations Agencies:
	<b>1</b> Social Policy and Employment  <b>20</b> Enterprise and Industrial Policy  <b>25</b> Science and Research  <b>27</b> Environment	<b>B1</b> Justice Sector  <b>B2</b> Home Affairs Sector  <b>B3</b> Public Administration Reform Sector  <b>B12</b> Civil Society Organizations Thematic Area	IOM, OHCHR, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNECE, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, UNOPS, and UN Women

### Outcome 1:

By 2020, people in Serbia, especially vulnerable groups, have their human rights protected and have improved access to justice and security



The Human Rights Agenda was affected by the combined effects of the pandemic, the postponed elections and subsequently delayed formation of the new Parliament (July 2020), the late appointment of a new Cabinet (end of October 2020), and, near year's end, the creation of a stand-alone Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. The state of emergency in force from March to May also significantly delayed certain legislative matters. The justice system's critical functions were maintained and prioritized, including trials involving violence against women. Restrictive measures on the entire population to prevent the spread of the coronavirus inadvertently and disproportionately impacted certain groups, impinging on both their rights and access to services. **Throughout, the United Nations worked closely with relevant ministries, civil society, and communities on practical solutions to mitigate the restrictions' impacts and ensure their fairness, while advocating for greater proportionality. Independent monitoring bodies such as the Ombudsman's office received a high number of requests** as the year began (related to air pollution) and throughout the COVID-19 crisis, indicating greater public awareness. Incidentally, the pandemic created a new, more visible space for civic engage-

ment and mutual accountability as means to enhance governance, which must be fostered going forward.

Despite the crisis, **several areas saw solid progress**. Serbia's legislative framework largely recognises the rights of all, yet gaps remain in the policies and implementation of those provisions impacting vulnerable groups, as well as in the ratification of several international protocols. The United Nations delivered on its regular mandate to strengthen the realisation of human rights and improve justice and security, while simultaneously addressing the specific needs of groups more at risk from the impacts of COVID-19. Certain key achievements in the paragraphs that follow.

**Transparent and systematic independent reporting is critical in realising the rights of youth, women and gender equality, and the United Nations Human Rights Team has supported the creation of first annual reports on youth rights and gender equality and women's empowerment, following the structure of human rights standards.** The Government and 20 civil society organizations (CSO) in the platform of organizations for cooperation with the United Nations Mechanisms, together with the United Nations Human Rights Team, prepared and submitted their first 'mid-term reports' under the Universal Periodic Review. This measures progress in implementing 175 recommendations from the third UPR cycle before the Human Rights Council, which will examine Serbia's progress in its spring session.

**The adoption of a new, widely consulted National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - after an almost five-year lull - should yield fuller equality and protection for an officially estimated 550,000 people living with disability, including in legal capacity, accessibility, employment, and gender equality.**

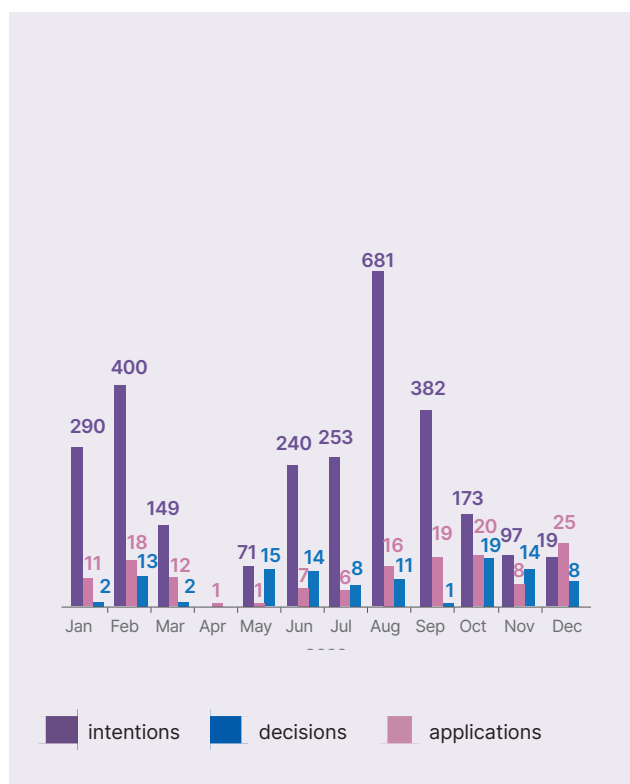


Figure 5: Asylum intentions / applications / decisions

The technical expertise and convening power of the United Nations Human Rights Team and participating Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) aided this strategy in achieving higher compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and recommendations for Serbia.

The United Nations Human Rights office supported the Ministry of Social Affairs in developing a draft National Strategy on Non-Discrimination, after the previous one expired in 2018, bringing the anti-discrimination framework towards compliance with the United Nations and EU human rights standards - pending adoption in 2021. Additionally, the Judicial Academy partnered with the Supreme Court of Cassation and the Constitutional Court to create case-law markers to regularly monitor the direct application of human rights law and treaties in domestic judicial proceedings, enabling annual assessment of progress and gaps.

Regarding refugee and migrant issues, Serbia has for several decades experienced large, successive waves of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, and more recently increased mixed migration through the country from Africa and Asia. At the same time, Serbian nationals returning from the EU – in large part the Roma – face severe difficulties in inclusion. Throughout 2020, the caseload of refugees and migrants varied between 4,500 and 9,000.



Figure 6: Evolution of the number of refugees/migrants



**15,760**  
persons counselled by  
UNHCR and partners

1,830 expressed an intention to  
seek asylum and 144 submitted  
applications

UNHCR legal partners represented 135 asylum-seekers in asylum procedures (including 17 unaccompanied and separated children, UASC) and 28 were granted international protection in 2020. Integration of refugees was supported through increasing employability and cash support.

UNHCR and legal partners organised 41 field visits to Roma settlements to identify cases of persons at risk of statelessness and provided free legal aid, information and/or counselling to 1,037 persons, resulting in **323 Roma obtaining their ID cards and 84 having their nationality granted or confirmed in 2020**. While these numbers may seem small in comparison to larger populations on the move in the past or in other regions, each such positive case grants one person or family a life-changing opportunity to reset their paths and aspirations, making each a success to celebrate. Specialized protection services and community-based programs contributed to the **wellbeing of women, men, and child migrants in Serbia**, through assistance provided by IOM under the EU Regional



Human Rights Day visual - Recover Better Stand Up for Human Rights

Task Force, including both direct assistance to those in need and actions aimed at developing the country's response capacity. Protection-sensitive migration management measures were further supported, allowing for the voluntary return and reintegration of 67 migrants to their countries of origin, better alignment of migration statistics in the accession process, and improved protection-sensitive work of migration stakeholders with migrants in various situations of vulnerabilities.

Local migration policies continued to develop and align with sustainable development objectives, through the revision of local migration action plans and strengthening capacities of local migration stakeholders. Two years after the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), Serbia has prepared and submitted the first national report on GCM implementation for the period 2019-2020, through a consultative process.

Additionally, the provision of logistical services and specialised equipment, along with capacity building activities, strengthened the country's migration management and border surveillance. Recognising that protection from gender-based violence remains an important element in realising the human rights of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, UNFPA contributed to building institutional capacity through online trainings aimed at 134 local service providers and providing individual counselling on the availability of GBV services to 289 women from mixed migrant populations.

The United Nations, through UNDP, UNODC, and IOM continued to support **local and regional efforts to reduce threats from terrorism, organized crime, drugs, and arms trafficking, to improve arms control legislation, to control and reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, and to eliminate human trafficking and migrant smuggling within the country and across borders.** These combined actions are implemented closely with the Ministry of Interior, Customs administration, and the Ministry of Construction, Transport, and Infrastructure to enhance stability

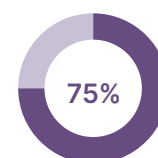
and security. Examples of such cooperation include i) the Container Control Programme and Airport Communication Project within UNODC Regional Programme for South East Europe, which trained 34 officials to strengthen capacities on intelligence and risk-led approaches to addressing threats at international airports; ii) UNODC Global Firearms Programme to improve the professional capacities of criminal justice practitioners, investigators, and prosecutors; iii) UNDP support to the investigation cycle, with a focus on the custody chain (Crime Scene Investigation and Ballistic Laboratory), with the Ministry of Interior.

Finally, with UNDP support to the regional project on war crimes, the Commission on Missing Persons increased its capacity for prompt investigation, including for expedited exhumation and identification in suspected mass graves in the south of the country, while associations of families of missing persons improved their skills for operational planning, public advocacy, and peer-to-peer psychological support.

Looking ahead, the decisive and accelerated approach taken by the new Minister for Human Rights and Social Dialogue signifies Serbia's renewed commitment towards fully realising the Rights Agenda, with a whole-of-government approach. We sincerely hope this is indicative of the people being central to Serbia's development ambitions.

## Outcome 2:

By 2020, governance institutions at all levels have enhanced accountability and representation to provide better quality services to people and the economy

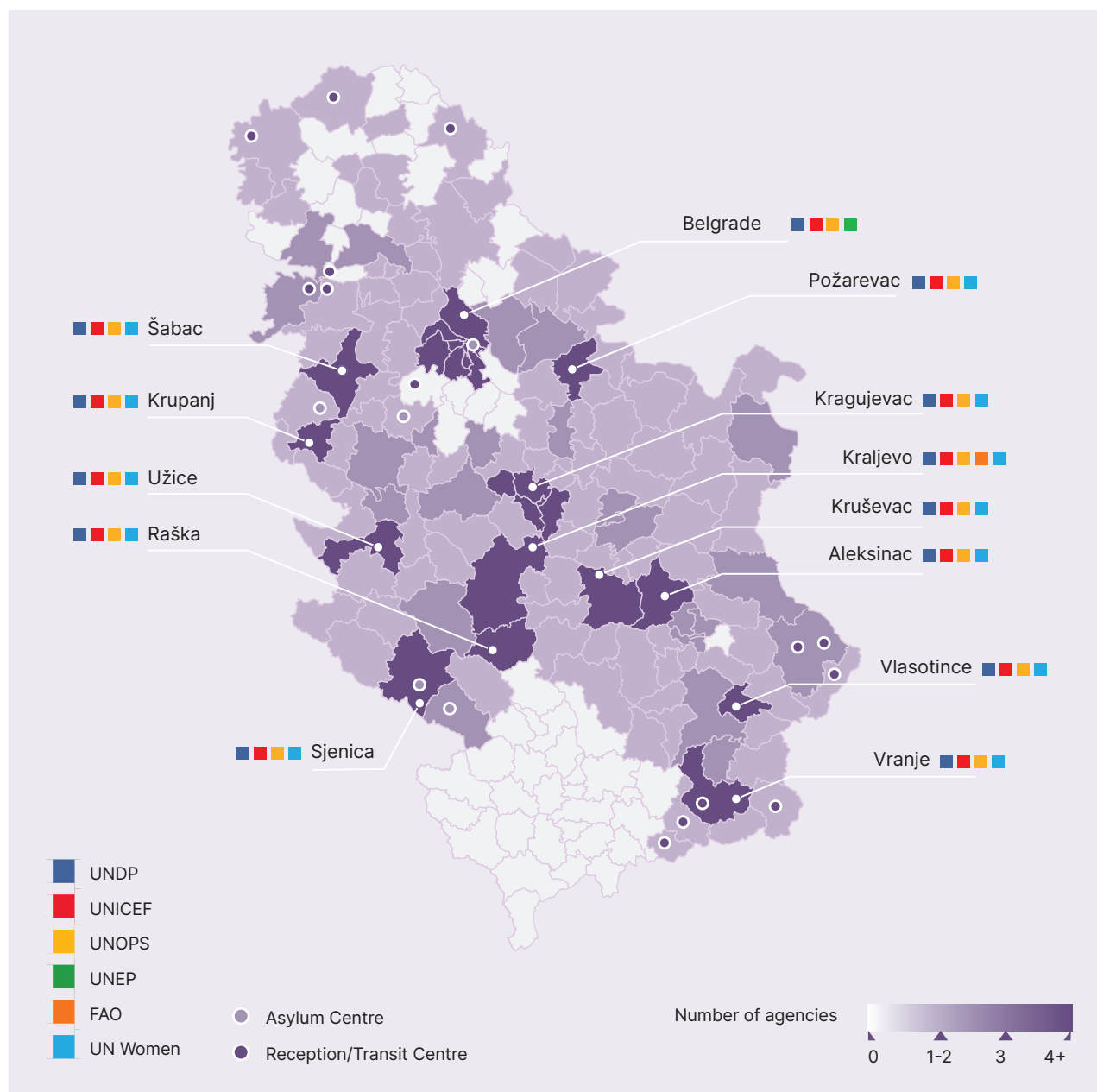


The pandemic severely tested governance of all forms and institutions at all levels at a time when effectiveness, accountability, and transparency became even more critical in crisis management. While several institutions were already on the path to digitalisation, the shift to virtual or blended work modalities disrupted regular legislative processes and delayed many reforms. Institutionally, crisis response capacities and regular citizen service maintenance varied significantly across the country. Budget diversions to health and emergency response strained other programmes and services.

