

A DECADE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

in the Republic of Serbia
2015-2025



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Preface

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia is publishing this special edition dedicated to the first decade since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015–2025.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015 and represents a strategic framework that all countries in the world should strive to follow. The Agenda includes short-term and long-term goals and sub-goals in the economic, social, and environmental spheres.

For the Republic of Serbia and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, due to its importance, the collection and publication of data for the SDG indicators represent a particular challenge.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia remains committed to collecting and providing reliable data necessary for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs in the Republic of Serbia.

Belgrade, 2025

Branko Josipovic

Acting Director, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

As we enter the final stretch toward 2030, this publication offers a timely opportunity to reflect on Serbia's progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the past decade, the country has made meaningful strides—in health, gender equality, digital transformation and economic growth, amongst other. These achievements reflect Serbia's growing commitment to building a more just, inclusive, and sustainable society.

At the same time, the report highlights that progress has been uneven in several areas and that greater effort is needed. Persistent challenges remain for vulnerable groups—including rural populations, the elderly, and children—as well as in education, healthcare access, and environmental sustainability. Yet these are not insurmountable. With strong leadership, coordinated action across sectors, and a shared sense of purpose, Serbia can continue to advance—faster and more inclusively.

The United Nations commends the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) for its indispensable role in monitoring progress toward the SDGs. Reliable, disaggregated data is the foundation for evidence-based policy that enables identifying where to focus efforts and how to allocate resources most effectively. Over the past decade, close cooperation between the UN and SORS has significantly expanded Serbia's SDG indicator framework—from 43 indicators in 2017 to over 160 in 2025—strengthening the country's capacity to track progress and align its data systems with EU standards and Agenda 2030.

The United Nations in Serbia remains a committed partner on this path. With just five years remaining, there is still time—and genuine opportunity—to accelerate progress and ensure that no one is left behind. By turning ambition into action, together we can realize the full promise of the 2030 Agenda and shape a future that benefits people and planet.

Belgrade, 2025

Matilde Mordt

UN Resident Coordinator in Serbia

Over the past ten years, Serbia has taken significant steps to align its development priorities with the global 2030 Agenda. This journey would not have been possible without reliable, timely, and accessible data. Evidence-based policymaking is no longer a choice – it is a necessity. In a world facing growing complexity, from climate change to demographic shifts, quality data serves as a compass for governments, institutions, and citizens alike. It enables informed decisions, more effective governance, and inclusive development that leaves no one behind.

This publication by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) is a valuable contribution to transparency and accountability. It also underscores the importance of national statistical systems in tracking progress, identifying gaps, and designing impactful policies.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, on behalf of the German and Swiss governments, has had the privilege to support this important work. Our joint efforts with SORS reflect our shared commitment to sustainable development and to strengthening Serbia's institutional capacities for SDG monitoring and reporting.

We commend the professionalism and dedication of SORS, whose work continues to be a cornerstone for data-driven development in Serbia. We also recognize the broader ecosystem of stakeholders – from ministries and local governments to academia and civil society – whose cooperation is essential for achieving the SDGs.

Belgrade, 2025

Daniela Funke

Country Director GIZ Serbia

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereinafter referred to as the 2030 Agenda) and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all United Nations Member States in September 2015, represent a global strategic framework for sustainable development to which all member states and relevant international actors should aspire. The 2030 Agenda provides the foundation for a vision of development as sustainable prosperity based on social inclusion and equality, while simultaneously preserving our planet. One of the fundamental principles underlying this strategic framework is that no one should be left behind in development processes and outcomes.

Monitoring progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an important aspect of implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has so far published five annual reports based on monitoring the achievement of the SDGs (for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024). This report has been prepared in the spirit of the anniversary, with the aim of assessing the areas of progress, stagnation, and possible movement away from the SDGs a decade after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

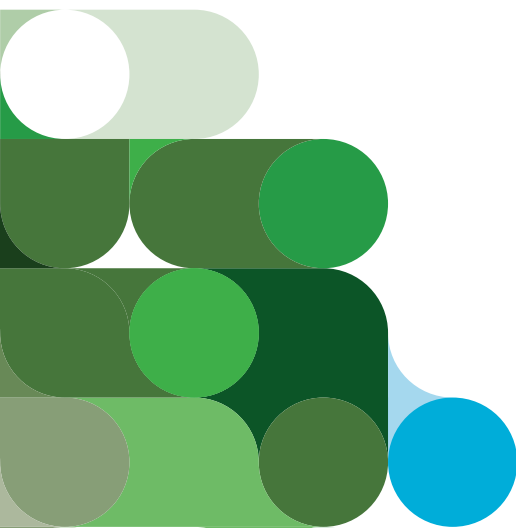
Such an undertaking has been made possible thanks to the strong commitment of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and partner institutions, which over the past decade have ensured the monitoring of SDG implementation based on a large number of indicators (159 out of a total of 248, of which 231 are unique indicators¹), which are publicly available on the SDG platform². Thanks to the continuity in monitoring progress, systematic insights have been enabled into the areas where the Republic of Serbia (RS) is advancing toward the achievement of the goals defined by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as into the areas where additional efforts are needed to accelerate development processes.

