



LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!

Progress on the Sustainable Development
Goals in the Republic of Serbia from the
perspective of life and development
of children

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PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

Publisher:



Република Србија – Републички завод за статистику
Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

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When using data from this publication, be sure to cite the source.

The production of this publication was supported by the Governments of Switzerland and Germany.
The publication does not necessarily represent the official standpoints of the Swiss and German Governments.



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PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

Leave No One Behind is the basic principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This principle represents the unequivocal commitment of all states to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end social exclusion and discrimination in all their forms, and reduce the inequalities and various forms of vulnerabilities that leave individuals and social groups behind and undermine their development potential and welfare, but also the development potential of humanity as a whole¹.

This principle is grounded in a finding that due to intertwining of various exclusion factors, some groups experience multiple and mutually strengthening forms of deprivation and inequalities, which result in their exclusion from development processes. Five key exclusion factors are the following: discrimination (on the basis of inherited or acquired traits); geographic remoteness or staying in an unfavourable geographic area (environmental degradation, lack of transport and communication, under-developed economy, technology, services); governance (inadequate laws, policies, non-transparent and unaccountable institutions, lack of democratic participation); socio-economic status (inequalities in access to resources and in employment possibilities, poverty and deprivation), as well as vulnerability to shocks (conflicts, crises, climate change and natural disasters)².

This short informative publication from the “Leave No One Behind!” series shows the situation with regard to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Republic of Serbia from the perspective of children, i.e. population of 0–17 years of age.

For the purpose of presenting the situation, the publication uses official SDG indicators followed on the web portal of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia³, and certain additional indicators that provide better insight into various life segments and position of children that indicate their social exclusion. Each time official indicator has been used, it has been noted in the brackets, and all other indicators are additional indicators. When possible, the focus was also on intersectional inequalities or differences among children defined by sex, type of settlement, material status or other characteristics.

Children population in the Republic of Serbia

According to the estimates of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, at the end of 2020, the total population of the Republic of Serbia amounted to 6,871,547 persons, whereby there were 1,193,612 or 17.4% of children (aged 0–17 years). The share of children population aged 0–4 years in the total population amounted to 4.6%, children aged 5–11 years amounted to 6.7%, younger adolescents (12–14) amounted to 2.9%, and older adolescents (15–17) amounted to 3.1%.⁴

¹ <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>

² UNSDG (2019) *Leaving No One Behind. A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams*, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Draft-Operational-Guide-on-LNOB-for-UNCTs.pdf>

³ <https://sdg.indikatori.rs/en-US/>

⁴ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, data base on population, <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/18010403?languageCode=en-US>



EVERY FOURTH CHILD IS AT RISK OF POVERTY, 2020 (SDG 1.2.1)



EVERY NINETEENTH CHILD UNDER 5 YEARS OF AGE IS STUNTED, 2019 (SDG 2.2.1)



EVERY TENTH CHILD UNDER THE AGE OF 5 IS OBESE, 2019 (SDG 2.2.2)



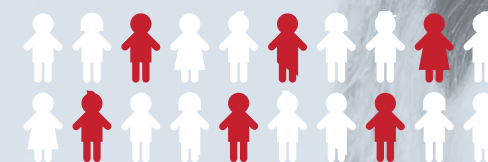
EVERY THIRTEENTH CHILD HAS NOT BEEN VACCINATED AGAINST DIPHTHERIA, TETANUS AND PERTUSSIS, 2019 (SDG 3.B.1)



EVERY EIGHTH CHILD HAS NOT BEEN VACCINATED AGAINST MEASLES, 2019 (SDG 3.B.1)



EVERY THIRD CHILD DOESN'T ATTEND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, 2019 (SDG 4)



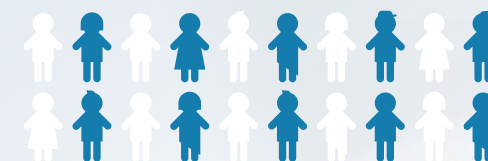
EVERY THIRD CHILD AT THE AGE OF 15 HAS NOT REACHED THE MINIMUM LITERACY LEVEL, 2018 (SDG 4.6.1)



EVERY ELEVENTH CHILD AGE 5–17 HAS BEEN EXPOSED TO CHILD LABOR, 2019 (SDG 8.7.1)



ALMOST EVERY SECOND CHILD AGE 1–14 HAS BEEN EXPOSED TO VIOLENT DISCIPLINE, 2019 (SDG 16.2.1)



