

EU Gender Country Profile for Serbia

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Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	3
I. Gender Equality in Serbia.....	4
A. Legislative and policy framework for Gender Equality	6
B. Institutional framework for Gender Equality	9
II. Gender analysis in six thematic areas of GAP III	11
A. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence	11
B. Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights	17
C. Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women	19
D. Promoting equal participation and leadership	27
E. Integrating the women, peace and security agenda	29
F. Climate change and environment and digitalisation	32
III. Gender Equality Stakeholders	36
IV. Conclusions and recommendations.....	41
Selected Bibliography and Reading List	47
ANNEX 1: Civil Society (CSO) participation in preparation of the Gender Country Profile for Serbia.....	49

Executive Summary

Gender equality is a core value of the European Union and a political priority across all areas. The Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III) adopted by the EU at the end of 2020 is a comprehensive framework to firmly place gender as an integral part of all EU external actions. A key element and a mandate for all EU Delegations is the preparation of an updated country gender analysis to guide EU support for the promotion of gender equality in its actions.

The aim of the gender country profile for Serbia is to provide a comprehensive and structured gender analysis in the six intervention areas identified in the GAP III, namely: Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence; Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights; Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women; Promoting equal participation and leadership; Integrating the women, peace and security agenda; and Climate change and environment and Digitalisation. The profile aims to provide all the necessary data and information to support the integration of a gender perspective into EU policies, programmes and projects in the country. It has been developed through a participative process with national institutions, International Organisations, EU Member States and civil society organisations.

Serbia has made enormous strides in developing a comprehensive legal and policy framework on gender equality. The most recent landmark advances include the adoption of the new and long awaited Law on Gender Equality at the end of May 2021. On the same day Amendments were adopted to improve the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, and only a month earlier the new Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025 was adopted. These build upon and draw from preexisting commitments to international instruments, as well as other earlier legislative changes such as the Law on Domestic Violence of 2017. Serbia has also advanced significantly in attempts to mainstream gender throughout the public sector, in particular through Gender Responsive budgeting, which is mandatory since 2015. Engagement with civil society has been enhanced especially in participatory development of new normative and policy frameworks.

Despite these advances, indicators and recent qualitative studies show the persistence of wide gender gaps. Women are in a disadvantaged position compared to men in almost all spheres, economic, social and political, posing serious challenges to their effective enjoyment of rights and autonomy. In most areas the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including measures introduced to curb its spread, has had a negative impact on gender equality, increasing the risk of gender-based violence and incrementing the burden of unpaid care work, while also limiting access to services and diverting resources away from equality policies. Gender-based violence in all forms remains a serious concern, as has been highlighted by a series of high-profile cases over the past year. Inequalities are deepened and compounded for those facing multiple forms of discrimination such as women and girls living with disability, those of Roma origin as well as other minority ethnic groups, older women, those living in rural areas, and who identify as LGBTI.

The gender analysis in each of the GAP III intervention areas demonstrates the enormous challenges of transposing Serbia's ambitions normative framework into practice. Some of the most prominent bottlenecks include deeply ingrained gender norms and stereotypes which permeate all levels of society. Their persistence impacts institutional awareness, knowledge and capacities to implement mandates, coupled with limited human and financial resources - especially at the local level. These obstacles are even more marked in remote rural areas. The country profile also revealed significant discrepancies when it comes to the information available, as well as in the activities of both state and international actors across the six different areas of GAP III.

Serbia's advances in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in the recent period give reasonable cause for optimism to face the challenges that remain. The commitment shown through the formation of a government with 50% representation of women in October 2020, the clarification of responsibilities for gender and the very recent adoption of the Law of Gender Equality are especially encouraging. These advances are spurred by the opportunities inherent in the Accession process, through which the European Union can continue to influence further advances. The Gender Equality Profile provides

a series of recommendations for all the GAP III intervention areas, to guide the development of a Country Level Implementation Plan and future EU activities to promote gender equality in Serbia.

Introduction

Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are prerequisites and vital pillars of sustainable development. As recognized in the UN Sustainable Development Agenda and Goals, achievement of gender equality requires both specific actions and the systematic mainstreaming of the gender perspective in goals, targets and activities.

The EU's new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III), adopted at the end of 2020, sets out an ambitious agenda to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through all external action of the European Union¹. Reflecting the objectives of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020 – 2025, it builds on the experience and evaluation of the implementation of its predecessor the Gender Action Plan II (2016 – 2020). The GAP III recognizes the rise in inequalities and challenging context due to the COVID-19 health and socio-economic crisis and aims to harness the EU's role as a global front-runner in promoting gender equality to address structural inequalities and build back with more gender inclusive societies. GAP III is based on three principles, a gender transformative approach, addressing intersectionality of gender with other forms of discrimination and a human rights approach.

A key step in this process, and mandate for all EU delegations, is the preparation of an updated gender country profile covering the six key areas of intervention identified in GAP III: Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence; Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights; Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women; Promoting equal participation and leadership; Integrating the women, peace and security agenda; and Climate change and environment and Digitalisation. The information contained in the profile will feed into the EU programming exercise 2021-2027 and the development of a Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP), which sets priorities, key objectives and actions of GAP III in Serbia for the coming years. Evaluation of the GAP II implementation found that almost one hundred EU delegations developed or used gender analyses, including Serbia for which a previous gender analysis had been developed in 2016. While the evaluation shows a correlation between gender analysis availability and the quality of gender mainstreaming it also recognised that the availability of a gender analysis is not a guarantee of its use².

The Republic of Serbia obtained Candidate Country status in March 2012, and accession negotiations opened in June 2013 with the adoption of a negotiating framework. Since then a number of negotiating chapters have been opened some of which directly impact gender equality, primarily Chapter 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights and Chapter 24 on Justice, freedom and security, while others like Chapter 19 on Social Policy and Employment and Chapter 27 on Environment are being negotiated. Serbia has accepted the new methodology for monitoring negotiations and clusters put forward by the EU in 2020, whereby human and fundamental rights remain essential to the process. There is a clear link between the accession process, reforms and programming with potential to further gender equality across the GAP III intervention areas.

This Gender Profile assesses the advances in Serbia to deliver on EU and international gender equality commitments. The preparation was led by the EU Delegation in Serbia, with support by the UN Women country office. Elaboration has been based on a detailed desk review of the legal and policy framework on gender equality in Serbia, reports and documents of national bodies, international organisations and civil society, and available gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data. Desk research has been complemented with semi-structured key informant interviews with officials from the main public institutions engaged and tasked with developing and implementing gender equality policy. Additionally, two online consultations were organised to capture the views of a broader group of stakeholders, the first with representatives of civil

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf

² GAP III Brief n. 1 Gender country profile and gender sector analysis, February 2021.

society organisations (women's organisations and organisations working on gender equality, see full list in Annex), and the second with representatives of EU Member States and International Organisations operating in Serbia.

The following chapter presents a snapshot of the current situation when it comes to gender equality in Serbia, and assesses the overall legal and institutional framework. It is followed by a detailed gender analysis in each of the GAP III intervention areas. The gender discrepancies, barriers and challenges in each area are presented through a review of recent indicators, statistics and studies, followed by an overview of the relevant legal and policy framework, and findings of international monitoring bodies. A mapping of key stakeholders engaged on gender equality and women's empowerment is presented at the end of the document. Finally the profile outlines conclusions and recommendations, identifying the main achievements and, more importantly, the key challenges and bottlenecks which need to be addressed in order to decisively and effectively take gender equality forward in Serbia.

I. Gender Equality in Serbia

Although gender equality is enshrined in Serbia's Constitution and several legal and normative documents, inequality persists in all the areas covered by the present analysis. One of the most comprehensive measures of gender equality in Serbia is the Gender Equality Index (GEI) of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Serbia was the first country outside of the European Union to introduce the Index in 2016, the second edition of which was published in 2018 with data from 2016, and the third is expected in the summer of 2021. The Gender Equality Index measures gender equality in six core domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health, as well as two satellite domains: intersecting inequalities and violence against women. By using standardized methodology, the Index allows for monitoring across time and comparison of the situation in Serbia with that of the EU average, as well as in relation to individual Member States.

Overall findings for Serbia demonstrate a slight improvement of 3.4 points compared to 2014, arriving to a GEI of 55.8 in 2016. This rise is mainly due to increase in the domain of power, while a lower increase has been noted relating to work, money, knowledge and health. The domain of time showed no change due to lack of new data. The overall progress highlights some of the remaining gaps and demonstrates that Serbia still needs to catch up with the EU average which stood at 66.2 for the same year, a difference of 10.4 points. Serbia is shown to be lagging behind the EU-28 average in all the domains, with the smallest gap in the domains of work and health and the highest in the domain of money.

In other global measures, such as the UNDP Gender Inequality Index for 2020, Serbia ranks 35th which is an improvement from the previous year. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2021, prepared by the World Economic Forum, Serbia is one of the five countries which improved the most in the overall index, moving up to be 19th in the world with a rank change of 20 compared to 2020. As with the GEI this improvement in overall ranking is mainly due to political empowerment where its position is at 21, due in part to the increase in the share of women ministers (from 19% to 43.5% between 2019 and 2021). In other domains such as Economic Participation and Opportunity and in Educational Attainment Serbia scores much lower at 54 and 52 respectively, in Health and survival lower still at 89.

According to the 2020 report of the Commissioner for Equality, 107 complaints were submitted to the Commissioner that year on the grounds of gender, making it the fourth in terms of all causes of discrimination, similar to previous years. The majority of the complaints relate to labor and employment, mainly discrimination based on gender and other causes relate to discrimination in the context of childbirth, motherhood and childcare.

Data analyzed in the six intervention areas of GAP III demonstrate significant and persistent gender inequalities, while there has also been some, albeit slow, improvement. In addition to advances in normative frameworks and the institutional set up, the greatest concrete changes can be seen in women's representation and participation in political decision making, although the main results are at the level of legislative power. Gender-based violence continues to plague Serbia, as evidenced by several high-profile

cases of sexual-abuse that have been at the forefront of media and public discussion since the end of 2020, including serious accusations against a Parliament representative. Advances have been made to strengthen the prevention and protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, but much remains to be done. There are also significant challenges to achieve gender-sensitive education, to raise public awareness of gender equality and to improve the labor market status of women, especially those facing multiple forms of discrimination such as Roma women, LGBTI women, women living with disabilities, and women in rural areas. Indeed, women from these groups are consistently found to be in the most difficult situation whether it comes to violence, socio-economic indicators or political participation.

The compounded COVID-19 crises have posed an additional challenge to gender equality, derailing advances in Serbia as they have globally. One concern has been how restrictive measures, especially at the start of 2020, posed an additional risk for victims or those at risk of gender-based violence and increased the already unequal burden of unpaid care work on women. An OSCE supported Gender analysis of COVID-19 response in Serbia found that regulations and measures taken during the state of emergency are not gender sensitive, including economic measures relating to recovery. Measures related to vulnerable groups people living alone and over 65, people living alone with children under 12, Roma men and women, especially those living in informal settlements, persons with disabilities, were rare or lacking. The analysis also highlighted that CSOs and representatives of vulnerable groups were not included in the work of crisis response teams, the decision-making process or the creation of services and measures³. Although the most restrictive measures have now passed the challenge remains given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, as well as to integrate the gender perspective into recovery measures considering the uneven impact of the crisis on men and women.

Discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes still permeate Serbian society. The CEDAW Committee in 2019 expressed concern about reports of high levels of discriminatory gender stereotypes, noting increased instances of anti-gender discourse in the public domain including misogynistic statements expressed in the media, by high-ranking politicians, religious leaders and academics. Patriarchal attitudes are widespread and social norms on gender are slow to change. A survey by the Institute for Sociological Research conducted in 2012 and 2018, showed that in 2018 found over 55% of men and women agreed with statements that men are supposed to be the main breadwinners and that household tasks to be naturally more suited for women⁴. This was not found to have changed much since the previous survey in 2012. USAID in its recent gender analysis conducted in 2020 found in key informant interviews that the pervasive cultural norms also impact decision-making at multiple levels, especially in the rural context⁵.

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) implemented in Serbia at the end of 2017 found that four fifths of men agree with the statement that their primary role is to earn enough money for their children. The report also showed some cause for optimism that societal roles are slowly changing. While the men surveyed overwhelmingly grew up in the families where fathers, or some other men, usually "never" performed tasks such as: cooking, house cleaning, clothes washing, bathroom/toilet cleaning, the survey showed that in the families of procreation, there is a shift towards a more egalitarian division of labour. The survey showed that while only one in fifty men takes parental leave, nine out of ten men claim that they wished they could have spent more time with their children and more than one-third of men reported that they would have liked to focus on childcare if their partners earned enough for the family. However, the report also reinforced evidence on conservative attitudes for example to homosexuality where men far more often than women say that they feel uncomfortable in the company of homosexual men and that they are against homosexual unions or adoption by homosexuals.

Civil society organisations are critical of the perceived shrinking democratic space, highlighting hate-speech on human and women's rights defenders, including through online attacks. The EU Commission in its 2020 report of Serbia also noted that the Equality Commissioner has raised concerns regarding

³ <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-serbia/459382>

⁴ Data taken from a database of a survey implemented by Institute for Sociological Research of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade through project "Challenges of New Social Integration in Serbia: Concepts and Actors".

⁵ https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WNPZ.pdf

increased occurrences of discriminatory and hate-speech in the during the state of emergency due to COVID-19. A report on Women's Rights in Western Balkans, by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation in 2020 noted that Serious attacks on WHRDs continued in Serbia whereby WHRDs, journalists and CSOs were targeted mostly related to their work on women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, human rights, and war crimes⁶.

When it comes to the role of CSOs there is noticeable progress in including women's CSOs in legislative processes and working groups, using their knowledge and capacity to train institutions and their representatives, and in improving cooperation with relevant institutions although there are still gaps and difficulties in cooperation. Civil society organisations and especially women's rights organisations struggle to finance themselves and to provide essential and specialized services to their constituencies, especially to women survivors of violence, in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EC 2020 report for Serbia highlighted concerns regarding missing legal and policy frameworks on gender and on violence against women which have very recently been adopted. In addition, the EC raised concern regarding the socio-economic status of women and the need to strengthen implementation of the Convention on Elimination of All form of Discrimination Against Women by increasing the knowledge of the judiciary, prosecutors and lawyers in this regard.

A. Legislative and policy framework for Gender Equality

The legislative framework for gender equality of the Republic of Serbia is guided by the states' obligations under the key international legal instruments. Serbia has committed to many of these frameworks as successor to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including the UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) (articles 20 and 26); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) (article 2); and the Convention on Elimination of All form of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979). Serbia has also committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Equality, Development and Peace) of 1995 and the UN Resolution 1325 'Women, Peace and Security' (2000).

At the European Level Serbia is signatory to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Conventions for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Social Charter, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (as of 2009) and most recently as of 2013 the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

The process of accession to the European Union is further impetus for strengthening Serbia's legislative and policy framework on gender equality, especially through negotiations of Chapter 23 on Fundamental Rights and Chapter 19 on Social Policy and Employment. The newly revised Action plan on Chapter 23 envisages updates to the legislative framework on gender equality to bring it more into line with international obligations undertaken by Serbia, which is currently underway, as well as strengthening staff capacities for its implementation. The Action plan for Chapter 19 was adopted in June 2020 and includes activities on gender equality standards, as well as anti-discrimination and equal opportunities that relate to women's participation in the labour market, protection in the workplace and access to pensions. The newly adopted methodology of the EU for the accession process which builds on credibility, political steering, dynamic process and predictability, places the rule of law, economic criteria and public administration reform as fundamental before further reforms can take place.

Serbia is also committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals, including the stand-alone SDG 5: to Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls and its nine targets, as well as gender-related targets of the other SDGs. In order to follow up on commitments the government has established an Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the SDGs since 2015. In 2018 with the support of GIZ the government produced the report entitled „Serbia and Agenda 2030: Mapping the

⁶ https://kvinna.tillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-Kvinna-tillKvinna-Foundation-report-WRWB_2020.pdf

national strategic framework in relation to the goals of sustainable development“ which noted that SDG 5 corresponds to EU negotiation chapters: 10, 19, 20, 23, 24 and 28. Since then the Interministerial group coordinated the preparation of Serbia’s first voluntary SDG review in 2019, through a multidisciplinary and participatory process to solicit a self-assessment from several levels of government and stakeholders, complemented by a UNICEF- supported youth review process and a survey opened to civil society to ensure no-one was left behind in the consultation.

At the national level there are several guarantees of gender equality enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and relevant laws and regulations:

The Constitution of Serbia (2006) sets the legal basis for the regulation of gender equality and establishes gender equality as a fundamental constitutional right. As per Article 15 of the Constitution, the state shall guarantee equality between women and men and develop equal opportunities policies. The Constitution also enshrines prohibition of discrimination, including, inter alia, gender-based discrimination.

The Law on Equality between Sexes (2009) has recently been replaced by the new **Law on Gender Equality** adopted by the Parliament in May 2021. This piece of legislation has been long-awaited, following several unsuccessful attempts to draft and pass the new Law, starting in 2014. The drafting process was led by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. The Law is aligned with the Law on prohibition of discrimination and there are special considerations regarding the Action Plan for Chapter 19 and 23. Among its provisions, the law establishes the gender institutional framework, giving a legal basis to the national gender machinery, includes special measures to reach a minimum of 40% for women’s participation on several levels, obliges the state to collect sex-disaggregated data including annual publication of data on unpaid domestic work, and establishes a monitoring mechanism for implementation of the law.