In addition to the annual reports on monitoring progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals³, which were prepared by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) in cooperation with GIZ and the United Nations in Serbia, several informative publications have also been released that examine the achievement of the goals from the perspective of different groups that may be excluded from development processes or are insufficiently involved in them. Seven publications from the series “Leave No One Behind” have been published,

1 Some indicators are used to monitor multiple goals, so the total number of indicators is 248.

2 <https://sdg.indikatori.rs/en-us/>

3 Progress Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the Republic of Serbia (English language version) 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024.



presenting the results of monitoring progress toward achieving the goals in relation to the population of Roma settlements, children, youth, and the elderly, as well as from the perspective of gender and spatial inequalities (between urban and rural areas, as well as between regions)⁴.

In addition to its mandate for the overall monitoring of sustainable development indicators, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has also closely collaborated with the United Nations team in Serbia on a range of specific issues. This cooperation includes:

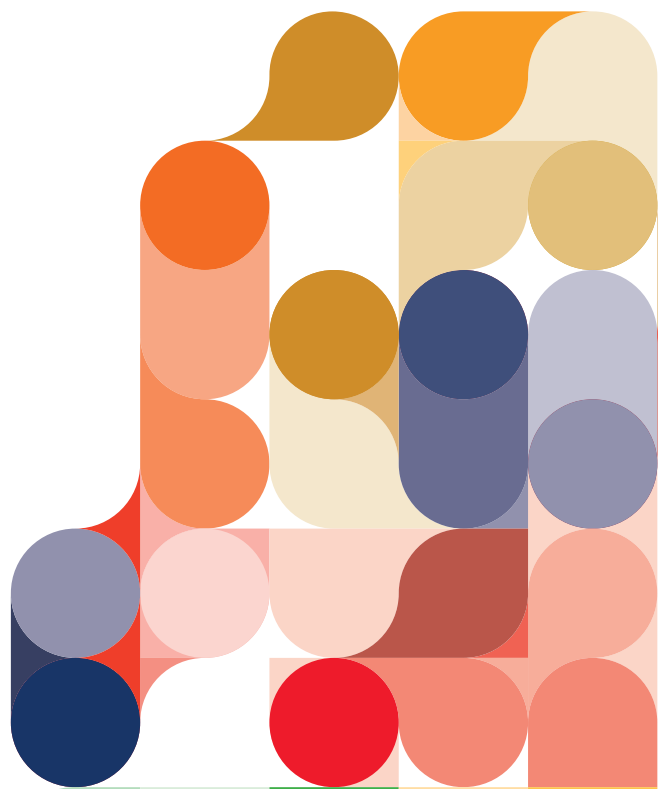
- a) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), conducted in 2019 with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)⁵;
- b) Filling data gaps in the areas of disaster risk reduction, resilience, climate change, and digital transformation (e.g., through mappings and other analytical publications supported by the United Nations Development Programme – UNDP, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction – UNDRR);
- c) Monitoring progress on indicators related to environmental protection (in cooperation with UNEP and the Resident Coordinator's Office – RCO)⁶;

- d) Monitoring progress within sustainable urban development indicators (in cooperation with UN-Habitat and the RCO);
- e) Providing data collection and analysis related to gender equality and sex-disaggregated statistics (e.g., the Gender Equality Index, "Women and Men in Serbia," gender-responsive budgeting, time use data – with support from UN Women, as well as related work by UNFPA).

4 The publications are available at: <https://sdg.indikatori.rs/en-us/documents/>.

5 The 2019 MICS survey was the sole source for 22 out of a total of 148 indicators (or 15%) that were being monitored at that time from the database of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. These indicators are of essential importance as they relate to the well-being of vulnerable population groups, including children, women, and the population of Roma settlements.

6 The publications are available at: <https://sdg.indikatori.rs/en-us/documents/>.



Serbia's Commitment to Agenda 2030: mechanisms, policies, processes

During the definition of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Republic of Serbia played an active role at the global level as a member of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing. During the national consultation process on the Sustainable Development Goals, citizens of Serbia had the opportunity to express their opinions on development priorities between 2012 and 2014, thereby influencing the global goal-setting process. In the first consultation cycle, "The Serbia I Want" (2012–2013), alongside goals emphasized in most other participating countries, such as poverty reduction, increasing decent employment, environmental protection, and the promotion of gender equality, nationally specific goals also emerged. These belonged to the realm of cultural aspects of development, including fostering tolerance and solidarity, and establishing conflict-free societies with the rule of law. Precisely because the results of consultations in Serbia highlighted these important aspects of development, the second cycle of consultations focused on the relationship between culture and development, and the results significantly contributed to the definition of SDG 16, which foresees the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

Immediately after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, the Republic of Serbia began establishing national mechanisms for implementing the Agenda. By the end of 2015, the Government of the Republic of Serbia had established an Intersectoral Working Group for the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This group was chaired by the minister responsible for demography and population policy, and its members included senior representatives from 27 relevant ministries and other institutions. The purpose of the Intersectoral Working Group was to coordinate the activities of all relevant ministries related to the 2030 Agenda, monitor its implementation, propose the adoption of a national sustainable development strategy with a financial plan that would integrate individual strategies and harmonize efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, propose statistical

monitoring of the goals, prepare periodic implementation reports, and continuously inform the UN representatives in Serbia and the UN system.

