



# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!

Progress on the Sustainable Development  
Goals in the Republic of Serbia for the  
Elderly Population (65+)

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PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FOR THE ELDERLY POPULATION (65+)

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# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!

PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FOR THE ELDERLY  
POPULATION (65+)

**Leave No One Behind** is the fundamental principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This principle signifies the unwavering commitment of all nations to completely eliminate poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination in all its manifestations. It aims to reduce inequalities and various forms of vulnerability that hinder individuals and social groups from participating in development processes, thereby limiting their overall development potential and well-being. This commitment also pertains to the development potential of humanity as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

This principle is grounded in the recognition that certain groups face multiple intertwined factors of disadvantage and inequality, resulting from a combination of various exclusionary elements. These factors collectively contribute to the exclusion of these groups from development processes. The five key exclusion factors are: discrimination (on the basis of some inherited or acquired characteristics); geographical distance or living in an unfavourable geographical area (degraded environment, lack of traffic and communications, underdeveloped economy, technology, services); governance (inadequate laws, policies, non-transparent and unaccountable institutions, absence of democratic participation); socio-economic status (inequalities in access to resources, employment opportunities, poverty, and deprivation), and sensitivity to shocks (conflicts, crises, climate change, and natural disasters)<sup>2</sup>.

This short informative publication, part of the series “Leave no one behind!”, focuses on presenting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Republic of Serbia concerning the population aged 65 and over — the elderly population.

The publication utilizes official SDGs indicators from the portal of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia<sup>3</sup> (SORS) to illustrate the situation. Additionally, it incorporates some extra indicators that offer a more comprehensive insight into the aspects of life and the position of the older population. These additional indicators may indicate instances where the elderly population are excluded from certain aspects of development. Each time an official indicator was used, it was noted in brackets, while all other indicators represent additional measures. Where possible, attention was also paid to cross-sectional inequalities, such as differences between older people based on gender, type of settlement, material status, or other characteristics.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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>

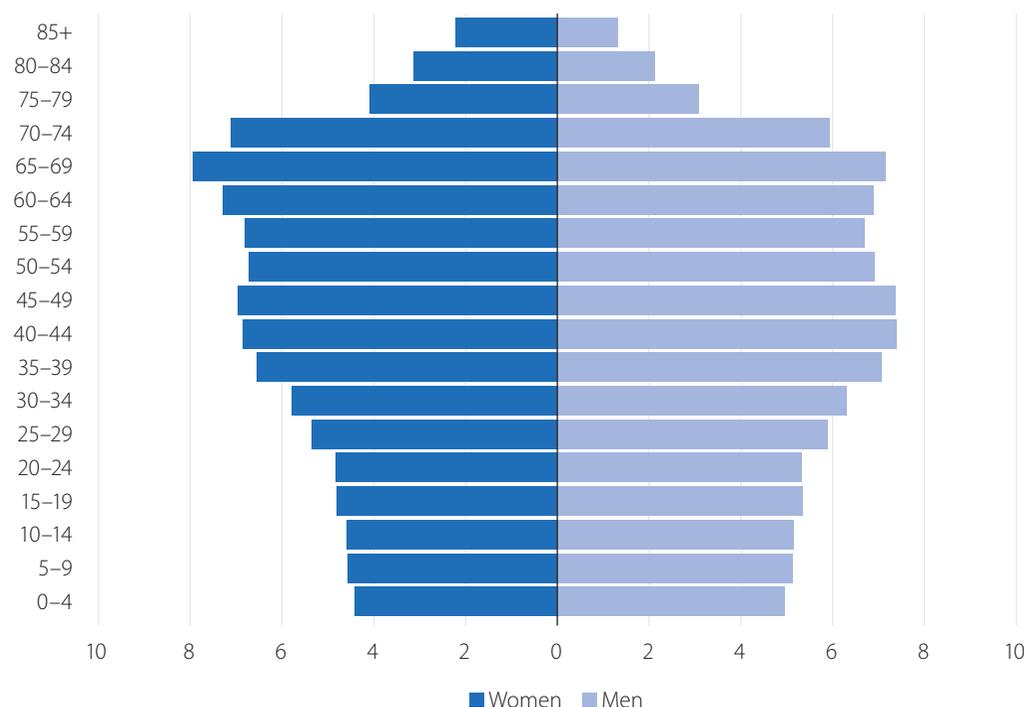
<sup>3</sup> <https://sdg.indikatori.rs/en-US/>

## Elderly population in the Republic of Serbia

According to the 2022 census, there were 1,468,855 people aged 65 and over in Serbia, constituting 22.1% of the total population<sup>4</sup>. Compared to the 2011 census, the total number of older residents has increased (amounting to 1,250,316), and their share in the total population has also risen (amounting to 17.4%)<sup>5</sup>. In comparison to the European Union, Serbia has a slightly higher proportion of the elderly population — the proportion of the population 65 and over was 21.1% in 2022, on par with the EU as a whole. Serbia is among the countries with the largest proportion of elderly population in Europe. Greece (22.7%), Croatia (22.5%), Italy (23.8%), and Portugal (23.7%) have a higher proportion of elderly population than Serbia.

Among the elderly population, individuals aged between 65 and 74, who could be categorized as the “younger elderly” population and who are generally characterized by better health, higher functionality, greater activity, and less need for support, constituted 63.8% of the total elderly population. Due to longer life expectancy, women comprise the majority of the elderly population — in Serbia, they account for 56.9% of the total elderly population (65+). When examining the two age categories separately, women constituted 54.9% of the population aged 65–74 and 60.5% of the population aged 75 and over in 2022<sup>6</sup>.

**Graph 1** Population by age and sex, 2022 (%)



Source: SORS, Census of Population, Households and Dwellings

<sup>4</sup> SORS, 2022 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings; Book 2 Age and sex, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2023/Pdf/G20234003.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> SORS, 2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings; Book 2 Age and sex, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2012/Pdf/G201218003.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> SORS, 2022 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings; Book 2 Age and sex, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2023/Pdf/G20234003.pdf>

In the period from 2013 to 2021, the proportion of households with two adults, wherein at least one person aged 65 and over resides, increased from 11.8% to 15.7%. Additionally, the proportion of households with single individuals aged 65 and over increased from 12.5% to 13.9%<sup>7</sup>.