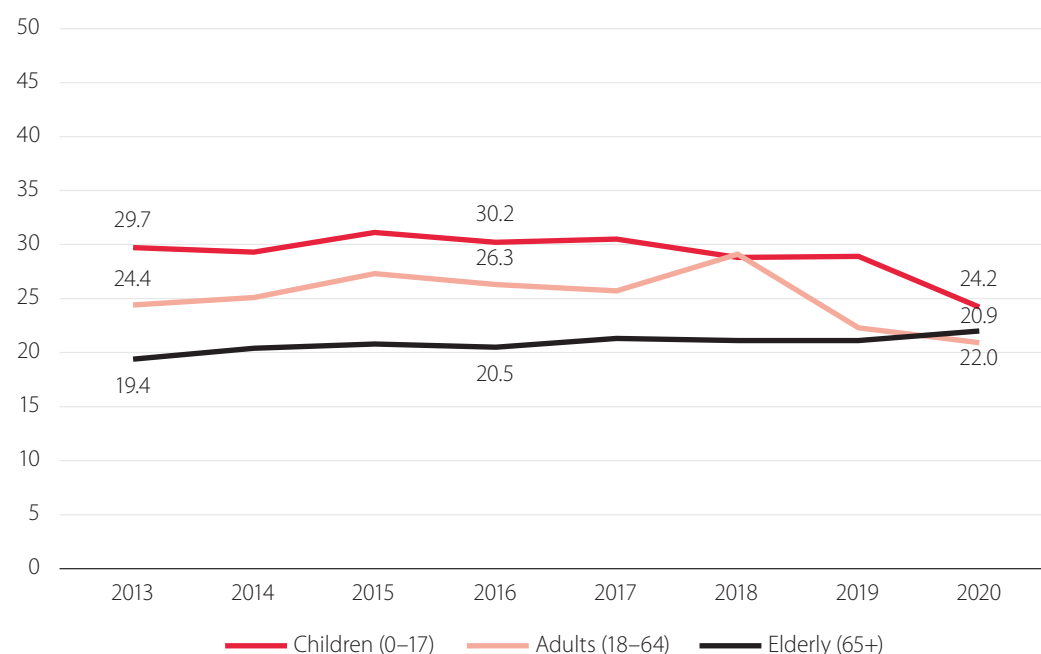
Sustainable development, among other things, implies creating conditions in which children can grow up developing their full potential and thus provide good chances to achieve a high-quality life in later stages of their life. SDG indicators enable the development processes to be viewed also from the perspective of children, in a way that indicates their chances for development and welfare through different stages of growing up.



CHILDREN ARE MORE EXPOSED TO RISKS OF POVERTY IN COMPARISON TO ADULTS AND OLDER POPULATION, WHICH MAKES FOR EVERY FOURTH CHILD MORE UNFAVOURABLE CHANCES FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT...

At-risk-of-poverty rate among the population of children (aged 0–17 years) has been higher compared to at-risk-of-poverty rate of adults (18–64) and older population (65+) almost throughout the whole observed period (2013–2020) (Graph 1). The positive trend has been perceived since 2018, when there was a drop of at-risk-of-poverty rate both for adults and children, wherefore the gap between these two age categories of population has been reduced. There has been a significant reduction of the gap between children and older population, but this time there has been a slight increase in at-risk-of-poverty rate of older population, aged 65 and more.

Graph 1 At-risk-of-poverty rate for the total population and children, % (SDG indicator 1.2.1)



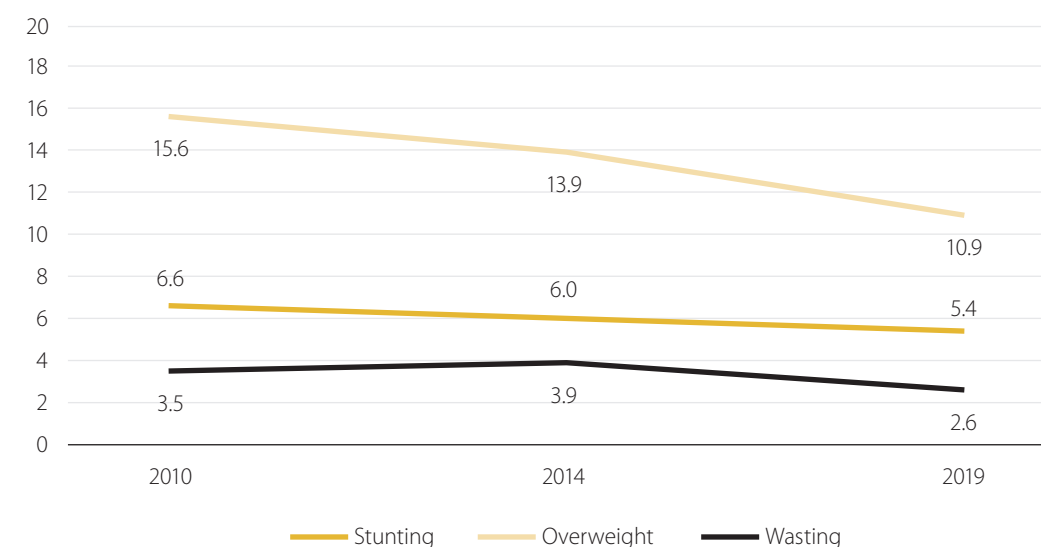
Source: SORS, SILC



STUNTING AND MALNUTRITION IN CHILDREN ARE DECREASING, HOWEVER IN THIS RESPECT THERE ARE ALSO DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN POORER AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN WEALTHIER HOUSEHOLDS, CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN CITIES AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN OTHER TYPE OF SETTLEMENTS...