With the aim of integrating all 17 SDGs into national policies, which was a commitment of the Government of the Republic of Serbia⁷, a series of steps were undertaken. The Republic Secretariat for Public Policies conducted an analysis of the alignment of overarching and sectoral policies with the 2030 Agenda, as well as with reforms within the process of accession to the European Union. Based on this analysis, an additional assessment of the alignment of national policies with the SDGs was carried out with the support of the UN team in Serbia during the preparation of the MAPS (Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support) mission⁸. In July 2019, the Government of the Republic of Serbia submitted its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-Level Political Forum meeting, in which achievements in the implementation of the SDGs were described, with a particular focus on local communities and youth.

These analyses have shown that there is a high level of alignment between national policies and the 2030 Agenda, and that key strategic documents defining Serbia's development path toward EU accession largely correspond with the SDGs. These include the National Programme for Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) and the National Priorities for Development Assistance (NAD). In addition to these overarching policies, the analyses have also shown significant correspondence between sectoral policies and the SDGs. In accordance with the Law on the Planning System, Serbia is required to adopt an integrated development strategy, which should enable better alignment of policies with the SDGs and stronger linkage of the SDG implementation process with reforms in the EU accession process.

7 At the national level, the Republic of Serbia has committed to giving equal importance to all the SDGs, while at the local level, each city and municipality has the opportunity to determine its own priorities.

8 In order to assess the factors enabling acceleration in achieving the SDGs and to identify areas where further implementation efforts are needed, the Government of the Republic of Serbia organized a visit by the MAPS mission in 2018, which conducted an analysis of the state of implementation.

In addition to this mechanism established within the executive branch at the national level, in 2017, the National Assembly of Serbia also formed a Focus Group to develop control mechanisms and oversee the implementation of the SDGs. This mechanism was intended to monitor and support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

At the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit held in New York in September 2023, Serbia once again reaffirmed its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The delegation was led by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Serbia highlighted efforts aimed at accelerating the implementation of the SDGs, particularly in the areas of energy, food systems, digitalization, education, gender equality, and social protection. The Summit also served as an opportunity to assess progress at the halfway point to 2030, and the adoption of the Political Declaration marked a renewed global commitment and agreement on accelerated steps toward achieving the goals. Serbia formally expressed its readiness to continue working on fulfilling the set goals and to adapt the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to its own development priorities.

Within the Government formed in May 2024, the responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was entrusted to the Intersectoral Working Group, established by the Government Decision on December 20, 2024. The chairperson appointed was the Minister of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation, while the deputy chairperson was appointed as the State Secretary from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Working Group consists of 24 sectoral ministries, as well as four government offices and secretariats. The Intersectoral Working Group has initiated the process of nationalizing the Sustainable Development Goals – aligning the implementation of the SDGs with the economic, social, and other development conditions of the Republic of Serbia, as well as with European Union standards, in close coordination with the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, and has taken the first steps in preparing the Second Voluntary National Review.

An important aspect of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is the “localization” of the Sustainable Development Goals, meaning the integration of the goals into local policies. In this process, the Standing

Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) plays an important role by coordinating the activities of local self-governments aimed in this direction. Alongside the SCTM, other civil society organizations have also been involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through various initiatives at both the national and local level.

Purpose and objective of the report

The purpose of this report is to provide systematic insights into the trends in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), clearly identifying areas of progress, areas of stagnation, areas with inconsistent trends, and areas where there is a movement away from the goals. The monitoring of progress in SDG implementation is aligned with the guidelines of the 2030 Agenda, in which Member States are encouraged to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven” (paragraph 79).

This review aims to provide findings relevant to policymakers, helping them to identify areas where positive trends should be maintained and strengthened, as well as development areas facing challenges that require additional attention in terms of higher prioritization, more effective policies, or increased investment in development processes. The review also offers important insights for other actors, such as civil society, the academic community, and other interested parties, who need this type of data to improve their activities and contribute to the synergy of various initiatives promoting sustainable development in Serbia.

Structure of the report


The report consists of two main parts: The first part presents the key achievements in the implementation of the SDGs during the period 2015–2025 (with most data referring to the period 2015–2023), while the second part focuses on the challenges of sustainable development. The final chapter presents the most important conclusions.