Other indicators also highlight significant ageing processes within the population, along with increasingly unfavourable structures in the relationship between the active and dependent population (those not participating in the labour market). The average age of the population in Serbia has increased from 42.1 years in 2011 to 43.8 years in 2022. The population ageing index, indicating the ratio of the elderly to the young population<sup>8</sup> has risen from 121.9 in 2011 to 149.7 in 2022<sup>9</sup>. The dependency ratio, or the functional population index<sup>10</sup>, has increased from 46.3 in 2011 to 57.3 in 2022, with a notably higher ratio for the population in rural (other) settlements (61.0) compared to urban settlements (55.2)<sup>11</sup>.

If current trends persist, according to the medium scenario of the SORS population forecast, Serbia is projected to have 1,644,912 inhabitants aged 65 and over by 2041. This population contingent will represent nearly a quarter of Serbia's total population, accounting for 24.1%<sup>12</sup>.

The ageing of the population should not only be perceived as a negative process. On the contrary, it also signifies a longer life, the opportunity for intergenerational knowledge transfer and experience sharing, and a more robust social support network. Nevertheless, societies characterised by a significantly ageing population encounter challenges such as ensuring an adequate labour force, sustaining pension systems, and establishing adequate conditions for healthy and active ageing. This entails enabling older individuals to fully participate in society and develop long-term care systems that provide social and health support tailored to their needs.

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat, [Distribution of households by household type from 2003 onwards — EU-SILC survey \(LIC\\_LVPH02\\_custom\\_7600471\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1&code=sdg11-6-10&plugin=1)

<sup>8</sup> The population ageing index represents the ratio of the population aged 60 and over to the population aged 0–19, estimated in the middle of the year of observation. (SORS, Demographic statistics 2018, p. 49, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2019/Pdf/G201914016.pdf>)

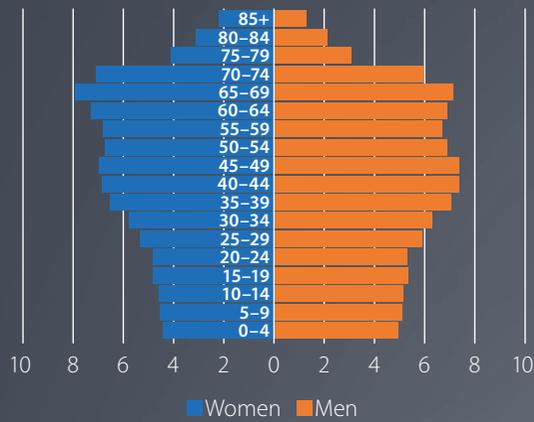
<sup>9</sup> SORS, <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/180710?languageCode=en-US&displayMode=table>

<sup>10</sup> The functional population index represents the ratio of the population aged 0–14 years and 65 years and older to the population aged 15–64 years, estimated in the middle of the year of observation. (SORS, Demographic statistics 2018, p. 50, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2019/Pdf/G201914016.pdf>)

<sup>11</sup> SORS, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2019/Pdf/G201914016.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> SORS, <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/180203?languageCode=en-US&displayMode=table&guid=2e739e46-614b-4f08-82a2-ae8d346d03ff>

Population by age and sex, 2022 (%)

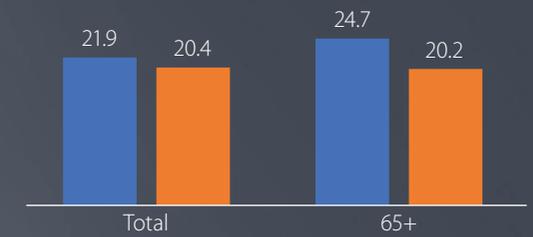


THE POPULATION OF SERBIA IS AMONG OLDEST IN EUROPE...



...WOMEN ARE AT GREATER RISK OF POVERTY THAN MEN...

At-risk-of-poverty rate by sex

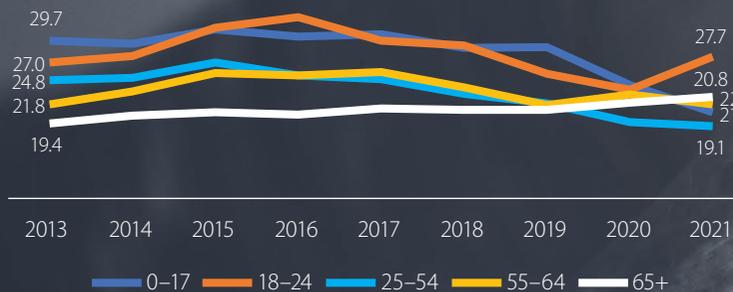


...THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INDICATORS SHOW THAT IN VARIOUS ASPECTS, ELDERLY PERSONS ARE „LAGING“ BEHIND THE YOUNGER SERBIA POPULATION AS WELL AS THEIR PEERS IN THE EU...