Key United Nations efforts in 2020 included: digitalisation support, good governance, building public administration capacity, and enhancing data availability for evidence-based policy making.

The United Nations support of **digitalization of public services** expanded, relieving numerous constraints. Incidentally, the crisis presented an opportunity for future-proofing the government's capabilities in rapidly deploying cost-effective,





**Figure 7:** United Nations support to local self-governments across Serbia in 2020

secure, and citizen-focused e-services, while implementing ICT policies.

UNDP provided policy support in information security procedures, in data protection legislation and standards, and in the preparation to the new e-Government Programme (2020-2022) and the Law on e-Government and relevant bylaws. The Law effectively made it mandatory for public institutions to release data in open formats upon request.

Government ICT infrastructure for the provision of e-services was supported, including through the strengthening of: a) **the National Open Data Portal data.gov.rs.** which combines and makes accessible to citizens the open data of public institutions; b) the Government's Data Centre in Kragujevac, both with UNDP support, and; c) **the provision of e-services to**

**citizens** and businesses in 61 local self-governments (LSGs) through the UNOPS-led program Swiss Pro. This also contributed to the Government's efforts towards **decentralization** to the local level.

These actions resulted in **Serbia's improved position from "high" to "very high" in the United Nations Online Service Index and in the EU's e-Government Benchmark survey**, and Serbia becoming first in the region and 41st on the list of all United Nations member states in the Open Data Index. This was critical during the COVID-19 pandemic; a specialized COVID-19 subdomain was operationalised (with information such as on the number of infections), while swift United Nations and Government cooperation generated the timely eUprava vaccination registration system, an important factor



Reza from Afghanistan dreams of becoming a painter in Serbia.

of success in Serbia becoming a leader in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

**Accountability in anti-corruption policies, transparency, citizen participation, CSOs financing, and the integration of good governance principles in infrastructural projects** was enhanced through the adoption of 248 local regulations. These efforts instil responsible and transparent use of public facilities, prioritising non-discrimination, equal access to excluded groups, and public resource management. These efforts directly benefited more than 15,000 people, including 8,236 from excluded groups (5,151 youth, 2,233 Roma, 802 persons with disabilities, and 50 older persons).

Effective governance and system efficiency are key in maximizing available resources while enhancing wellbeing. In support of the Government's anti-corruption efforts, UNODC and the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative launched a three-year programme, Southeast Europe – Together Against Corruption, that will bring together 25 public institutions, 40 business representatives, and 175 civil society representatives from across the region in the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

UNDP also facilitated cooperation between the Ministry of Finance and professional organizations of internal auditors by developing a rulebook and new curriculum with the Faculty of Economics, leading to 438 internal auditors being certified in 2020. The United Nations also worked with the State Audit Institution on increasing the number and quality of external audit reports, initiating the development of customized Audit Management Software for automating the audit process.

Aiming to enhance corporate values, tax administration perception, and voluntary tax compliance, UNDP supported **capacity building efforts** by initiating an exchange between Swedish and Serbian Tax Authorities on tax and operational procedures, measures for combating tax fraud, risk analysis, use of e-tools, and fighting against fiscal fraud and interna-

tional tax evasion. Through a specialized training programme with the National Academy for Public Servants for newly appointed leaders in LSGs, 32 newly elected mayors received instruction in managing local government structures and action plans. These efforts in municipal administration should improve citizen services and economic opportunity. Finally, UNDP supported amendments to electoral legislation ensuring an increased percentage of women candidates on local and parliamentary lists (from 33% to 40%). At the national level, UNDP organized an induction webinar for all new MPs upon the forming of the new Serbian Parliament.

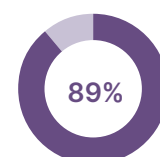
UNDP-SEESAC supported the Ministry of Defence in strengthening capacities of Persons of Trust, an internal complaints mechanism. More than 100 Persons of Trust were trained to effectively prevent and respond to cases of discrimination and harassment in the Ministry of Defence and Serbian Armed Forces.

**Quality data is a prerequisite for evidence-based policy-making, and most of the United Nations agencies contribute to strengthening data collection and data management systems at national and local levels. Examples are included throughout the report.** UNECE, in cooperation with the Resident Coordinator's Office, continued to support the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia in modernising its statistical production processes and systems, also by contributing to an assessment of the data needs of local authorities in the COVID-19 response.

UNICEF, UNFPA, and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia jointly conducted a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6), a household survey of 8,100 households and 1,934 households in Roma settlements, on a wide range of topics such as immunization rates, school attendance, infant and under-five mortality among Roma children. Such detailed survey based on extensive disaggregated data can inform and guide policy makers on multiple key topics, while aiding the United Nations and partners in closing remaining gaps in progress.

### Outcome 3:

By 2020, state institutions and other relevant actors enhance gender equality and enable women and girls, especially those from vulnerable groups, to live lives free from discrimination and violence



Serbia achieved greater gender parity in the Government through the 2020 general elections, with a female Prime



National campaign on gender and circular economy

Minister appointed, key ministries entrusted to women,<sup>10</sup> and women's representation in Parliament increased to 39%. This represents clear progress towards achieving SDG 5, which calls for women's full and effective **participation and equal opportunities for leadership** at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.

The Gender Equality Index<sup>11</sup> has significantly improved in Serbia, with the country a top performer on many indicators in a recent joint UNDP/UN Women regional survey. Yet it remains lower than in most EU countries as women are still under-represented in decision-making bodies at the local level, in the private sector, and in many processes that shape lives, workplaces, and safety; only 20 of 165 mayors (12%) are women, and 31% of representatives of municipal councils. Violence against women is still prevalent, and longstanding trends in unpaid care work persist.

Gender issues featured strongly in the COVID-19 crisis and response. Representing the vast majority of health care workers and as the more traditional family care givers, women were more exposed to the virus. Women are also more predominant in the informal sector, and thus more directly affected by the loss of jobs with no direct safety net.

Against this complex backdrop, the United Nations in close cooperation with relevant institutions, including the Coordination Body for Gender Equality (CBGE), continued to **support normative and policymaking processes, build the capacity of local and national administrations, promote gender responsive budgeting, prevent gender-based violence, and**

**provide general and specialized services to all women, especially vulnerable ones**, throughout the pandemic.

2020 was a critical year in enabling important **normative processes for advancing gender equality**, anti-discrimination, and inhibiting violence against women in Serbia as per the recommendations outlined by the Convention of Elimination of All Discriminations against Women, concluding observations and recommendations of this Convention after the Fourth Periodic Report and the GREVIO<sup>12</sup> baseline evaluation report, and in the spirit of the Istanbul Convention.

### Ending violence against women - women in action:

During the state of emergency, the number of reported cases of domestic violence decreased, while psycho-social support to women in situations of violence provided through emergency helplines increased by 30%. UN Women and UNDP supported 20 CSOs in providing 24-hour SOS helpline services (chat, SMS, call), piloting an SOS mobile application for violence reporting, providing psychosocial and legal support services, assisting 1,700 women through 5,500 services from April through July alone, while fielding 2,800 helpline calls during the state of emergency.

Through the national Red Cross, UN Women provided hygiene and food packages to 10 women's shelters for victims of violence. UN Women also contributed to 27 prosecutors and judges enhancing their knowledge on femicide and helped four Centres for Victims of Sexual Violence become fully functional, while UNDP supported 20 public prosecutors from eight prosecution districts in organising on-line multi-agency meetings for processing newly reported and ongoing cases of domestic violence.

With regular channels for reporting domestic violence diminished during the state of emergency, the media's role was crucial and UNDP assisted Journalists against Violence, a group of 60 women journalists and media editors dedicated to strengthening the preventive role of media and providing essential information to women survivors of violence, to develop guidelines for ethical reporting and expand the public availability of information on support services and institutional response. During the 16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women, the group was awarded by the international company AVON with the first Women's Courage Award in Serbia.

<sup>10</sup> Some of the results are presented under Outcome 4 (health) and Outcome 5 (education)

<sup>11</sup> UN Women partnered with the Republic Statistical Office, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, and the Coordination Body for Gender Equality supported the production of a new edition of the Gender Equality Index

<sup>12</sup> GREVIO is the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) by the Parties.





Members of the Journalists Against Violence network receiving Women Courage Award

Photo: AVON Serbia press

With United Nations support, the newly formed Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, in partnership with the CBGE and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran, and Social Affairs, initiated discussions on: i) the new Law on Gender Equality, ii) the Law on the Amendment of Anti-discrimination Law, iii) the Law on Same Sex Partnerships, and iv) the National Strategy for Prevention, and Combating Gender Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025.

UN Women and CBGE supported the Serbian Government to successfully comply with national and international gender commitments and the EU gender equality acquis, by mainstreaming gender in IPA assistance for labour, social policy, employment, and education sector (IPA 2021/2022), and in gender responsive policy planning and budgeting. In addition, UNOPS furthered gender responsive budgeting at the local level.

In partnership with the Public Policy Institute, UN Women also supported the development of gender equality tests for legislation aimed at ensuring all legislation has gender equality standards mainstreamed before it reaches parliamentary procedures.

## Gender responsive budgeting introduced in:



**68 of 79**  
institutions  
at the national and  
provincial levels



**10 of 174**  
local self-governments

UN Women helped enable pioneering work in **mainstreaming gender in environmental policies**, yielding the first ever gender assessment of energy poverty and energy consumption and the development of a gender sensitive inventory of particulate matter emissions, while UNECE facilitated the gender analysis of policy documents on **waste prevention and circular economy**.

Issues related to balanced parenting and the redistribution of unpaid care work have come into focus during the COVID-19 crisis with initiatives started by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women. CBGE in partnership with UN Women supported the economic analysis of the monetary value of unpaid care work and the analysis of legal norms. GRB goals and indicators in the economy of care were introduced in four LSGs. UNFPA partnered with national TV to produce a 13-episode series with famous fathers promoting positive gender norms and responsible fatherhood and conducted a campaign "Dad in Quarantine" on men engagement during pandemics, which reached over 240K people on social media. **UNOPS facilitated local women councilors' networks** in developing local action plans for gender equality and in advocating on gender equality principles in local assemblies. 18,000 women and men also benefitted from 14 innovative pilot initiatives in the economy of care, which were implemented in 15 municipalities with the support of UN Women.

Gender equality and women's empowerment were the backbones of the United Nations normative support to Serbia in 2020, along with fast-tracking support to mitigate the risks of the crisis for the most vulnerable women and girls, including rural women, women in situations of violence, older women, and Roma women. The 2021-2025 Cooperation Framework will focus on both women's economic empowerment and the elimination of violence against women, as well as on the more active role of women in the energy sector and in climate change mitigation.