The MICS results from 2010, 2014 and 2019 show that stunting was more prevalent among boys than among girls (7.4% to 3.1%), and it was three times more prevalent among the children from the poorest households, as compared to the children from the richest households (9.6% to 3.0%). On the other hand, obesity affects children from more affluent households to a greater extent; the share of obese children from the richest households amounts to 13.8%, while the share of those from the poorest households amounts to 8.9%. Overweight affects children from urban areas more than the children from other types of settlements (12.6% to 9.1%). Wasting is also more prevalent among children in urban settlements than in other types of settlements (4.3% to 0.8%).

Graph 2 Prevalence of stunting (height at certain age) and malnutrition (wasting and overweight) among children up to 5 years old, % (SDG indicators 2.2.1 and 2.2.2)



Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



CHANCES FOR SURVIVAL OF CHILDREN HAVE INCREASED – MORTALITY RATES OF INFANTS AND CHILDREN UP TO 5 YEARS OLD HAVE BEEN REDUCED IN THE LONG TERM, HOWEVER NOT ALL CHILDREN HAVE BEEN COVERED BY THE RECOMMENDED IMMUNIZATION...

The Republic of Serbia has reached the globally set goal for 2010–2020 to reduce neonatal mortality rate to no more than 12 per 1000 live births. Moreover, the infant mortality rate (children 0–27 days old) is declining in the long term — until 2015 it was kept at the level below 5, and in the following period Serbia managed to reduce it and keep it at the level below 4, and in 2020 it was 3.78 (Graph 3). However, when observed by gender, it is noticed that the mortality rate is somewhat higher for male as compared to female infants throughout the whole period, while in 2020 the ratio was 4.31 to 3.21.

Graph 3 Neonatal mortality rates⁵ (per 1000 live births) (SDG indicator 3.2.2)