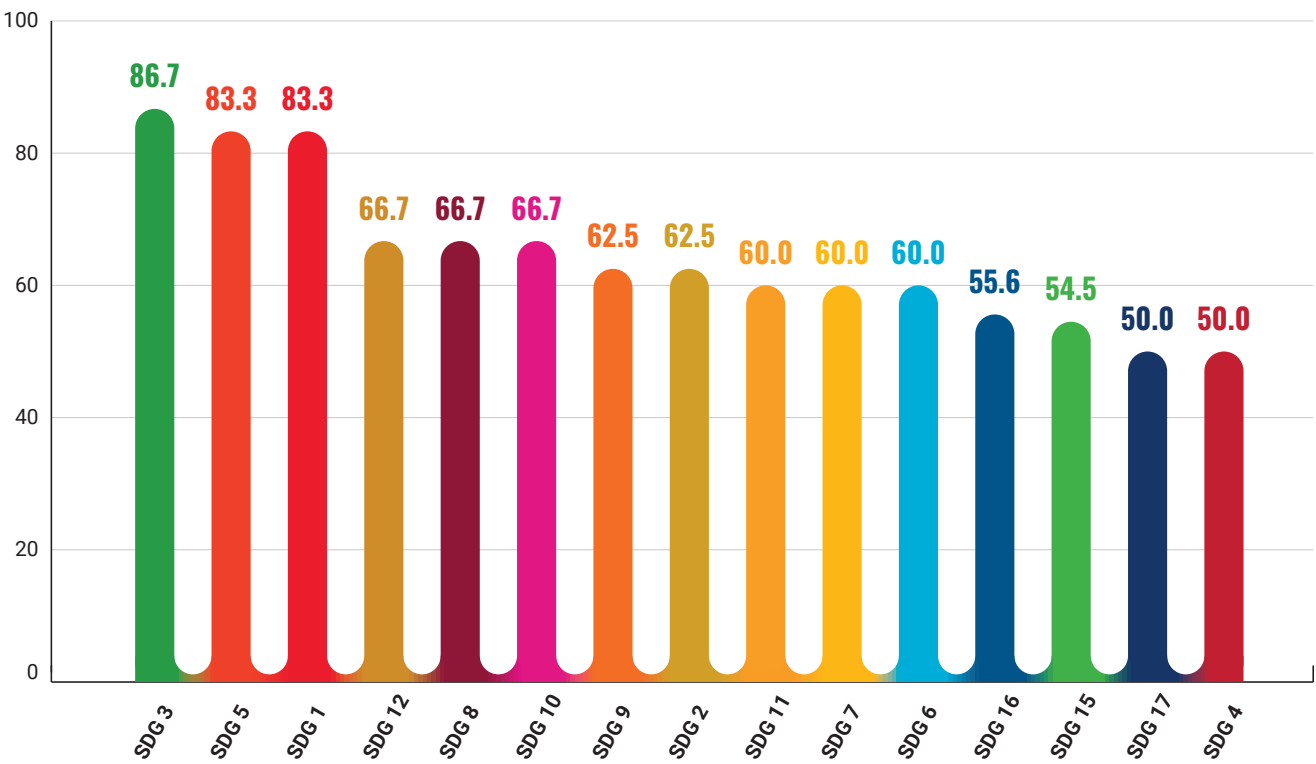
Overview of Trend Changes according to Goals

Progress was measured based on the share of indicators for each individual SDG that show either goal achievement or progress toward the goal, out of the total number of indicators for that SDG for which it is possible to track trends, according to the EU methodology:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/methodology>

Measurement of progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals shows that the greatest progress has been achieved in the areas of **health (SDG 3)**, **gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5)**, and **poverty reduction (SDG 1)**. The greatest challenges in development processes are observed in the areas of **partnerships for sustainable development (SDG 17)** and **education (SDG 4)**.

 Chart 1: Degree of goal achievement based on the share of indicators showing progress or goal achievement, 2015–2025 (%)



Progress achieved in the areas of social and economic development and environmental protection

Social progress

Serbia has recorded progress in numerous aspects of social development covered by the Sustainable Development Goals.

1
NO
POVERTY



Poverty and the risks of poverty or social exclusion have been reduced (SDG 1).

- The proportion of the population living in extreme poverty, according to the World Bank definition, has decreased.
- The share of the population at risk of poverty, as well as at risk of poverty or social exclusion, has decreased.
- The coverage of the population with access to safe drinking water has increased (now almost full).

2
ZERO
HUNGER



All forms of malnutrition among children under five years of age have been reduced (SDG 2).

- The prevalence of all forms of malnutrition among children under five years old has decreased, both in the general population and among children living in Roma settlements.
- Investment in agriculture has increased.

3
GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



Improvements have been made in various health aspects, including sexual and reproductive health of women, as well as maternal health care for pregnant women and new mothers (SDG 3).

- The maternal mortality ratio has decreased, achieving the target set at the global level.
- Almost all women in Serbia give birth under the supervision of trained healthcare professionals, and the proportion of women who have four or more prenatal visits during pregnancy has increased.
- Mortality rates for children under five years of age and neonatal mortality have decreased, with the target achieved relative to the value defined at the global level.
- The incidence of tuberculosis, premature mortality from non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as the mortality rate from unintentional poisoning, have all decreased.
- The suicide mortality rate has decreased.
- Mortality rates from road traffic injuries have decreased.
- The proportion of women using modern contraceptive methods has increased, and the birth rate among adolescent girls has decreased.
- The proportion of the population with high expenditures on health has decreased.

4 QUALITY
EDUCATION


Progress has been achieved in early childhood development, as well as in the participation of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education (SDG 4).

- The value of the early childhood development index has increased.
- The (already high) enrollment of children in preparatory preschool programs has increased.
- The participation of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training has increased.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES


Policies have been adopted to establish economic, social, and environmental linkages between urban and rural areas (SDG 11).

- The target has been achieved whereby countries should adopt urban policies or regional development plans.

5 GENDER
EQUALITY


Certain aspects of gender equality have been enhanced (SDG 5).

- The amount of time spent on unpaid household chores and caregiving has decreased.
- The participation of women in legislative bodies at the national and local level, as well as the share of women in managerial positions, has increased.
- Mobile phone usage among the female population has increased.
- The introduction of gender-responsive budgeting has achieved the global-level goal of establishing a system for monitoring and allocating public expenditures for gender equality and women's empowerment.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS


Progress has also been made regarding aspects of peace, security, and reduction of discrimination in society (SDG 16).