## PILLAR 2

## Social and Human Resources Development



SDGs:

EU Accession  
Chapters:

- 19 Social Policy and Employment
- 23 Justice and Fundamental Rights
- 26 Education and Culture
- 27 Environment
- 28 Consumer and Health Protection

National Priorities  
for International  
Assistance (NAD):

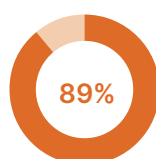
- B8 Human Resources and Social Development Sector
- B3 Public Administration Reform Sector

Contributing United  
Nations Agencies:

FAO, IAEA, OHCHR,  
UNFPA, UNICEF, UNODC,  
UNOPS, WHO

## Outcome 4:

By 2020, high quality, inclusive, equitable, gender-sensitive, and age appropriate health services that protect patient rights are available and utilized by all



Serbia has a comprehensive universal health system with free access to health care services at the primary level. The **initial response to COVID-19 drew upon the strong pre-existing framework of public health laws. Adequate emergency response and disease surveillance systems, skilled expert teams in the National Institute of Public Health, and the 24 district institutes of public health helped delay the outbreak and contain its magnitude.**

WHO initiated its emergency response by January 2020, fully repurposing its work in 2020 and prioritizing the outbreak in collaboration with national authorities, primarily through technical briefings, training webinars, communication plans, and generating a new set of guiding documents, protocols, and algorithms. Most of the Biannual Country Agreement's planned activities for 2020/21 were postponed or put on hold,<sup>13</sup> while implementation efforts in health legislation and health systems support were also delayed due to the political transition. Rapid emergency actions by UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNHCR, IOM, and UNICEF, in their mandated areas, mobilized EUR 25 million, primarily used for emergency procurement and operations, hiring additional medical staff, and outreach to the general population, as well as to particularly

vulnerable groups. The United Nations also supported the set-up of the cold chain for COVID-19 vaccine distribution, and the procurement of vaccines through the Covax platform (to be delivered in Q2 2021).

UNCHR and IOM facilitated refugee and migrant access to the public health system, limiting the contagion in these communities. In response to COVID-19's impact on **mental health**,<sup>14</sup> since September 2020, UNFPA facilitated direct psychological support to 160 COVID-19 patients and their family members, 95 care providers, and to 310 seniors. Mental health will be an area of focus for WHO, UNICEF, and UNFPA in the next United Nations Cooperation Framework.

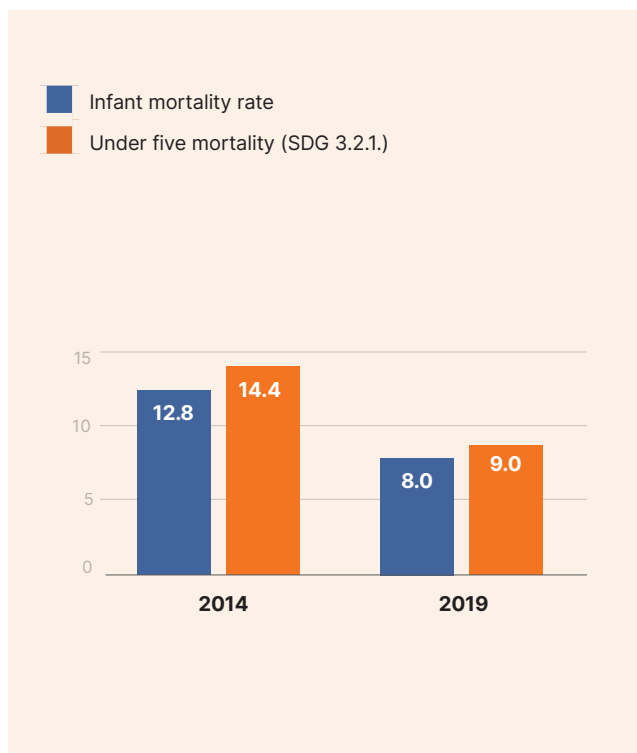
In addition to emergency response efforts, the United Nations supported the health system in meeting **non-COVID-19 obligations**, maternal, neonatal, child health, **early childhood development (ECD)** services, and advocacy for **reproductive health and rights**.

As in many other countries, the pandemic highlighted the limited capacity of the health care system to dual-track its efforts to continue and provide regular health services while assisting COVID-19 patients and addressing the public health dimension of the crisis. WHO continued to support regular immunization campaigns (including the 2020/21 flu immunization), and prevention efforts against non-communicable diseases, focusing on tobacco use prevention under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and reduced salt intake/consumption for cardiovascular disease prevention, while UNODC continued its efforts on drug use prevention strategies.

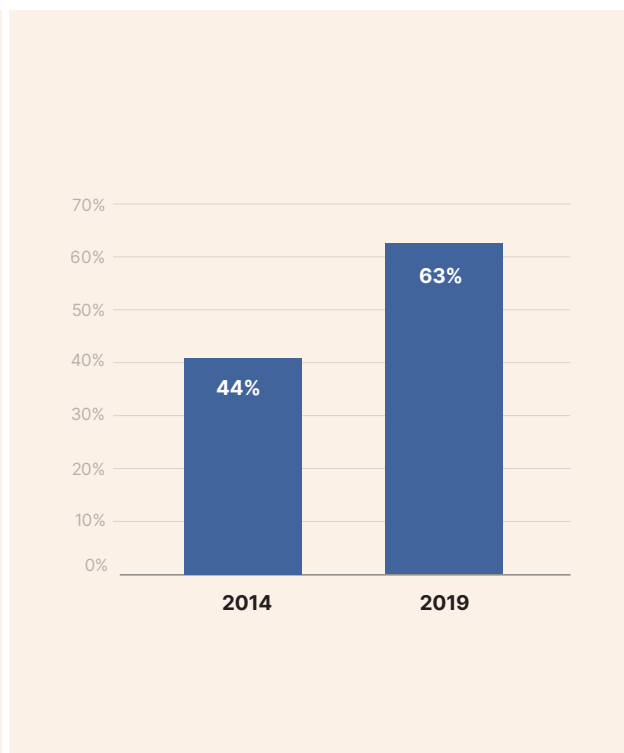
UNICEF maintained its support to maternal and child health and early childhood development care, including during COVID-19, through paediatricians, home-visiting nurses, Roma

<sup>13</sup> In the next United Nations Cooperation Framework, WHO will work towards ensuring that agreed results can be at least partially attained to mitigate any further health impact of the pandemic on the citizens of Serbia.

<sup>14</sup> For example, UNICEF U-Report - a digital platform that empowers young people to share their opinion with decision-makers - indicates increased levels of distress among children.



**Figure 8:** Infant and child mortality in Roma settlements (per 1,000 live births)



**Figure 9:** Full immunisation coverage of children in Roma settlements (24-35 months)

Source: 2019 Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6) and 2019 Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey.

health mediators, and early childhood intervention practitioners. UNICEF also used tele/video counselling and digital platforms to reach more than 15,000 parents and children on a weekly basis through counselling and more than 40,000 Roma families in 70 municipalities with advice on preventive measures, referrals to COVID-19 testing centres, and facilitated access to vaccination. Sustained cross-sectoral, integrated, and family oriented early childhood intervention and early childhood development parenting services were integrated into local public health models. The launch of an innovative mobile phone application for parents, Halo Beba (Parent Buddy), provided personalized content on children's health, nutrition, growth, and development and reached more than 5,000 parents. This successful initiative is set to be replicated in other countries.

UNFPA supported capacity building of more than 100 women with disabilities in five municipalities to advocate with local decision makers for their **reproductive health and rights**. Out-of-school sexual education improved knowledge on sexual and reproductive rights of more than 270 students of secondary schools, while 96 were trained to become peer educators in their communities. The capacities of 36 health care workers on Minimal Initial Service Packages for sexual and reproductive health and gender based violence were also augmented.

Despite progress in overall health system reform in the last decade, improvements to the system's performance and transparency are still pending. The crisis brought to light

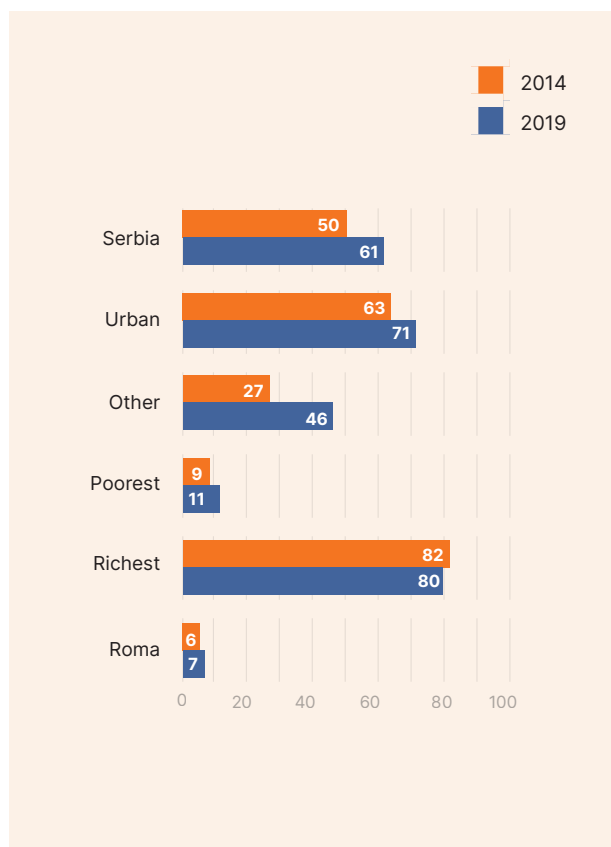
entrenched and unaddressed weaknesses and gaps, including in human resources and in vulnerable groups' limited access to non-routine care, due to financial barriers. The United Nations SERP identified 16 key strategic recommendations to both sustain the short-term crisis response needs as well as address the long-term structural challenges, including the need to invest in health and health systems and to mainstream health in all policies to prevent and reduce the impact of a future health crisis. These recommendations now form the backbone of the health programme under the 2021-2025 Cooperation Framework.

### Outcome 5:

By 2020, an efficient education system is established that enables relevant, quality, inclusive and equitable education to all, particularly the most vulnerable, and increases learning and social outcomes



From mid-March until the end of the school year, schools in Serbia were closed, and education went largely to remote teaching and learning (TV lessons, use of online platforms, IT



**Figure 10:** Attendance rate (%) to early childhood education programmes

Source: 2019 Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 6) and 2019 Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey.

tools and solutions), covering the majority of students. Many public schools adapted relatively quickly to new modalities, primarily due to pre-existing digitalisation efforts. But many children in traditional neglected communities were not able to access distance learning. The main obstacles were related to a lack of internet connectivity, a lack of digital devices, and weak digital literacy among teachers and parents and limited capacities amongst parents to support home-based learning.<sup>15</sup>

Backing the Ministry's Operational Plan for Continuation of Schoolwork in Difficult Conditions, the United Nations helped deliver distance learning using a diversified toolkit (TV lessons, use of online platforms, IT tools, etc.), reaching almost the entire school population of 750,000 students, with a priority on the most vulnerable children.

To ensure children on the move also had access to distance-learning opportunities, Education Technology Libraries were established in three reception centres and 100 children received support to learn English online and mentoring support in their formal education in Serbia. Finally, WHO and UNICEF, in close cooperation with the Institute of Public

<sup>15</sup> e.g. 17% of Roma students in primary schools were not involved in distance learning

### UNICEF supported:

- the establishment of a digital support service for online learning within the Institute for Improvement of Education, reaching 400 schools attended by approximately 200,000 children
- enhancing competencies for online education of more than 43,500 teachers, and
- mapping school geolocations and strengthening school connectivity (in partnership with the Ministry of Telecommunications).



UNICEF advocacy work on prevention of digital divide

Health, also implemented a joint project that tackled COVID-19 and water, sanitation, and hygiene - related activities in schools' settings.

As in other sectors, reform processes in education were both delayed and accelerated. Despite significant progress achieved in inclusive education over the last decade, challenges and obstacles for its full implementation remain, with children from the most vulnerable families being largely left behind. UNICEF and OECD jointly published the report "Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education in Serbia." The report informed the development of the new education strategy (to be adopted in 2021) and will be used for further advocacy and technical support to modernize the education system. The United Nations agencies continued to support on-going education reforms, strengthening of the national learning management system, and the prevention of digital divide. UNICEF prioritized support to the Ministry of Education in implementing the newly adopted **preschool curriculum** framework and corresponding teachers' professional development programmes through an innovative comprehensive capacity-building programme (blended learning, peer learning, mentoring, communities of practice, etc.). This programme, also supported by the World Bank, reached 2,830 preschool professionals from 22 preschool institutions. In **pre-university education**, noteworthy was the United Na-

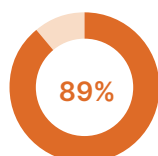


tions support towards adopting the new curriculum alongside improving ICT capacities. UNICEF continued to assist the Institute for Improvement of Education in further developing the e-learning platform for educators, which hosted online trainings for more than 20,000 teachers. UNFPA also supported adolescent girls with digital and communication skills through the Girls Advanced Lab initiative in partnership with the private sector and CSOs.