The **Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination (2009)** makes any discrimination illegal, stipulates discrimination forms and cases, including multiple forms of discrimination, as well the procedures for the protection against discrimination. This law has also been updated by amendments which have been adopted at the end of May 2021, following the completion of an analysis of its implementation which deemed the further changes necessary to bring the law fully in line with the EU acquis. The amended legislation includes an updated definition of indirect discrimination, sexual harassment, and a strengthened role of the Commissioner for Equality, as well as special measures such as obligations of the employers to support equality of persons, obligation of the public institutions to promote equality within public funds, changes in fines for discrimination, among others.

The **Law on Domestic Violence**, another domestic legislative milestone, came into force on 1 June 2017. This law regulates the protection against domestic violence and the conduct of public authorities and institutions in preventing domestic violence and in protecting and providing support to the victims of domestic violence. The law introduced emergency measures for perpetrators, establishes multi-sectoral cooperation in preventing and responding to violence, and increased the responsibility and accountability of employees in relevant institutions. The Criminal Code of Serbia has also been amended to stipulate sexual harassment, stalking, genital mutilation and forced marriages as criminal offences.

A **Law on Same-Sex partnership** has also been developed however it is currently on hold. The Serbian Constitution of 2006 explicitly defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman and there is at present no legislation that regulates same-sex partnership. Sex between consenting adult men was decriminalized in Serbia in 1994, but the Ministry of Health considered homosexuality to be an illness until 2008.

Other anti-discrimination laws that contribute to gender equality include the **Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities** and the **Law of Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities**, which has been improved in 2016 through the inclusion of a provision relating to the exercise of equal rights of persons with disabilities according to the government report to the CEDAW Committee. The previous Gender Analysis undertaken by the EU in Serbia in 2016 found that in general laws, by-laws and other legal acts of state authorities do not use gender-sensitive language, and that the

majority of laws which do not target women specifically are for the most part gender blind (Dokmanovic, 2016). In recent years in some cases this has been improved somewhat through amendments and gender equality clauses that have been integrated in legislation on specific sectors, including labour, family relations, social protection, health care, media, education, political life, sports and others (Krstic 2020).

Enacted in 2018 the Law on the Planning System prescribes that when drafting and implementing planning documents, their effects on gender equality should be taken into account (Article 3, item 14). Furthermore, the Regulation on the methodology of public policy management, analysis of the effects of public policies and regulations and the content of individual documents of 2019 includes an obligation to conduct a gender equality impact test as an integral part of the impact analysis. The results of the test allow the institution that is proposing new regulations to estimate how the proposed solutions will impact individuals, including vulnerable categories of the population, and whether a more detailed ex-ante analysis of the effects is required. The Public Policies Secretariat is in the process of finalising the **Gender Equality Test** which has already been piloted to assess to what extent proposed legislation and policies contribute or not to gender equality, a crucial tool with potential to greatly improve systematic mainstreaming of the gender perspective across the legal and policy framework in Serbia.

The **Budget System Law** mandates gender-responsive budgeting in Serbia since 2015 including gender mainstreaming of the budget process, gender-based assessment of budgets, and restructuring revenues and expenditures to promote gender equality (Article 2). The law in addition to mandating allocation of resources for gender equality, also obliges municipalities to publish their annual budgets online. The Budget System Law relies on the gradual introduction of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB). For 2021 of 53 direct budget beneficiaries at national level, 42 applied RB in their budgets and 26 institutions at the provincial level. Pursuant to the Budget System Law, entities receiving funds from the budget of the Republic of Serbia are required to monitor and report on its implementation, as such periodic reports have been prepared since 2017. In 2019 a separate report was drafted on effects on gender-responsive goals for budget beneficiaries (36 national and 18 provincial institutions) that introduced GRB the previous year.

Policy documents that accompany the implementation of the existing legal commitments are for the most part in the process of being updated. The **National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2021-2030** is in the first phase of drafting and is expected to be finalized in 2022. The Strategy will include an **Action Plan** and define goals, indicators, roles, financial resources, monitoring mechanism, reporting procedures, etc. Apart from main objectives/traditional areas, new areas such as gender equality in the context of climate change, environmental protection, green economy, disaster and risk reduction, and others will be introduced. The lead institution is the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in cooperation with the Coordination Body for Gender Equality.

The previous Gender Equality Strategy for the period from 2016-2020 and its **Action Plan (2016-2018)** have been evaluated with the support of UN Women and the EU. The evaluation of the AP found that there was some improvement, despite limited capacities. Implementation at the local level was found to be a challenge including collection of systematic information on implementation in local communities, reflecting the limitations in vertical coordination of the existing gender mechanism (see section B below). The evaluation fed into the development of the new Action plan 2019 - 2020 which was drafted but never formally adopted, hence the Strategy has been implemented since 2019 without an operative plan in place. The evaluation of the Strategy found it had achieved significant initial results in some areas, but that effectiveness in the various target areas is uneven. A key challenge has been found to be the lack of a financial mechanism for implementation or monitoring of resources invested. A report prepared by the government in review of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +25 notes that one of the key remaining challenges is gender mainstreaming of all public policies and improving the culture for gender equality, as well as assuring the conditions for effective access to justice for victims of gender discrimination, and improving efficiency in provision of judicial protection of the right to non-discrimination⁷.

⁷ National-level review of the progress on the implementation of the Beijing declaration and platform for action +25: https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/Serbia_ENG.pdf

Another policy document which requires updating to take into account recent legislative changes and amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Law is the **Strategy for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination** the last one covered the period from 2014 to 2018.

One new policy document adopted in April 2021 is the **Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025**, in order to support comprehensive implementation of ratified international treaties, in particular standards of the Istanbul and CEDAW Conventions, as well as the provisions of domestic legislation of 2017. The Strategy is discussed in more detail in the section on Gender-Based Violence. The drafting of an Action plan is already in process and is foreseen for adoption in the coming period.

Other policy documents which contribute to achievement of gender equality in Serbia include: the National Strategy on Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Roma Women in Serbia 2016-2025 and accompanying Action Plan adopted in 2017; the National Strategy to prevent and suppress human trafficking, especially trafficking in women and children and to protect victims 2017-2022 along with its first Action plan 2017-2018 adopted in 2017, and second Action plan for 2019 – 2020 adopted in 2019. A new strategy on Strategy on Social Protection is being developed building on an evaluation of the implementation of the previous one.

In its report on progress on the implementation of Beijing +25 the government asserts that sectoral gender analysis has been prepared by the Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water and Forestry, the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Government (underway at the time of the report), Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

B. Institutional framework for Gender Equality

While the Constitution obliges all public authority bodies to take active part in promoting gender equality and equal opportunities, it is the recently adopted Law on Gender Equality (2021) that sets out the institutional framework for the creation, implementation, monitoring and improvement of policies for achieving gender equality. According to the law the structure responsible are:

1. Government;
2. Ministries, other state administration bodies within the scope of which are the areas in which general and special measures for achieving and promoting gender equality are determined and implemented
3. Coordination Body for Gender Equality;
4. Governmental Gender Equality Council;
5. authorities of the autonomous province;
6. bodies of local self-government units;
7. other public authorities, organizations and institutions that, in accordance with their powers, participate in the prevention of discrimination based on sex or gender and the prevention of gender-based violence.

For each level of government, the new Law sets out the responsibilities. What is novel in the Law on Gender Equality in respect of existing structures is establishment of advisory bodies in the form of Gender Equality Councils at the government and provincial government levels, and the establishment of a Council for Gender Equality in the administrative bodies of local self-government units.

The **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue** was formed after the elections in October 2020. In addition to responsibility for gender equality, the Ministry has assumed the role previously held by its predecessor the Office for Human and Minority Rights (OHMR) which was responsible for monitoring the compliance of national legislation with international treaties and other international instruments on human and minority rights, including the preparation of periodical reports to the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

One of the greatest achievements of the recent years has been the establishment of the **Coordination Body for Gender Equality (CBGE)** by the government in 2014, which is led by the Deputy Prime Minister who is also the Minister for Construction, Transport and Infrastructure. The Law on Gender Equality has finally given a legal status to the Coordination Body and clarified that its task is directing and coordinating the work of state bodies related to gender equality, considering all issues and improving the state of gender equality. The CBGE is an expression of the understanding of the inter-sectoral nature of gender equality, and the political commitment of the Government to ensure greater horizontal and vertical coordination. Since its establishment the CBGE has been recognized to have had a positive effect on the promotion of gender equality in Serbia, as per the findings of the first evaluation of the NAP for the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality, and as evidenced by the progress achieved in this area and registered in the Gender Equality Index for Serbia for 2018. Over the recent years the Coordination Body has received support from UN Women to strengthen coordination work and gender mainstreaming throughout the work of public authorities, through the project "Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality" funded by the EU. The principal challenges encountered by the CBGE in the recent years have been limited financial and human resources, coupled with a lack of clarity in mandate between the CBGE and the Ministry of Labour Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. The latter has largely been removed with the establishment of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue as the ministry responsible for gender equality, and the clarification of mandates enshrined in the new Law on Gender Equality.

The **Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU)** has been operating since 2018 within the Office of the Prime Minister and has been an active partner in preparation of the Strategy for Gender Equality 2016-2020 and its AP 2016-2018, and the Gender Equality Index for Serbia.

In addition to the leading Ministry and the CBGE, all line ministries and key institutions have focal persons for gender equality. The Law on Gender Equality now mandates that all public administration entities with more than 50 employees must have an appointed gender equality focal person. There are also teams for gender-responsive budgeting in all budget beneficiaries.

At the legislative level there is a **Parliamentary Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality** which considers, draft laws and other general acts from the gender perspective and examines the implementation of gender equality policies. Since 2013 there is also a **Woman's parliamentary network** comprises women MPs from all parliamentary groups focusing on five objectives: women's and family health, combating violence against women and children, economic empowerment of women, education of women and promotion of women's knowledge, and increased participation of women in political and public life. This network is an example of informal form of joint action of women collaborating together across different areas/parties, on challenging issues.

At the **provincial level** in Vojvodina the key institution is the Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy Demography and Gender Equality which is placed in the executive branch of government and is responsible for implementing and monitoring progress on the Decision on Gender Equality of AP Vojvodina. In the legislative level the Parliament of Vojvodina has a Committee on Gender Equality. In addition the Institute for Gender Equality of Vojvodina is a expert body gender equality which advises the provincial Executive Council in mainstreaming gender and preparing regulations related to gender equality. There is also an independent Provincial Ombudsperson with a Deputy Ombudsperson for gender equality.

Local mechanisms have been envisioned since the previous 2009 legislation on gender equality. According to the government report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 2019 over 100 bodies have been set up in the local government units, some have both gender equality bodies and gender equality officers. However, the establishment and effectiveness of these local mechanisms has been uneven, of those established not all are active and financial resources are limited. In 2017 the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality undertook a survey of local self-government units on gender equality in decision making at this level of government which found that approximately half of the cities and municipalities still have not established a working body for gender equality. The 2019 evaluation of the first NAP of the the National Strategy for Gender Equality found that functional gender equality mechanisms at local level are an area of low effectiveness. The Law on Gender Equality of 2021

mandates the establishment of a Commission for Gender Equality in the Assemblies of Local Self-Government Units, as a permanent working body of the Assembly, and Councils for Gender Equality is formed in the administrative bodies of local self-government units.

There are also independent bodies for the protection of human rights. The **Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman)** with three deputies, one of whom is in charge of children's rights and gender equality. The Ombudsman takes its role from the Constitution of Serbia and the Law on the Protector of Citizens, and is appointed and dismissed by the National Assembly to which he/she reports. In addition there is the position of **Commissioner for the Protection of Equality** which was established under the Anti-Discrimination Law in 2009 as an independent body. The Commissioner has the authority to act preventively in the field of gender equality regardless of the individual characteristic that is the basis of discrimination.

It is important to also mention the role of the **Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS)**, a Unit for Justice and Gender Statistics which operates in collecting gender disaggregated data and producing gender statistics. From 2005, SORS periodically, every three years, publishes the publication Women and Men in Serbia. The latest report was published in 2020. Civil society has highlighted that the draft Strategy for the Development of Official Statistics in the Republic of Serbia 2021 - 2025 does not contain a plan for collecting sex-disaggregated data for all relevant statistical areas, as demanded by public policies and international and EU standards, and that CBGE comments to the strategy are awaited.

II. Gender analysis in six thematic areas of GAP III

A. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence

Gender-based violence remains a significant concern in Serbia. One of the most comprehensive studies was conducted by the OSCE in 2018 as part of a regional research effort, supported by UN agencies. The study found that every fifth woman in Serbia has suffered physical and/ or sexual violence. More than 45 percent of the women surveyed said they experienced violence at the hands of a former or current intimate partner since the age of 15. Two out of five women surveyed indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment at some point since the age of 15, and 18% had such an experience in the 12 months prior to the survey. Ten per cent of women with partners said they had experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of their current partner, and 9 % of all women surveyed said that they had such experiences at the hands of a non-partner. Those whose main activities were domestic and care duties were more likely to experience physical violence from their current partner than those in paid employment. Stalking has affected one in ten of the women surveyed. Women living in urban areas are more likely to have experienced sexual harassment and stalking and violence at the hands of a previous partner than those in rural zones. Younger women and those who find it difficult to cope on their current income are exposed to higher risks of violence than others.

When it comes to perceptions of violence, five out of six of the women surveyed perceived GBV as common, and over a third as very common. While more than 73% of the women surveyed indicated hearing of at least one of the three organisations providing services to victims of GBV, the survey found that few women accessed services. For example, after the most serious incident of physical and/or sexual violence, only 3% contacted a women's shelter and only 1% a victim support organisation. Those who did speak to someone, chose a friend or family member rather than a specialist service/ organization. The survey also revealed low police involvement in incidents of political violence, and a third of the women asked were found to perceive violence as "a private matter" that should be kept within the family. According to the study some of the barriers that prevent women accessing services include feelings of shame, fear or mistrust of the police, social workers and healthcare professionals while in rural areas services may not be available. Some of the severe and long-lasting impacts of GBV were confirmed: two in five of the women surveyed suffered from anxiety, around 25% suffered from depression or difficulty sleeping and feelings of fear, anger, annoyance or shock were mentioned by at least two in five of the women surveyed.

The IMAGES survey implemented at the end of 2017 found that nearly one-third of men interviewed committed insults and humiliation as forms of violence against their partners while in one-fourth of cases,

men deliberately intimidated their partners. Physical violence was admitted in one-fifth of cases. Economic violence in the form of prohibition to go to work was widespread. One in ten men in the study sample states they had forced women into sexual intercourse, under different circumstances.

According to data collected by civil society network Women against Violence⁸ between 2010 and 2020 at least 333 women were killed by their partner or member of family, an average of 33 per year, and in every third case violence had previously been reported to one of the responsible institutions. According to the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in 2020, about 32,000 cases of domestic violence were reported and 29,540 emergency measures were imposed⁹. To have an accurate assessment of the extent and nature of gender-based violence it is vital to have a centralized system of administrative data that is disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, disability, geographical location and socio-economic background, which is unfortunately not yet available in Serbia. At present each institution in Serbia collects its own data, with no standardised methodology, in addition most official data relates to domestic violence and not all forms of violence against women. Data of the statistical office of Serbia includes only judicial statistics, reflecting the criminal code. A unified system is foreseen both in the Domestic Violence law and the newly adopted Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (see below).

When different forms of discrimination intersect the risk of experiencing gender-based violence is greater. Women who live with disability, or identify as LGBTI, who belong to an ethnic minority, especially Roma, and asylum-seeking and migrant women are particularly vulnerable.

The OSCE 2018 study found that violence at the hands of a previous partner is higher among women who identify as being from an ethnic minority in the region where they live. Roma women stated that they felt women in their community to be at risk of violence at the hands of their parents-in-law, in particular psychological violence, given that it is common in the Roma community for married couples to live in the husband's home with his family. They were also found to have even lower expectations of services, expressing the belief that service providers consider violence to be common in their community. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey implemented by UNICEF and SORS found in 2019 that among women aged 15 – 49 living in Roma settlements 22% believe partners are justified in hitting or beating their wives in a variety of situations, as compared to only 2% in Serbia as a whole.

Early and forced marriage is a form of gender-based violence which is particularly prevalent among Roma communities in Serbia. Considered by many to be a norm, custom or cultural practice which contributes to a perception that it is not necessarily the state's responsibility to act. The MICS of 2019 found that 34% of young women between 15 and 19 years of age living in Roma settlements are married or in a union, rising to 41% in the poorest households, while these percentages are at only 4% and 13% respectively for national averages. In Roma settlements 56% of women age 20- 24 married before the age of 18. This was more common among women with only primary education than among those who with secondary or higher education.

One of the most hidden forms of gender-based violence is the denial of economic resources. This form of violence goes hand in hand with other forms of GBV, such as violation of bodily autonomy, early and forced marriages. MICS survey shows that early marriage is more common among women with only primary education. This data imply that some percentage of research participants have potentially been denied access to economic resources, in this case, formal education. This highlights the importance of initiatives that address multiple intersecting issues.

Persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) experience gender-based violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity in the family, community, workplace, school, and health care settings. A poll undertaken in 2015 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) that over 70 percent of LGBTI respondents were exposed to psychological violence and harassment, and 23 percent

⁸ <https://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/femicid-u-srbiji>

⁹ Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025

reported having been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity¹⁰. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has implemented a EU LGBTI Survey in all EU member states as well as in two candidate countries including Serbia. The first was applied in 2012, and the second implemented in 2019. The Survey found that 1 in 5 trans and intersex people in Serbia were physically or sexually attacked in the five years before the survey, double that of other LGBTI groups. Serbia also had one of the highest rates of physical or sexual attacks motivated by the victim being LGBTI at 17%. According to the USAID gender analysis of 2020, Astraea Lesbian Foundation reported that 20 percent of people in Serbia believe that violence towards same-sex couples is justified.

Women and girls who are refugees and migrants face specific protection challenges, including the risk of exploitation and gender-based violence. In 2015 the refugee crisis saw more than one million asylum seekers make their way towards Western Europe, the vast majority of which transited through the Western Balkans, including Serbia, some of whom are still in Serbia having sought asylum. A pilot survey undertaken by the NGO Atina with the support of UNFPA in 2017 found that 24% of the participants confirmed that they were exposed to sexual violence, meaning that they were forced to have sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual activities. Complementary questions indicated that this number could be much higher. A UN Women study of the migrant crisis from a gender perspective in 2016 found that language barriers, cultural factors, and the intention of asylum seekers to move transit countries as quickly as possible, contribute to limiting the ability of migrant women and girls who are victims of GBV to communicate with service providers and seek protection and support. The report also found limited capacity of front-line actors to systemically identify, refer and respond to issues of GBV. UNFPA in coordination with all relevant stakeholders has developed standard operating procedures regarding GBV for the refugee population. Further development of the system is needed to ensure safety for the most vulnerable members of the refugee population.

It is important to note that women's rights organisations and groups have expressed concern that risk of GBV has increased in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular as a result of the restrictive measures enforced to curb and prevent its spread resulting in victims being locked in with perpetrators in a context of increased stress, while also limiting protection and support services available. Many women's organisations in Serbia provided services to victims of gender based violence during the lockdown. For example, from April to July 2020 the SOS helpline managed by the Human Rights Committee in the town of Vranje, reported a 43 per cent increase in the number of first-time calls, 37% increase in requests for support and 35% more calls than before. Similarly the Autonomous Women's Centre which manages another SOS helpline which reported receiving three times more calls from new women in the first month of declaration of the emergency despite working shortened hours although these helplines are not only relating to GBV). Measures to ensure continuity of access to services for victims of gender-based violence are of vital importance, as is increased awareness-raising of services and support available. The EC 2020 Serbia report highlights this increased risk of GVB in the context of COVID-19 and notes that the Ombudsman submitted an initiative to amend the decree on emergency measures in order to allow free movement of victims of domestic violence. The Serbian High Court Council also classified cases of domestic violence (including protective measures for the victims) as those that courts continued to deal with during the state of emergency, including prosecution in such cases without delay.

The government estimates that violence is grossly underreported with only 25% of women who suffered violence from their ex-partner reporting violence to the police, and 18% of those who experienced persecution and only 3% of women reported sexual harassment to the police¹¹. According to the data of the Ministry of the Interior, in the past three years, it can be noted that the total number of reports of violence increased in 2019, while in 2020 that number was close to the period from 2018 - which is more than 27.000 incidents reported. On average, about 60% of all forms of violence are psychological violence, followed by about 36% physical violence, while the number of economic and especially sexual violence that has been reported or detected is still small. In addition to existing SOS phone lines, since 2020 it is possible to report

¹⁰ UNDP/ USAID Serbia Country study on Being LGBTI, 2015.

¹¹ Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025

violence through a mobile SOS application, available in Serbian, English and Romani and accessible to women with disabilities - the only app with these features in the region.

In January 2021 Serbia was rocked with allegations of sexual and psychological abuse that emerged of women and girls by a renowned acting professor and well known public figure, which flooded traditional and social media. Subsequently in March one more case of an actress pressing charges against another well-known actor emerged and further allegations of sexual abuse have implicated a local government representative and member of the National Parliament. These high-level cases and public reaction highlighted the complex stereotypes that persist around gender-based violence, including views that perpetuate GBV such as questioning why the victims did not come forward sooner that place doubt on the authenticity of the victim and accusation or even public threats to victims by one of the accused.

A qualitative analysis of Serbian media on violence against women, undertaken by the the group Journalists against Violence against Women supported by UNDP, reviewed over 11,000 articles published in electronic and printed media from January to December 2019. It found that as many as 45% of reports violated principles of professional reporting in the very title. Of concern was that apart from using sensationalist and stereotyped phrases, and revealing the identity of the victim and members of her family, more than one-third of the media reports contained specific details pertaining to the case of violence or murder. Other challenges in reporting were statements that justify the act(s) of violence by referring to the personal traits of the perpetrator or the external circumstances, as well as expressions that minimise the effects of violence and directly manifest lack of confidence in the survivor or victim (15% of the reports), contributing to normalisation of violence in the eyes of the public. The group Journalists against Violence against Women has prepared Guidelines for Media Reporting on Violence against Women published in December 2019 to support journalists to resolve dilemmas with which they are faced, while avoiding or minimising the traumatising of women who have suffered violence as a result of public exposure.

Policies to address gender-based violence

Important advances have been made in Serbia to improve the normative framework around gender-based violence. Key achievements include the adoption of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence in 2017 which regulates the protection against domestic and other forms of violence and the conduct of public authorities and institutions in protecting and rendering support to the victims. The Law sets out standardised approaches based on multi-agency risk assessment, introduces emergency protective measures (such as removing the perpetrator from the family or prohibiting them to approach the victim), establishes broad multi-sectoral cooperation in preventing and responding to violence, and increases the responsibility and accountability of employees in relevant institutions through liability for those who fail to act. Importantly it imposes a duty to maintain a central register of domestic violence cases under the jurisdiction of the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office.

The introduction of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence was accompanied by amendments to the Criminal Code that introduced new criminal offences related to female genital mutilation, stalking, sexual harassment and forced marriage. The Family Law in Serbia gives women who are victims of violence the right to file a civil lawsuit to request protection orders in cases of domestic violence, which can also be filed by members of the victim's family, a legal representative, a public prosecutor and centers for social work.

The most recent advance in March 2021 is the adoption of the Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025. This document was long-awaited and has been prepared through a broad participative process, which included the establishment of a working group of experts, consultation with civil society and the support of UN agencies working on GBV in Serbia. While the new strategy is both ambitious and comprehensive it remains to be seen how it can be effectively implemented, including by ensuring sufficient human and financial resources. The drafting of a two-year Action Plan to accompany the Strategy and support implementation is now taking place.

Addressing gender-based violence requires a comprehensive multi-sectoral approach. In Serbia the main institutions in charge of prevention and protection from GBV include the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, the Ministry of Labor Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry

of Health and the Ministry of Interior which oversees the work of the Police. Following the adoption of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, the Government has established the Council for Prevention of Domestic Violence to monitor the implementation of the Law and improve the coordination. Composed of nine members representing the line ministries and other state authorities and institutions in charge of implementing the law it is headed by the Minister of Justice with the Minister of Interior as deputy. Since the law was adopted the Ministry of Interior established the Working Group for Combat against Domestic Violence. Also, since 2016 the Crime Police Directorate has formed the Domestic Violence Prevention and Combating Unit, which monitors, analyses and coordinates domestic violence cases at the level of all 27 police administrations.

Furthermore Groups for Coordination and Cooperation have been established at each basic public prosecutor's office, composed of representatives of the basic public prosecutor's offices, police directorates and centers for social welfare, while representatives of educational and healthcare institutions, the National Employment Service, and other legal entities, as well as associations and individuals are invited to meetings as required. The Groups consider reported cases of domestic violence that have not ended with a final court decision, as well as cases where support and protection of victims is required. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 the work of the Groups for Coordination and Cooperation has with the support of UNDP been taking place online and informant interviews reveal that this has not only ensured regular continuation of activities despite restrictive measures, but has also led to some efficiencies in some cases when it has been possible to obtain missing information faster and continue analysis of cases without waiting for the next physical meeting of the Group.

A National Coalition for Ending Child Marriage has been set up bringing together all relevant public institutions and civil society representatives. GREVIO recognized this as a positive development together with the government's stated intention to intensify training for professionals on protection from child marriage and plans to increase support for Roma girls, their families and Roma organizations.

In June 2018 the government of Serbia prepared and submitted its first report on the Istanbul Convention to the GREVIO expert group (responsible for monitoring implementation of the Convention) in advance of the 2019 GREVIO mission to Serbia and subsequent report. Despite the significant advances that Serbia has made, GREVIO has highlighted several remaining challenges, especially in ensuring the application of the normative framework in practice. One deficiency of the legal framework is criminal offence of rape is not defined as a sexual act that the victim did not consent to, but only if committed with the use of coercion, force or threat. Another refers to the new law on Free Legal Aid which distinguishes between victims of domestic violence and those who are victims of other forms of GBV who must demonstrate their eligibility through a complex process, and according to GREVIO fails to recognize years of experience built up by civil society in providing legal aid to victims of GBV. As the EC 2020 report for Serbia points out a more comprehensive response to all violence against women covered by the Convention is needed, to include not only domestic violence but also include rape, stalking, sexual harassment and forced marriage.

Other challenges for advancing in prevention and protection from GBV indicated by GREVIO include stable and sustainable funding levels on the basis of separate budget and funding lines; ensuring due respect for the confidentiality and anonymity of all callers to the newly established national helpline for victims of gender-based violence, increased efforts to identify and support women asylum seekers who have experience or are at risk of gender-based, expanding the provision of shelters and heightened respect among legal guardians and medical professionals for women's informed and free decision-making in relation to medical procedures such as abortion and sterilisation, in particular for women with disabilities in residential institutions. GREVIO also indicated that Conviction rates for most forms of violence against women are extremely low, noting that this may be for a range of reasons from „low levels of reporting to lack of guidance on how to build a case, and insufficient training on more recently introduced offences“¹². On a positive note, GREVIO's report recognised that the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and additional policy documents have led to an increase in training and specialisation across the legal professions as well as law enforcement agencies.

¹² <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-serbia/16809987e3>

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Serbia expressed concern regarding the high prevalence of physical violence against older women, and the reported increase in all forms of gender-based violence against women with disabilities in institutions, based on civil society reports submitted in the same reporting round. It also expressed concern that support to victims of gender-based violence is mainly provided by non-governmental organizations and is dependent on donors for funding, citing also a shortage of shelters for victims of gender-based violence. This issue has also been noted in the EC 2020 report for Serbia. The new law on Gender Equality (2021) includes specifications which special measures against gender-based violence will be financed from the state, provincial and local budgets, however some will only apply from 2024. The EC further highlighted that police protocols do not mandate cooperation with specialist support services or routine referral of victims, resulting in the under-utilisation of existing CSO expertise.

Trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings represents one of the most harmful and complex forms of gender-based violence. Sexual exploitation in neighboring countries and throughout Europe is the main purpose of trafficking in women and girls. On the other hand, Serbian nationals, primarily men, are subjected to forced labour in labour-intensive sectors, such as the construction industry, in and outside the EU.

According to data included in the Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the percentage of identified female victims has been rising constantly every year from 2013 to 2017, except for 2014 which was marked by a surge in labour exploitation of construction workers. In 2013, the percentage of identified female victims was 62 per cent, in 2015 it was 80 per cent, while in 2016 it was 82 per cent of all identified victims. According to data for 2019 from the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection, women and girls represent 82% of all formally identified victims, of which 59% girls and 41% women. The largest number of identified victims are victims of sexual exploitation 59%. The Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection has overseen the formal identification of victims of THB in Serbia since its establishment in 2012, as well as the organisation and coordination of victims' protection and assistance.

Serbia has improved its institutional and strategic framework in this area through the Strategy to prevent and eliminate Trafficking in Human Beings, in particular Women and Children, and to protect Victims of Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia 2017–2022 and an accompanying Action Plan for the period 2019 – 2020. The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking a social protection institution has been operating since 2012. The Centre assesses the situation, needs and strengths of victims of human trafficking and the risks they face, identifies victims and provides them with appropriate assistance and support, to ensure their recovery and reintegration, including coordination with all implicated institutions. social protection services, residential social protection, courts and other authorities to ensure that the best interests and safety of victims of human trafficking are always taken into consideration. A specialized helpline has been introduced to provide support to survivors of THB, and share preventive information. The first state run shelter for accommodation of victims of THB has finally been established. Other services are provided in collaboration with civil society organisations of which ASTRA and ATINA are significant partners including in operation of safe houses and accommodation for underage migrants.

The Criminal Code prohibits trafficking in human beings for sexual and labour exploitation. The Law on Foreigners includes a temporary stay of up to 90 days to foreigners presumed to be human trafficking survivors, providing for their safety and protection, including accommodation, psychological and material support, access to healthcare, counselling and information about their rights. Once formally identified as a survivor of human trafficking, victims are granted a temporary residence permit of up to a year, with the possibility of extension, if it is deemed necessary for their protection, recovery and safety. These rights are not conditional on testifying in court. In addition, victims of THB may be granted a work permit for the validity of their residence. Exclusive jurisdiction for the investigation of human trafficking crimes is under the Criminal Police Administration, and an independent Office of the National Coordinator has been established. Within Public Prosecutor's Offices, specialized training on THB has been to designated focal points in all higher public prosecutor's offices.

The second evaluation report of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) considers that the Serbian authorities should take further measures including proactive measures to combat gender inequality, stereotypes and gender-based violence, and to raise awareness of the risks of THB among children, parents, educational staff and child welfare professionals, paying special attention to Roma communities and children in street situations. The Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women has expressed concern regarding a decrease in trafficking convictions, partly owing to plea bargains, while victims have been referred to civil proceedings to claim compensation or, reportedly, prosecuted for prostitution and therefore denied available protection. Indeed, women in prostitution are subject to punishments under the Public Law and Order Act by fines and imprisonment. Improvements are also seen to be required when it comes to more protection services and budgetary allocations for victims of trafficking, including shelters, in particular for girls, given that the majority are run by non-governmental organizations. There are no public accommodation facilities for male victims of trafficking, raising concerns that they may be placed in institutions for elderly persons (homes and gerontology centres).

B. Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights

According to the National program for preservation and improvement of sexual and reproductive health adopted in 2017, the sexual and reproductive health of the population Serbia faces a number of challenges including predominantly conservative birth control and risky sexual behavior of adolescents and young people. Information from the latest MICS of 2019 found that 62 percent of women who are married or in a union use contraceptives, but that the majority use traditional methods with withdrawal being the most popular used by 31 percent of married women and only 15 % a male condom. A higher level of education and wealth were found to influence increased use of modern contraception methods. Experience of induced abortions (at least one) have been reported by 11% of women aged 15 to 49 in Serbia overall, but 28% when it comes to those living in Roma Settlements. Women 15 – 49 married or in a union mostly make decisions on their reproductive health independently 82%, almost one in five make the decisions with their husband. In Roma settlements this percentage is much lower only 56% compared to 41 who make the decisions with their partner. The MICS 2019 also found that only 16% of women who had live births in the previous two years attended a childbirth preparation programme in a primary health-care facility, while in Roma settlements only 3%. Also only 30% women in Serbia who had live births in the previous two years received a home visit from a taronage nurse. The MICS also shows that the situation in the area of sexual and reproductive health has not changed significantly compared to 2014.

The Institute of Public Health of Serbia found that in 2017, 15.8% of beneficiaries from 25 to 69 years of age were included in the targeted screenings for the early detection of cervical cancer. Even lower at 11.4% was the percentage of beneficiaries aged from 45 to 69 years who were referred for mammography by their chosen gynaecologist in the previous 12 months¹³.

A qualitative survey on access of adolescents to information regarding sexual and reproductive health undertaken by civil society with the support of UNFPA, UN Women, UNDP and UNICEF in 2019 noted that education on sexual and reproductive health is still not a part of the educational system in Serbia. It found that among the respondents the topic of sexual and reproductive health was mentioned seldom, not at all or from time to time with discomfort in families of majority of respondents (58.6%). Additional focus group interviews confirmed that young people talk seldom about these issues with the adults and that participants found it difficult to find adequate words and expressions related sexuality in order to express their feelings. Most young people asked do not consider school and teachers an important source of information on sexual and reproductive health and most of the parents surveyed agreed.

Research on sexual and reproductive health of women and young girls with disabilities supported by the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) and UNFPA in 2018 which involved a survey on the experiences of women with disabilities, found that a large percentage do not have

¹³National-level review of the progress on the implementation of the Beijing declaration and platform for action +25: https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/Serbia_ENG.pdf

access to timely and good information on sexual and reproductive health (41%); one in five women with disabilities (20%) discussed sexuality issues at the counselling center. The report found the women interviewed had insufficient knowledge of basic topics such as family planning, maternity, and child health care services and HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted disease prevention, as well as on various contraception options.

According to the government report on progress on the implementation of Beijing +25, the survey results indicate that „women with disabilities are discriminated against in exercising their right to sexual and reproductive health and on many levels - from prejudice and stereotypes to unavailable and inaccessible services“¹⁴. A capacity assessment of shelters (safe houses) for women victims of violence in Serbia, conducted during 2019 by CSO FemPlatz found that shelters are not accessible to women with disabilities survivors of violence. Also a Survey on Reproductive Health of Women with Disabilities in Vojvodina implemented in 2018 showed that women with disabilities face discrimination and prejudice related to their gender roles, sexuality, particularly in relation to marriage, family relations and parenting.