- The number of victims of intentional homicides has decreased.
- Total primary government expenditures as a share of the originally approved budget for all sectors except science, education, and energy have increased.
- Nearly complete registration in the birth registry has been achieved.
- The target ensuring legally guaranteed access to information of public importance has been met.
- The target mandating the establishment of independent national institutions for the protection of human rights in accordance with the Paris Principles has been achieved.

10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES


Income levels of economically vulnerable populations have been improved (SDG 10).

- Growth rates of disposable income for the bottom 40% of the population and the overall population have increased.
- The share of the population with disposable income below 50% of the median equivalent income has decreased.
- The labor share in GDP has increased.
- Total financial flows for development have significantly increased.

Economic development

In the areas of economic development, progress is recorded regarding:

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	Economic growth, the level and characteristics of employment, including the decline of informal employment, wage levels, as well as policies for improving employment (SDG 8).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → There is an increase in the growth rate of real GDP as a measure of economic growth. → The share of informal employment in total employment is decreasing. → The average wage is increasing. → Unemployment rates are declining. → The share of young people who are neither employed nor in education or training is decreasing. → An Employment Strategy has been adopted, which includes measures for youth employment.
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 	Certain aspects of industrial production and access to modern information and communication technologies (SDG 9).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The volume of passenger and freight transport has increased. → The share of small-scale industries in the total industry value added has increased. → Although CO2 emissions from fuel combustion processes have increased overall, the contribution of the processing industry to these emissions has decreased. → Access to information and communication technologies has improved, as the share of the population covered by 3G and 4G mobile networks has increased.
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 	Partnerships for sustainable development, including improving access to information and communication technologies for scientific cooperation and innovation, as well as enhancing the capacity of statistics and data quality.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The number of fixed broadband internet subscribers and the share of individuals using the internet have increased, which is essential for improving international cooperation in the fields of science, technology, and innovation. → The target related to building statistical capacity and the availability of quality data has been achieved, as well as the target related to measuring progress toward sustainable development.

Progress in the area of environmental protection

In the field of environmental protection, progress has been recorded in the following areas:

6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



Improvement of water quality and sanitation (SDG 6).

- Water quality has improved, and the share of water bodies with good water status has increased due to a higher proportion of household and industrial wastewater being safely treated.
- The amount of official development assistance directed towards water supply and sanitation has increased, as part of a government-coordinated spending plan.
- The target related to local water supply and sanitation management plans has been achieved.

7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



Increase in capacity for renewable energy production (SDG 7 and SDG 12).

- Although the progress appears stagnant in terms of the share of the population with access to electricity, this is due to the fact that almost the entire population already has access.
- The share of energy from renewable sources in gross final energy consumption has increased.
- Energy intensity has decreased.
- The capacity for renewable energy production has increased.

12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



Increase in the recycling rate of municipal waste (SDG 12).

- The recycling rate of municipal waste has increased.
- The capacity for renewable energy production has expanded.
- Policy instruments aimed at supporting the transition to sustainable consumption and production have been adopted.

15 LIFE
ON LAND



Expansion of protected mountain areas, along with the development of policy and legal frameworks aimed at enhancing environmental conservation (SDG 15).

- The share of key mountain biodiversity sites covered by protected areas has increased.
- The target related to establishing legislative, administrative, and policy frameworks for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources has been achieved, as well as the target on integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning.
- Financial resources from all sources aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems have increased.



Leave No One Behind

Leave No One Behind is the core principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This principle is based on the recognition that certain groups face multiple and mutually reinforcing forms of deprivation and inequality, due to the intersection of various exclusion factors. These dynamics result in individuals and communities being left out of development processes. All countries have embraced this principle, demonstrating a firm commitment to fully eradicate poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination in all their forms, as well as to reduce inequalities and various forms of vulnerability that exclude individuals and social groups from development processes. These efforts aim not only to improve the development potential and well-being of those affected, but also to enhance the overall development potential of humanity as a whole⁹.

Monitoring progress in achieving the SDGs relevant to social development indicates that the following groups are at risk of being left behind in certain development processes:

- **Elderly population (65+)** is experiencing an increased risk of poverty.
 - The at-risk-of-poverty rate among the elderly rose from 20.8% in 2015 to 23.5% in 2023¹⁰.
 - The share of the elderly population with a disposable income below 50% of the median equivalized income increased from 13.4% in 2015 to 15.6% in 2023.
 - Additionally, the elderly population has not experienced positive trends in reducing the share of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work. On the contrary, among people aged 65 and over, the share of time spent on these activities increased from 14.9% in 2015 to 16.6% in 2021. This increase is especially notable among the elderly population living in rural areas, where it rose from 14.4% to 18.1%¹¹.
- **Certain groups of children under the age of five** show opposite trends compared to the general child population in terms of nutrition. Among boys in the general population, there was an increase in the share of children who are stunted in 2019 compared to 2014, among children from wealthier households there was a slight increase in the share of obese children, and among the poorest children there was an increase in the share of underweight children whose weight lags behind their height¹².