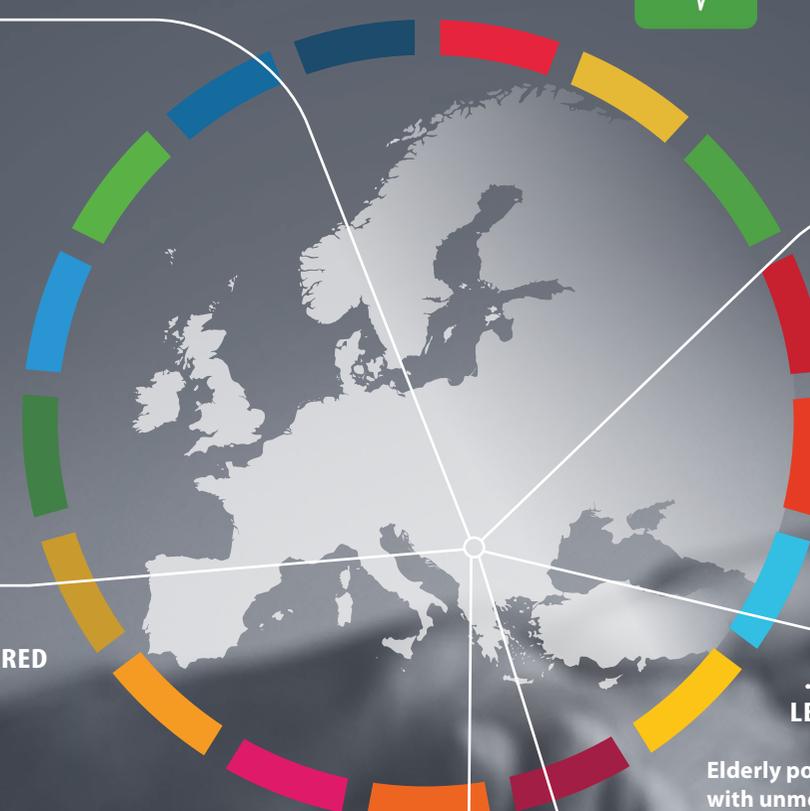
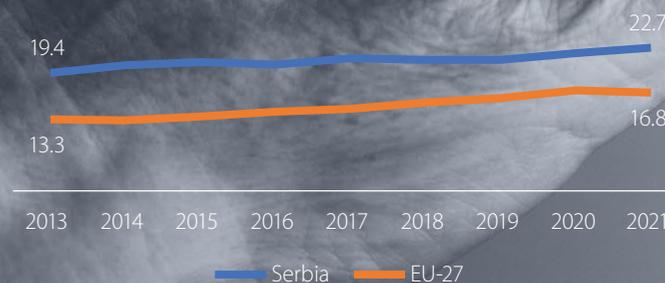
...OLDER PERSONS WERE AT HIGHEST RISK OF POVERTY IN 2021 WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER AGE GROUPS EXCEPT YOUNG PERSONS...

At-risk-of-poverty rates



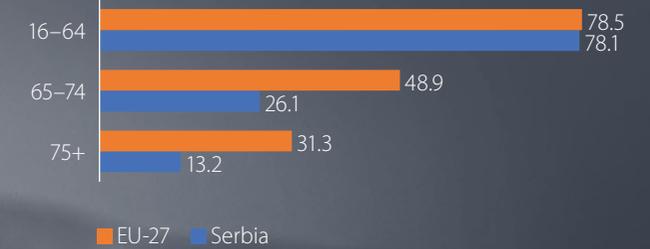
...THEY ARE CONTINUOUSLY AT HIGHER RISK OF POVERTY THAN THEIR EU PEERS...

At-risk-of-poverty rate for population aged 65+



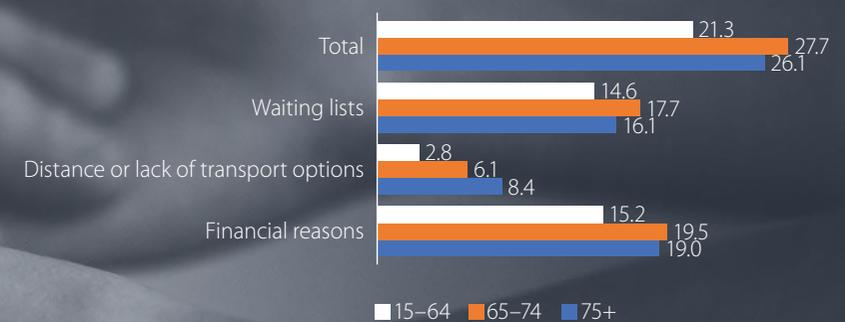
...EXPECTEDLY, ELDERLY PERSONS IN SERBIA ARE IN POOR HEALTH THAN PERSONS UNDER 65 YEARS OF AGE, BUT ALSO IN POOR HEALTH THAN THEIR EU PEERS...

Population who rate their health as good or very good



...ALTHOUGH THEY NEED IT MORE, ELDERLY PERSONS IN SERBIA HAVE LESS FAVORABLE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE...

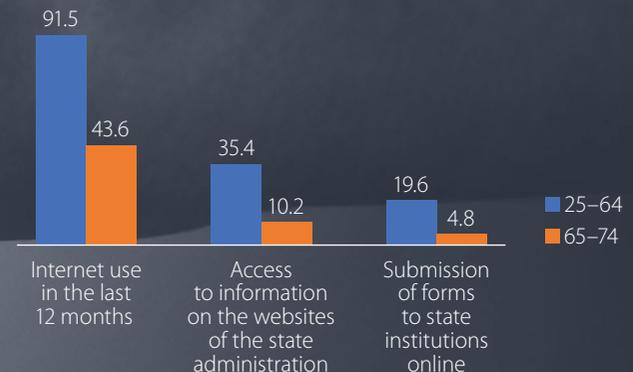
Elderly population with unmet need for healthcare and reasons, 2019



...THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IS EXTREMELY LOW AMONG THE ELDERLY POPULATION, WHICH CAN LIMIT THEIR ACCESS TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SERVICES, SOCIAL SERVICES, AS WELL AS TO GENERAL INFORMATION AND SOCIALIZING WITH OTHERS...



INFORMATION AND SOCIALIZING WITH OTHERS...