Civil society consulted in preparation of this analysis has alerted to how the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has further endangered the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls in Serbia by limiting access to services in particular access to abortions at times when the health system was overwhelmed and clinics accepted only emergencies.

The situation of women with disabilities living in institutions has over the recent years been raised as a particular concern when it comes to gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health. The 2017 report by Disability Rights International and CSO Mental Disability Rights Initiative of Serbia (MDRI-Serbia) found several worrying practices affecting women with disabilities deprived of legal capacity and living in institutions in particular administration of contraceptives (intrauterine devices and contraceptive pills) without informed consent; forced abortions for women under guardianship who are not informed or asked, and most worrying cases of forced sterilization for which transparent evidence lacked but emerged as a shared belief among women and staff interviewed. Civil society has alerted to the importance of freedom of choice and consent when it comes to reproductive rights, since its absence leads to exclusion and marginalization of women and girls from vulnerable groups including Roma women, migrants, women with disabilities, and others.

In their 2019 Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Serbia the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed concern regarding the low use of contraceptives and the lack of knowledge among young girls and adolescents about modern methods of contraception; prevalence of adolescent pregnancy among Roma girls; continuing use of abortion as a contraceptive method, in particular among women over 40 years of age; low participation of women in birth preparation programmes, especially among rural women and Roma women, and the insufficient coverage of organized screenings for the early detection of breast cancer and cervical cancer; persistent difficulties faced by women with disabilities in gaining access to sexual and reproductive health services; and reports that LGBT women and intersex persons are excluded from family planning services, including artificial insemination. The GREVIO report for Serbia of 2019 also states that women with disabilities in Serbia have difficulties accessing health care, in particular reproductive and sexual health care, including after experiencing sexual violence.

The first National Programme for maintaining and improving sexual and reproductive health of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia was adopted in 2017. While there was no Action plan for 2018 or 2019, in 2020 UNFPA worked with the Ministry of Health to develop an Action plan for the implementation of the National programme, the development of which had been slower down by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the plan was submitted to the Ministry of Health at the end of 2020. There is no official publicly available report on the implementation of measures from the program, and it is not clear if it has been operationalized, or that financial resources have been allocated. The EC annual report for Serbia notes the lack of an action plan and sufficient financial resources for implementation of the National Programme.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The new Gender Equality Law adopted in May 2021 includes a section on sexual and reproductive health and right, which nominates the Ministries responsible for education, upbringing and health, for family care and demography as well as public institutions in these areas as responsible for ensuring all women and men, as well as girls and boys have access and easily accessible information relating to sexuality, contraception, birth planning, marital and family life.

The National Youth Strategy 2015 – 2025 calls for education in the field of reproductive health through the work of counselling centres for young people, support to programmes of peer education of young people for the purpose of improving reproductive health and at the same time support to programmes of parents' and pupils' education in the field of reproductive health. The Strategy for Education Development in Serbia by 2020 refers to reproductive health only in relation to secondary schools where the care of reproductive health of young people is included into activities directed towards promoting healthy life styles in local self-government. According to 2019 survey on access of adolescents to information regarding sexual and reproductive health the terms „health education“ and „sex education“ are not mentioned in the Strategy.

The Evaluation of the National Action Plan for implementation of the Serbia National Strategy for Gender Equality supported by UN Women and EU found that ensuring universal availability sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights was an area of low effectiveness. A recent report by CSO Women's Autonomous Centre and The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (Kvinna till Kvinna) intended to assess implementation of the National Programme for maintaining and improving sexual and reproductive health but found that there is no monitoring taking place and a severe lack of available data to adequately assess progress. It furthermore raised concerns that the inclusions on sexual and reproductive health in the Gender Equality Law reduces the ambition of the National Programme, by not including systemic education on sexual and reproductive rights or counselling services¹⁵. The issue of including sexual reproductive health in formal education has also been raised by GREVI and the CEDAW Committee.

C. Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women

Statistics show that women and girls in Serbia still suffer discrimination in when it comes to ensuring equal access to economic and social rights, in particular when it comes to employment, access to resources and the care economy and entrepreneurship. The Gender Equality Index provides information in three domains: the Domain of Work, which looks at equal access to the labour market, in terms of both participation and segregation; the Domain of Money, including financial resources and economic situation; the Domain of Knowledge exploring attainment and participation as well as segregation. Overall there have been improvements between 2014 and 2016 in all three domains, the highest in the domain of money (1.1 points) and the lowest in Knowledge (0.4 points). Of concern is that in both the domains of Work and Knowledge segregation has increased, that is the index in this area has decreased by 0.4 points for segregation and quality of work, and 0.3 points for segregation in education.

Education

There are no major differences between the number of boys and girls enrolled in preschool, with girls accounting for 48.5% and boys accounting for 51.5% in 2019, and this has been similar for the past five years. At the same time women account for 95.2% of employed in these institutions¹⁶. In Serbia overall girls' academic achievement is much higher than boys' both in primary and in secondary education¹⁷. In secondary education significant segregation across selected areas of study emerge. Data of 2019 from the SORS shows that while there is a gender difference in selection of three-year vocational secondary education (with a three to one ration in favour of boys), in these type of establishments and in four-year upper secondary schools there is an overrepresentation of girls in sectors relating to personal care; health

¹⁵ <https://www.womenngo.org.rs/en/news/1720-saopstenje-za-javnost-bez-napretka-u-oblasti-seksualnog-i-reproduktivnog-zdravlja-i-prava-zena>

¹⁶ SORS Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia 2020 <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/20210129-zene-i-muskarci/>

¹⁷ Fourth periodic report submitted by Serbia to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/SRB/CEDAW_C_SRB_4_7321_E.pdf

and social welfare and textile and leather industry, while boys overwhelmingly predominate in Electrical engineering, Machinery and metal processing and especially in vocational schools in Geodetics and construction and in Transport. In tertiary education this segregation continues, girls and young women predominate in education, health and social welfare, while young men and boys in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and in Engineering, manufacturing and construction. Segregation is also replicated for graduate degrees and PHD graduates. When it comes to the Serbian Academy of Science in 2020 over 90% of all members were men¹⁸.

Access to education is also not uniform across all population groups. Intersecting inequalities affect particularly women from rural areas who are least educated both compared to other women and compared to rural men¹⁹. The situation is also worrying for girls from Roma settlements. According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, in Roma settlements boys have higher chances of being included in all levels of education than girls. The Gender Parity Index within the MICS 2019 shows almost full gender parity for both the Serbia average and for children living in Roma settlements in primary education, however for children from Roma settlements the gender parity index drops to 0.89 in secondary school.

While both Roma boys and girls are dropping out of school early, for Roma girls the most commonly cited reasons for dropping out of school are early marriage, preserving their sexuality, and helping with household chores. For boys, the commonly cited reason is to join the labor force. A World Bank survey found that among female drop outs, 35 percent reported marriage/pregnancy as the primary reason²⁰. One of the consequences of dropping out of school early is a lower literacy rate girls living in Roma settlements: 80 percent compared to 99 percent for girls in the general population²¹. The combination of poverty and patriarchal tradition often leaves Roma women in a “vicious circle”, whereby low levels of education and qualifications reduces their chances of successful social inclusion and contributes to vulnerability and greater exposure to discrimination, violence and health hazards²².

The Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2019 expressed concern regarding the high numbers of Roma girls who are almost fully absent from the education system after the age of 18. More broadly the Committee was concerned regarding the influence of increasingly prevalent anti-gender political agenda in education which translates into gender-stereotyped content in teaching material, widespread discriminatory gender stereotypes among the teaching personnel as well as the fact that girls with disabilities are less involved in inclusive education than boys with disabilities.

A World Bank supported study on discrimination against sexual minorities using evidence from two field experiments in 2018 explored discrimination against LGBTI in schools. The study used two “mystery shopping” exercises one on accessing basic education and the other on finding a place to live. With regard to education it found that feminine boys were three times more likely (14%) to be refused enrollment in public primary schools than non-feminine boys (4%)²³.

Employment

Despite some shifts in recent years, a gender gap persists in almost all the indicators relating to the labour market. Employment rates for women remain lower than those of men in 2020, 41.9% compared to 56.6%, representing a 14.7 percentage point difference. The greatest gender gap affects older women, in the age

¹⁸ <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/20210129-zene-i-muskarci/>

¹⁹ Situation of Rural Women in Serbia, Shadow Report to the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia, Informal network of women’s organisations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017

²⁰ <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/867831552914300138/the-problem-is-they-see-us-as-a-whole-explaining-gender-and-ethnicity-based-inequalities-among-the-roma-in-serbia>

²¹ <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/MICS6-Multiple-Indicator-Cluster-Survey-for-2019>

²² Fourth periodic report submitted by Serbia to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/SRB/CEDAW_C_SRB_4_7321_E.pdf

²³ World Bank Group, Discrimination against sexual minorities in education and housing: Evidence from two field experiments in Serbia, 2019.

category 55-64 years where the employment rate for women is 40.5% while that of men is 60.8% (20.3 points difference). Correspondingly the inactivity rate for women at 52.9% is higher than for men at 37.3%, a difference of 15.6 percentage points. The largest gap for the national average also affects the age group 55 and older, where the inactivity rate for women is 78.4% whereas for men it equals 61.6%²⁴.

According to the Gender Equality Index, Serbia has a lower score than most EU countries in the domain of work with gaps in participation, segregation and quality of work. The index for 2016 increased slightly overall compared to 2014, mainly due to an increase in value for participation attributed to a rise in total employment rather than a reduction in the gender gap. Segregation has also increased and working women tend to be concentrated, and often represent the majority, in social sectors of the economy such as education, health and social protection.

Women are less frequently employed in full-time equivalent jobs and also work less frequently with flexible working hours. Part-time work and underpaid jobs characterise women's employment more than men's, which allows them to combine work and unpaid care responsibilities. When asked, 95% of women stated the care for own children or others in need as the main reason for being in part-time work, compared to 4% of men (see below for more on time-use). Among informally employed there is a gender gap, especially among youth aged 15 to 24 (66.9% women and 55.3% men). There are also twice as many self-employed among men than among women, 25% of men and 14% women are self-employed in the age group 15 to 64²⁵. Their working life is also shorter than men's, with the Gender Equality Index showing a 6.6 year gap in 2016.

As in other areas covered by this analysis, the gender gap in employment does not affect all women equally. In the rural population women have a lower share of active persons, less employed persons and less persons engaged in activities outside agriculture than men. The situation is especially unfavourable in South and East Serbia, where gender differences are particularly observable in all segments of the labour market²⁶. Overall the situation of women working on farms is a challenge as they remain largely invisible, may be unpaid, lack access to social insurance, and have limited access to social rights. The Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report highlighted that over 74% of women who report that they work in agriculture do so as unpaid family members while the participation of women in decision-making with regard to agricultural holdings is extremely low, with only 15.9 per cent of women managing such holdings.

The situation is also worse for Roma women. Unemployment rates of Roma women are at 50 percent%, much greater than among Roma men at 33% and the general working age population at 16%²⁷. According to the 2020 SORS report on Roma, 60% of women in Roma settlements are reported to be inactive. Data from the National Employment Service show that the number of unemployed Roma has increased during the period 2016- 2019 along with their share in total unemployment, by 1.0. Data for 2019 indicate that 49.7% of Roma unemployed are women.

Persons living with disability are overrepresented among long-term unemployment, but there is a lack of data on labour-market participation of women with disabilities to allow for a detailed analysis and monitoring.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an unfavourable impact on the labour market in Serbia as it has globally. The sectors that have been impacted the most are accommodation and food, wholesale and retail trade and manufacturing and real estate. A rapid gender assessment supported by UN Women and undertaken by SeCons found that the impact of pandemic on employment in terms of job loss was greater on women than men in the labour force – 7% of employed women and 4% of employed men lost their jobs. As a large portion of the workforce transferred to work from home, this also affected women more than men probably due to the horizontal segregation of the labour market which sees more women in education,

²⁴ <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/20210129-zene-i-muskarci/>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy for the period 2014–2024

²⁷ UNDP Roma at a Glance, Serbia, 2018

social protection, public administration or other administrative jobs that are easier to be transferred to online work.

Segregation of the labour market also impacts wage equality. Despite legislation that prohibits this form of discrimination, in 2018 the gender pay gap was 8.8%. The gap is particularly high among Craft and related trades workers (23.8 %), Technicians and associate professionals (19.3%) and Professionals (19%). Regarding sectors, the pay gap is highest in Financial and insurance activities (20.1%) and Manufacturing (19%). Gender inequalities that permeate the labour market lead to gender gaps when it comes to pensions. In 2019, for every 100 men there were 95 women that have access to old-age pensions, and 68 when it comes to disability pensions. The gap is particularly marked among persons engaged in independent activities where to every 100 men only 50 women have access to old-age pensions and only 32 to disability pensions²⁸.

A recent study funded by the EU and undertaken by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation explored gender-based discrimination (GBD) in the labour market. Overall, the study found that 47% of women and 28% of men respondents had experienced GBD in their previous or current workplaces. GBD was found to begin during the hiring process, when women tend to encounter questions about their marital status and family planning more frequently than men. Almost half of the women surveyed stated that they have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment at work, and every fifth woman was subjected to sexual harassment more than once. An important finding is that many participants were unable to recognise GBD, and some normalised discrimination. The study also recognised the vulnerable situation of persons facing multiple forms of discrimination on the basis of gender coupled with being Roma or LGBTI.

A World Bank survey on socioeconomic dimensions of LGBTI exclusion in Serbia reports high levels of discrimination and a hostile work environment, despite a lower unemployment rate than the general population mainly due to on-average higher education. The survey found that in 10 percent of cases, discrimination in the workplace motivated LGBTI people to quit their job. The CEDAW Committee in 2019 expressed concerns regarding the lack of measures to address sexual harassment in the workplace, specifically with regard to young women and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons, including the disproportionately low number of convictions for sexual harassment.

Poverty, Access to resources, Entrepreneurship

The Gender Equality Index measures financial resources (earnings and income) and economic situation (risk of poverty) in the Domain of Money. This domain recorded a very small positive change of 1.1 points overall from 2014 to 2016, with the greater increase in financial resources (1.6) and limited progress (0.2) in the economic situation. It also remains the domain in which there is the largest difference between Serbia and the EU -28 average. According to the SORS the at-risk-of-poverty rate, by age and sex, was on the highest level for persons below the age of 18, and it equalled 29.3% for women and 28.6% for men. The risk is greatest among persons aged 65 years and over, where the rate was 23.2% for women and 18.3% for men. Between 2017 to 2019 the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate was highest for women and men aged below 24.

There is limited sex-disaggregated data available on access to resources. Overall almost no centralised sex-disaggregated data exist on access to financial markets or different types of credit. Network SOS Vojvodina has requested data from the Republic Geodetic Institute in February 2021 which found that women own 25,6% of real estate while also owning 12.8% of real estate in which there is co-ownership and in which women participate (0,3% of real estate is joint property). The data also found that ownership is particularly low when it comes to plots as opposed to land parcels²⁹. Previous research on rural areas also

²⁸ <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/20210129-zene-i-muskarci/>

²⁹ Independent report of Network SOS Vojvodina on implementation of priority recommendations from the CEDAW Committee to the Republic of Serbia, for period 2019-2021, March 2021.

found cultural norms and practices to be the main reason for women not being owner or co-owners of property, as well as that women often renounce property for the benefit of male heirs³⁰.

According to the SORS in 2020 legal 69% of founders of enterprises were men and only 31% women. The gap is even worse for legal and other representatives of companies of which 74% are men and 26% women. Serbia's Strategy for the support to development of small and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurship and competitiveness (2015 to 2020) notes that women entrepreneurs represent one quarter of total number of businesspeople in Serbia, and that there is also increasing number of women in managerial positions in enterprises. The Strategy noted that among the employed women, only 15.6% women perform business individually, against 30.5% men.

Women seem to begin their journey as entrepreneurs out of necessity, but also to face significant obstacles in establishing and running operations. The choice of a sector, gender discrimination and stereotypes, and insufficient care services all contribute as does the lack of access to information and networks. Furthermore it is likely that women's limited access to property makes access to credit more difficult. The USAID Gender analysis (2020) found that in more-traditional regions, like Sandžak, women entrepreneurs may be limited to businesses that align with traditional gender roles, for example establishing private kindergartens or supporting family businesses run by male family members.

Time-use and the care economy

The disadvantaged position of women in the labour market and inequality when it comes to resources is in large part a consequence of structural inequalities and gender norms that replicate the 'women as carers' and 'men as providers' nexus. Information from the SORS notes that when asked the reason for working less than full-time for women the answer is predominantly „Looking after children or disabled persons“ (87%), while men most frequently mentioned “Could not find a full-time job“ (62%), as the main reason.

The Statistical Office periodically collects and analyses information on how men and women in Serbia use their time, with two surveys undertaken since 2010. These surveys confirm stereotypes, since women spend twice as long as men on household and unpaid care work³¹, regardless of whether they are engaged in the labour market or not, and in turn spend much less time than men working in paid employment. In addition to limiting women's participation in the labour market, the responsibility of unpaid care work entails a longer overall working time for women than for men, one hour more per day, when paid and unpaid work are added together.