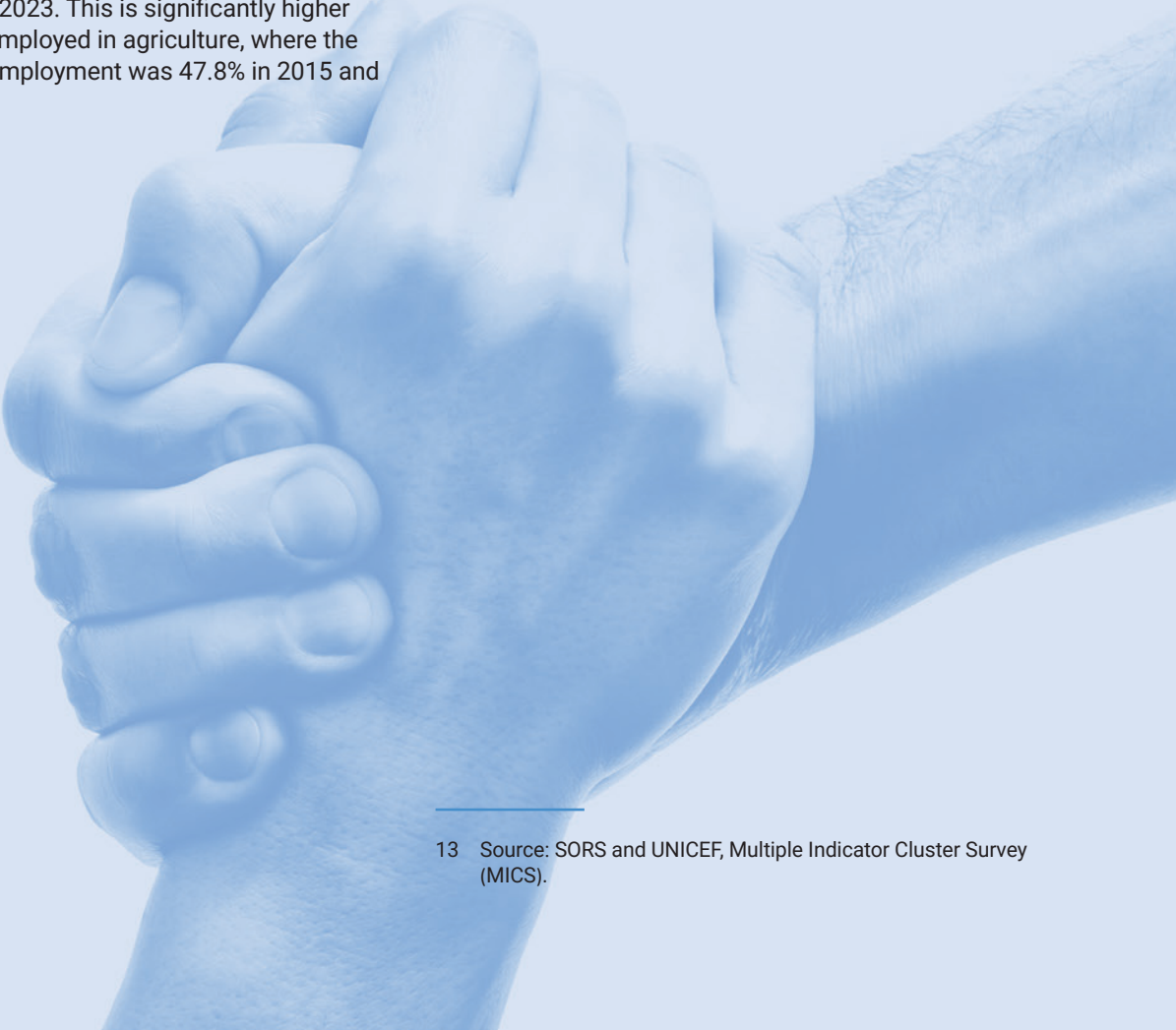
⁹ <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>

¹⁰ Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC).

¹¹ Source: SORS, Time Use Survey.

¹² Source: SORS and UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).

- **The population living in rural (“other”) settlements** has not experienced positive trends in the reduction of time spent on unpaid household and care work. Among the rural population, the share of time spent on these activities remained the same in both observed periods (2015 and 2021), at a level of 14.9%.
- **Women employed in agriculture.** While the overall employment in Serbia, as well as employment in the agricultural sector and non-agricultural employment, shows a decline in the share of informal employment (target 8.3), these positive trends have not been observed among women employed in agriculture. The participation of informal employment among women working in agriculture remains very high, at 83.4% in 2015 and 83.5% in 2023. This is significantly higher than among men employed in agriculture, where the share of informal employment was 47.8% in 2015 and 30.8% in 2023.
- **Children from rural areas.** Unlike children from urban areas, where an increase in coverage for immunization against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTP) has been recorded, children from rural areas have experienced stagnation in this coverage. In 2014, the percentage of immunized children in rural areas was 89.3%, while in 2019 it was 89.0%¹³.



¹³ Source: SORS and UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).

Challenges of sustainable development 2015–2025

Challenges in the field of social progress

The most important challenges in the field of social development have been recorded regarding:

1
NO
POVERTY
 

Mobilization of resources for social services such as education, healthcare and social protection (SDG 1).

- Government spending on basic social services has decreased. This trend is mainly due to a reduction in expenditures for social protection, while spending on education and healthcare has increased.

2
ZERO
HUNGER
 


Food insecurity among the adult population and the preservation of genetic diversity of plants and domesticated animals (SDG 2).

- Prevalence of undernourishment among the population remains stagnant.
- The share of the adult population facing moderate or severe food insecurity has increased.
- Contradictory trends are observed in maintaining genetic diversity of plants and domesticated animals, as well as their related wild species: stagnation is seen in the conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture, while there are positive trends regarding local breeds classified as endangered.