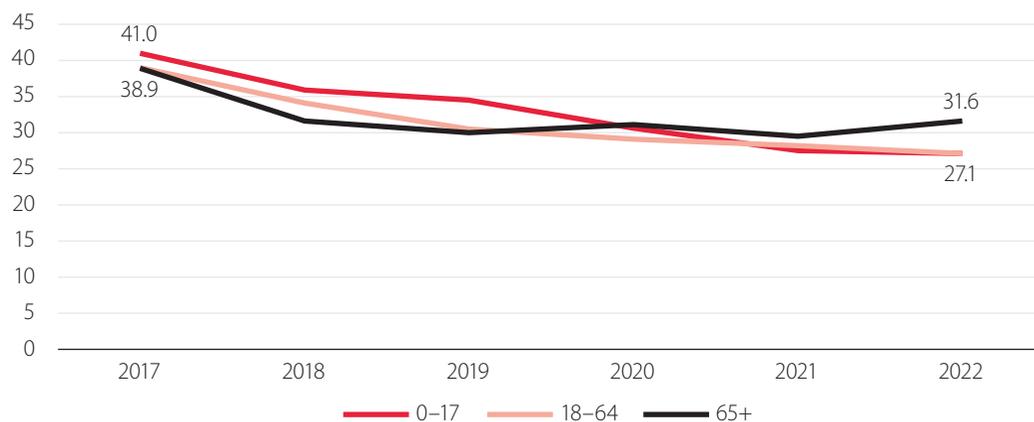




CONTRARY TO CHILDREN AND THE MIDDLE-AGED POPULATION, WHICH EXPERIENCE A STEADY DECLINE IN THE AT-RISK-OF-POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION RATE, THE ELDERLY POPULATION EXHIBITS AN INCREASE BETWEEN 2021 AND 2022. ADDITIONALLY, THE RATE OF FINANCIAL POVERTY RISK ALSO RISES, NEGATING THE PREVIOUS ADVANTAGES THE ELDERLY HELD OVER YOUNGER AGE GROUPS. CONSEQUENTLY, IN 2022, INDIVIDUALS OVER 65 ARE AT A GREATER RISK OF POVERTY COMPARED TO ALL OTHER AGE GROUPS IN THE POPULATION.

The at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion rate<sup>13</sup> continues to decrease steadily for children and the population aged 18–64. However, it increases for the older population (65+) from 2022 onwards (Graph 2).

**Graph 2 At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, by age, Serbia, 2017–2022 (%) (SDG indicator 1.2.2)**

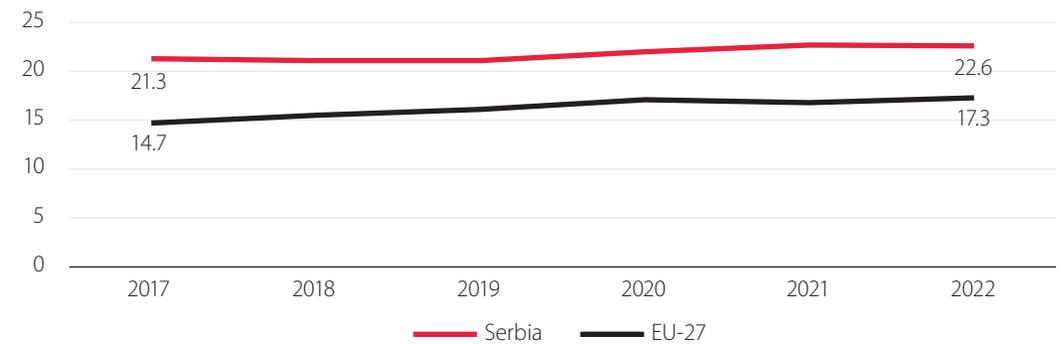


Source: SORS, SILC

<sup>13</sup> At-risk-of poverty or social exclusion rate represents the percentage of people who are at risk of poverty or severely materially disadvantaged, or living in households with very low work intensity.

The elderly population in Serbia was also facing an increasing risk of financial poverty<sup>14</sup> from 2017 to 2022. This trend is also observed across the European Union (EU), where the elderly population in Serbia consistently experiences a higher percentage of financial poverty risk (Graph 3).

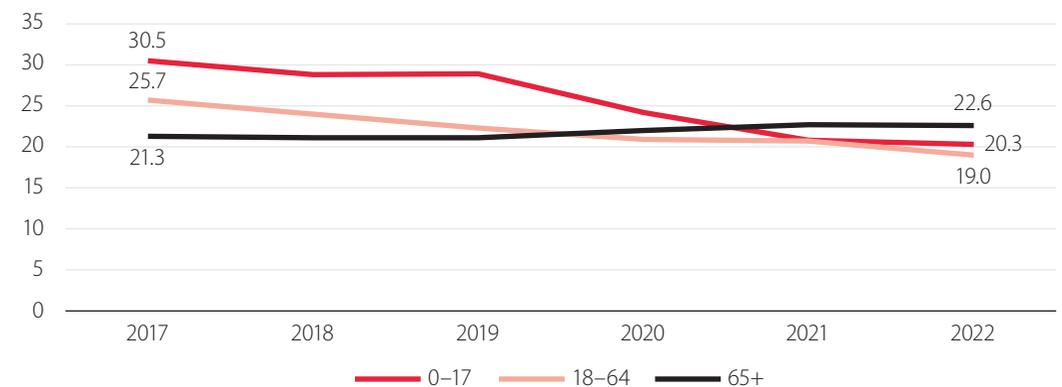
**Graph 3 At-risk-of-poverty rate for the population aged 65+, 2017–2022, Serbia and EU-27 (%) (SDG indicator 1.2.1)**



Source: Eurostat, SILC

At the outset of the observation period (2017), the elderly population faced a lower percentage of financial poverty risks compared to younger population groups. However, this scenario has shifted due to a consistent increase in the proportion of the elderly population at risk of poverty and a concurrent decrease among younger population groups. As a result, by 2022, the elderly population were exposed to a higher percentage of poverty risks than both children and individuals aged between 18 and 64 years (Graph 4).