The CBGE with the support of UN Women and the UK government undertook in 2020 a gender analysis of the economic value of unpaid care work. According to the study the value of unpaid work in Serbia is estimated to equal 21.5% of the Gross Domestic Product GDP, of which 14.9% corresponds to unpaid work done by women and 6.6% to that done by men.

The unpaid work burden is the highest for married women with a child aged under seven who spend almost an entire work shift on unpaid work. Men from this type of family structure also spend more time, almost three hours more, on housework compared to men from all other categories. Nonetheless in all categories women spend more time on housework, especially women with children regardless of their age. Data disaggregated by settlement type demonstrate that the burden of unpaid work is highest for rural women taking up more than a fifth of their time (21.1%) while only 17.9% of the time of women in urban areas.

³⁰ Situation of Rural Women in Serbia, Shadow Report to the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia, Informal network of women's organisations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017

³¹ Unpaid activities include the so-called housework: dealing with food, maintaining the household, care for the child/children or adult household members, textile production and care, shopping and services, repairs, gardening, as well as time for travel regarding the above activities.

Women spend twice as much time at household unpaid work than men. The main activity for women is cooking or baking or preparing a meal followed by activities related to housekeeping, cleaning and tidying up the apartment or yard. Women also on average spend twice as much time as men on caring for their own children, and on caring for other people. Men on the other hand spend three times more time than women on unpaid repairs, home renovation, gardening, and pet care.

Trends over time show a mild improvement: in 2015 women spent 15 minutes less on housework than in 2010 and men 11 minutes more. Time spent on housework has been reduced for all categories, except for urban men where it stayed the same. The reduction was the smallest for rural women, showing that their situation improved the least over time. In the 5-year period there has also been an increase of 2.5 hours per day in time women spend in the caring activities over their own children and other dependent persons.

Data from time-use surveys shows the care burden of dependent populations that falls on women due to the failure to redistribute care among the state, society and families, and within families among women and men. It is also especially due to insufficient public care service. Information from the SORS on participation in early childhood care found that only 26.2% of children aged 0-3 are enrolled in kindergartens, and 63.9% of children from the age of 3 to the age of 6 when they start the obligatory preparatory preschool programme³². Other care services for adults, elderly and children are provided by the social services network under the mandate of local self-governments, and as such a great variation exists across localities, however there is no estimation of the unmet needs for social services including care. Mapping from 2015 shows that 133 of the 145 local self-governments provided care services, with the most prevalent being elderly home care (provided in 122 LSGs), followed by day care for children with developmental and other disabilities (provided in 68 LSGs)³³.

A World Bank study on women's access to economic opportunities in Serbia from 2016 found that policies on tax and benefits do not provide sufficient incentives to engage women in formal part-time work which can support reconciliation of work-family obligations. It notes the presence of high minimum social security base contributions and the design of major social cash transfers to be disincentives for part-time work for those with low earnings capacity, with little or no working experience and with low level of education. There is also a need to better understand social cash transfers from a gender perspective to ensure these do not reinforce gender roles. A recent study by the government on effects of the one-off financial assistance to targeted categories of the population on the trends related to the poverty and inequality of income and consumption indicators did not include a gender perspective, nor data disaggregated by sex.

There is a substantiated concern regarding the exponential increase in the care and unpaid work burden affecting women as a result of the measures to curb and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the accompanying economic and labour market contraction. Closures or restrictive hours of educational establishments, coupled with the demands of working from home, have placed unbearable stress on working parents, in particular women who undertake the majority of child care. The impact of the pandemic and its accompanying measures is yet to be fully analysed. The rapid gender analysis undertaken in 2020 by SeCons with UN Women and UNFPA support found that a higher share of women reported increased time spent on unpaid care work activities, for example on cooking 36% of women compared to 20.4% of men. Unsurprisingly given that the period covered the most restrictive measures where most family members were at home, the biggest change was recorded in regard to cleaning, with over half of women (51.4%) reporting the increased time spent on this activity.

Discrimination of vulnerable groups

While the challenges faced by vulnerable groups facing multiple forms of discrimination has been highlighted throughout the study, there are additional concerns.

³² Economic Value of the Unpaid Care Work in the Republic of Serbia, CBGE/UN Women, 2020.

³³ Mapping Social Care Services within the Mandate of Local Governments in the Republic of Serbia, SIPRU, 2016, <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Mapping-Social-Care-Service-within-the-Mandate-of-Local-Governments-in-the-Republic-of-Serbia.pdf>

In the case of women living with disabilities, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has expressed concern over the existence of a guardianship regime and restriction (deprivation) of legal capacity of women with disabilities, due to which they can be prevented from marrying, starting a family, accessing justice or voting, and has called on the government to repeal all legislation on the basis of which the legal capacity of women with disability is limited or deprived. Also investigations by CSOs in the province of Vojvodina to review availability of services for women during the state of emergency declared due to COVID-19, found that there were no specialised services for women with disabilities in any of the municipalities covered by the research.

Women in the older age groups face poverty, discrimination and violence, while a particular concern is the lack of special services and support, including in the home. Services, especially access to health, have been further limited in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A report by CSOs Amity and Femplatz supported by UN Women and the EU found that older women in Serbia are in a worse position compared to older men and compared with women and men from other age groups. They are more exposed to poverty, often do not have enough income to meet basic living needs, and yet have increased treatment costs. Almost 20% of respondents from the research assessed the standard of their household as very bad or bad. Also 8% of respondents do not have a pension and only 2% of them receive financial social assistance from the state. This is coupled by social neglect, including from closest family members, and low participation in social activities and groups. The report also asserts that the situation is hardest for older women from rural areas. Overall there is a dearth of data on older women, and a new report supported by UNFPA is expected for the end of 2021.

A survey undertaken by the World Bank in 2019 on socioeconomic status of LGBTI people identified a number of areas for greater attention from a policymaking perspective which include: expanding the LGBTI evidence base; increasing LGBTI diversity in public sector employment; improving trust in government and institutions; and bolstering awareness and capacity to effectively address transgender issues. The study found that 95 percent of LGBTI respondents have low trust in the political system, 93 percent feel the same about the legal system, and 91 percent share this view of the police.

Policies for economic and social rights

Key institutions when it comes to promoting economic and social rights of women and girls in Serbia include the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs (MLEVSA) together with the CBGE, as well as the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU). Recent changes with the introduction of the new government in October 2020 have seen discrimination and gender equality move to the newly formed Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, which also has the remit for gender equality. This has entailed significant changes to the internal organization within the MLEVSA some of which are taking time to integrate and which interviews revealed are still causing some disruption to the workflow on these issues.

A new **Employment Strategy for the period from 2021 to 2026** and accompanying **Action plan 2021 – 2023** were adopted in February and March 2021 respectively. The Strategy recognised that women are in a significantly more unfavorable situation compared to men and that a gender gap is still present in all indicators of the Serbian labor market. Women are one of the groups with priority for inclusion in “financial” measures of active employment policy, as are victims of trafficking and victims of domestic violence, in recognition that they belong to a ‘more difficult to employ’ category of the unemployed. Special measures are also foreseen for improving the position of women in the labor market. Under these measures the Strategy highlights including: priority in specialist IT trainings; further development of normative regulation of domestic work to provide conditions for rights from the insurance system given the significant share of women in this field; and intensifying activities to promote women's entrepreneurship through educational programs and training and grant subsidies for self-employment, continuous mentoring in the first years of business for sustainability of self-employment. The strategy states that a gender-sensitive approach will be applied to implementation and monitoring, including through sex-disaggregated data as well as application of gender responsive budgeting. In particular the gender dimension is to be taken into account in all interventions aimed at young people.

The Action plan 2021- 2023 includes indicators to measure: the participation of unemployed women in ALMP measures; the effect of financial measures on employment of women; participation of women employed in the National Employment Service records; and participation of women who started their own business with the award of a subsidy for self-employment in the total number of subsidies. Planned activities include an analysis of preconditions for reconciling work and family life and special measures to activate and encourage the employment of inactive women in less developed areas

An ex-ante evaluation of the implementation of the previous National Employment Strategy (2011 – 2020) had found that despite being the largest vulnerable group in the labor market, women were not targeted by specific programs. Notwithstanding the promotion of women's entrepreneurship, women were mainly included in general labor market programs in which attention was paid to the gender structure of the participants during the design. The participation of women in financial measures increased from 51% in 2011 to 55% in 2019, which was found to be significant given the perceived stronger effects on future employment compared to service-type measures. The evaluation concluded that active labor market policy programs have to some extent contributed to improving the absolute and relative position of women in the labor market and reducing the gap between men and women.

While there is no strategy in Serbia exclusively on the development of women's entrepreneurship it is included within Pillar 6 of the Strategy for the support to development of small and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurship and competitiveness (2015 to 2020). The Strategy includes two dimensions that refer to Improvement of statistical monitoring and research of entrepreneurship of women, youth and social entrepreneurship and Politics and instruments for support to women's, youth and social entrepreneurship. Specifically it proposes including women's entrepreneurship in all state documents affecting the economy, increasing women's participation in SME programmes and introducing special programmes to foster women's entrepreneurship. In its progress on the implementation of Beijing +25 the government reported that funds have been allocated in 2018 and 2019 for programmes promoting women's innovative entrepreneurship at the national and local level implemented by Minister responsible for Innovation and Technological Development. The programme aims at reducing under-representation of women in the business sector in managerial positions, and as owners and founders of small and medium-sized companies (22.1%) or among entrepreneurs (34.3%).

Serbia has adopted the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2024 in which the promotion of entrepreneurship of women and youth in rural areas is one of the development objectives. The CEDAW Committee noted some advances in measures for rural women, including special interest rates for women farm owners as part of credit support for entrepreneurs in 2017, and paid maternity leave for women who are members of farms. Additional support for rural policies is available through EU IPARD Programme which gives priority to entrepreneurial women in selection criteria and promotes the integration of rural women organisations in Local Action Groups (LAGs) that have a 30% quota for women.

The National Strategy for Youth for the period from 2015 to 2025 includes objectives relating to improving the employment and employment of young women and men.

In March 2020 Serbia adopted the Strategy for improving the position of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2024 which has mainstreamed the gender perspective, and highlights many of the challenges faced by women living with disability. Nonetheless, there is little on social and economic rights in objectives and expected results, where focus is placed on violence against women living with disability. Similarly the corresponding action plan does not explicitly focus on women with disabilities (except for one targeted goal relating to violence) and most indicators are not sex-disaggregated.

There is also a long term Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women covering the period 2016 – 2025, which outlines gender differences regarding the social and economic position of Roma men and women and includes measures for protecting the rights of persons of different sexual orientation and gender identity, and promoting the status of Roma women and gender equality. It also mandated that action plans for its implementation should ensure gender mainstreaming as well as special measures for advancing the

status of Roma women and girls. The last Action plan was prepared for 2017 – 2018 and includes gender specific targets and indicators. Monitoring of the Strategy and Action plan is done by the Coordination body for Monitoring Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma established in 2017. According to the CEDAW Committee Roma are given priority in active employment policies while the Strategy and Action plan are deemed to have produced effects when it comes to increased coverage of Roma men and women with training programmes and active job-seeking programmes designed to enable them to acquire skills and motivate them for active job-seeking.

When it comes to Education civil society has raised concerns that the Draft Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 does not mention the Gender Equality Law, policy documents and international conventions ratified by Serbia concerning gender equality, or include references to gender- based violence and gender discrimination, or the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The normative framework on social protection is in the process of being improved with ongoing processed to develop a Strategy on Social protection and also strengthen the legislative framework.

Evaluation of the the Strategy for Gender Equality found that some progress was made in improving gender equality in formal education, in strengthening the capacity of employees in preschool institutions and parents, analysis of the content of Serbian language textbooks, development of manuals for introducing a gender perspective in Serbian language teaching, and gender training of teachers who teach civic education. When it comes to the economic position of women and participation in the labor market the evaluation found that measures were mainly limited to entrepreneurship. Only a few initiatives were found to have been implemented to influence the redistribution of care. Lack of data is noted on women and men in rural areas. It was found that some measures to stimulate agriculture overall happened to be particularly beneficial to women, while positive examples of targeted actions include legal changes to improve access to property and innovative social inclusion programs in rural areas.

D. Promoting equal participation and leadership

The domain of power, which includes power and decision making in the political, economic and social spheres, is the domain of the Gender Equality Index which has increased by far the most from 2014 to 2016, a huge 9.3 points. Progress is mainly noted in the domains of political and social power. The increase in political power corresponds mainly to the increase in the participation of women in local assemblies, followed by a smaller increase in national parliament and central government. According to the Index, average participation of women among Ministers for 2014 was 21% while for 2016 it rose marginally to 22.5% (as a calculation of the average for 2015 – 17). The average share of women among Members of the National Assembly also rose slightly from 33.7% for 2014 to 34.4% for 2016. The greatest increase is in the share of women in local assemblies from 18.7% in 2014 to 30.3% average for 2016.

With regards to the national assembly, according to the SORS there were 38.8% women out of the total number of elected representatives of the Assembly as of October 2020. The previous convocation had a female Speaker of Parliament, but a smaller number of female MPs - 93 (37.2%). There are 20 committees in the National Assembly, of which 15 are chaired by men, although there is equal representation among deputy chairpersons. Interestingly women make up the majority in six committees which deal with topics that are traditionally associated with women, such as the Rights of the Child; Health and Family; Labour, Social Issues, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction. On the other hand, in the Security Services Control Committee, all the committee members are men³⁴.

A Women's Parliamentary Network was founded in 2013, and has been active, though to a varying degree, in promoting gender equality at all the levels of decision-making, supported by UNDP and OSCE. The network comprises women MPs focusing on five objectives: women's and family health, combating violence against women and children, economic empowerment of women, education of women and promotion of

³⁴ Analysis of women's participation in public and political life, Regular annual report of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for 2020

women's knowledge, and increased participation of women in political and public life. It has been active in supporting the integration of legal amendments and new laws on gender equality and the fight against violence against women, while its national conferences are often attended by council women from Serbian towns and municipalities resulting in the creation of 53 councilwomen's networks across Serbia. The last Conference of the Women's Parliamentary Network was held in January 2021.

Representation is similar albeit a little lower when it comes to assemblies of municipalities and towns, where 31.3% of the members were women following the June 2020 elections. Of greatest concern is that women represent only 12% among the presidents of municipalities/mayors³⁵.

According to latest data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, as of October 2020, 50% of government members were women. Since 2017 to date, the Government of the Republic of Serbia is for the first time headed by a woman Prime minister who is also openly lesbian. It is important to note that the increase in the number of women at top levels of government does not automatically entail increased government commitment to substantive gender equality in terms of implementation of international and national commitments. Civil society organisations have expressed concern that despite an increase of women in top positions of the government the discourse of public officials is not always supportive of gender equality.

In her annual report of 2020, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality reported increased participation of women in international cooperation, representation in the diplomatic service, and delegations participating in the work of international institutions. In the diplomacy of the Republic of Serbia, the report notes a total share of women is 38.6%. In comparison it noted that in 2015 there were no women in any of the seven permanent missions to international organisations.

Data of the High Judicial Council showed that 71.8% of judges in the Republic of Serbia, are women and a total of 58.2% of women hold the position of court president. While women judges in appellate courts make up 77.4%, all presidents are men. Women also represent 65.9% in the Supreme Court of Cassation³⁶. According to SORS in 2019 women accounted for 39% of public prosecutors.

The Gender Equality Index also measures economic power, looking at the share of women in boards of the largest quoted companies and the Executive Board of the National Bank, finding that while the share in companies has increased from 17.3% in 2014 to 19.3% in 2016, while it dropped among members of the Executive Board of the National Bank of Serbia (from 31% in 2014 to 27.6% in 2016). In the sub-domain of social power there was an increase corresponding to increase in the share of women in boards of broadcasting organisations. But there were no women in boards of research organisations and only 3.8% among members of the highest decision-making bodies of national Olympic sport organisations.

The Serbian government has long applied quotas to elections at national and sub-national levels to increase gender parity in government. Initial amendments to the law of parliamentary elections introduced quotas in 2004, subsequently strengthened with amendments to the law in 2011 which also introduced closed lists so that members of parliament should be extracted from the list of candidates in the same order as they appear on the lists. In early 2020 the most recent and ambitious changes took place with amendments to the Law on the election of Members of Parliament and the Law on local elections to introduce a new minimum quota of 40 per cent on electoral lists for both parliamentary and local elections having to be from the less-represented gender of candidates. It is important to note quotas only apply for the legislative and not for the executive branch. The latest change follows a self-assessment which was carried out by the parliament with support of the International Parliamentary Union and UNDP.

³⁵ SORS Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia 2020 <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/20210129-zene-i-muskarci/>

³⁶ Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Regular annual report for 2020.

According to the study entitled “Analysis of Gender Equality in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia” published as part of the “Open Parliament” initiative, once a woman elected MP loses her mandate, resigns, or goes on maternity leave, despite the gender quotas mentioned above, she does not automatically get replaced by another woman, but by the next candidate on the electoral list. The study argues that since the number of women on the electoral lists is almost always reduced to the legally required minimum, the next candidate on the electoral list is usually a man, demonstrating how, despite the quotas, there are still legal loopholes that can lead to the under-representation of women in politics.