The prevention of, and response to, violence in schools remained a key priority. UNICEF supported the preparation of amendments of the Rules of Procedure in schools in cases of violence, abuse, and neglect, adopted and implemented in August 2020. New Guidelines for Teachers on implementing these rules and other prevention and intervention measures were launched in May 2020. UNDP supported embedding climate change in formal and non-formal education by developing training toolkits and sector-specific publications on the dedicated website klimatskepromene.rs. Adaptation and development of the first Serbian version of UNDP's Climate Box is underway. This toolkit will be localized to meet the needs of primary and secondary schools in including climate change in the classroom.

## Outcome 6:

By 2020, the social welfare system is strengthened to provide timely, holistic, and continued support to individuals and families at risk and enable them to live in a safe, secure, supportive family and community environment



The pandemic exposed the limits of Serbia's social protection infrastructure and capacities to deal with emergencies and the nature of a large-scale pandemic.<sup>16</sup> In early 2020, the COVID-19-related movement restrictions hampered the provision of community based and facility based long term care services for many at-risk groups, such as people with disabilities and older persons. Additionally, the welfare system was stretched to accommodate the needs of new at-risk groups that had emerged, including informal sector workers with no safety net, returnees previously working in European countries, and families no longer receiving remittances, among others. The crisis also revealed the systemic and deeply entrenched vulnerabilities of certain groups; those in Roma settlements, where the lack of access to water and power hindered implementing prevention measures, those living in care institutions, and the older persons in rural areas. The Government's stimulus and social protection measures, a

combination of cash and in-kind assistance, were generous and timely, but not targeted. Volunteering initiatives from individuals and businesses blossomed across the country.

### Volunteering in an emergency:



**7,000**  
persons  
volunteered

The online platform "Be a Volunteer" supported older citizens and other persons in need. The unified "COVID-19" contact center – also supported by UNDP – facilitated disseminating information about the virus and the contacts of the Ministry of Health and the Institutes for Public Health throughout the country. In addition, the online peer-volunteer platform "Budi volunteer" launched by UNICEF helped adolescents and young people cope with the pandemic and supported safe online activities and awareness raising interventions among peers and in community networks.

**The United Nations<sup>17</sup> mobilized for the emergency and beyond**, cooperating with the Prime Minister's office and its Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, municipalities, the Red Cross, and CSO partners in 4 core areas: **(1) needs assessments, logistics, and procurement of humanitarian aid, (2) outreach to targeted groups and expansion of social protection services, including for domestic violence, and at the local government level, (3) provision of social infrastructure, and (4) continued support to overall social welfare system reform.**

As the crisis developed, the United Nations mapped the needs of hard-to-reach communities, leading to a more targeted government delivery of critical goods, services, and outreach support.

### Mapping of Roma settlements covered



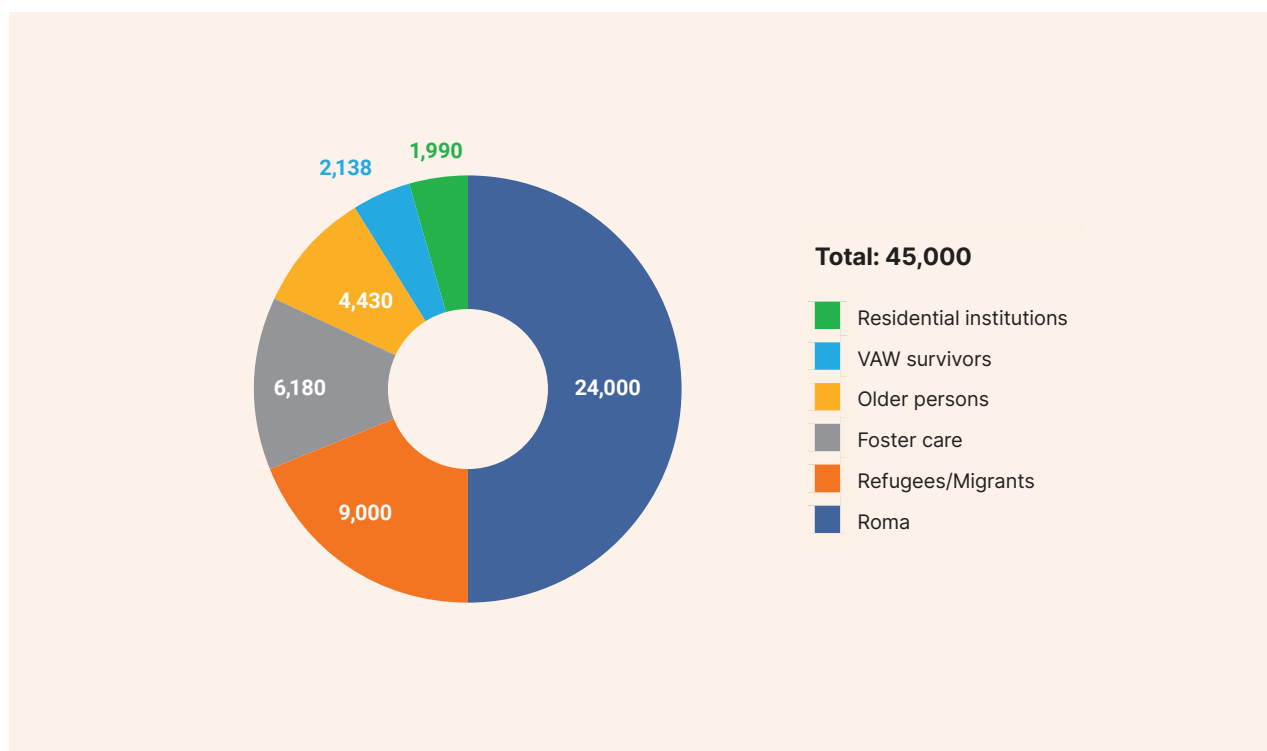
**170,000**  
residents



**702**  
Roma  
substandard settlements

<sup>16</sup> While inclusive in its intentions, the social welfare system was under stress even before the health crisis, with the number of people entering the social protection system increasing by 3% since 2017 and 11% since 2014.

<sup>17</sup> UNFPA, UN Women, UNDP, UNICEF, UNOPS, UNHCR, IOM, UNODC



**Figure 11:** Population segments reached for COVID-19 distribution

**As in other sectors, the pandemic response ultimately became an accelerator for elements of the social protection reform. The need to enhance targeting and communication and to expand both benefits and their reach expedited the reform of the social card registry system and the social protection information system.**

In its committed support to older people, UNFPA continued its analytical, data driven work and developed policy recommendations to complement the implementation of the new Regional Demographic Resilience Programme: a) on the mental health of informal care givers, and b) on the status of older people in Serbia.

UNICEF and partners established an innovative online knowledge and peer-support platform at the Faculty of Political Science, Department for Social Work (KonekTas). The platform reached more than 850 professionals and increased alternative avenues for reporting abuse by expanding the National Child Helpline with a chat-bot and a Viber-bot.

**Communication, prevention, and protection activities targeting refugees and migrants both in government centres and in private accommodations** included the long overdue renovation of government led centres and the provision of cash support to 110 refugees. UNFPA promoted digital inclusion of all generations and intergenerational cooperation through innovative solutions for online tutorials and trainings in IT. In partnership with the Red Cross of Serbia, 170 older persons in five municipalities in Serbia were provided with face to face trainings to use digital technology.

The EU PRO programme, implemented by UNOPS, addressed structural development needs at the municipality level, **generating the collateral benefits of providing jobs when the job market was shrinking, basic social and education infrastructure, and expanded social protection services.**

#### Impact of EU PRO



**4,500**  
beneficiaries

from groups at risk



**17**

social cohesion in 17  
**multi-ethnic municipalities**  
has improved



**750**  
children

improved their functional  
knowledge of Serbian



**290**

**people with disability**  
received enhanced services



Although boys and girls are both affected by child marriage, the brunt of harm is largely carried by girls.

© UNICEF Srbija/2019/Pančić



UNICEF campaign on Early Childhood Development

© UNICEF Srbija/2019/Pančić

Completed local infrastructure projects include 8 educational facilities, 16 sports and cultural facilities, and numerous health and social institutions, benefiting over 162,000 users. Nearly 20,000 citizens have also benefited from corporate-social responsibility activities implemented by the beneficiary enterprises.

**Under the EU Support to Social Housing and Active Inclusion Programme,** UNOPS worked with municipalities to strengthen capacities for introducing socially innovative and integrated services, including through institutional grants aimed at meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups in both regular and emergency situations.

As a result, 291 participants (of which 215 were women) from 82 local self-government entities strengthened their capacities and knowledge to improve social protection services, address the needs of excluded groups, and provide services more efficiently.

The Regional Housing Programme - established to provide durable housing solutions to vulnerable refugees and displaced persons following the 1991-1995 conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia – and jointly implemented by UNHCR, OSCE, and the Council of Europe Development Bank, facilitated over 1,000 varied housing solutions in 2020

(construction of pre-fabricated units, apartments, and village houses, provision of building materials etc.)

A major success was achieved in 2020 with the government adoption of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence, with UNICEF providing key technical support throughout the process. Regarding child-care services, integrating parenting programme and family strengthening services were prioritized, as was transforming residential institutions into community centres for children and families.

These efforts will continue in 2021. UNICEF continued to fight for ending child marriage, still affecting an estimated 15% of Roma women, empowering girls, boys, and parents in 20 Roma settlements by strengthening the advocacy capacity of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage and integrating child-marriage indicators into the social welfare data-management system to ensure improved monitoring and response.

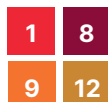


## PILLAR 3

## Economic Development, Growth and Employment



SDGs:

EU Accession  
Chapters:National Priorities  
for International  
Assistance (NAD):Contributing United  
Nations Agencies:

16 Taxation

1 Economic and Monetary  
Policy19 Social policy and  
employment, 9  
Financial Services20 Enterprise and Industrial  
Policy

25 Science and Research

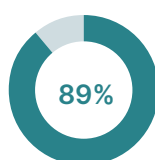
B4 Competitiveness Sector

B9 Agriculture and Rural  
Development SectorIFAO, ILO, UNCTAD, UNDP,  
UNECE, UNICEF, UNIDO,  
UNOPS, UNWTO

Response deficiencies in social protection highlight the pressing need to adopt evidence-based social service policies based on disaggregated data and to make financial social assistance programmes more cost effective.

## Outcome 7:

By 2020, there is an effective enabling environment that promotes sustainable livelihoods and economic development, focused on an inclusive labour market and decent job creation



Recently released official figures show that the Serbian economy contracted by 1.4% in 2020, against the EU projected fall of 7.6%. The employment rate fell during the crisis to 48.2%, but has since rebounded back to pre-pandemic levels of almost 50%. Generally, the severity of the impact was moderated by; COVID-19 measures that kept most economic sectors opened after May 2020, a relatively good macro-economic environment, and the distinctive structure of the economy and exports, with Serbia businesses less integrated in global supply chain networks.

Business short term resilience was maintained by government support packages, shorter COVID-19 related movement restrictions and temporary business closures than in most other European countries. Agro business maintained a healthy output due to domestic demand, but small farmers, particularly women, were severely affected by movements restrictions. Many SMEs were launched in urban and rural areas.

Serbia's HDI value is above the average of the countries in Europe and Central Asia and increased by 11% in the past 20 years.<sup>18</sup> Worker productivity remains much below EU standards (35%). The average wage in Serbia as of December 2020 is 560 Euros, with important variations, indicating a markedly uneven distribution of earnings in the country.

In this volatile environment, the United Nations prioritised three core areas to boost decent job creation, productivity, and competitiveness:

**a. Support government counterparts on the development, adjustment, or finalisation of laws, policies, regulations, and strategies in the circular economy, labour and employment, and agriculture**

The Ministry of Environmental Protection developed a Roadmap for the circular economy in Serbia, with UNDP support and in cooperation with the Circular Economy Platform for Sustainable Development in Serbia – the implementation of this strategy will require much effort, among other reasons, because the rate of recycling waste in Serbia remains low.