**Graph 4 At-risk-of-poverty rate by age groups, Serbia, 2017–2022 (%) (SDG indicator 1.2.1)**

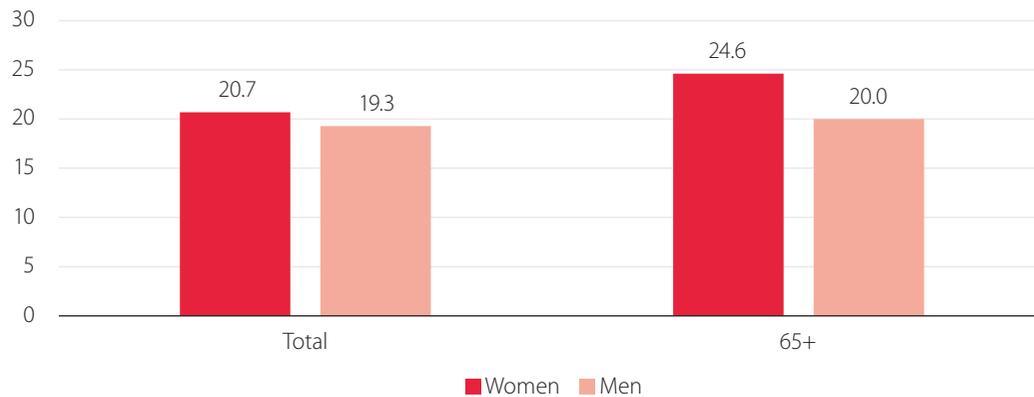


Source: SORS, SILC

<sup>14</sup> The at-risk-of-poverty rate indicates the percentage of individuals whose equivalised disposable income falls below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. It is important to note that this rate does not indicate the actual number of individuals living in poverty, but rather the percentage of individuals whose equivalised disposable income is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

Compared to men, women face a higher percentage of poverty risks. This gender disparity widens with age, with a greater gap observed among the elderly population (4.6 percentage points) compared to the total population (1.4 percentage points) (Graph 5).

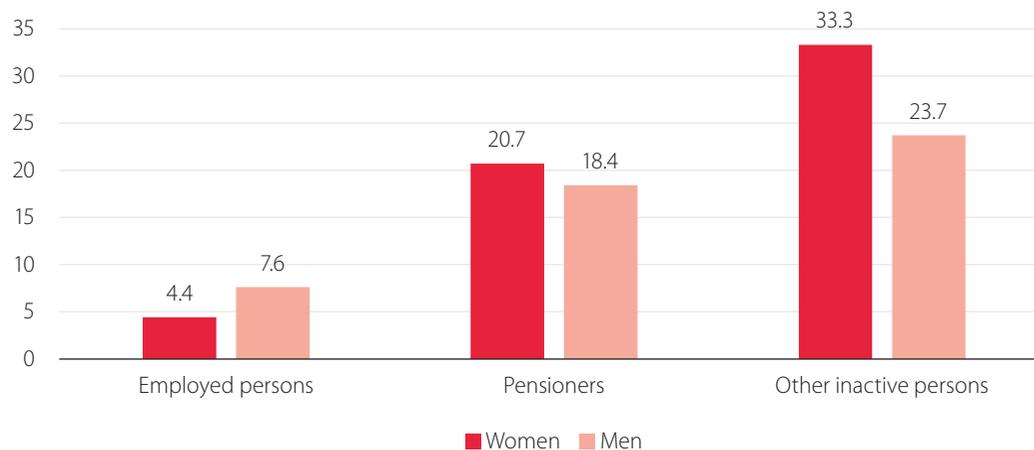
**Graph 5 At-risk-of-poverty rate by sex for the total and elderly population (65+), Serbia, 2022 (%) (SDG indicator 1.2.1)**



Source: SORS, SILC

Depending on the level of the poverty risk rate, the older population in pensioner status falls between the employed population (any status) and the remaining inactive population (Graph 6). In this context, there exists a gender disparity within the pensioner group, as female pensioners face a higher risk of financial poverty compared to male pensioners (with a difference of 2.3 percentage points). However, this gender disparity becomes even more pronounced within the category of other inactive individuals, where it equals 9.6 percentage points.

**Graph 6 At-risk-of-poverty rate by most frequent activity status and sex, Serbia, 2022 (%)**



Source: SORS, SILC

The risks of material and social deprivation tend to increase with age. In 2022, 22.6% of the elderly population aged 65–74 were affected by material deprivation, while this figure rose to 29.4% among the oldest population (75+)<sup>15</sup>.

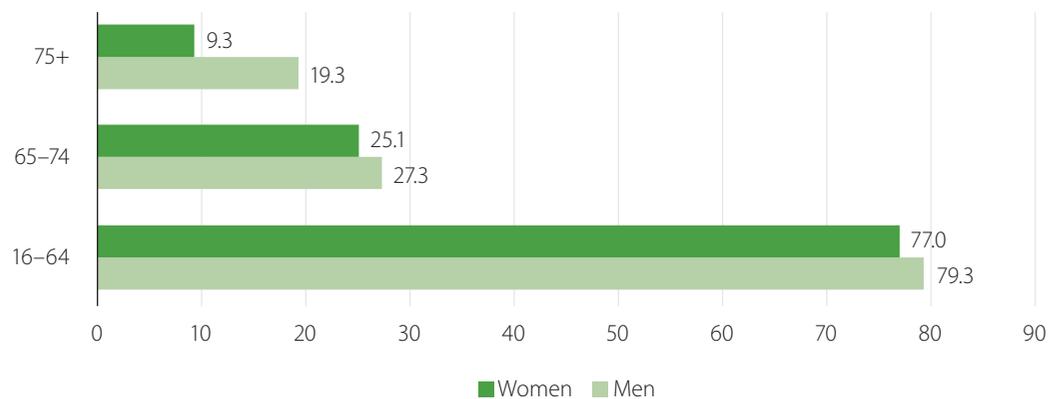
<sup>15</sup> Eurostat, SILC, [Material and social deprivation rate by age, sex and most frequent activity status \[ILC\\_MDS01\\_\\_custom\\_7603468\]](#)



...HEALTH TENDS TO DETERIORATE WITH AGE, RESULTING IN FEWER INDIVIDUALS AMONG THE OLDER POPULATION RATING THEIR HEALTH AS GOOD OR VERY GOOD COMPARED TO THOSE UNDER 65. HOWEVER, ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS IN SERBIA PERCEIVE THEIR HEALTH STATUS AS SIGNIFICANTLY WORSE THAN THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN THE EU. ADDITIONALLY, THEY HAVE POORER ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE COMPARED TO THE YOUNGER POPULATION.