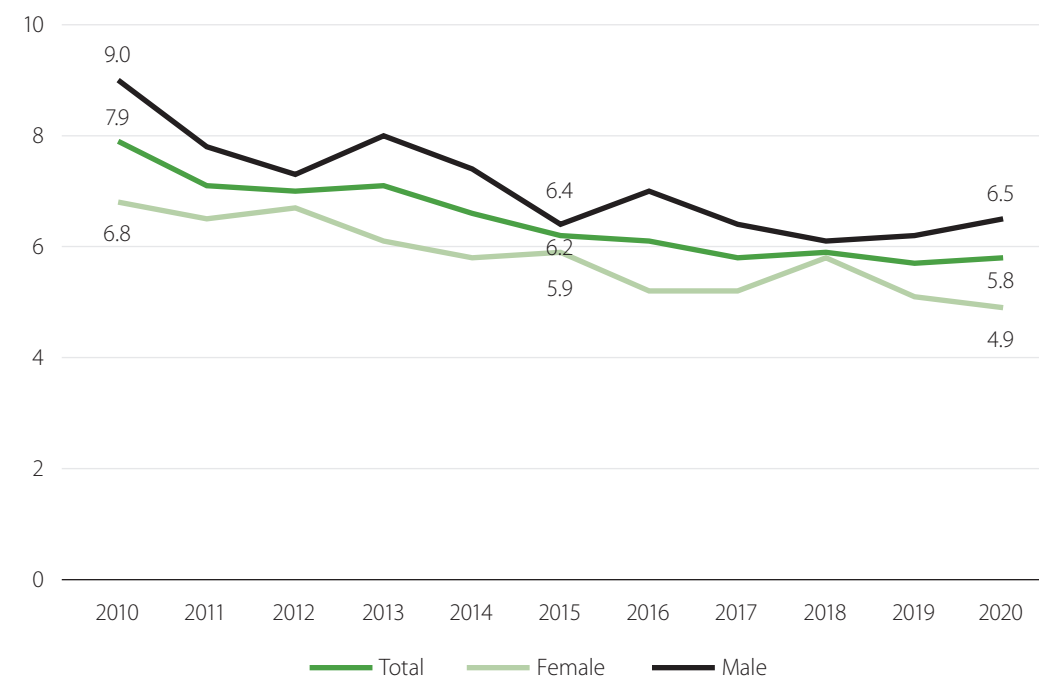


Source: SORS, Vital statistics

⁵ Infants 0–27 days old

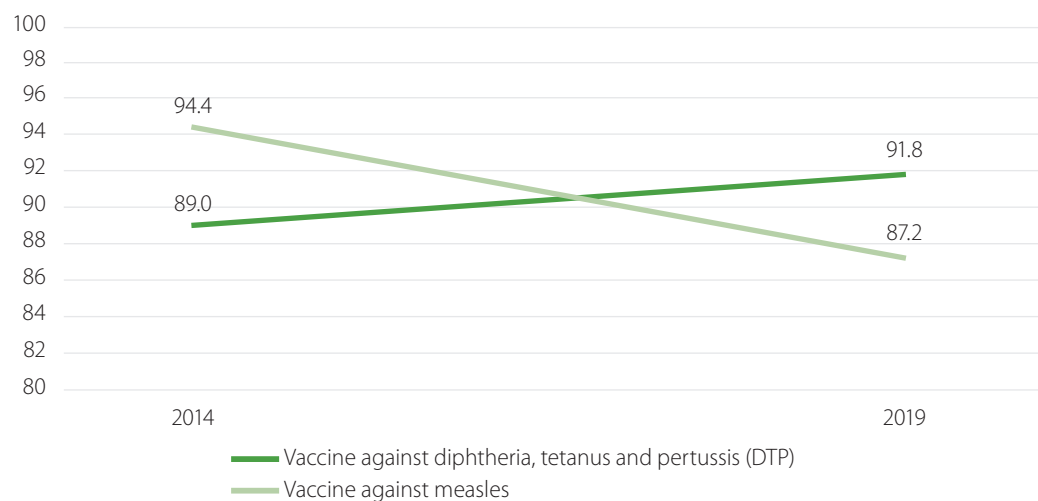
The chances for children under the age of five to survive increase over time, as in the previous case. Namely, the Republic of Serbia managed to achieve and adhere in this field to the globally set goal (the mortality rate of children under 5 must not exceed 25 per 1000 live births) in the entire observed period, 2010–2020. In addition, the mentioned rate was in constant decline — from 7.9 in 2010, 6.4 in 2015, to 5.8 in 2020. As in the previous case, this rate is slightly higher when it comes to boys, as compared to girls (Graph 4).

Graph 4 Under-5 mortality rate (per 1000 live births) (SDG indicator 3.2.1)



Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF

Immunization of children against infectious diseases is one of the reasons for the reduction of child mortality. According to the recommendations of the World Health Organization, all children should be vaccinated against tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, hepatitis b, haemophilus influenzae type b, pneumococcus, rotavirus and rubella. Data on immunization from MICS for 2014 and 2019 indicate that immunization coverage of children is not complete, and that it is uneven among different vaccines and different groups of children. The data in the Graph 5 indicate an increase in vaccination coverage of children against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis with simultaneous decrease in immunization against measles.

Graph 5 Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTP) and measles immunization coverage, % (SDG indicator 3.b.1)

Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF

According to data from 2019, immunization against pneumococcus covers significantly fewer children as compared to immunization against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, as well as measles. However, when it comes to the DTP vaccine, which covers the largest share of children population, it is noticed that the coverage is lower in certain groups of children, among children living in other types of settlements compared to children living in urban settlements, among children living in the poorest households and especially among children living in Roma settlements (Table 1).

Table 1 Immunization coverage, 2019, %

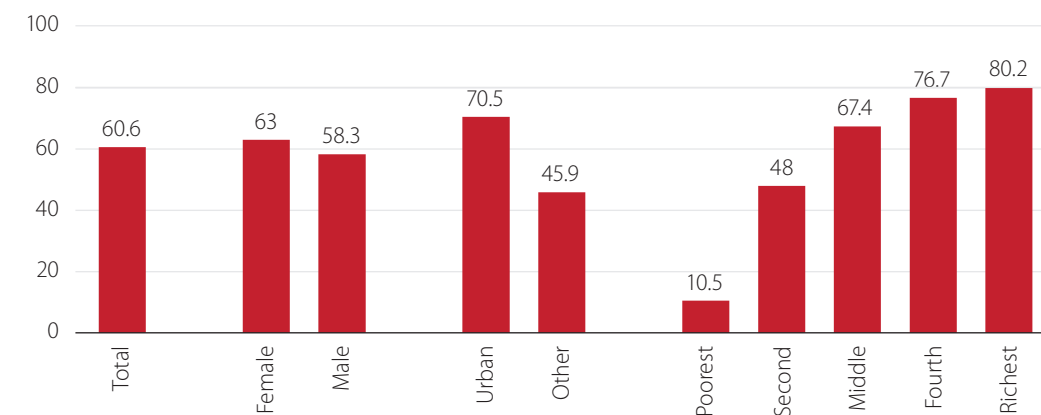
		Vaccine against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP) (indicator 3.b.1a)	Vaccine against pneumococcus (conjugated vaccine) (indicator 3.b.1b)	Vaccine against measles (indicator 3.b.1c)
Total		91.8	65.4	87.2
Sex	Female	91.5	65.3	87.9
	Male	92.2	65.5	86.6
Type of settlement	Urban	93.9	67.3	84.1
	Other	89.0	62.9	91.4
Roma settlements		73.3	47.0	76.5
Wealth index quintile	Poorest	81.5	61.4	87.7
	Second	84.6	58.7	93.0
	Middle	94.1	53.7	88.8
	Fourth	91.9	71.4	83.4
	Richest	99.1	73.0	86.6

Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF



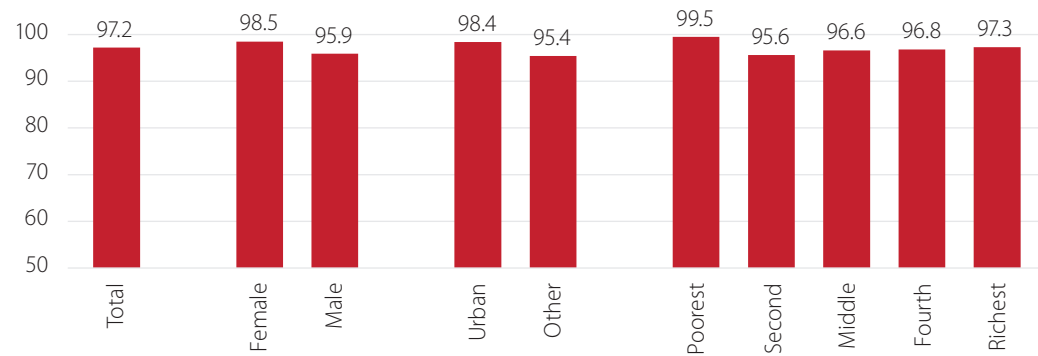
THE MOST PROMINENT INEQUALITIES IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION ARE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD, THEY DISAPPEAR AT THE LEVELS OF COMPULSORY PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY EDUCATION AND INCREASE AFTERWARDS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION. THE ACCESS TO EDUCATION IS THE MOST UNFAVOURABLE AMONG THE CHILDREN FROM THE POOREST HOUSEHOLDS AND AMONG THE CHILDREN LIVING IN ROMA SETTLEMENTS.

Early education, which lays an important foundation for children's developmental potential and further schooling, is not equally accessible to children from different social groups. A significantly lower percentage of children from other settlements attend early education as compared to children from urban settlements, and a small number of children from the poorest households are included in early education (Graph 6). Gender differences are noticed through lower involvement of boys in early education as compared to girls.

Graph 6 Percentage of children aged 36–59 months that undergo education in early childhood, 2019

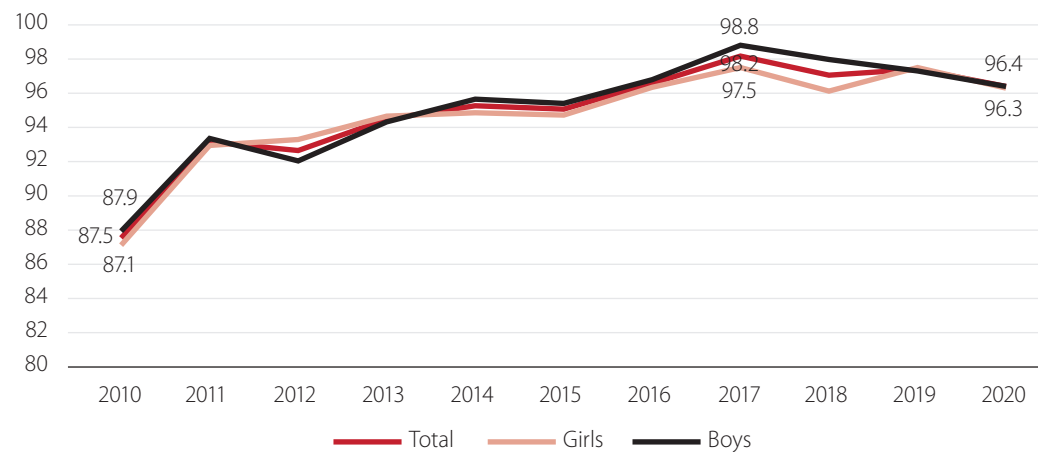
Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF

Early Childhood Development Index measures whether children are developing properly in the domains of letters and numbers recognition, physical development, socio-emotional development and learning. Values for 2019 indicate that 97.2% of children in the general population are developing properly, and girls show slightly better results as compared to boys, as well as children from urban areas compared to children from other settlements (Graph 7).

Graph 7 Early Childhood Development index (36–59 months), 2019, % (SDG indicator 4.2.1)

Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF

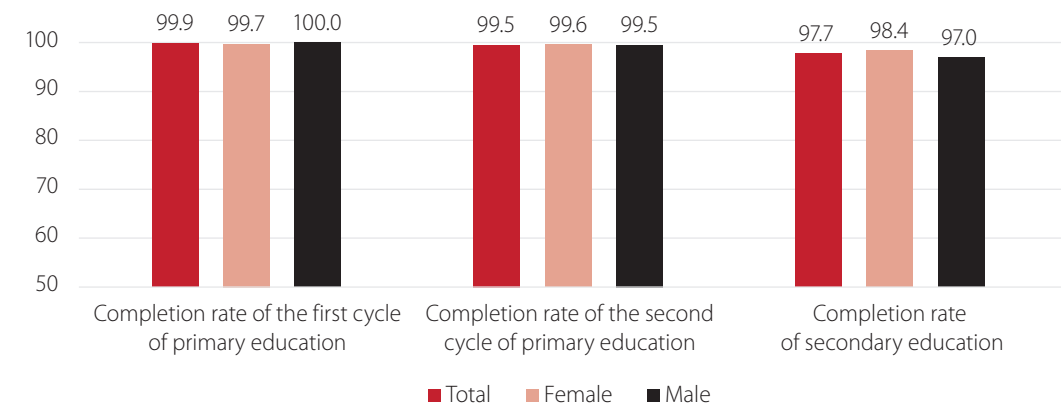
Participation in education one year before the official age for enrollment in primary school is at a high level, and one of the most important reasons for that is the obligatory attendance in the preschool preparatory program. Although there has been a long-term progress in this respect, during the period 2018–2020 there has been a slight decline in the rate of children's involvement in organized learning in the year before enrollment in primary school (Graph 8).

Graph 8 Participation rate in organized learning⁶ (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex, 2010–2020, % (SDG indicator 4.2.2)

Source: Statistics of education, SORS

⁶ Coverage of children by the preparatory preschool programme represents the number of children who attend preschool program and age groups of children who are obliged to attend PPP.

All children in the Republic of Serbia finish primary school, and the rate of children who finish secondary school are also rather high, there is no evident gender gap (Graph 9).

Graph 9 Completion rate (primary and secondary education), 2019, % (indicator 4.1.2)

Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF

However, chances to complete primary and secondary school are considerably lower among children who live in Roma settlements, as well as among the children from the poorest households (Table 2).

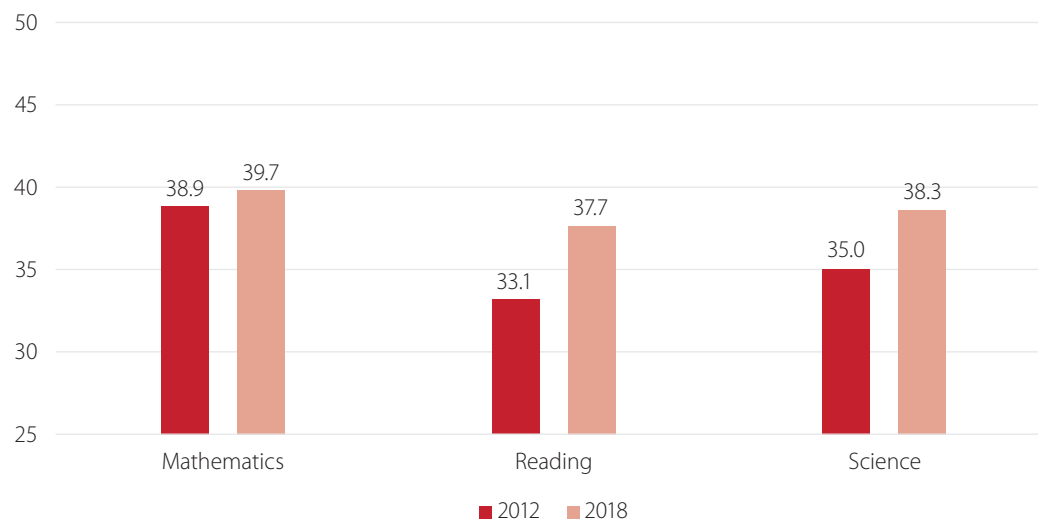
Table 2 Primary and secondary school completion rate, 2019, % (SDG indicator 4.1.2)

		Primary school completion rate	Secondary school completion rate
Total		99.5	97.7
Sex	Female	99.5	97.0
	Male	99.6	98.4
Type of settlement	Urban	99.9	98.7
	Other	98.9	96.0
Roma settlements		63.7	61.0
Wealth index quintile	Poorest	97.1	93.0
	Second	100	98.7
	Middle	100	97.1
	Fourth	100	98.9
	Richest	100	99.5

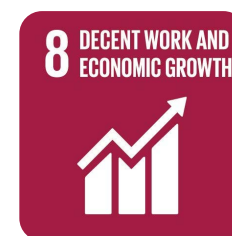
Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF, SORS

Trends regarding education achievements in basic areas of education such as Mathematics, Reading and Science are not favourable. The results of PISA tests indicate an increase in the share of children who have not reached the lowest level of achievement in these areas between the two tests in 2012 and 2018 (Graph 10).