In its 2019 report the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women expressed concern of the low representation in political or public life of women belonging to disadvantaged groups, such as Roma women or women with disabilities. The Committee also expressed concerns of the low level of women in local administration, but also in the foreign service, in the armed forces and in decision-making positions across all sectors. It had recommended the government include quotas of 50% in the new draft law on gender equality referring to representation of women in the areas of social life marked by an unbalanced representation and extend that quota to all public authorities and administrations. The law does require at least 40% participation of women in permanent delegations representing the Republic of Serbia in international bodies, as well as the election and appointment to certain positions, formation of working bodies and composition of official delegations; as well as managing and steering bodies of political parties, trade unions and professional associations.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has noted concerns about the exclusion of persons with disabilities from political life, especially women with disabilities and Roma persons with disabilities Roma. In Serbia, the exercise of the right to vote is associated with legal capacity, hence persons who are deprived of legal capacity are automatically deprived of the right to vote and can be a hinderance to women living with disability in this situation to access political rights. Regulations need to be revised to ensure that persons with disabilities are not deprived of the right to vote on the basis of disability and special measures are required to support women with disabilities to both exercise their right to vote and to run in local and national elections.

E. Integrating the women, peace and security agenda

Available data on integrating women into the peace and security agenda is limited. According to the study on Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the OSCE Region although feminist and women’s civil society organisations in Serbia have mobilized to oppose violence and ethnonationalism, as well as to promote reconciliation across political and social divides, women have often been excluded from formal peace negotiations. Giving the example of Serbia the OSCE notes that there has been little progress in terms of women’s participation in the Track I process of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, while there have been some civil society-led efforts involving women during Track II. The OSCE also reports that addressing the needs of survivors of Conflict-related sexual violence has been an extremely slow and highly politicized process in Serbia. According to the 2018 OSCE-led survey on violence against women thematic report on Conflict and violence against women 26% of women in Serbia were directly conflict-affected, while Serbia 7% of the most serious incidents of intimate partner violence were associated with conflict³⁷.

Women civil society organisations in Serbia have a long history of peace activism ever since the wars in the former-Yugoslavia in the 1990s. WCSOs like Women in Black demanded demilitarisation and disarmament as the key to achieve long-term peaceful solutions to the war, and created trans-national alliances to promote peaceful conflict resolution. WCSOs today continue to actively promote peacebuilding and reconciliation across borders and communities aiming to contribute to prepare the ground for agreements on the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo mediated by the EU.

More information is available on the representation of women in the defense sector including the military. The previous EU Gender Analysis of 2016 noted that amendments to the Law on Serbian Armed Forces

³⁷ <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/444157>

have introduced positive novelties regarding the right of employees at the Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Armed Forces during pregnancy, maternity leave, childcare or special childcare.

According to the 2020 Report on the Implementation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, Peace and Security, based on data as of December 31, 2020, of the total number of employees in the Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Army 22.94% are women, 1.01% more than in 2019. However, at the level of officers the proportion is much lower, women are represented with 7.91% (increase by 0.92% with respect to 2019), only 2.40% among non-commissioned officers. Representation of women in command and managerial positions amounts to 8.96%, which is 0.47% more than in 2019. In particular advances have been seen during the implementation of the NAP (2017-2020) in the representation of women in the Military Intelligence agency which increased from about 19.5% to 24%, in part due to changes in formation of the Agency which increased the number of positions that civilians can apply to. Also, the Military Intelligence Agency undertook a process to compare regulations in order to ensure women can equally compete in competitions for defense envoys of the Serbian Army.

Specifically, in the Serbian Army the representation of women increased marginally from 11.7% in 2019 to 12.35% 2020, however only 4.80% of women are in command and management positions. During 2020, 13.78% of the total members sent to the multinational operations of the UN and the EU by the Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Army were female.

A higher percentage of women are enrolled in different forms of training for the Military, which raises the question of retention and drop-out rates on which there are presently no studies. In the 2020/2021 school year 38% of students enrolled in undergraduate studies at the Military Academy were girls, while at the Medical Faculty of the Military Medical Academy this proportion is even higher at 68%. During 2020, four referral deadlines for voluntary military service were realized and of the total number of candidates selected 17.33% were women. Interviews undertaken in preparation of the present gender analysis revealed the perception of some respondents that women still face multiple forms of discrimination in the workplace in the defense sector, including discrimination based on gender, which significantly limits their possibilities for further development and advancing to higher managerial positions, as confirmed by the above statistics which demonstrate the effect of a 'glass ceiling'.

According to the progress on the implementation of Beijing +25 progress was made in mainstreaming gender in the Ministry of Interior including efforts to improve representation of women at all levels. The report notes that six senior managers completed a mentorship programme for gender equality, and 10 chiefs of police administration are receiving support from women gender equality experts on mainstreaming gender in their fields. A Women's Police Officers Network was established in 2018. Guidelines have been adopted for the to improve gender equality through the human resources management system in the Ministry of Interior, and an Instruction with guidelines for the prevention of and protection from gender-based discrimination from 2018.

The main elements of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, Peace and Security adopted in 2000 are addressing sexual violence in armed conflict and increasing women's participation in peace processes and political institutions, partially in response to the violent conflict in the Balkans during the 1990s and other conflicts across the globe. The government of Serbia, at the proposal of the Ministry of Defence and following demands by many CSOs, adopted the first National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, Peace and Security in the Republic of Serbia (2010-2015) in December 2010. The first four years of implementation focused on the twelve ministries, administrations and agencies in the security system, but in 2015, on the proposal of the Political Council and according to the decision of the Government, its implementation was extended to all ministries, four offices of the Government of the Republic Serbia and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

Following a participatory review process of the first National Action Plan, the second NAP for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 – "Women, Peace and Security" in Serbia was developed which covers the period 2017-2020. The second NAP has been developed through the establishment of a working group which included representatives of public administration and local self-government bodies, academia, civil society organisations and independent male and female experts. In

addition, public consultations were organised with the support of the OSCE in six towns across Serbia together with the Serbian government's Office for Co-operation with Civil Society, and the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities.

The second NAP document includes a recognition of multiple forms of discrimination, noting the importance of creating equal opportunities in practice for education, employment, career guidance and advancement of women (especially women from multiply discriminated and minority groups) and men in the security system. Novelty of the Second NAP include establishing the Operational Body, a single reporting model and Focal Points for the implementation. The Political Council of the Government remained the highest political body for implementation of the NAP, while the Operational Body of the Government to ensure achievement of the goals and tasks of the NAP consists of the experts from the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, and as a supervisory body the Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of the NAP was established by the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and the Assembly of AP Vojvodina. The NAP also foresaw the formation of Analytical groups and research teams in certain institutions in the security system for planning and monitoring activities, in addition to Focal Points at the level of local self-governments and the introduction of a Mechanism of gender equality "persons of trust" to provide peer support, regulated by a special internal act (instruction). Finally, the NAP foresaw the role of an Advisor for the implementation of the National Action Plan and a Gender Advisor in all civilian and military missions

The aforementioned OSCE study assessed the development and implementation of NAPs in the region, including Serbia. It found that respondents felt the second NAP was more harmonized and integrated with the broader national state policies and frameworks on gender equality than the first plan. According to the OSCE, the two Serbian NAPs have a strong focus on Security Sector Institutions though the second NAP covers a broader range of issues. Through individual projects regarding Security Sector Institutions there has been piloting of innovative approaches to gender mainstreaming, for example the use of gender coaching through support by the Swedish Police to the Serbian Ministry of Interior and national police (see information on Ministry of Interior above)³⁸. The second NAP also incorporates the development and implementation of gender-sensitivity training for civil defense and protection actors that play a key role in disaster response. The integration of domestic violence/intimate partner violence and related police responses into the NAP was perceived in a positive light.

A specific aim of the second NAP has been localization, while the degree of guidance given to local authorities has been limited, and several respondents voiced concerns that the Ministry and the Standing Conference they had not remained active in the implementation process after the development of the plan. The Ministry of Interior, on the other hand, instructed its 27 regional police directorates to support local administrations in implementing local action plans.

The OSCE has been supporting the localization process including through capacity building and presenting on the NAP to 25 municipal representatives in 2018. In some locations, local women's organizations and CSOs have been active in developing plans especially on issues of domestic violence/intimate partner violence, small arms or migration. According to the OSCE several plans were developed, and the locality of Pirot was mentioned as a good example by several respondents. Since then other municipalities have more recently adopted plans deemed by civil society as good examples of localization, including Sečanj, Nova Crnja, Ada. Key obstacles in localization are perceived to be a lack of interest or understanding of the Women Peace Security agenda as well as lack of funding and capacity to develop action plans. Several respondents voiced concerns regarding the increased workload due to the multiplicity of different action plans and potential resulting confusion between broader gender equality action plans and the localization of the NAP on women, peace and security, especially at the local self-governing body level. CSO Sandglass conducted research in 2020 in one district and found that many officials have not heard of the resolution and most respondents did not recognize the differences in security risks for women and men. In addition, the report highlighted the limited communication with civil society given challenges faced to reach local officials during the research.

³⁸ Project: Developing Gender Agenda in the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia 2016-2018

Regarding participation of civil society, some CSO representatives interviewed by the OSCE felt that CSO participation was selective, with an imbalance between state representatives and CSOs in coordinating groups. An additional perceived challenge is the lack of transparency and limited information sharing between state actors and CSOs and among CSOs themselves.

The evaluation of the implementation of Serbia's Gender Equality Strategy 2016- 2020 found that when it comes to implementation of the NAP on WPS part of the challenges come from lack of accompanying regulations and policies which would support its implementation. The evaluators also raised concerns regarding difficult access to public information and data on the implementation of the NAP. In addition several independent reports on the implementation of the second NAP have been made by civil society organisations, including most recently on implementation of the NAP during COVID-19 pandemic which was found to have further hindered NAP implementation³⁹.

Finally, when it comes to resources in Serbia some amounts were allocated directly for implementation of the NAP, but these were limited with an implicit expectation that most of the NAP activities would be covered by external funding resources. In Serbia, implementers interviewed by the OSCE highlighted the need for NAPs to identify responsible implementers more clearly and ensure indicators are not too general.

The CEDAW Committee in its 2019 report noted a concern regarding insufficient budget allocation to implement the second national action plan. The Committee furthermore noted concern regarding the lack of statistics on conflict-related violence against women and girls, and the lack of engagement of women affected by conflict and with civil society organizations that work with survivors. It also recommended the government strengthen and promote the representation of women among peace negotiation and mediation personnel, including at senior levels.

Given that the second NAP for Serbia expired in 2020 there are plans to develop the third plan.

F. Climate change and environment and digitalisation

Climate change and environment

There is very little information publicly available in Serbia on gender and climate change or the environment more broadly. The Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection with the support of UNDP and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) produced in 2015 the first report on gender and climate change in Serbia. The study however does not present any data, rather it reviews the then global and national framework for gender and climate change and proposes a series of recommendations. Another study from 2019, also by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection with the support of UNDP and the GEF which explores the socio-economic aspects of climate change in Serbia makes no mention of gender, or the differential impacts of climate change on men or women. Other studies have been mentioned by the government in reports, such as a study on gender perspectives of household waste management, are however not available for review.

A project on Women in Sustainable Energy South-East Europe (WISE SEE) implemented research in Serbia at the end of 2017 start of 2018. It found that women dominate when it comes to men overall employed in Ministries and Agencies whose mandate has an impact on the environment and climate change, they are much less represented at the first decision making level: 33% in the Ministry of Environmental Protection and only 18% in the Ministry of Mining and Energy. The Serbian Environmental protection agency was found to employ 64% of women but have none at the first decision making level. In the public energy enterprises (Elektroprivreda Srbije EPS and Elektromreza Srbije EMS) women account for approximately 20 % of the workforce, while surprisingly EMS has 56% women in top management. Assessing attitudes of those employed in the sector it found that one fourth of women felt they faced problems and obstacles due to their gender. Measures are lacking to promote gender equality in the sector,

³⁹ <https://cpz.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Procena-uticaja-pandemije-COVID-19-na-primenu-NAP-1325-na-lokalnom-nivou.pdf>

including through career advancement in the public and private sector. On the other hand, the study found women entrepreneurs, farmers and women in households to all be interested in improving energy efficiency and implementing green technologies, especially to find out more regarding public funding for the same.

A study on Energy Poverty prepared with UN Women and EU support in 2021 found that there is no estimation or recognition of potential different effects of energy policies on women and men in Serbia. It generally found a lack of qualitative data on different roles and needs of men and women when it comes to energy services. In addition, the study found that existing support schemes for energy vulnerable populations do not integrate the gender perspective and proposes several entry points to improve in this overall area.

Recently an analysis has also been undertaken on gender equality in the transport sector in the framework of a World Bank supported project implemented by the CBGE and civil society actors. This study found significant gender inequalities when it comes to transport. Men were found to drive cars and motorcycles more frequently than women (40% of all trips for men, compared to 16% for women); women on the other hand were more frequently found as passengers in cars (16% for women compared to 6% of men). This was partially down to unequal access to resources as fewer women own a car. When it comes to public transport women use it more than men, as well as taxis, and are more prone to intermodal mobility behavior. Due to these findings it was deduced that men focus on individual transport options while women are more dependent and less autonomous when it comes to transport than men. Women were also found to take more trips than men. Finally, the study found that the transport sector employs predominantly men who make up 80% of all employees, and women are mainly employed in administrative and professional occupations, men predominantly as drivers and workers. Women are also overrepresented in public transport sector and men in the private.

Despite the lack of publically available data and studies, the report of the government of Serbia progress on the implementation of Beijing +25 notes a number of advances when it comes to mainstreaming gender in environmental and climate change policies and programmes. It reports that the Ministry of Environmental Protection in 2019 earmarked funds for a gender analysis aimed at mainstreaming the gender perspective in the Ministry's environmental policies and activities.

Two areas where significant advances have been made include impact of chemicals on women's health and integration of the gender perspective in waste disposal. Serbia's updated National Plan for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants includes a number of measures and activities aimed to improve gender-disaggregated data, dissemination of information among women and especially mothers on the impacts of chemicals and hazardous waste on reproductive health, and strengthening staff capacities through training on gender equality in the area of chemicals management. On the other hand the Ministry undertook research on gender perspectives of household waste management in Serbia in 2018 which revealed that women are key drivers of current waste separation for recycling (68%), as well in terms of changing present practices (61%).

Gender equality criteria were also included in two proposals for solutions to climate change that were launched by the Ministry of Environmental Protection in 2018. Training of local self-government units was also delivered on gender mainstreaming in tackling climate change and developed the first Training Manual on Gender and Climate Change⁴⁰. An effort was also made to mentor development of selected project proposals to strengthen their gender components, through the establishment of gender sensitive monitoring framework in the climate change area within the GEF-funded ongoing climate change related projects. The framework provides guidelines on how and where to mainstream the gender perspective not only in climate change policies but in other relevant policy areas, as gender equality (as well as climate change) is a cross-sectoral and multi-sectoral issue⁴¹.

⁴⁰ https://www.un-gsp.org/sites/default/files/documentos/training_handbook_web-eng_002.pdf

⁴¹ <https://www.klimatskepromene.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Gender-and-Climate-Change-monitoring-framework-DRAFT-18122019.pdf>

The activities carried out during 2018 in this area in Serbia were recognised as an example of good practice and shared at international events including the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24 UNFCCC) and a Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 2019.

When it comes to Disaster risk reduction and management, provisions on gender have been integrated into the relevant legislation. Serbia was hard hit by flooding in 2014, after which a Gender Analysis was done of the Impact and a Guidebook developed for inclusion of women in decision-making in emergency situations at local level in 2015. the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Disaster Risk Management Programme (2016–2020) includes targeted activities to empower, women, support for training of women’s CSOs, plan preparation that includes women’s perspectives and the requirement to ensure the availability of women’s healthcare system preparedness plans.

A report prepared by the RES Foundation in 2020 which reviews energy policy in Serbia found that several strategic and policy documents do not integrate the gender perspective. These include the Serbian Energy Development Strategy, Programme for Implementation of the Energy Strategy, National Energy Efficiency Action plan and the National Action Plan for utilization of renewable energy sources. Similarly the Second National Communication of the Republic of Serbia under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) prepared in 2017 did not include any mention or disaggregated data on climate change outcomes for women and men.

At a UNFCCC workshop on gender integration into national climate in September 2020 the Ministry of Environmental protection presented Serbia’s experience, noting that several national documents on climate change were revised to be gender sensitive and that the CBGE has been included in preparation of national documents since 2018. She noted that the differential impact on women and men is recognized in the Low Carbon Development Strategy and that gender has been mainstreamed in IPA 2019 – 2020 EU for Environment and Climate Action. Looking to the future the Ministry indicated plans to establish system of Gender Sensitive Data and Indicators, including tracking gender sensitive budget expenditure at national and local levels; Increase capacities of civil servants and other stakeholders at sectoral, national and sub-national levels; prepare a National Gender Voluntary report to UNFCCC, undertake studies on Gender and Urban Planning and a Gender Inventory of PM emissions and energy consumption, and train energy and climate managers at the local level on gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Gender Inventory of PM emissions and energy consumption was recently undertaken with the support of UN Women and initiated a new consultation process with the Ministry of Energy and Mining, the EU Delegation and UN women including joint planning of a new intervention on gender energy efficiency. The Ministry representative also recognised some of the key challenges including: lack of mechanisms to monitor financing and implementation, need for more gender desegregated socio-economic data, low level of institutional and individual capacities and limited cross-sectoral collaboration⁴².