The Ministry of Agriculture received support by FAO to comply with the EU Common Agricultural Policy, achieved through a road map on needed adjustments in the legal framework and guidance on how to address capacity gaps following workshops for government stakeholders.

ILO completed an ex-post analysis of the implementation of the Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities: this important initiative looks at why people with disabilities are not successful on the job market: a mix of ineffective incentives and para fiscal burden on employers, distorted evaluation practices, physical barriers and

<sup>18</sup> A new methodology, released in 2020, allows adjusting HDI for inequality. While the inequality-adjusted HDI is lower both for the region and for Serbia, the adjustment is greater for Serbia



Young Roma UN Volunteers employed through joint UNHCR, UNDP, UNV initiative.

prejudices. The findings of this study will complement the work planned in 2021 and beyond to address the needs and rights of person with disabilities.

**b. Enhanced capacities of national and local counterparts to improve the business environment and boost economic opportunities**

ILO advocated for strengthening the counselling services of the National Employment Service (NEC) in the “Functional analysis of the Employment Sector and NEC,” which was prepared in November 2020, including an analysis of the feasibility of the introduction of the Youth Guarantee in the new Strategy for employment with Serbia 2021-2026, which is to be adopted in employment with 2021.

UNDP procured 42 experts for engineering, procurement, legal advice, and finance services for the Public Investment Management Office (PIMO) towards expanding its implementation capacities. As a result, PIMO obtained EUR 8.75 million from the CEB and EUR 109.25 million from EIB loans, creating 700 construction jobs.

UNOPS facilitated nine **economic infrastructure projects**, bolstering national and local government efforts, channelling

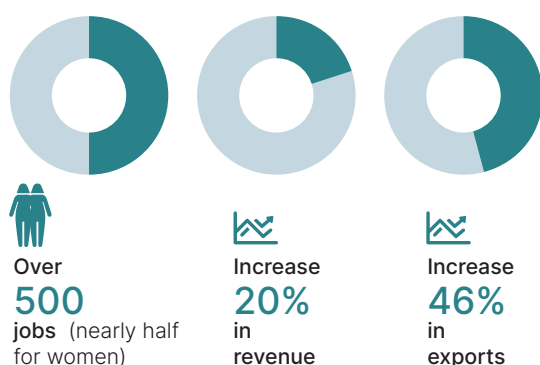
18 million Euros in investments and creating a pipeline for an additional 61 million Euros. Infrastructure upgrades on over 630 hectares of land enabled 26 new companies to initiate businesses in eight supported industrial zones, generating 781 jobs, and another 2,655 potential positions in the longer term. Finally, 15 completed regulation plans created a pipeline for investment of 45 million Euros. In designing these schemes, sustainability aspects were prioritised.

UNECE partnered with the Ministry of Trade, Tourism, and Telecommunications and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce to finalize evidence-based national action plans for removing regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in goods in Serbia based on a whole-of-government approach, with detailed recommendations for addressing legislative and capacity shortfalls in the areas of trade facilitation, quality infrastructure (standardization, technical regulations, accreditation, conformity assessment, market surveillance and metrology), and regional cooperation, drawing on internationally recognized best practices. The action plans will serve as a means to move towards the 2030 Agenda, as each recommendation was mapped against the SDG target to which it contributes and will also contribute to the COVID-19 recovery.

UNDRR ran a survey-based analysis of SME resilience to natural and man-made disasters, with a focus on COVID-19 as well as climate change impacts. Over 500 SMEs contributed to the gathering of experiences, providing the basis for strategic policy recommendations and dialogue with SMEs on strengthening their disaster resilience.

**c. Upscale productivity, job opportunity, and a COVID-19 green recovery through innovative business initiatives, grants and skills development, primarily for SMEs**

Area-based projects - implemented by UNOPS, EU Progress, and Norway for You - provided SMEs with vocational training and digitalization support equipment. This generated over 500 jobs (nearly half for women) and increases of 20% in revenue and 46% in the value of exports.



Results achieved through other UNDP interventions included:

- UNDP intervention created working opportunities for young and educated men and women by supporting 7 infrastructure projects for technology and innovation and 13 for medical sciences and health care in 6 cities. In addition, in a joint UNHCR/UNV/UNDP initiative, a total of 65 young Roma men and women were employed in local institutions such as Centres for Social Work or local self-government units.
- Collaboration with the Office for Information Technologies and Electronic Government and National Employment Service enabled skilled junior programmers to enter the labour market in an additional 6 cities, while 410 citizens were re-trained in IT skills, including 15 people with disabilities. An in-depth impact assessment of the previous phases of IT retraining programs indicates that around 35% of participants gained employment in the IT sector following the program.
- UNDP also strengthened the competitiveness and productivity of the agribusiness sector. A geolocated and publicly available open-source platform – to be used by businesses, farmers, institutions, and inspectorates – was developed along with a database of storage and processing capacities in the agriculture sector. Additionally, a One Stop Shop for agribusiness producers and traders, a Farmers Club, and capacity-building activities strength-



UNDP/WHO challenge call for corporate and social response to COVID-19

ened the capacities of cooperatives and farmers associations, including in meeting international standards. UNDP and FAO facilitated Serbian companies in joining international trade events and fairs, generating USD 40 million of contracts signed in the Russian Federation and neighbouring countries.

- Using challenge calls as a programmatic instrument, UNDP supported several companies through technical assistance or co-financing for the deployment of innovative and sustainable solutions (i.e. recycling used oil from restaurants, transforming refrigerators into raw material for fire extinguishing). As another example, UNDP and WHO jointly launched the Innovation Challenge Call with the private sector, inducing new solutions in personal protective equipment, medical equipment supplies, testing kits, and medical waste management processes, simultaneously boosting business development, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Looking ahead, the macro challenge of depopulation remains daunting. In extensive consultations with various stakeholders, the UNDP Accelerator Lab has developed an innovation portfolio based on system transformation, with a focus on maximizing human potentials and the agility of public policies. These will be areas of focus of the next Cooperation Framework.

## PILLAR 4

## Environment, Climate Change and Resilient Communities



SDGs:



EU Accession Chapters:

- 15 Energy
- 27 Environment
- 31 Foreign, Security, and Defence Policy



National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD):

- B6 Environment and Climate Change Sector
- B5 Energy Sector
- B8 Human Resources and Social Development Sector

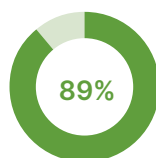


Contributing United Nations Agencies:

FAO, UNDP, UNECE, UNEP, UNIDO, UNICEF, UNOPS, WHO

## Outcome 8:

By 2020, there are improved capacities to combat climate change and manage natural resources and communities are more resilient to the effects of natural and man-made disasters.



2020 was an unpredictable year for the environment. Short term gains from the lockdown quickly faded and pollution of all sorts increased. The formulation and adoption of climate change laws and multiple action plans were postponed by the pandemic and delayed elections, hampering the new cabinet in strategic decisions and national and local parliaments in validation. Environmental and natural resources management budgets were cut to assist social and economic recovery packages.

Globally and nationally, the United Nations championed a robust green recovery blueprint, advocating for the COVID-19 crisis to be used and accelerate fundamental transformations in development strategies. While Serbia continues to invest in coal power, new opportunities are springing up, along with EU Green Deal incentives, civil society commitments, and growing community awareness. To maximize the untapped potential, United Nations activities in 2020 under this outcome were linked to disaster response and risk reduction, structural transformation necessary for the green economy, natural resources management, and improved energy management and diversification.

- a. **COVID-19, a disaster directly linked to humanity's management of natural resources, impacted and guided the United Nations disaster response, risk reduction and prevention efforts.**

About 70% of efforts focused on the initial rapid response and logistical support, as described in Chapter 1. Commitments by Serbia to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction are monitored and implemented at the national level by the Ministry of Interior – with support from UNDRR – and at the municipal level with support from several agencies. Other prevention work included; i) institutional strengthening of chemical, medical, and hazardous waste management, reaching 30 towns and municipalities and more than 15,000 people, including Roma informal waste collectors (UNDP/WHO), ii) air pollution studies to prepare for long-term intervention and public advocacy campaigns (WHO/UNEP), iii) preventing threats to agricultural production (FAO), and iv) bolstering health systems to respond to future emergencies (WHO).

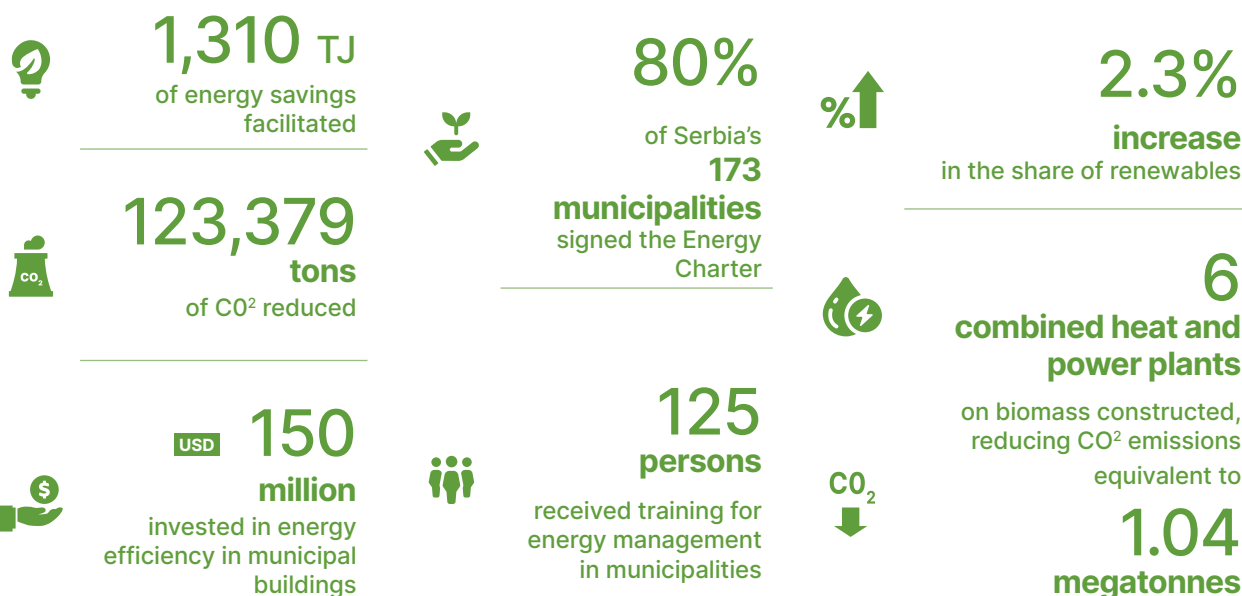
- b. **Structural efforts necessary to the green transformation took a slower pace, focusing on environmental governance, strengthening policies and institutions, reporting on progress, expanding capacities, and improving the sustainable management of natural resources.**

The adoption of the Draft Law on Climate Change was postponed to 2021, as was the formulation of energy laws. UNDP facilitated the completion of the Ministry of Environment's interim report to UNFCCC and facilitated three local municipalities in adopting first-time local climate change adaptation plans. The report to UNFCCC reflects Serbia's commitments and obligations under international law and EU Accession priorities – it reflected mixed progress on the development of the GHG inventory and other key processes and indicators. To accelerate Serbia's adaptation and mitigation achievements, UNEP collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Management to finalise the strategy for the Green Climate Fund country programme, including a national coordination mechanism.

**Institutional capacity** in the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Health was strengthened through programmes by UNDP, WHO, and UNECE including: a) an information system on data collection and management for reporting to the requirements of conventions on chemicals and waste management (i.e. the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and Minamata Conventions), b) capacity-building programmes to



## Reducing environmental footprint



enhance gender mainstreaming in environmental policies and to adequately plan environment and health related activities, and c) supporting a review of green economy status in Serbia focusing on renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, and climate change.

Finally, FAO provided key technical assistance in major advances in sustainable management of critical natural resources: i) the Law on Land Degradation Neutrality was formulated and adopted, and ii) the forest inventory of Serbia was completed, a requisite to a more effective forest management strategy.