Graph 10 Proportion of students aged 15 years not achieving the minimum fixed level on the PISA scale for three elementary school subjects, % (SDG indicator 4.6.1)



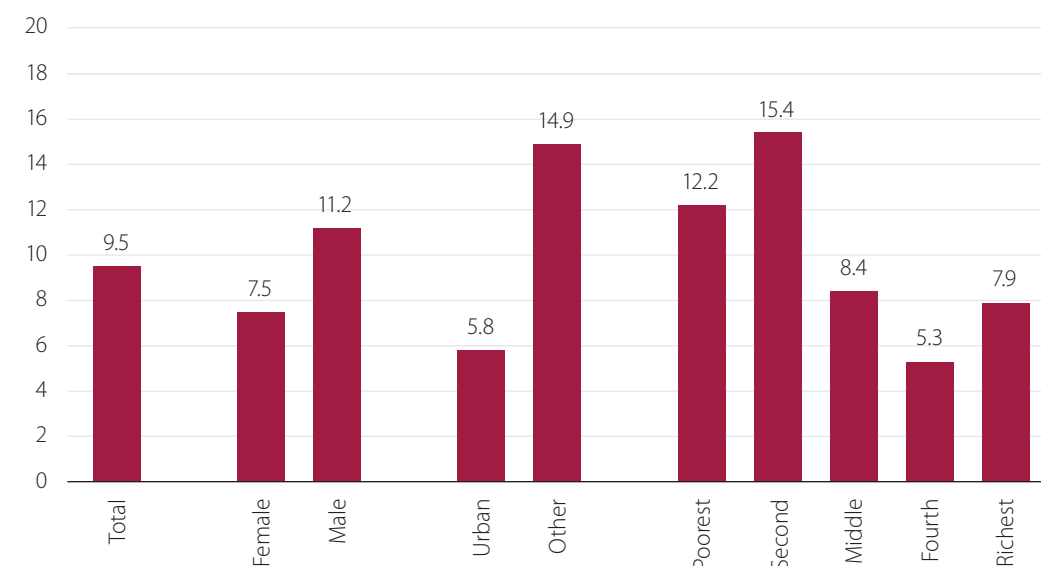
Source: OECD



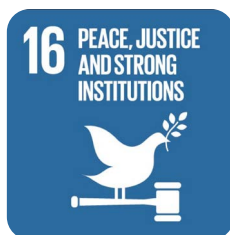
RISK FACTOR FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT IS CHILD LABOUR WHICH PARTICULARLY AFFECTS BOYS FROM RURAL (OTHER) SETTLEMENTS AND FROM HOUSEHOLDS OF LOWER MATERIAL STATUS...

Every tenth child aged 5–17 years is exposed to child labour abuse. Child labour is more prevalent among male than among female children (11.2% to 7.5%), and among children from “other” settlements, as compared to children from urban settlements (14.9% to 5.8%). Observed by age, child labour abuse is more prevalent among children aged 5–11 years (15.9%) than among children of early adolescence (12–14 years) where it exists in 4.3% of cases, or among older adolescents (15–17 years), where it occurs in 0.6% of cases. In addition, child labour abuse is more prevalent among children from the poorest and second quintile households (12.2% and 15.4%, respectively) than among children in the middle, fourth and richest quintiles (8.4%, 5.3% and 7.9% respectively) (Graph 11).

Graph 11 Percentage of children aged 5–17 years who are involved in child labour, 2019 (SDG indicator 8.7.1)



Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF

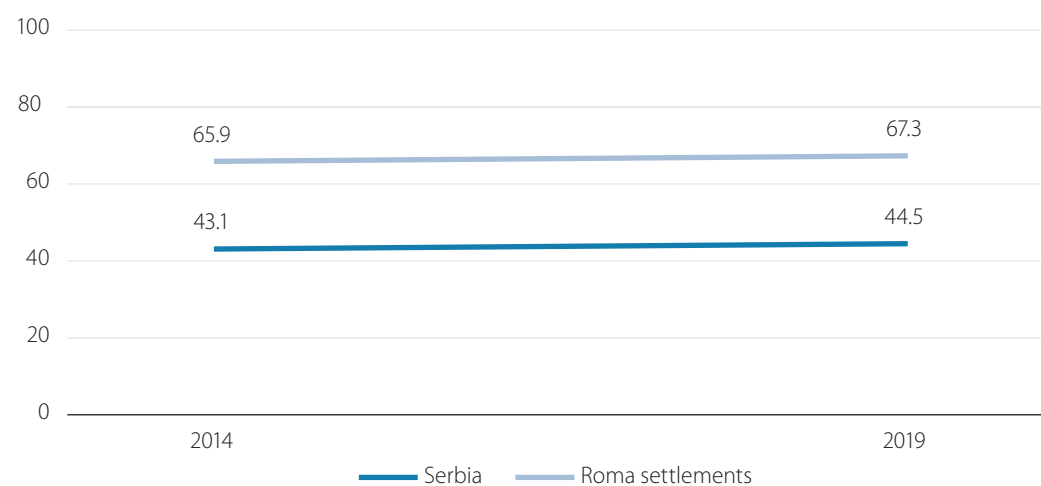


ALMOST ALL CHILDREN ARE PROVIDED WITH IDENTITY BY REGISTRATION IN THE REGISTRY OF BIRTHS. THERE ARE STILL METHODS OF VIOLENT DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN THROUGH PUNISHMENTS. CHILDREN ARE ALSO AMONG VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING; AMONG MINORS WHO ARE IN PRISONS, THE SHARE OF THOSE UNSENTENCED IS CONSIDERABLY HIGHER AS COMPARED TO ADULT CONVICTS.