3
GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING
 

Insufficient density and distribution of certain health worker profiles (SDG 3).


- Contradictory trends have been observed regarding child immunization, with positive trends noted for vaccination against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTP), while negative trends are seen in the vaccination against measles.
- Contradictory trends are also registered concerning the density and distribution of healthcare workers, with positive trends for doctors, nurses, and midwives, but negative trends for dentists and pharmacists.

4
QUALITY
EDUCATION
 

Educational achievements of children and youth, inconsistent trends in linguistic and numerical literacy, as well as the development of various digital skills among the population (SDG 4).

- A negative trend has been observed in the share of children who, at the end of the first cycle of primary education (grades 1–4), achieve at least the minimum level of proficiency in reading and mathematics.
- Contradictory tendencies are present regarding the number of young people and adults possessing adequate skills for employment, as monitored through the various digital skills.


5
GENDER
EQUALITY



Negative trends such as the increase in early marriage among the population of Roma settlements (SDG 5).

→ A movement away from the goal has been observed regarding the early marriage among the population from Roma settlements, specifically marriages occurring before the age of 15 and before the age of 18.

11
SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES




Stagnation in combating informal settlements, as well as conflicting trends in reducing the negative impact of cities on the environment (SDG 11).

→ The proportion of urban population living in inadequate settlements is stagnating.

→ Contradictory trends have been observed regarding the impact of cities on the environment.


10
REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



Stagnation and inconsistent trends in reducing inequalities (SDG 10).

→ The share of tariff lines applied to imports from the least developed countries and developing countries with zero tariffs is decreasing.

16
PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



Negative trends in the use of violent disciplinary methods on children, increases in the number of human trafficking victims and unsentenced detainees in prisons, and a decrease in the seizure of illegal weapons (SDG 16).

→ The share of children who have experienced violent disciplinary methods has increased.

→ The number of victims of human trafficking has risen.

→ The number of confiscated firearms under Article 348 of the Criminal Code has decreased.

Challenges in the field of economic development

The most important challenges in the field of economic development include:

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



An increase in resource consumption and their less productive use, as well as reduced availability of commercial banks alongside a simultaneous greater availability of ATMs (SDG 8).

- There is a movement away from the target regarding domestic material consumption and resource productivity.
- Contradictory trends are observed in strengthening the capacity of domestic financial institutions, reflected in the reduction of commercial bank branch availability alongside an increase in the availability of ATMs.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Contradictory trends in industrial development due to a decline in the gross value added of the manufacturing industry, but increased employment in the industrial sector, as well as unequal investments in research and development across different sectors (SDG 9).

- Contradictory trends in promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization are observed due to the decline in the gross value added of manufacturing in GDP, alongside a simultaneous increase in manufacturing employment.
- Contradictory trends in investment in research and development are noted, as an increase in investment is registered in the business sector and the public sector, while a decrease is observed in the higher education sector, alongside a simultaneous increase in the number of researchers.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Contradictory trends in domestic resource mobilization, negative trends in debt repayment and contradictory tendencies reflected in annual GDP growth accompanied by a decline in exports of goods and services (SDG 17).

- Contradictory trends are observed in the mobilization of domestic resources, as total government revenues as a share of GDP are decreasing, while the share of the national budget financed from domestic taxes is increasing.
- Contradictory tendencies are also registered regarding the mobilization of additional financial resources from multiple sources, as foreign direct investments are rising, while remittances from abroad are declining.
- Debt repayment as a share of exports of goods and services is decreasing.
- Contradictions are present in macroeconomic aspects due to GDP growth alongside a decline in exports of goods and services.

Challenges in the field of environment

The most important challenges regarding the progress in the field of environment are the following:

6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



The share of the population using safe drinking water is stagnating, while the share of the population with access to safe sanitation services is decreasing; water resources are being increasingly exploited but used more efficiently, with contradictory trends in integrated water resource management (SDG 6).

- The share of the population with access to safe drinking water is stagnating, especially in rural areas.
- The share of the population using safely managed sanitation services is decreasing, but nearly the entire population has access to hygienic conditions requiring the presence of handwashing facilities with soap and water within the household.
- The level of water exploitation is increasing, although water is being used more efficiently.
- Contradictory trends are observed regarding integrated water resource management.

12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



The amount of hazardous waste produced is increasing (SDG 12).

- When it comes to resource exploitation and productivity, negative trends are recorded.
- The amount of hazardous waste produced is increasing.

13 CLIMATE
ACTION



Greenhouse gas emissions are stagnating (SDG 13).

- Total greenhouse gas emissions are stagnating.

15 LIFE
ON LAND



Contradictory trends exist in ensuring, conserving and restoring terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, with negative trends in sustainable forest management, combating desertification, poaching, and trafficking of protected wildlife (SDG 15).

- Forest area is stagnating, but the share of freshwater areas and important terrestrial areas within protected areas is increasing.
- Above-ground biomass stock in forest and the share of forest area within protected areas are stagnating, while the forest area under independently verified forest management certification schemes and the percentage of forest area according to long-term forest management plans are decreasing.
- The share of degraded land is increasing.
- The share of wild species, both plant and animal, that are traded and originate from poaching or illegal trade is increasing.