**c. Energy management, diversification, and efficiency are becoming major areas of interest, investments, awareness, and action for the public and private sectors, and for citizens.**

UNDP, with relevant stakeholders, facilitated energy savings, CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions, and an increase in the renewable energy share. UNDP and the Ministry of Energy blended GEF funds with those of private investors and constructed six Combined Heat and Power Plants on biomass. Belgrade's action plan for district energy was finalised with UNEP support, forecasting energy savings of 20% over five years. Such investments simultaneously reduce energy consumption and air pollution.

A comprehensive approach to decision and policy making in the energy and water sector needs to exploit the country's natural hydro-energy potential in a way that is sensitive to trade-offs. UNECE supported Serbia and its co-riparians in a new phase of dialogue on the Drina River Basin to reconcile energy development, water management, and environmental protection.

### Zagađenje vazduha je i pitanje društvene nejednakosti i socijalne pravde

Zagađenje vazduha najviše utiče na sledeće grupe



**Žene i decu**

Prilikom obavljanja kućnih poslova poput kuvanja, naročito su izloženi dimu koji potiče od sagorevanja goriva u ložištima.



**Starije osobe**

i pojedince sa bolestima pluća i srca koji su posebno ranjivi na zagađenje vazduha.



**Siromašne:**

Skoro 90% smrtnih slučajeva uzrokovanih zagađenjem vazduha dešava se u nerazvijenim i srednje razvijenim zemljama usled drastičnog porasta broja motornih vozila i drugih razloga.



International Day  
of Clean Air  
for blue skies

UN  
environment  
programme

#CleanAirForAll

UN Serbia advocacy intervention on air pollution

Serbia will need to upscale and accelerate its ambitions and efforts to meet its domestic, regional, and international commitments to the climate change and environmental protection agenda and to its multiple international commitments. Serbia's recovery from COVID-19 - if tailored to support a greener, less resource intensive, and less polluting economy - should help the country become more globally competitive, more resilient to future shocks and crises, and lead the region on the path to sustainable development.

## PILLAR 5

## Culture and Development



SDGs:

8 11 16

EU Accession  
Chapters:

- 26 Education and Culture
- 10 Information Society and Media
- 1 Free Movement of Goods
- 20 Entrepreneurship and Industrial Policy

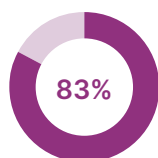
National Priorities  
for International  
Assistance (NAD):

- B10 Culture Thematic Area
- B2 Home Affairs Sector
- B4 Competitiveness Sector

Contributing United  
Nations Agencies:OHCHR, UNESCO,  
UNOPS

## Outcome 9:

By 2020, Serbia has inclusive policies ensuring an enhanced cultural industries sector, promoting cultural diversity, and managing cultural and natural heritage as a vehicle for sustainable development.



2020 severely affected regional, national, and local cultural sectors and creative industries. Mobility restrictions and containment measures throughout Serbia and South Eastern Europe closed heritage sites, cancelled or postponed events, and interrupted cultural production. 26% of these organizations laid off employees.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted measures aimed at the creative industry both as part of the Program of Economic Measures aimed at reducing the negative effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and specifically with 211.7 million dinars that were set aside as non-refundable aid for independent artists, members of representative associations.

Tourism suffered acutely: tourist arrivals dropped by 40.4% from January 2020 to January 2021, and tourist overnight stays by 34.8%, according to Statistical Office. The loss of international tourists primarily affected higher end resorts. Re-invigorated local tourism partly offset these losses, with a sharp increase in occupancy for small operators and accommodation providers. In mobilizing its response and sustaining regular activities, UNESCO conducted **assessments**,<sup>19</sup> engaged **regional cooperation**, and promoted **cultural tourism and cultural consumption** in Serbia.

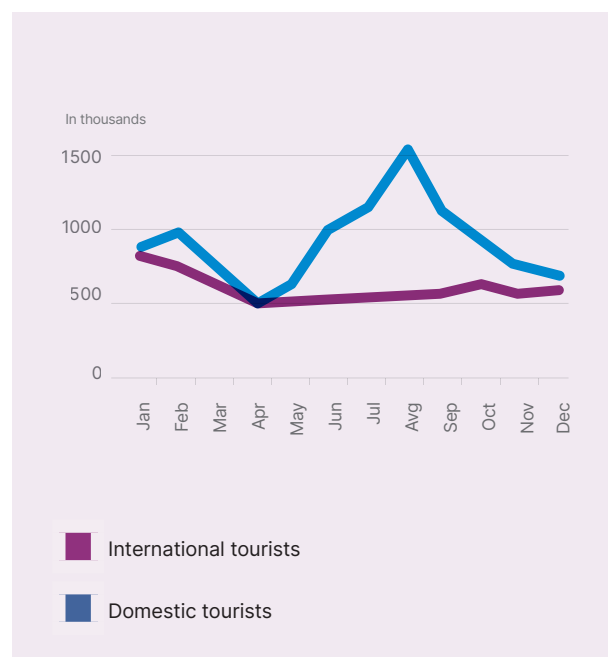


Figure 12: Tourist overnight stays

19 UNESCO, Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 to Cultural and Creative Sectors in Serbia, July 2020.



Grant signing ceremony within the DFF project - six organizations from Serbia receive funds for realization of the cross-country cooperation projects



Call for Proposals under the Joint UN Regional Programme Dialogue for the Future

© UNICEF Srbija/2019/Pančić

With the National Platform “Serbia Creates” of the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Culture and Media, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, UNESCO conducted a Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Cultural and Creative Sectors in July 2020. The study indicated that the cultural and creative sector must strive to adapt to new working and living conditions, based on principles such as public safety, transparency, income equity, and equality.

The hardest hit groups within the sector



Women (58.8% of employees) and young people (70% of employees are between 25 and 44 years old) were found to be the hardest hit groups within the sector, as was the LGBTI community, signifying inclusivity’s importance in designing the recovery.

In support **to cultural tourism, UNESCO promoted local communities as destinations rich in cultural heritage and tradition and activities such as domestic and nature-based tourism.** The Ministry of Culture and Media introduced a new programme for the training and certification of experts in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) at Cultural Heritage properties, authorizing 42 such experts. In addition, a DRR plan was prepared for the Stari Ras and Sopocani World Heritage complex.

In further cooperation with the Ministry, UNESCO presented the final report on “Culture for Development Indicators in Serbia,” advocating **for increased cultural consumption by households towards greater social cohesion, intercultural tolerance, and mutual trust.** For culture to further contribute to social development, the advancement of gender equality practices as well as targeted actions to improve freedom of expression and self-determination are crucial. The Gender Perception Indicator (75%) shows a positive orientation towards gender equality, though further measures must be taken to overcome obstacles to participation in political and public life.

**Constructive dialogue between communities, promotion of peaceful coexistence, and increased trust and respect for diversity were fostered under the joint regional programme Dialogue for the Future (DFF), implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia.**

Through 19 cross-border initiatives, governments, CSOs, and academia engaged with 2,500 young people, adolescents and teachers on social cohesion, innovation, gender issues, political literacy, leadership, media and digital skills, while building trust in intercultural communication.

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

The 2030 Agenda views partnership between state and non-state actors as a vector for fast-tracking and augmenting the achievement of the SDGs. It also foresees increased cooperation in financing and capacity-building, based on the spirit of strengthened global solidarity. **Partnership was stirred and shaken in the throes of the pandemic, an exceptional situation in which all local, national, and international actors were deeply affected by the crisis, albeit in different ways and degrees. Yet 2020 also saw the intricate exchange of knowledge, expertise, technology, and innovative solutions to new problems, infusing a new meaning to partnership seen traditionally as direct financial support.**

This section provides a snapshot of new and expanded partnerships developed by the United Nations in 2020, in both its crisis response and its on-going developmental activities.

**Within three weeks of the crisis onset, the United Nations in Serbia re-purposed about USD 21 million of on-going and upcoming programme support towards the emergency response. The pro-active collaboration between key counterparts and partners, and the flexibility of the modalities used, were unprecedented. This support was critical in mitigating initial risks and enabling the health system.**

**Guided by the principle of aid effectiveness, the United Nations in Serbia also helped disseminate time-sensitive information among all partners on needs, gaps, activities, and results.** Using the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment to steer a joint analysis of the pandemic's manifold impacts in Serbia (within the United Nations and with government counterparts), the United Nations produced recommendations for the Socio-Economic Response Plan for a COVID-19 recovery grounded in the Build Forward Better perspective and the Leave No One Behind principle. New financing modalities to finance SDG achievement were also established, primarily with regional/sub-regional actors, but also with bilateral donors, IFIs, and the private sector.

### Government

The **Government of Serbia** is the United Nations principal counterpart in executing the Development Partnership Framework and in responding to COVID-19. All 20 United Nations agencies work extensively with different levels of the administration, from the **Prime Minister's office, to Parliament, line Ministries, and municipalities, as well as inde-**

**pendent and oversight bodies.** This work focuses on developing new legislation and policies, providing direct technical assistance, recruiting consultants in key Government units, organizing trainings and capacity strengthening initiatives – e.g with the **National Academy for Public Administration** on initiating innovative, competitive training programmes and e-learning platforms for civil servants. In specific cases, the United Nations has directly procured equipment, logistics, and infrastructure. Below are some examples:

The **Ministry of European Integration** (with the EU) re-purposed Euro 18m from current and future UNDP and UNOPS IPA projects towards medical equipment, cold chain, and transport logistics, facilitating immediate COVID-19 responses in March and December 2020.

The **Government**, with UNDP, invested in the **e-Government Support Centre**, providing 17 services, such as “My first salary,” “Local tax administration,” “e-Gov Portal,” and the **newly established COVID-19 vaccination platform.**

UN Women, with the **Ministry of Finance, the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, and the Provincial Secretariat of Finance**, re-aligned government expenditures towards SDGs by introducing **gender responsive budgeting (GRB)**. This innovative public policy tool enables the impact assessment of policies and budgets from a gender perspective, ensuring policies and their accompanied budgets facilitate an equal society for women and men.

### Regional/sub-regional initiatives

In responding to the COVID-19 emergency, UNCT partnered with the EU for the first time under the **Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace**. The IcSP, implemented by UNHCR and IOM, facilitated a **quick and flexible response** throughout the region to ensure adequate conditions in asylum and reception centres, socio-economic rights to refugee and asylum-seekers, and protection and psycho-social support to vulnerable cases.

UN Women contributed to building the capacities of the **EU Delegations present in the region** to instil a gender perspective approach in their environment and climate change programs. This resulted in **gender-informed programming and financing**, especially in the EU Green Deal and EU GAP III.

Under the regional initiative Dialogue for the Future, supported by the **Peacebuilding Fund**, respect for diversity was fostered among communities and youth in **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia.**



## Bilateral and multilateral partners

The United Nations partnership with the Council of Europe focused on the rights agenda, through joint advocacy and joint statements with the Resident Coordinator and OHCHR, supporting child refugees and migrants with UNHCR and UNICEF, and advancing implementation of the GREVIO Base-line Evaluation Report recommendations issued to Serbia in January 2020.

UNDP and UNODC's joint efforts on the Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap facilitated the launching of four new initiatives financed by Germany, UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, and Norway through **the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund**.

New partnerships were operationalized with the **UK Government Department for International Development** on the first systematic actions to tackle the redistribution of unpaid care work; with the **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency** on Gender Responsive Budgeting and the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls.

## IFIs and other financial institutions

UNICEF intensified its partnerships with the **European Union and European Investment Bank** on digitalising education. These partnerships allowed the **Ministry of Education's and schools'** capacity to rapidly adapt, **enabling uninterrupted school attendance for almost 774,000 students**. The three-party partnership between EIB, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance, and UNOPS enabled the implementation of a non-performing loan, resuming the construction of three Clinical Centres in Serbia (Novi Sad, Nis, and Kragujevac) through technical support in project management, combined with capacity building of the Ministry of Health and its Project Implementation Unit to implement donor and IFIs funded projects.

With the **Slovene Enterprise Fund**, UNIDO advanced cross-border knowledge exchange and technology transfer. It also leveraged the expertise of the Universities of Belgrade and Novi Sad to foster smart manufacturing in Serbia through innovation uptake and business ecosystems development, improving industrial competitiveness.