Data based on the subjective assessment of health status indicate that there are much less older individuals who rate their health status as good or very good compared to those under 65. Moreover, clear differences exist between older individuals in two different age categories and between women and men. A lower percentage of “older seniors” (75+) rate their health as good or very good compared to “younger seniors” (65–74). The gender gap in subjective health status is particularly pronounced among the oldest individuals, where as twice as many women rate their health as good or very good compared to men (Graph 7).

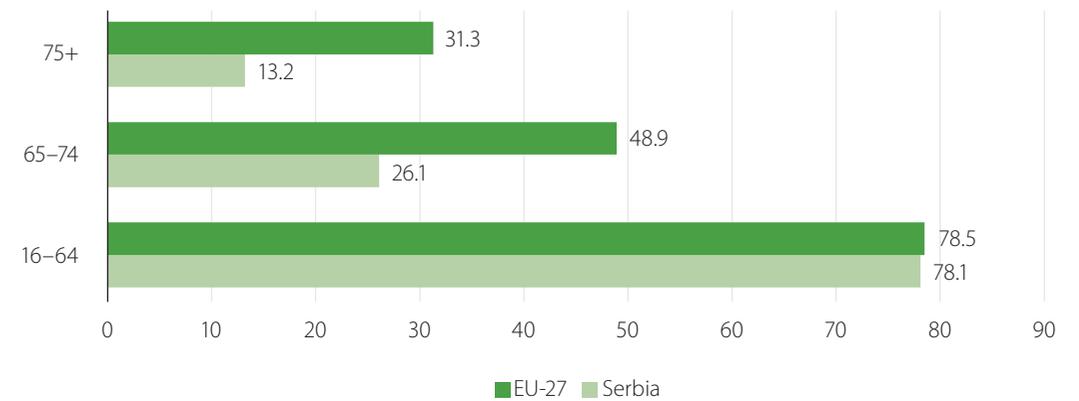
**Graph 7 Population who rate their health as good or very good, by age groups and sex, Serbia, 2021 (%)**



Source: Eurostat, SILC

Compared to the EU, there are noticeable disparities in the assessment of the health status of elderly people. While there are minimal disparities in the proportion of the population under 65 years of age who rate their health as good or very good in Serbia and in the EU-27, these disparities become evident among the older population categories. Specifically, the proportion of elderly people in Serbia who rate their health as good or very good is significantly lower than the proportion of older people in the EU-27 who provide similar assessments (Graph 8).

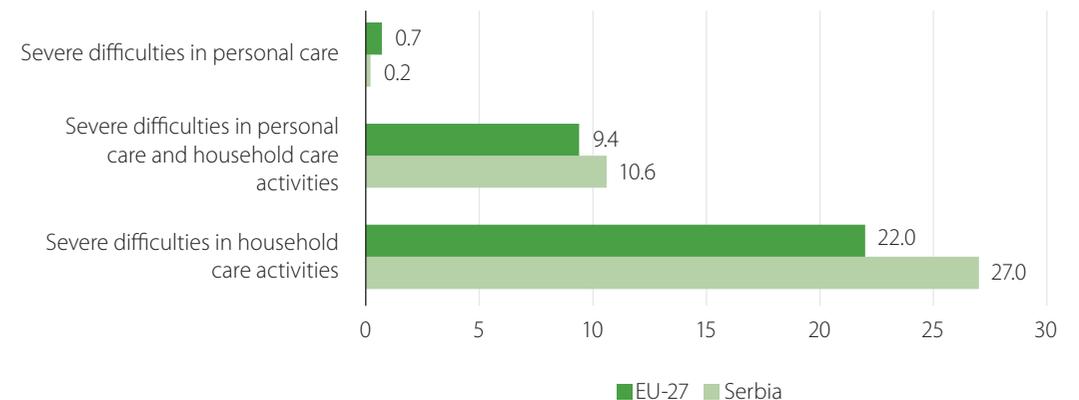
**Graph 8 Population who rate their health as good or very good, Serbia and EU-27, 2021 (%)**



Source: Eurostat, SILC

Compared to the EU-27, there are more elderly people in Serbia who experience limitations in their ability to function (Graph 9).

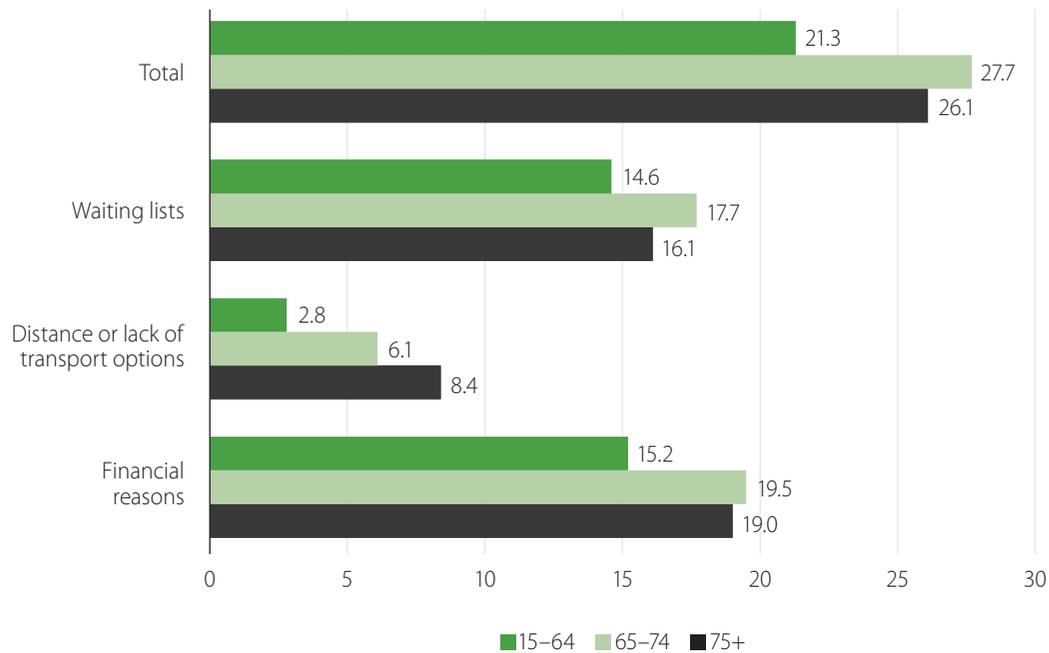
**Graph 9 Elderly population (65+) who reported having greater difficulty in personal or household care activities, Serbia and EU-27, 2019 (%)**