Serbia is currently preparing its National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) following the adoption in 2021 of two new laws - the law on renewable energy sources and the law on energy efficiency and rational use of energy, as well as amendments to two laws on energy and the law on mining and geological research. Although the two new laws do not appear to have integrated a gender perspective, the NECP could be a new opportunity to address gender and climate change in Serbia.

Digitalisation

According to data from the SORS, 92% of women own a mobile phone compared to 96.2% of men. In 2019 slightly more young women than men (16 – 24 years old) used a computer, but for those aged 55 – 74 only 34% of women used compared to 47.6% of men. Among working age persons 25 – 54 the gap was slight with 87.2% of men compared to 84% of women. In all age groups there is a slight gender gap in favour of men when it comes to internet use. In terms of basic or higher digital skills among the population aged 16–74, 43% of women and 49% of men were found to have them. Disaggregated data demonstrate

⁴² <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SERBIA%20Danijela%20Bozanic.pdf>

the disadvantaged situation of rural women especially, with 83 percent of men and 76 percent of women living in urban areas used computers, while in rural areas only 67 percent of men and 60 percent of women did so. According to the EU Digital Economy and Society Index Serbia overall is lagging behind the EU with an index value of 38 compared to the EU average of 50 (DESI for 2018).

In Serbia, women represent between 15 and 20% of total employment in informatics and engineering⁴³.

The Centre for Investigation of Public Policies with the support of UN Women and the EU has undertaken an investigation on gender in digital entrepreneurship. Earlier investigation by the Centre has indicated that men are more present than women among digital entrepreneurs. Men dominate in areas of higher earnings including the creative industry and ICT services while women are more frequently found in provision of office services, data entry, writing and translation, which are lower paid. The study found men on average earn three times more than women, but also that women require more information on different types of legal entities, additional education to develop business plans and manage finances.

The Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications has been engaged in activities to improve access of girls and women in use of ICT. In 2019 it launched the first Programme for the empowerment of women in the information and communication technologies sector 2019 – 2020 which has the objective to encourage primary school age girls to choose further education in ICT; supporting non-formal education in ICT for women from other sectors; and raising digital competencies among women of all ages to address the digital gender gap. Previously the Ministry implemented project which prioritised women in selection criteria, for example in 2017 nine projects were selected which aimed at the inclusion of women in the ICT sector through reskilling and upskilling. In the same year the Ministry implemented the project "Training for women in the field of IT", supported by UNESCO targeting unemployed women. In 2018 a public call was made to support programmes for raising the level of digital literacy and digital competences of women from rural areas and seven projects were approved aimed at developing women's digital skills and increasing their use of new technologies and e-services. Since 2010 the Ministry has been marking International Girls in ICT Day to raise awareness with relevant institutions, sectors, universities, and companies in the field of digital technologies participate, as well as among girls of primary school age. The national IT retraining program, implemented since 2017 by UNDP and the Government of Serbia, attracts a significant number of applicants each year – searching for a career change through new skills and participation in Serbia's growing IT sector. Initially women only made up 26-28% of participants annually, since 2020 online media on the programme targeted specifically women resulting in a significant increase in female applicants to 47%.

The newest policy in this area is the Strategy for the development of digital skills in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2024. Gender has been effectively mainstreamed into the document with specific sections on women and girls, as well as recognition of intersecting inequalities. The goal on development of digital skills in relation to the needs of the labor market includes taking into account the number of women involved and the effects of measures taken. In two other areas targeted measures for women are envisioned: implementing training programs to improve the digital skills of women from rural areas as well as special reference to women entrepreneurs in implementation of certified / accredited training programs in areas of digital skills relevant to employment. Special mention to women and girls is also made with regard to increasing their interest in the sector from a young age and throughout life and education cycle in order to achieve greater gender balance in the ICT sector.

As much of the usual activities have gone online since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation is becoming increasingly important when it comes to income-generating opportunities. In this regard it will be important to ensure the gender dimension is adequately captured in all policies and programmes that seek to promote the digital dimension in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery.

⁴³ The Strategy of Digital Skills Development in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2024
<https://mtt.gov.rs/en/download/Strategy%20of%20Digital%20Skills%20Development%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20Serbia%20for%20the%20period%202020-2024.pdf>

III. Gender Equality Stakeholders

The **European Union** supports Serbia's efforts on gender equality and gender empowerment and is by far its biggest donor overall with more than €3.6 billion in grants provided over the past 20 years in fields such as rule of law, public administration reform, social development, environment and agriculture. The EU support can be grouped into three categories, regional, bilateral through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, and thematic through EU programmes and instruments such as the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC) and European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The support can be channeled directly to the government but most often it is channeled through international organizations or civil society organisations. At present the following projects and programmes are being implemented:

Regional: "Implementing norms, Changing minds" programme focused on reduce violence against women and girls and all forms of discrimination, implemented with UN Women (see more below), and the Horizontal Facility in partnership with the Council of Europe (also see below). Both programmes are regional spanning Western Balkans and Turkey. Through the Regional Civil Society Facility Programme established under IPA, the EU is also supporting the project Women for Peace and Security – Towards good neighbourly relations between Serbia and Kosovo with the Association of Women Sandglass (CSO).

Bilateral: Through IPA II the EU is supporting the second phase of the project „Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia“.

Thematic: Through the EIDHR the EU is currently supporting a project on Increased Participation of Older Women in Public and Political Life with CSO Association of citizens AMITY ending in 2021, as well as the project Improving democratic society through strengthening the capacities of female NGOs and citizens with the Association Forum of Women from Prijepolje. An ongoing EIDHR project of three years with CSO ASTRA aims at strengthening the capacity and capability of civil society organisations across the country to fight human trafficking (especially women and girls victims of sexual exploitation). Under REC the EU is supporting the Empowerment of Older Women: Preventing violence by challenging social norms, a joint action of the Austrian Red Cross, Austrian Institute for Conflict Research and the Red Cross of Serbia, with support of the Austrian Development Agency. Finally there is also the programme „I can chose to say no“ supporting the Autonomous Women's Center in an action on ending cyber sexual and gender based violence in youth aged 15-19.

International Organisations

The **United Nations Country Team (UNCT)** is an extremely active partner implementing gender equality programmes in Serbia. Its Gender Theme Group is chaired by UN Women and serves as a platform for coordination, information sharing and joint actions. The group develops a UN Gender Brief every six months presenting information on the activities of each agency in different areas relating to gender equality⁴⁴.

„Integrated Response to Violence against Women and Girls in Serbia“ is a joint project of the UNCT (in particular UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP) and the government of Serbia led by the CBGE and supported by the Swedish government. This project entered into its third phase at the end of 2020, working with multiple stakeholders including several ministries and civil society organisations, and focusing on ensuring violence is effectively sanctioned, that women and children who are victims of gender-based violence are protected and receive adequate support, including trough capacity building for responsible professionals, working to promote positive discipline and end child marriage and informing citizens, especially youth, on causes, consequences and need to prevent violence, including through ethical media reporting.

Further impetus has been given to efforts to curb gender-based violence in Serbia through the aforementioned regional programme "Implementing norms, changing minds", implemented by **UN Women**

⁴⁴ <https://serbia.un.org/index.php/en/54653-gender-brief-serbia-vol-11>

with EU support since 2017, recently extended until July 2023. Focusing on the most disadvantaged groups of women, this initiative involves close strategic partnerships with women's civil society organizations and networks. In the coming years the programme aims to: improve quality standards for shelters and provision of digital SOS and psychological support, with a special focus on women with disabilities, strengthen professional capacities for both free legal aid services and for development of individual safety plans within Groups for Coordination and Cooperation, and to support economic reintegration of Roma women survivors of violence. With support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs UN Women is also implementing the project „Improved Safety of Women in Serbia“ which provides support to CSOs in activities aimed at rural women, especially those facing multiple forms of discrimination, as well as supporting Regional Police Directorates and the Ministry of the Interior, as well as the work of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality on gender-based violence.

The main programme through which the EU and UN Women support gender equality and women empowerment efforts of the government of Serbia is the Gender Equality Facility, or project „Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia“ which has recently entered its second phase. Since its start in 2017 efforts focused on supporting the CBGE in strengthening capacity for coordination, improving the policy framework through evaluation of the NAP and Gender Equality Strategy and support for development of new legislation – including through development of a Gender Equality Test for drafting of new regulations – and monitoring gender equality including through the development of the Gender Equality Index. The GEF also supports the Ministry of European Integration in order to mainstream the gender perspective in the policy and strategic framework. A third component of both the first and second phase of the GEF is support through civil society organisations, as well as strengthening capacity of Local Gender Equality Mechanisms to develop and implement Local Action Plans for gender equality.

Another important area of work of UN Women in Serbia is gender responsive budgeting (GRB) in close cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, the CBGE, the Provincial Secretariat of Finance and the Provincial Secretariat for Demography, Social Policy and Gender Equality. Previously UN Women supported capacity building of budgetary users at all levels, especially local-self government where ten units across Serbia received mentoring support to introduce GRB. A new four year regional initiative has recently been launched with financial support from the government of Sweden entitled Transformative Financing for Gender Equality towards more transparent, inclusive and accountable governance in the Western Balkans. Initial activities in Serbia included a gender analysis of COVID-19 related budget reallocations during 2020 with a focus on economy and culture.

With support of the government of the UK, UN Women is implementing the project „Gender Responsive Governance – Redistribution of Unpaid Care work“. Activities have included two analyses on unpaid care work, estimating the economic value of unpaid care work based on data from Time-use surveys, and an analysis of Legal Norms relating to the Economy of Care, as well as six local needs analyses with project partners. Support of UN Women through this project includes grants to ten women's CSOs for piloting initiatives to redistribute care work at the local level.

UNFPA in Serbia continues to promote sexual and reproductive health including through support to development of the government policy, as well as awareness raising in partnership with the civil society sector. UNFPA also works to promote the rights of women living with disabilities, especially to improve their access to sexual and reproductive rights. UNFPA focus is policy advice and professional guidelines development, data availability improvement, and health professionals SRH capacity building and health care quality improvement.

Within the „Integrated response to Violence against Women and Girls“ UNFPA is supporting health institutions' and health care staff capacities to recognize and adequately respond to cases of gender-based violence, and improve the quality and manner of collecting data on violence from the health system. UNFPA also participates in the organization of multisectoral training which will support local stakeholders to develop comprehensive and appropriate handling of referrals in cases of GBV. In the area of prevention of gender based violence, UNFPA is working to empower girls and boys to recognize negative and harmful gender stereotypes and correlation between stereotypes and gender based violence, including GBV on the internet. Jointly with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, the UNFPA is co-chairing the

working group on gender based violence in emergencies, which deals mainly with GBV in the mixed migrant/refugee/asylum seekers population, in accordance with the national normative framework on GBV.

UNFPA is also working jointly with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to revise the National Youth Strategy and develop an Action Plan for its implementation, and it is advocating for development of a new Strategy on Ageing that will mainstream the economic and social rights of older persons, especially women. In order to adequately inform development of Strategy on Ageing and other policy documents, UNFPA is supporting National Transfer Account Analysis (NTA) analysis which shows the influence of changing age structure on economic growth, gender and generational equity, public finances, and other important features of the macro-economy.

In addition to activities implemented under the Joint Project „Integrated response to Violence against Women and Girls“, **UNDP** has also been implementing the project „Reduce risk Improve Safety: Towards ending small and light weapons misuse in the domestic violence context“, with support of the German Federal Foreign Office, including an analysis of domestic laws for prevention of firearms misuse in domestic violence. Research includes an in-depth desk-review analysis of the procedures and practices related to the SALW license denial, removal and revocation in the context of domestic violence, research on judicial practice and response of the criminal-justice system related to misuse of firearms in the cases of domestic violence, analysis of administrative data collection practices on the misuse of SALW in domestic and intimate partner violence and an analysis of cases of femicides committed with firearms. Finally with the group “Journalists against Violence” UNDP supported a qualitative analysis of media reporting on SALW misuse and initiated the development of guidelines for ethical and gender-sensitive media reporting on domestic violence committed with firearms.

UNDP's South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) initiative supports the government in its efforts to advance gender equality in security sector reform through training and providing tools for integrating gender in relevant legislative and policy framework, and supporting the implementation of the UN Resolution 1325. The initiative includes regional exchange and development of important capacity-building tools including a manual on Combatting Gender based discrimination, sexual harassment and abuse.

In December 2020 Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the initiative Women's Economic Empowerment: Areas for joint actions in the Western Balkans with the aim of foster regional cooperation and partnerships to enact mutually reinforcing reforms in addressing gender inequalities and co-designing initiatives on women's economic empowerment including in the aftermath of COVID-19. The programme is currently under development.

The Strengthening Oversight Function and Transparency of the Parliament project includes onling support to the Women's Parliamentary Network and the networking of women members of local assemblies, with the Swiss Cooperation Office in Serbia as key donor. In addition, UNDP is partnering with the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government to empower local-level women leaders - Women Mayors Network established in March 2021 through provision of hands-on and tailor-made capacity building.

A number of UNDP projects have an important gender component. For example the „Beyond Recovery Towards Economic Resilience“ project which supports the Serbian government to digitalise crucial area as part of COVID-19 recovery includes an output on women entrepreneurs especially in creative industries and the tourist sector. A project on strengthening integration of Returnees to Western Balkans implemented since early 2021 contributes to reduce discrimination of women returnees especially Roma. The Local Initiative for Improved Social Inclusion of Young Roma has a quota to ensure at least 30% participation by women in activities. Finally gender is also part of two GEF-funded with gender-sensitive monitoring and guidelines on how to mainstream gender in climate change while a second project planned to begin at end of 2021 will include support of finalisation of Serbias first Gender Action Plan through UNDPs Social and Environmental Screening Procedure.

UNICEF supports the government of Serbia together with CSOs through the programme „Towards the End of Child marriages in Serbia“ through which it engaged a total of 21 Roma communities, as well as 8

schools, with hundreds of roma children receiving individualised school drop-out prevention plans. The project includes a component to strengthen Roma male activism to challenge harmful gender norms and practices. The project also supports the National Coalition to End Child Marriage.

UNICEF is also implementing the third phase of the „Action against gender-based violence affecting refugee and migrant women and children“, implemented with support of CSOs which continued to support outreach teams and Women and Girl Safe Spaces in four locations. Gender is also one of the key areas of UNICEF's Playful Parenting Support programme with the support of LEGO foundation, including gender-balanced parenting support. UNICEF is also working with young people through a Youth Board to integrate the youth perspective in its work and that of other UN agencies, with young girls forming the majority of the Board. Finally UNICEF together with UNFPA and the government's statistical office, with EU support, periodically collects and analyses the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey MICS providing vital data for monitoring gender equality, including disaggregated data for Roma settlements.

UNHCR through its work to support immigrants and refugees has been implementing activities to reach women and girls requiring legal aid as well as psychological counseling for women refugees. **UNOPS** is implementing partner in Serbia of the "EU Support to Social Housing and Active Inclusion" programme, which is supporting local self-governments to develop social housing and active inclusion projects. Women victims of domestic violence are one of the four target groups, as are Roma, persons with disabilities and children and youth without parental care.

The **OSCE Mission to Serbia** has been active in supporting establishment and capacities of local gender equality mechanisms, as well as in supporting the Women's Parliamentary Network. It also implements a mentoring programme for young women – in particular from the Roma community – to help them with their career choices. Work on gender-based violence has included the most recent and comprehensive study of violence against women as part of a regional effort. As part of efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 the OSCE is supporting the evaluation of the previous NAP and elaboration of the new one. Annually a summer school on gender equality is organised. The OSCE mission in Serbia has been hailed as an example of good practice among OSCE offices for its work to mainstream gender throughout programming support. Practices include gender focal points in different sectors, a tool for self-assessment and periodic training of staff.

The **Council of Europe** office in Belgrade is implementing the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey (Horizontal Facility II) 2019-2022, a co-operation initiative of the European Union and Council of Europe (CoE). The programme supports reform processes agreed with the authorities, in line with relevant Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies' recommendations including where relevant within the framework of the EU enlargement process, relating to: ensuring justice; fighting economic crime; combating discrimination and protecting the rights of vulnerable groups and freedom of expression and freedom of the media. While there is no specific component on gender it has been mainstreamed in project design and there is a practice to explore gender analysis of specific sectors following one in-depth gender analysis on an Action on detained and sentenced persons. The CoE is also implementing the second phase of ROMACTED EU funded programme which includes a focus on Roma women.

Bilateral Donors

The Serbian Ministry for European Integration coordinated Sector Working Group, of which the Human Resource Development sector is responsible for gender equality under the leadership of Swiss Development Cooperation.

Several examples of targeted support from donors including Sweden, Norway and the UK have already been mentioned above. In addition the following are being implemented:

In addition to support through the aforementioned „Integrated Response to Violence against Women and Girls in Serbia“, the government of **Sweden** is supporting cooperation between the Ministry of Interior and Swedish police relating to gender-based violence. It is also providing support to municipalities to implement the gender agenda and gender responsive budgeting – as one component within program implemented by

Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM). Finally support for civil society organisations working on gender equality is provided through Swedish organization Kvinna till Kvinna. New contributions from Sweden are pending approval of the government's new Development Cooperation Strategy in mid-2021.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (**GIZ**) GmbH has several ongoing projects in Serbia, two of which have a specific gender component. The „Social Rights for Vulnerable Groups II (SoRi II)“ project focused on Roma, women and young people, disabled people and members of the LGBTI community. It supports local authorities, non-governmental organisations and government agencies in their efforts to apply strategies aimed at the inclusion and support of these groups. The project „Inclusion of Roma and other marginalised groups in Serbia“ develops and implements anti-discrimination measures, which helps reduce prejudice and discrimination, particularly against Roma women.