UNDP aided in expanding a governmental investment study for the energy-efficient renovation of 28 large public buildings, leading to a EUR 40m loan to Serbia from the **Council of Europe Development Bank**. Talks with the **Green Climate Fund** for financing the renovation of government heritage and public buildings were launched towards reaching Near

Zero Energy Buildings status. **GCF** financing was allocated to streamline Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use (AFO-LU), financing capacities for priority climate investments.

FAO established a regional partnership with **EBRD** to strengthen quality standards in the agri-food sector; digital technologies for agriculture; the development of Serbia's Irrigation Strategy; animal health and food safety; diversification of agri-food exports; and the grain and oil seeds sector.

UNFPA intensified efforts with the **World Bank** on National Transfer Accounts to assist **government efforts to re-align expenditures towards the SDGs**, instilling knowledge of how demographic shifts influence economic growth, gender and generational equity, and public finances. UNICEF and the **World Bank** are also assisting the Government of Serbia on three sectoral public expenditure reviews in education, health, and social protection.

## The private sector

The private sector was extensively involved in the COVID-19 response, both as a provider and a recipient of services. As a newly appointed ex-officio member of the Steering Committee of **Global Compact Serbia**, the United Nations Resident Coordinator provided strategic vision towards SDG realization through private sector engagement.

In 2020, Global Compact members expanded contributions towards the most vulnerable groups by providing medical equipment to over ten COVID-19 hospitals and food and hygienic supplies to more than 15,000 in need, while advocating for reduced interest rates and a 90-day moratorium on loan repayments through the Chamber of Commerce.

A joint WHO & UNDP challenge call to the corporate sector yielded 23 innovative models in producing, procuring, or transporting products, including personal protective equipment (PPE), medical equipment such as respirators/ventilators, and COVID-19 testing kits, and in healthcare waste management processes and equipment.

UNHCR partnered with **IKEA** on increasing refugee and asylum-seeker employability and in "changing the narrative" by bringing displacement issues closer to the workforce. UNDP and **IKEA** enhanced the living conditions of residents in the Gerontology Centre in Belgrade by donating 250 beds.



Visual for data driven challenge on depopulation for IT professionals and academia (UNDP/UNFPA)

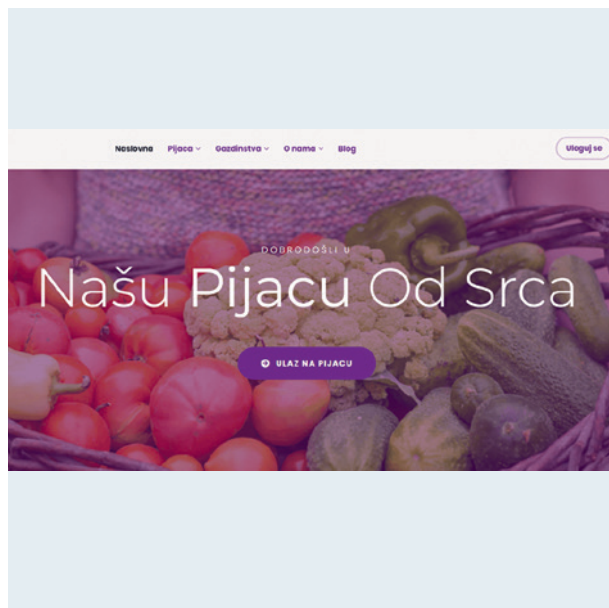
UNICEF's **private sector** partnerships also enabled a comprehensive and equity-focused skills-building programme for adolescents. UNOPS supported **SMEs** in vocational training and digitalization, facilitating market expansion, and new employment to 500 workers.

To address negative demographic trends in Serbia - driven by interconnected factors such as low fertility rates and out-migration – UNDP and UNFPA engaged the **Commission for Demography, the private sector, and the country's diaspora** to promote an environment that encourages people to stay or remain actively invested in Serbia while away.

## Civil society organisations, Non-governmental organisations

CSOs and NGOs are core partners to multiple United Nations agencies such as UNHCR, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women. Only a few examples of new types of partnerships are highlighted here. Women CSOs were crucial in ensuring adequate services for women at risk. UN Women, UNDP, and UNFPA strengthened the advocacy and delivery capacity of women CSOs with *Women against Violence Serbia* and the *Vojvodina SOS Network*. These efforts, among others, generated a mobile application for reporting violence in Serbian, English, and Romani and an accompanying Information System, ensured the functionality of four Rape Crises Centres within hospitals, and provided specialized services to women with disabilities in situations of violence.

In partnership with ten local self-governments in Serbia, UNDP provided support to establish a methodology for transparent financing of CSOs and grants to various local CSO projects within the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in



Empowering rural women during COVID-19: online market supported by UN Women and funded by the EU

the Western Balkans and related activities. In 2020, fast-track COVID-19-related support to CSOs was also provided.

The pandemic containment measures caused a temporary stop in agricultural production, disproportionately impacting rural women. UN Women, in partnership with **CSOs**, developed an online farmers' market connecting women farmers to customers. This market enabled **122 women farmers** from the Kolubara District (Western Serbia) to reach customers and **alleviate the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods**.

## 2.4. Results of the United Nations working more and better together: coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency

### Planning and executing together

In 2020, the UNCT's 20 entities bolstered efforts to ensure increased coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency in United Nations activities in Serbia. With UNDRR as the latest member, the United Nations Country team configuration is tailored to increase synergy amongst its agencies and collaboration across its programmatic, communication, and operational activities.

The 2019 UNDPF Evaluation found the United Nations system coordination mechanisms increased the efficiency of programmatic activities in line with UNDPF objectives, and provided a number of recommendations that were integrated in the 2021-2025 Cooperation Framework.



6 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence/Orange the World campaign supported by the Government and international partners

## Communicating together

The joint communication activities undertaken through the United Nations Communications Group (UNCG) on key thematic areas and COVID-19 are an example of the UNCT working more and better together.

In 2020, the UNCT also garnered 18,500 media hits, 60% through online media, 25% through print media, and 15% through broadcasting.

### Communications reach



**1.5**  
million

**people reached**  
on key thematic areas via **social**  
and **mainstream media**



**6**  
million

**people reached** on COVID-19  
related risk communication and  
through community engagement.

High profile activities included more than 35 advocacy interventions (all activities listed in Annex 1) on key issues like climate change and environmental protection, Agenda 2030 and Leave no One Behind, Human Rights, Gender Equality, UN 75 & Multilateralism, and Building Forward Better. Throughout the year, United Nations key joint messages featured at high-level events and meetings with the government, various target publics (youth, partners, diplomatic community, etc.), and on major United Nations observances and anniversaries, including:

- On Human Rights Day, the Government of Serbia co-organized a high-level event with UNCT, led by the Prime Minister, and co-chaired by the Minister of Human and Minority Rights and the United Nations Resident Coordinator, a strong indication of Serbia's new commitment to the Rights Agenda.
- During the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (25/11 – 10/12), UNCT joined the global United Nations "Orange the World" campaign, together with CBGE and Ministry of Interior, with a broad reach on social and





UN75 social media campaign in Serbia

**traditional media.** UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, the Resident Coordinator's Office also organized awareness raising and advocacy activities on the prevention of gender based violence during COVID-19 and beyond.

- **The United Nations facilitated a youth campaign that generated 9 million views** and included daily posts, newsletters, and two surveys to both raise youth awareness of the health crisis and their role in responding as well as to amplify the voices of specific youth groups, such as those with disabilities and rare diseases and minorities.
- **A 10 month-long campaign on "UN75 – the Future We Want, the UN We Need" reached more than 800,000 people** with key messages on multilateralism and building forward better, while identifying leading issues of concern in Serbia's future: health, environmental protection, and solidarity.
- **Advocacy on climate change, sustainable recovery, and the urgent need to stop accelerated nature degradation was a priority for the UNCT in 2020.** UNEP, UNDP, UNICEF, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, and WHO all advocated particularly on these issues, while joint messages were reiterated and advanced by the Resident Coordinator in more than 17 high-level events and meetings with government officials, CSOs, and the private sector.
- During the COVID-19 crisis, UNCT communicated **with one United Nations voice by deploying risk communication and community engagement actions.** As the outbreak unfolded, communication priority shifted to psychosocial support, mental health, preventing domestic violence, advising parents, and promoting positive gender norms. The SEIA and SERP reports were launched with a series of high-level events with government and development

stakeholders on key issues like health, the economy, and gender, advocating for a green and just recovery.

## Operating together

Co-led by the United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP, the Operation Management Team (OMT) developed a Business Operations Strategy (BOS), making Serbia's Country Team the first in the region to operate under this modality. One UNDP staff member acquired the exclusive BOS expert title, empowering them to support UNCT in transitioning and providing assistance to other regional countries (e.g. Moldova and Georgia) in establishing their own BOS.

The United Nations Serbia BOS conceptualized strategic planning for essential common services and implemented them with full efficiency, resulting in all common procurement services organized to an outstanding level. The OMT's opportunity and cost benefit analysis identified 16 areas of joint operational activities, including common administrative services, common ICT, and common Finance/HR services. The Serbia BOS model has enabled achievement in five service lines, resulting in greater cost avoidance (25% or \$2.56M), efficiency, and common service quality. Serbia was also among only ten countries to launch the Common Back Office (CBO) project.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the efficiencies gained through BOS and CBO allowed the Operations Management Team to extend support to the emergency response by creating a procurement coordination platform, upscaling and fast-tracking the United Nations coordination efforts. This platform produced an overview of United Nations team procurement activities, enabled the coordination and mapping of joint procurement activities, and helped identify funding gaps against the Country Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP).



## 2.5. Financial overview and resource mobilization

The UNCT in Serbia allocated USD 82.2 million in 2020 across the 5 pillars of the DPF. Pillar 1 accounted for 34%, Pillar 2, the largest proportion, for 48%, Pillar 3 for 10%, Pillar 4 for 7%, and Pillar 5 for 1%. USD 70 million (or 85% of the total) were non-core resources. The quality of funding was satisfactory, tapping into diverse sources of finance. The EU was the largest single donor, accounting for 38%, while multi-donor arrangements were 34%.

Resource mobilization in 2020 was a success and focused on supporting the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of existing programmes were repurposed and adapted to integrate COVID-19 related approaches and activities. As a result, the United Nations in Serbia mobilized and allocated USD 30 million to COVID-19 related activities, accounting for 37% of the total spent in 2020.

Over half of all funding for COVID-19 related procurement came from EU reallocated IPA resources managed by United Nations agencies, primarily UNDP, UNOPS, and UN Women. UNOPS, for example, reprogrammed €3 million in late December from IPA 3 to cold chain procurement.

In addition, resources for procurement activities were provided by bilateral donors and IFIs. Certain agencies mobilized private sector resources to procure medical equipment for health institutions in Serbia. Most communication and outreach activities were funded through individual Agencies core resources (UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, IOM, IAEA).

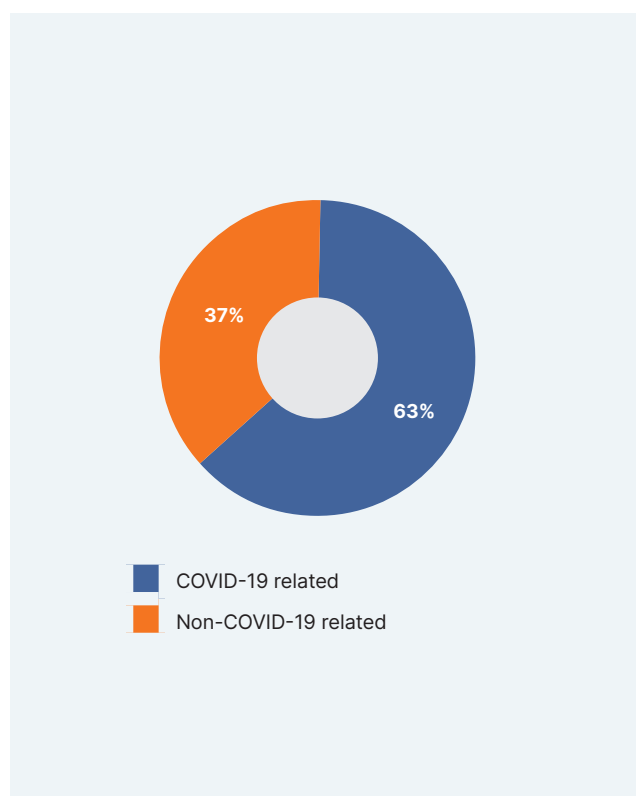
The United Nations is still mobilizing additional resources to continue the response to the pandemic in line with the priorities laid out in the SERP. This amounts to USD 44 million, covering short-, mid-, and long-term COVID-19 related responses through the end of 2022.