Source: Eurostat, SILC

When it comes to accessing healthcare services, a higher percentage of older people in Serbia encounter barriers compared to individuals under the age of 65. Among the older population who reported not having all their healthcare needs met during the year, reasons such as waiting lists, lack of financial resources, or distance, i.e., lack of transport, are more prevalent than among the younger population (Graph 10).

**Graph 10** Population reporting an unmet need for healthcare, by age groups and reasons, Serbia, 2019 (%)



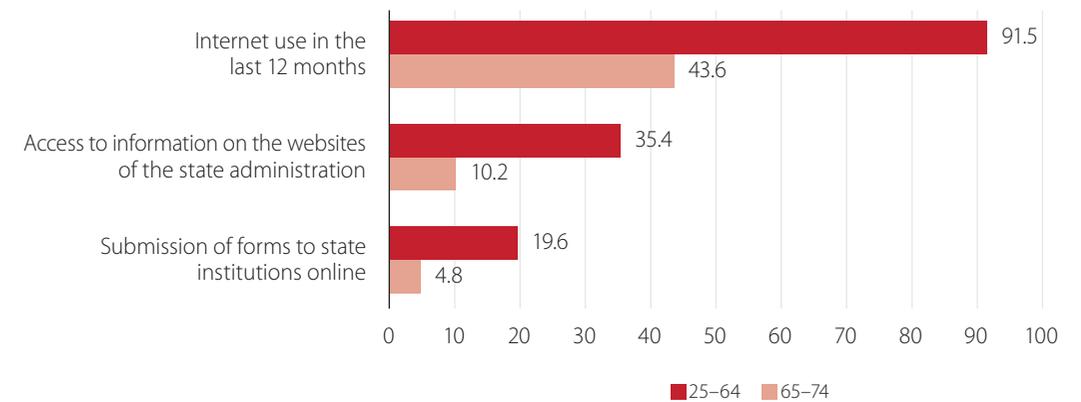
Source: Eurostat, EHIS



...THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IS EXTREMELY LOW AMONG THE ELDERLY POPULATION, WHICH CAN LIMIT THEIR ACCESS TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SERVICES, SOCIAL SERVICES, AS WELL AS TO GENERAL INFORMATION AND SOCIALIZING WITH OTHERS...

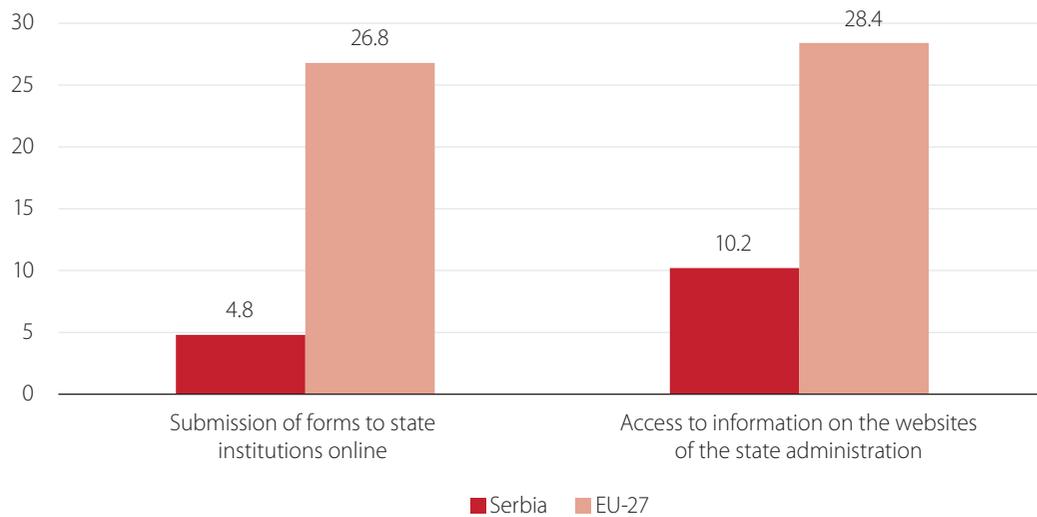
The elderly population in Serbia utilizes the Internet much less frequently compared to those under 65. In the past year, only one in ten elderly individuals used the Internet to access information on government websites, and only one in twenty submitted an inquiry via the Internet (Graph 11).

**Graph 11** Proportion of the population that has used the Internet in the last 12 months, Serbia, 2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat, ICT

Compared to their peers in the EU-27, older people in Serbia are much less likely to use the Internet to access information on government portals or to make various inquiries to state institutions (Graph 12).

**Graph 12** Proportion of the population (65–74) that has used the Internet in the last 12 months, Serbia and EU-27, 2021 (%)

Source: Eurostat, ICT



THE GENDER GAP WITHIN THE ELDERLY POPULATION IS EVIDENT IN DISPARITIES IN PENSIONS, AND AMONG OLDER WOMEN, THERE ARE INSTANCES OF PARTNER AND NON-PARTNER VIOLENCE WITHIN THE LAST 12 MONTHS...