The right of children to personal identity, which is attained by registration in the registry of births, is legally guaranteed, and it is almost completely realized. In 2019, 99.9% of children under the age of five in the general population and 98.5% of children in Roma settlements were registered in the registry books. At the age of 48 to 59 months, all children from the general population were registered in the registry of births. However, progress in achieving SDG 16 for children remains a challenge.

A large share of children are still brought up by violent methods such as physical punishment or psychological aggression. Almost half of the children in general population and more than two thirds of the children in Roma settlements were exposed to violent methods of discipline at least once during the month preceding the Multiple Indicators Survey (Graph 12). Comparative data for 2014 and 2019 also indicate a slight increase in the share of children who were exposed to violent discipline.

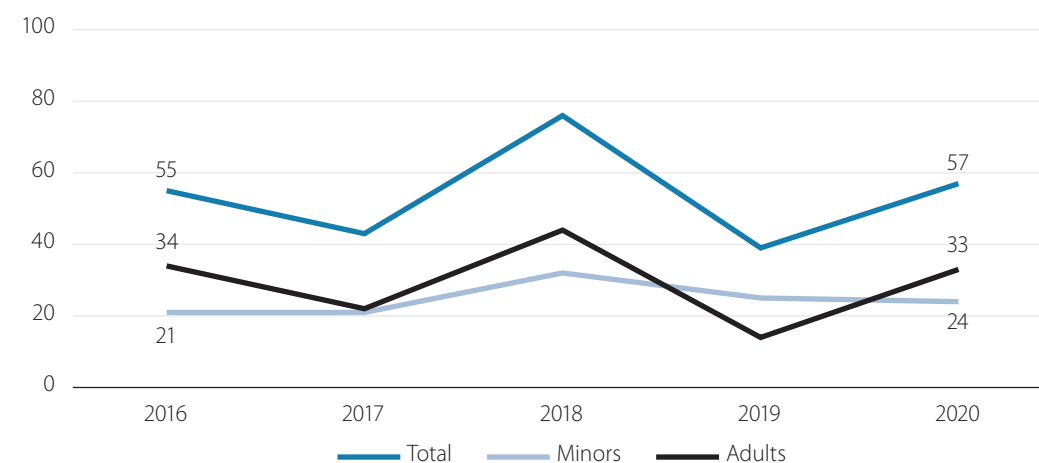
Graph 12 Proportion of children aged 1–14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month, 2014–2019, % (SDG indicator 16.2.1)



Source: MICS — SORS and UNICEF

Children are also among the victims of human trafficking. According to the data of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking in the period between 2016 and 2020, the number of identified minor victims of human trafficking was more than 20 (Graph 13).

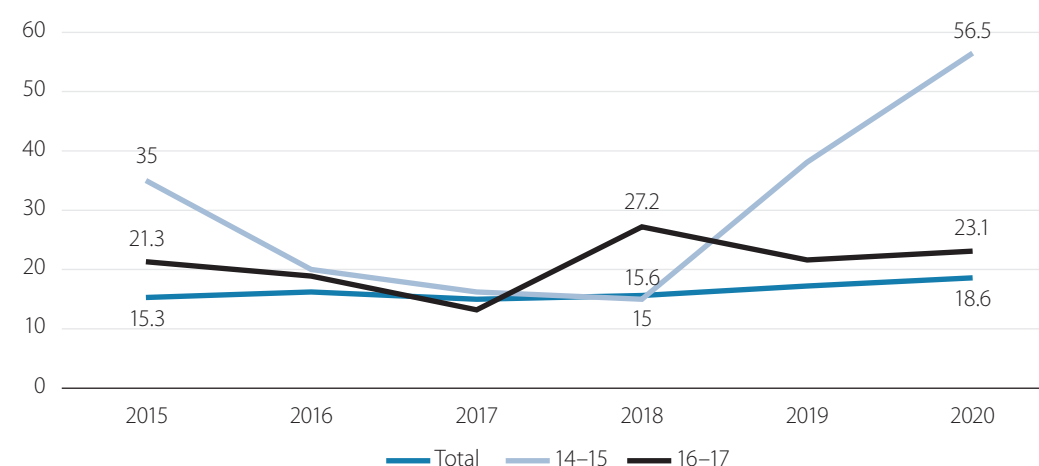
Graph 13 Number of victims of human trafficking by age, 2016–2020 (SDG indicator 16.2.2)



Source: Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking

When it comes to children in conflict with the law, the share of unsentenced detainees in the prison population is higher among children aged 14–15 years as compared to children aged 16–17 years. This indicator aims to measure the situation regarding the principle that no one should be in prison until they receive a final verdict, in accordance with the principle that everyone is innocent until proven guilty.

Graph 14 Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of prison population, total and for minors, % (SDG indicator 16.3.2)



Source: Ministry of Justice



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