In 2021, a new Cooperation Framework will be adopted, together with a new multi-year Funding Framework, based on an assessment of the resources required to deliver the Cooperation Framework in as realistic a way as possible and on a joint resource mobilization strategy.

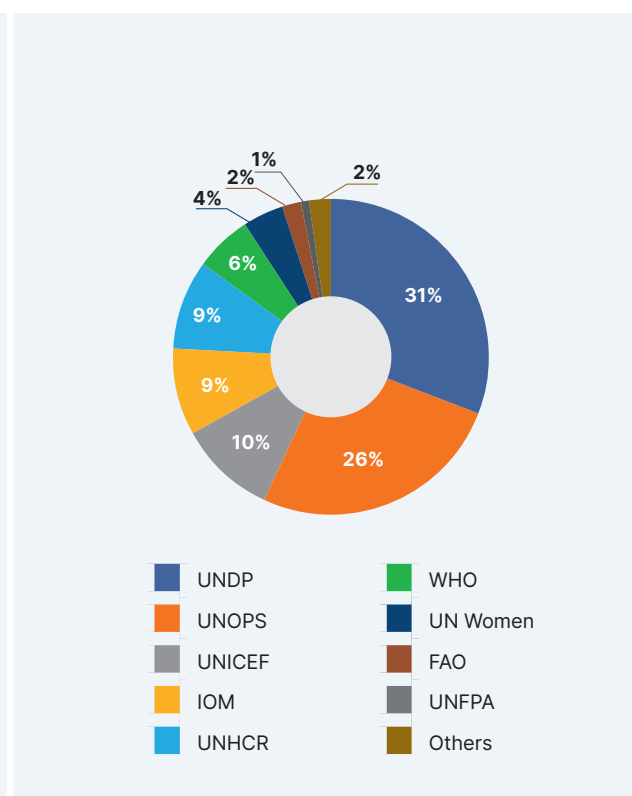
This will result in enhanced predictability of funding that is; (a) required, (b) available and projected to be available, and (c) to be mobilized by the UNCT to deliver on the outcomes and outputs of the Cooperation Framework. Special focus will be on lowering the transaction costs for partners and government counterparts due to more focused engagement and fewer agreements with donors and reports, and better alignment with partner priorities and agendas. Leveraging United Nations global and regional expertise and funds will be also be expanded.



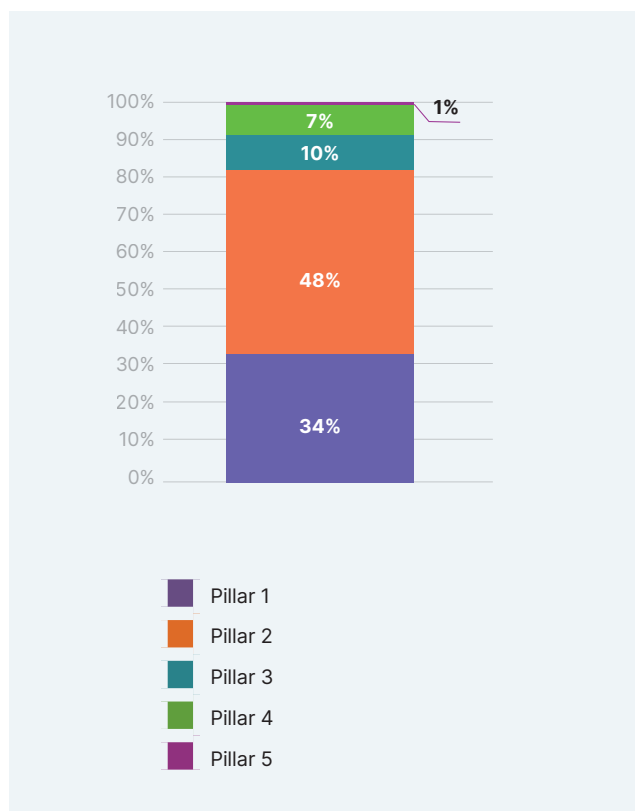
**Figure 13.** Contribution to SDGs by 2020 expenditure



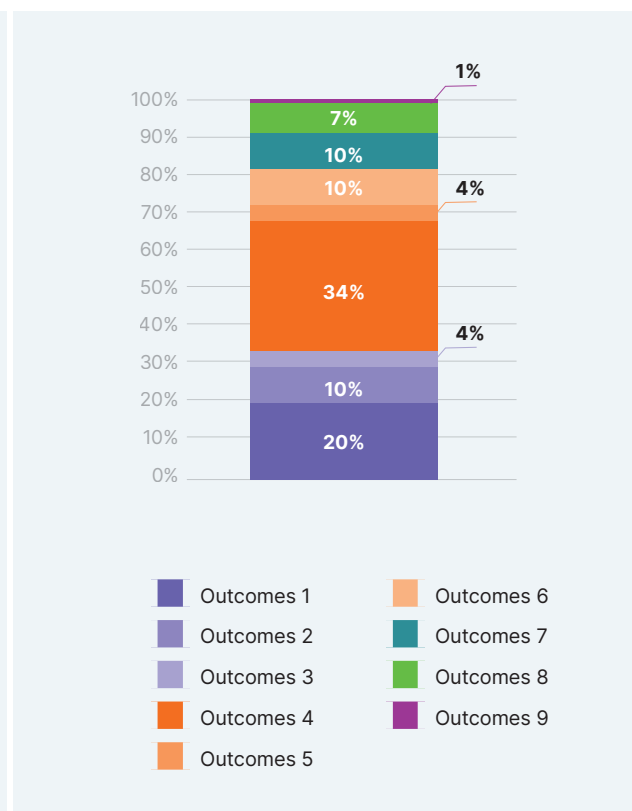
**Figure 14:** 2020 expenditure by non-COVID-19 related and COVID-19 related activities



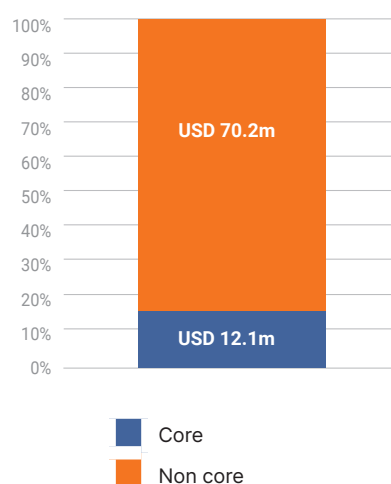
**Figure 15:** 2020 expenditure by agency



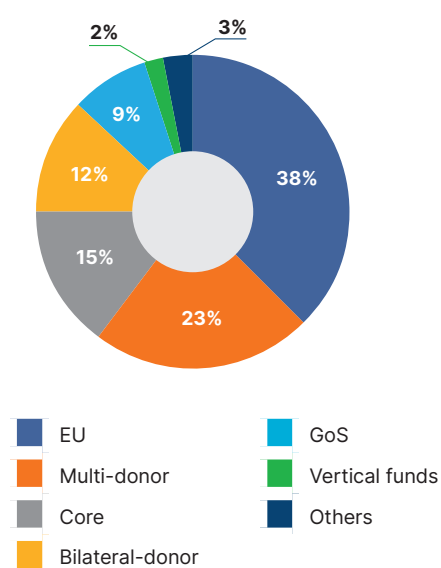
**Figure 16:** 2020 expenditure by contribution to DPF Strategic Pillars



**Figure 17:** 2020 expenditure by contribution to DPF Outcomes



**Figure 18:** 2020 expenditure by core and non-core resources



**Figure 19:** 2020 expenditure by funding source

## Chapter 3

## 3

## Into the future

In 2021, the United Nations in Serbia will renew its engagement towards the achievement of Agenda 2030 through a new Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework with the Government of Serbia for the 2021 to 2025 period. The Framework is the result of a broad, collaborative effort between all United Nations agencies in close consultation with the Government, civil society, development partners, businesses, banks and financial institutions, and academia. It provides a coherent and complementary set of actions that will also contribute to the EU accession, while building upon and expanding the many partnerships that already exist, with creativity and commitment. Internally, the United Nations family in Serbia, led by the Resident Coordinator, will push to finalize key United Nations reforms towards greater coherence and integration.

This new Cooperation Framework defines three strategic priorities that fall within the United Nations Secretary General's critical topics for 2021, which include a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery from COVID-19, decisive climate action and making peace with nature, tackling poverty and inequalities, and promoting human rights and gender equality. These priorities are formulated as follows:

- 1) harness the full potential of a green, sustainable, and inclusive economy to increase opportunities for all and manage risks; 2) place well-being, social equity, and human potential at the heart of systems, policies, and practices, and 3) build trust and mutual accountability through the enhanced rule of law and the rights and duties agenda, with gender equality a cross-cutting theme.

2021 is a critical year for climate action. The direction given by the United Nations Secretary General is clear: wherever we are and no matter the context, we must endeavour, with our counterparts and partners, to sow the seeds for a greener, healthier, more sustainable, and inclusive future. For the United Nations in Serbia, this implies focusing on an open, circular, and low-carbon economy, a just energy transition, the sustainable management of natural resources, and shaping innovative solutions to create decent jobs, manage risks, and strengthen community resilience. We will support the country

to upscale its climate ambitions ahead of COP26. We have an urgent but exciting agenda ahead working on the green transformation with national institutions, cities, rural communities, and civil society. We believe that right now there is a good window of opportunity in Serbia to make this happen with the combined support all of development actors, the business community, and the people. Now is the time to build a positive narrative and engage the youth of the country, to build a better future for us, the generations to come, and the planet. The green agenda is one of the best incentives for resetting demographic dynamics in this country and spearheading holistic growth.

Support to health, social protection, employment, and education will remain key to the COVID-19 pandemic response and beyond. The United Nations is already assisting the vaccination campaign and will work collaboratively with counterparts to achieve long-term reforms in health and education. We will continue to address structural causes of exclusion and inequalities, as well as gender-based violence. We will also continue to support the multiple reforms in public administration and the rule of law towards equal enjoyment of rights, gender equality, and effective evidence-based governance using reliable data. 2021 already holds transformational promise for key laws on rights, employment, gender, and climate.

At the regional level, the United Nations will expand its support to locally-led efforts around trust-building, constructive dialogue, social cohesion, and reconciliation, strengthening regional cooperation and integration through the empowerment of positive agents of change and addressing impediments to sustainable peace and development.

Finally, the United Nations has a special role to play while operating in a country with many other powerful actors and large-scale investments. While engaging on many different levels and in various functions - policies, action plans, services, advocacy, community outreach - our fundamental mandate is to ensure that ALL people in Serbia benefit from the investments and dividends that the next years will bring. We must secure equitable solutions for the poorest and most marginalised, those with special situations and needs, to uphold human dignity and realise greater equality in the enjoyment of rights. We cannot do business as usual. This is where and when the objective of Agenda 2030 to Leave No One Behind is most relevant.



Tara National Park, Serbia. Viewpoint Banjska Stena. View at Drina river canyon and lake Perucac with Focus on the lake and canyon

The time is now!

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Trenutak je sada!

# Annexes

- [!\[\]\(95b42f0077faf7439a26242a54e021ec\_img.jpg\) \*\*Annex 1:\*\* RCO United Nations Resident Coordinator communications and advocacy interventions in 2020](#)
- [!\[\]\(e097ab4c08b8186dd0908330bbc2dc28\_img.jpg\) \*\*Annex 2:\*\* Key United Nations Publications in 2020](#)
- [!\[\]\(1e9d865c5de095f8e3304757c49e79d7\_img.jpg\) \*\*Annex 3:\*\* United Nations agencies in Serbia: Key communications/advocacy interventions in 2020](#)



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