Examining violence inflicted by individuals other than women's intimate partners (indicator 5.2.2), the data reveals that in 2021, 0.7% of women aged 65–74 experienced physical violence (including threats), while no women reported sexual violence<sup>16</sup>.

**Table 1** Proportion of ever-partnered women aged 65–74 who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months, by type of violence, 2021 (%) (SDG indicator 5.2.1)

Types of violence	%
Psychological violence	1.2
Physical violence (including threats)	0.4
Sexual violence	0.1
Physical violence (including threats) and sexual violence	0.4
Psychological, physical violence (including threats) and sexual violence	1.2

Source: SORS, Survey on the Safety and Quality of Life of Women (EU-GBV)

The gender gap in pensions for the elderly population (65–74 years) was 13.7% in 2022, which was lower than the average gender gap in pensions in the EU-27, where it was 25.2%<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> SORS, Survey on the Safety and Quality of Life of Women (EU-GBV)

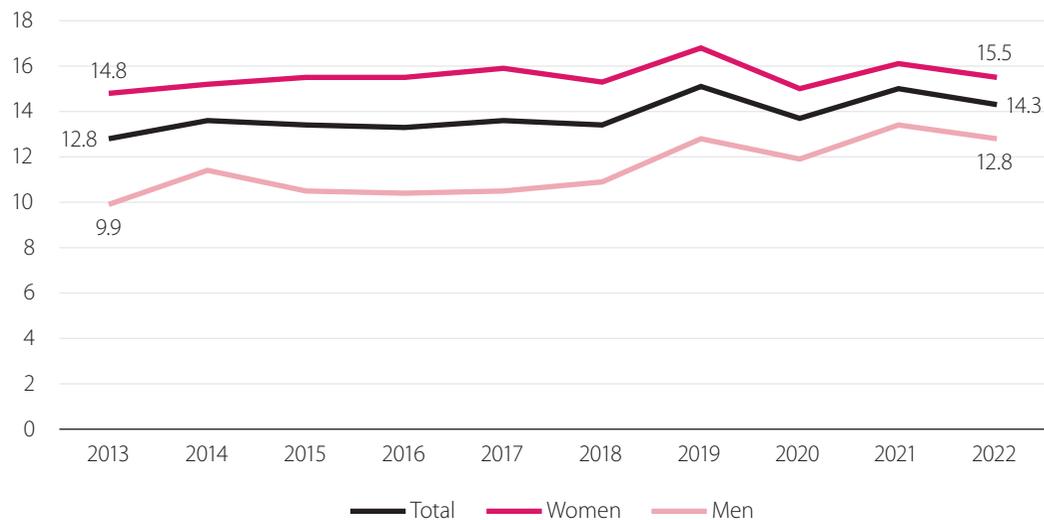
<sup>17</sup> Eurostat, Gender pension gap by age group — EU-SILC survey [ILC\_PNP13]



...ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES PERSIST WITHIN THE ELDERLY POPULATION, ILLUSTRATED BY THE FACT THAT 14% OF INDIVIDUALS AGED 65 AND OVER HAVE A DISPOSABLE INCOME OF LESS THAN 50% OF THE MEDIAN EQUIVALISED INCOME...

Among the population aged 65 and over, 14% have a disposable income of less than 50% of the median equivalised income. The gender gap persists throughout the period 2013–2022, with a higher proportion of women than men having a disposable income of less than 50% of the median (Graph 13).

**Graph 13** Proportion of the population with disposable income less than 50% of the median equivalised income, by sex, population 65+, Serbia, 2013–2022 (%) (SDG indicator 10.2.1a)



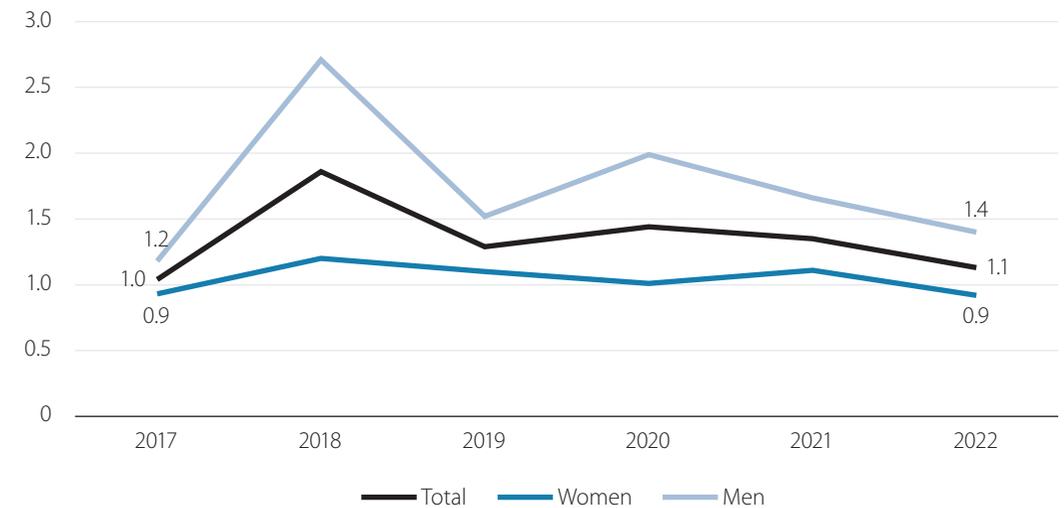
Source: SORS, SILC



...OLDER MEN ARE MORE FREQUENTLY VICTIMS OF INTENTIONAL HOMICIDE THAN OLDER WOMEN.

One of the targets under SDG 16 (16.1) is to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates. According to the data, there was a slight increase in the number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 inhabitants from 1.04 to 1.13 between 2017 and 2022. Gender-specific differences exist, with men being more often victims of violent homicides than women (Graph 14).

**Graph 14** Number of victims of intentional homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, elderly population (60+), Serbia, 2017–2022 (SDG indicator 16.1.1)



Source: Ministry of the Interior



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