Challenges in monitoring progress

Lack of data and disaggregation

Many SDG indicators require up-to-date, comprehensive and disaggregated data (by gender, age, education, etc.).

A major ongoing challenge for countries in working with SDG indicators is still the fact that collecting data through survey-based research is a methodologically long-term and relatively costly process. It is also important that these surveys are comparable at the international level, which ensures the production of high-quality data that can be disaggregated and presented within the planned categories. The lack of such data hinders the identification of vulnerable groups and the effective planning of interventions.

Lack of institutional coordination

Institutional coordination is a crucial element in ensuring reliable and sustainable indicators. Successful monitoring of progress requires close cooperation between various institutions (ministries, agencies, and local authorities). Clear coordination mechanisms are often lacking, leading to duplication of activities or gaps in reporting.

Low awareness on Sustainable Development Goals

Low awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals among citizens and decision-makers reduces their motivation to actively contribute to the monitoring and implementation of these goals.

Monitoring and reporting

While some indicators are regularly monitored, others are neglected, often due to limited resources or the technical inadequacy of existing systems. There is a lack of a standardized and transparent reporting framework at both the national and local level.



Conclusion

Progress

Over the past decade Serbia has made visible progress in several areas of social and economic development, as well as in environmental protection. The most significant results have been achieved in the areas of health, gender equality, poverty reduction and improving living conditions for vulnerable groups. Indicators related to women's sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child protection and mortality rates from various diseases and injuries have improved. The growing use of modern contraceptive methods and the decline in adolescent birth rates reflect advancements in reproductive rights.

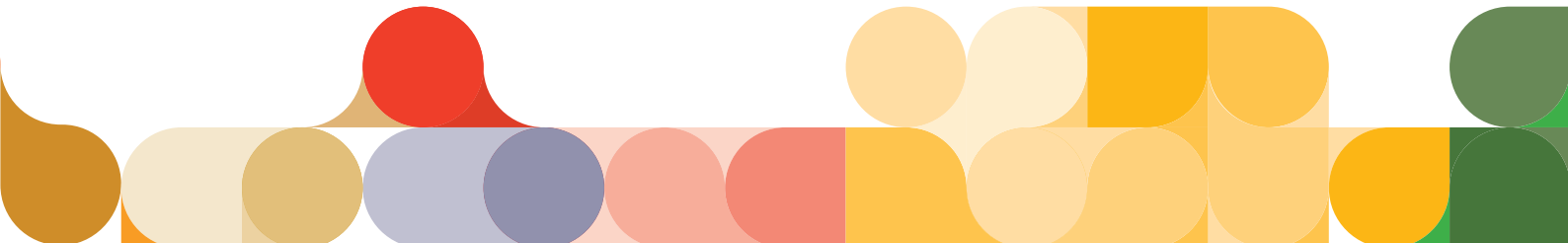
In the economic sphere Serbia has recorded an increase in real GDP, a decline in unemployment, a reduction in informal employment, a rise in average wages and in the adoption of new employment strategies, particularly for youth. There has also been a significant increase in investment in industrial production and an expansion of access to ICT technologies, which is driving labor market transformation and the development of new capacities.

As for the environmental protection, the progress has been made in improving water quality, increasing the capacity for renewable energy production, raising the recycling rate, and expanding the percentage of protected natural areas. Relevant policy and legal frameworks have also been adopted for biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Challenges

Despite positive trends, Serbia still faces significant development challenges. In the area of social development, insufficient investment in social services such as education and social protection, limited availability of certain healthcare professionals, inconsistent trends in literacy and digital skills, and a rise in early marriages among the population living in Roma settlements present serious obstacles. Additionally, concerning trends have been observed in combating human trafficking, violence against children and inequalities in access to healthcare and education services.

Economic challenges include increased consumption and reduced resource productivity, a decline in gross value added in the manufacturing industry despite rising employment in the sector, unequal investment in the research and development, as well as problematic trends in mobilizing domestic financial resources. At the same time, while foreign investment is on the rise, there has been a drop in remittances and in the export of goods and services, indicating structural imbalances.



In the environmental sector challenges are reflected in the stagnation of access to safe drinking water, particularly in rural areas, as well as a decline in access to safe sanitation services. The production of hazardous waste has increased, while greenhouse gas emissions have not shown a significant decrease. In the domain of land and water ecosystems protection, negative trends have been observed in combating desertification, poaching and the illegal trade of wildlife.

Groups at risk of being left behind in development

Despite the efforts to ensure that no one is left behind, several population groups remain at risk of marginalization. The elderly population is experiencing rising poverty and a disproportionately heavy burden of unpaid work, especially in rural areas. Women employed in the agriculture sector continue to be highly exposed to informal labor, with little improvement over the past decade. Children living in rural settlements show lower immunization rates, while their development and access to education continue to lag behind. Rural population as a whole has not seen improvements in the distribution of unpaid work. Particularly concerning are negative trends regarding children's involvement in violence and the rising number of victims of human trafficking.

Challenges in monitoring progress

The availability of quality and disaggregated data, by categories such as gender, age, education, and place of residence, poses a challenge for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs. Survey research is methodologically complex and financially demanding, which further limits the timely availability of data.

There is a lack of institutional coordination among the responsible bodies. Additionally, public and decision-makers' awareness of the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals remains low, reducing their willingness to actively contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