The government of **France** has been engaging with CSOs, the CBGE, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and Commissioner for Equality in preparation of the Generation Equality Forum which will take place at the end of June 2021, while gender has been introduced as a priority into all bilateral cooperation activities. The embassy is revising its action plan for gender equality.

The **Czech** government is implementing the project “Strengthening access to justice for women victims of violence in Serbia” together with Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights – YUCOM.

In addition to projects mentioned in the previous section **Norway** also supports „Norway for You: Norwegian Support to the Western Balkans Development“ which is implemented through UNOPS and which emphasises the inclusion of youth, women and vulnerable groups in the labour market.

Switzerland has been supporting the Women’s Parliamentary Network through its project Strengthening the Oversight Role and Transparency of the Parliament and supports gender budgeting through the institutional support to the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities. Project Swiss PRO - The Enhancing Good Governance and Social Inclusion for Municipal Development Programme includes gender equality as a separate pillar. The project From Education to Employment (E2E) supports youth employment policies in Serbia and includes support to empowerment of young women. Previously the project Women in Sustainable Energy South-East Europe promoted women’s mapped women professionally engaged in this area.

USAID is implementing the project „Women Entrepreneurs and Start-up Founders Initiative“ through partners Impact Hub Belgrade and with the Association for Affirmation of Women’s Potential and Networking Association of Business Women, until mid 2022. The initiative builds competence, leadership, and influence of women entrepreneurs and gender-diverse start-ups, with a view to ultimately increase their economic impact including through access to new and alternate sources of investments.

Civil Society

Serbia has a vibrant and active civil society and a number of national and local women’s organisations or organisations that work on women’s rights. WCSOs in Serbia have been at the forefront of efforts to raise public awareness on gender equality issues, change discriminatory legislation, improve institutional response to gender-based violence, promote reconciliation among and across communities affected by conflict, offer services to survivors of violence. In some areas of the GAP II, such as gender-based violence, WCSOs were for decades the only actors providing safe spaces, psychological counselling, healthcare, legal aid, and other services to women who had suffered violence. While it is impossible to do justice to the wealth of knowledge and initiatives implemented by women’s organisations in Serbia, the below offers a short overview.

Femplatz is a women’s rights organisation whose focus of work is improving the overall position of women and girls. The Center for Girls works on education and emancipation of young women. the Autonomous Womens Centre (Autonomni Zenski Centar) has been working on gender based violence since the early 1990’s. The Women against Violence Network is a coalition of specialised women’s non-governmental

organizations which also manages the Independent Observatory for Monitoring Violence against women. ATINA and ASTRA are the two civil society organisations that stand out in the area of trafficking against women. The Serbian Association for sexual and reproductive health and rights is active in this field. Reconstruction Women's Fund supports women's organisations throughout the country at both national and grassroots levels. The Centre for Women's Studies conduct and publish research on intersectional gender issues.

Local women's rights organisations include: SOS Helpline for Women and Children Victims of Violence Vlasotince, Women's Forum of Prijepolje, Women for Peace Leskovac, Women's Centre Uzice, Association of Women Sandglass Krusevac, Association Fenomena Kraljevo, Alternative Girls' Centre Kruševac, ROZA Association for Women's Labour Rights, Zrenjanin. In Vojvodina the SOS Network of Vojvodina is made up of: Women's Support Centre Kikinda, Iz Kruga Vojvodina, SOS Women's Centre Novi Sad, Women's alternative Sombor, the Association of Roma Novi Becej, and Educational Centre of Zrenjanin.

A number of civil society organisations concerned with human rights or rights of specific groups also work on gender equality. Some that participated in consultations for the preparation of this profile include: A 11 – Initiative for economic and social rights, Roma Center for Women and Children Daje, Victimology Society of Serbia, Women in Black, BeFem and Amity. The full list of CSOs that participated in preparation of the profile is in the Annex.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

This is an interesting moment in Serbia given that normative documents including legislation, strategies and action plans relating to most of the gender equality intervention areas, are either in the process of being updated or have recently been adopted. This provides ample opportunities to further strengthen the gender equality framework, which has already advanced significantly in recent years, and to support the government and civil society in implementation of the new norms and policy ambitions which has been revealed as the most significant challenge facing Serbia at present. Recent reforms of the institutional framework for gender equality, including the process to further strengthen the main GE coordination body, present both an opportunity and a challenge, as they highlight the need for strengthened capacities throughout the state apparatus, both in terms of quality but also quantity of qualified personnel. While there is progress at the legislative and policy level, the full conditions for effective transformation of norms and attitudes on gender equality, human rights and civil liberties have still not been met. Civil society organisations, including women's organisations, continue to be crucial actors contributing to build a more democratic, gender-equal and just society amidst considerable challenges. The EU Accession process coupled with significant financial and technical support from the EU have already contributed to the significant advances when it comes to gender equality and women's empowerment in Serbia. This section summarises the main findings and proposes recommendations firstly overall, and then in each of the GAP III intervention areas for EU support in the next seven years.

Key findings

- Recently strengthened normative framework with the adoption of Gender Equality Law (May 2021), including clarification of responsibilities and accountability mechanisms, as well as amendments to Anti-Discrimination legislation.
- Ongoing policy developments as entry-points that include elaboration of a Gender Equality Strategy and Action plan, as well as a new Anti-Discrimination Strategy for implementation of legislative commitments (in addition to policy documents in each of the intervention areas).
- Gender-responsive budgeting has been established and is globally hailed as a good practice, however progress is uneven and not yet complete, and sustainable financing for implementation of gender equality policies remains a challenge, especially at the local level.
- Persisting gender norms and stereotypes permeate society including institutional structures and staff tasked with implementing gender equality policies and programmes.
- Mainstreaming of the gender perspective in work of the government at all levels has advanced but remains uneven across and within sectors, with lack of a common understanding of what it means

and how to do it leading to missed opportunities to substantively mainstream gender in the state apparatus.

- Institutional weaknesses have been identified as a key challenge, in terms of both quantity and quality of available human resources for implementation of existing and new normative framework for gender equality, including at the local level.
- National statistics for periodic monitoring of gender-equality exist, however these need to be complemented with further disaggregation that includes geographic, ethnic and other factors to capture the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women in rural areas, Roma women, women with disabilities and those from the LGBTI community, as well as specialized studies in areas of interest. An opportunity exists to further enhance cooperation between producers of gender statistics, namely the SORS but also sectoral Ministries, and users of statistical data (primarily the CBGE and Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue) to promote analysis and establish effective monitoring of policies and programmes.
- Civil society organisations working on gender equality and women's organisations have increasingly become engaged in development and monitoring of legislation and policies on gender equality. Further efforts can be made to ensure wider representation especially of civil society groups in remote areas and engagement at the local level, as well as those representing the most vulnerable groups of women, and to strengthen the capacities of civil society organisations to apply for and implement available EU funding for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Recommendations

1. Continued **political dialogue** of the EU with the government of Serbia regarding implementation of international commitments and alignment with EU Aquis on gender equality, in particular through negotiations on Chapter 23 and 19.
2. Support the **implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and provisions of the revised legislation on Anti-Discrimination** ensuring they are adequately transposed into the development of a National strategy and action plan on Gender Equality and Strategy on Anti-Discrimination and the establishment of effective accountability mechanisms at all levels of the state apparatus.
3. Continued support for **increased, strengthened and sustainable capacities** within key institutions tasked with implementing gender equality, in particular the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and CBGE, especially with a view to improved coordination and to deal with multiple forms of discrimination.
4. **Strengthen capacities of local GE bodies** to develop and implement local GE plans, including through improved collection and analysis of data on gender equality.
5. Promote **systematic institutionalized mainstreaming** of the gender perspective by ensuring all responsible entities and officials possess a mutual understanding of what mainstreaming is and how to do it including through practical examples.
6. Support development of **improved gender equality statistics** and indicators that adequately capture multiple forms of discrimination and provide sufficient data to monitor the future Gender Equality Strategy and Action plan, including by promoting institutionalized regular cooperation between the main producers and users of gender statistics.
7. EU financial support should be complementary to **national financing** for gender equality, that needs to be **increased and sustainable** by promoting the continued implementation of Gender-responsive budgeting, especially at the local level but also securing adequate resources for the CBGE and WCSOs..
8. Establish opportunities for in-depth **technical exchange of transformative practices and lessons learned** in addressing existing challenges in Serbia with EU Member States and other Accession Countries that have faced similar issues, including through the European Institute for Gender Equality.
9. Support the development and implementation of **broad communication campaigns** to address social norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequalities in Serbia.
10. Improve existing donor **coordination mechanisms among state institutions, EU, Member States and international organisations** to support synergies in support to government institutions and civil society.

11. Channel support to **strengthen capacities of civil society organisations** including women's civil society organisations, especially those from remote areas and dealing with vulnerable groups, to access and implement national and EU funds as well as to engage meaningfully with state institutions developing and implementing GE policies.

A. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence

Key findings

- Significant improvements have been made to the normative and policy framework with 2017 Law on Domestic Violence and newly adopted Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025, as well as advances to adopt corresponding Action plan.
- The improved normative framework has contributed to increased cooperation, for example through Groups for Coordination and Cooperation, establishment of protocols and standards and increased awareness and knowledge among practitioners.
- Some remaining gaps in legislation have been identified by international monitoring bodies. The challenge now facing Serbia is the implementation of an ambitious agenda with limited resources, financial and human. Needs for further capacity building are significant, including for more standardised interpretation of the legal framework. Services to victims of GBH and THB still largely depend on provision by CSOs and external funding.
- Gender norms persist that perpetuate violence in society, and also penetrate awareness in institutions and impact on victim's confidence to come forward.
- A unified consolidated register of victims and perpetrators of GBV is yet to be established, mandated by the 2017 Law on Domestic Violence, and included in the recently adopted Strategy on GBV.

Recommendations

1. Support the implementation of the Strategy and soon-to-be adopted Action Plan for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence including through activities to build capacities of all institutions engaged in prevention and response to gender-based violence and improved protection for women suffering multiple forms of discrimination.
2. Call for full compliance with the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee and GREVIO including through harmonisation of existing legislation and implementation thereof.
3. Encourage the government to establish stable and sustainable funding for a range of state services for victims of gender-based violence, including for victims of THB, especially shelters and centres for victims.
4. Continue to support funding for women's organisations, including Roma women's organisations, as providers of essential services to survivors of violence.
5. Support the establishment of a centralized unified national register of victims and perpetrators of all forms of gender-based violence, ensuring adequate disaggregation by ethnicity, urban/rural and other personal characteristics that can capture the situation of women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

B. Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights

Key findings

- There is scarce data when it comes to women's sexual and reproductive health, mainly dependent on UNICEF's Multi Indicator Cluster Surveys which are funded by the EU. Other than this almost no data is collected periodically, and what data does exist is not disaggregated by ethnicity, geographic area, disability etc. This means data for monitoring implementation of national policies is also missing.
- The National Action Plan for implementation of the National Programme for maintaining and improving sexual and reproductive health of 2017, although a draft has been developed. There is no monitoring of the National programme implementation or the resources assigned to it.

- Concerns have been raised regarding serious breaches of the sexual and reproductive rights of disabled women living in institutions. This area requires further research and safeguarding protocols in place.

Recommendations

1. Support the adoption of the Action plan for implementation of the National Programme for maintaining and improving sexual and reproductive health including sustainable finance and periodic monitoring of implementation.
2. Promote inclusion of sexual and reproductive health education into the national programme and government activities.
3. Encourage periodic collection of statistics pertaining to sexual and reproductive health of women, including disaggregation to capture multiple forms of discrimination.
4. Support development of qualitative studies on sexual and reproductive health in Serbia, including on women with disabilities, Roma women, women in rural areas and youth.

C. Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women:

Key findings

- Significant gender gaps persist in accessing economic rights through employment, including entrepreneurship, as well as in access to resources. These inequalities are a direct result of persisting gender norms which assign different roles to men and women and can be seen clearly in the unequal distribution of time and unpaid care work which underpins the formal economy. Public policies do not yet adequately recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work to promote women's economic empowerment.
- The situation of Roma girls who drop out due to family obligations and early marriage is a concern especially in secondary education. Gender segregation across educational subjects is significant and transposes into the labour market.
- Mainstreaming gender into social and labour policy has advanced but also faced challenges, especially in light of the risk that social policies and programs, such as conditional cash transfers, to reinforce gender roles if not considered in the design. Furthermore, sustainable financial and human capacities are limited.
- Vulnerable groups facing multiple forms of discrimination face the greatest challenges but there is also the least data available regarding their situation and needs, especially when it comes to older women, women with disabilities, rural women and LGBTI women.

Recommendations

1. Support greater coordination among institutions working on economic and social rights, and capacities to both mainstream and implement policies with substantive gender components, including assessing gender impact of labour and social policies, and identification of good practices.
2. Encourage revision of the Draft Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 to integrate the gender perspective.
3. Support the preparation of the new Strategy for Social Protection and Law on Social Protection to ensure a participative process and effectively integrate gender equality concerns.
4. Promote improvements in data collection pertaining to social and economic rights that is disaggregated not only by sex but also by different forms of discrimination.

D. Promoting equal participation and leadership

Key findings

- Political participation is an area where Serbia has possibly advanced the most in recent years in part due to the progressive integration of quotas for the legislative branch at both national and local levels. The latest government formed in October 2020 has 50% representation by women. However, of particular concern is the extremely low level of women's participation at the local executive level with only 6% of women among the presidents of municipalities/mayors.

- Representation of women from vulnerable groups including women with disabilities, Roma women and from the LGBTI community is extremely low, and concerns have been raised regarding the access of women with disabilities to political life both as electorate and as candidates.
- Data on the participation of women in other spheres is generally hard to access, but evidence shows that women remain underrepresented in economic decision-making bodies.

Recommendations

1. Explore challenges to women's increased participation in the executive branch of local governments, and support actions to overcome these in order to increase significantly women in the roles of presidents of municipalities/mayors.
2. Support increased access of women facing multiple discrimination including women with disabilities, older women, Roma women, rural women and from the LGBTI community, in particular eliminating any legal barriers to the political participation of women with disabilities.

E. Integrating the women, peace and security agenda

Key findings

- Advances in the WPS agenda in Serbia are slow and uneven. The representation of women in the military and defense sector has increased yet significant gender gaps persist in this male-dominated sector especially at managerial and decision-making levels. The ministry of the interior has also advanced in mainstreaming, but this process has been heavily dependent on external support.
- As the second National Action Plan expired, Serbia is still awaiting adoption of the third NAP on WPS. Challenges with implementation of the previous NAP include limited financial and human resources, and assignment of responsibilities.
- Engagement of women and women's organisations in the peace-process taking place between Belgrade and Pristina has grown but remains limited, as is action to address the needs of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Recommendations

1. Support adoption of the third National Action plan on WPS, including integration of recommendations from an evaluation of previous efforts in this field, and its subsequent implementation.
2. Promote actions to integrate women and women's organisations in the dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation between Serbia and Kosovo.
3. Support initiatives to increase knowledge of officials and citizens on UNSCR 1325 and its implementation in Serbia.
4. Support civil society initiatives to promote cross-border reconciliation and peacebuilding among Serbs and Albanians and other ethnic communities to contribute to establishing good neighbourly relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

F. Climate change and environment and digitalisation

Key findings

- Serbia has been hailed by some as a good example of gender mainstreaming in the areas of climate change however the process is not systematic and there are many policy documents that do not capture the gender dimension.
- Data on different needs, roles and impact of climate change on women is almost nonexistent, especially through periodic data collection. Qualitative and quantitative studies in selected areas such as waste management and energy efficiency provide some insight.
- Digital gender gaps persist especially among older age groups. The digitalization agenda in Serbia includes special attention to opportunities for women and a recent targeted Programme was implemented for the empowerment of women in the information and communication technologies.

Recommendations

1. Promote systematic institutionalized mainstreaming of the gender perspective in Serbia's environmental and climate change policies and programmes, recognizing the importance of earmarked funding for gender and the need to strengthen capacities in the state apparatus, including through political dialogue and negotiations on Chapter 27.
2. Support periodic collection of sex-disaggregated statistics to explore the gender differences in needs and impact relating to climate change and the environment, as well as studies in select areas of interest.
3. Conduct gender-sensitive environmental analysis of impact of infrastructure projects supported by the EU (including bridges, dams, roads).
4. Encourage continued integration of the gender perspective in the digitalization agenda, encouraging in particular linkages with education policies for increased participation of women in the ICT sector, and including the gender perspective in programmes in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery.

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ANNEX 1: Civil Society (CSO) participation in preparation of the Gender Country Profile for Serbia

A 11 – Initiative for economic and social rights

Amity

Association of Women Sandglass

ASTRA - Anti-trafficking Action

ATINA

Autonomous Women's Center

Center for Girls

FemPlatz

Fenomena

Gender Knowledge Hub

Iz kruga Vojvodina

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

Roma Center for Women and Children Daje

Serbian Association for sexual and reproductive health and rights

SOS Network of Vojvodina

Victimology Society of Serbia