

# THE REPORT

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FROM A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE



The report was prepared as part of the project "Empower - learn - led - Expand:YOUth4SDGs changing the rules transforming our world"

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VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA ON THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



TOWARDS EQUALITY OF SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE  
AND EVERYWHERE IN SERBIA THROUGH GROWING INTO SUSTAINABILITY

 SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## Ramonda serbica (the “phoenix plant”) The Symbol of Sustainable Development of the Republic of Serbia

*(We refer to the First Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Serbia on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was presented on July the 17th at a political forum at United Nations Headquarters)*

Link: <https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/VNR%2C%20eng.pdf>

# INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Serbia is fully committed to Sustainable Development Goals. The First Voluntary National Report is not only a document but also a process that involves collaboration, exchange of experience, implementation of good practice between authorities, individuals, local government and other partners. The Republic of Serbia recognises the importance of the vision of the 2030 agenda for both present and future generations.

The focus in the First Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Serbia on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is on children and young people because they are the ones who will be the pillars of society and agents of social changes by 2030.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## Challenges

- How to achieve the guaranteed income in line with the financial capacity of the country which would guarantee economic and financial sustainability?
- Empowering people at a local level to plan and develop strategic investment projects.
- How to ensure for all children healthy patterns for growing up, acquisition of adequate habits and sustainable lifestyles, particularly with respect to those who are most remote from opportunities provided by the family and the environment in which they grow up?
- Developing a culture and knowledge based on digital literacy contributing to creating an entrepreneurial society and linking the state with everyone.
- Identifying models that will ensure development opportunities and utilisation of potentials of all generations, particularly the senior citizens who make up 20.2% of the total population, so that no one is left behind.
- How to empower people and ensure inclusiveness and equality?

## Areas of assistance needed

In growing into sustainability, Serbia needs assistance through an increased scope of investments, knowledge and skills, technologies and special partnerships for the development of a generically sustainable, carbon-neutral circular industry and sustainable materials, technological processes, products and services, including services in the financial sector, especially encouraging individual entrepreneurship and multiplication of micro, small and medium enterprises in these two fundamental productive sectors of the future for which opportunities have already been created through the digitalisation of the necessary activities and strengthened connectivity of the country through rehabilitated transport, energy, and communications infrastructure.



## Sustainable Development Goal 1

### No Poverty

End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

#### Some Facts

When it comes to Serbia, children and young people are exposed to poverty at higher risk than adults. In 2017 the risk of poverty rate for children 30,5% and for young people 29,7%, which means that the rate for the general population was exceeded. In Serbia, young women are also more threatened when it comes to financial poverty than young men. According to the data of the National organisation of persons with disabilities two-thirds of families who have children with a disability stated that they don't have enough income to provide adequate care and support for their children.

#### Youth perspective and key messages

Young people in Serbia are aware of the importance of fighting against poverty and social exclusions of children and young people. According to them the most endangered population and the most exposed to poverty is the Roma population. Some of the solutions suggested by young people are that the Government should support young people and provide easier access to the labour market. Employment is one of the key things for the reduction of poverty. One of the key messages from young people was stronger support for the activation of youth with specially adapted measures for different groups: those from remote areas with disabilities, members of the Roma minority, children in conflict with the law, children without adequate parental care, children from poor families, children with single parents to parents.

2 ZERO HUNGER



## Sustainable Development Goal 2

# Zero Hunger

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

### Some Facts

Serbia is facing the problem of obesity rather than the problem of malnutrition. According to MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey), 1.8% of children are underfed, 6% of children have low body height regarding their age and 4% of children have low body weight concerning their height. 13,9% of children are dealing with obesity. This situation is even harder and more unfortunate in Roma settlements because of the poor material position of families and these families also don't have enough knowledge of food and care standards.

### Youth perspective and key messages

Young people who were engaged in developing this National Report had some suggestions and ideas. One of the best ways to improve nutrition is providing healthy meals in educational institutions. Why? That is the place where children are spending most of their time. Distribution of food to poor people is also one of the ideas and it would work by the principle of food storage or food bank. The food shouldn't be wasted and discarded, yet some organisations can store it and then deliver to people in need. Promoting healthy eating among children and young people through popular personalities, digital technologies, specialised applications and the Internet. Young people also emphasised how important is the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the measures defined in the Public Health Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2018 to 2026 is needed, especially with regard to the effectiveness in achieving the goal of increasing adequate nutrition and physical activity in the population under 18 by 10%.

## 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



## Sustainable Development Goal 3

### Good Health and Well-being

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

#### Some Facts

Children and young people in Serbia are dealing with different problems when it comes to health. One of the problems is the risk of death at the earliest age. The mortality rate has decreased from 1990 to 2017 but it is still high in the Roma population. The next issue is the concerns for the sexual and reproductive health of young people. Unlike North America and Northwest Europe, Serbia is not facing the high rate of pregnancy and births in adolescence. The birth rate for adolescents has decreased from 44,5 out of 1000 women in that age to 15,1 out of 1000 women in that age. The high rate still exists among Roma women. The third problem is alcohol and drug abuse. More than a third young people smoke. In 2014 research was implemented about mental health. Half of the respondents indicated that they had at least one stressful event in their life.

#### Youth perspective and key messages

Young people have emphasised the importance of sexual and reproductive education. They have also accented how important is to implement education about the importance of mental hygiene in schools. Decisive vaccination measures need to be taken, raising awareness among parents about the importance and providing safe vaccines for their children. Contraceptive, family planning and sexual and reproductive health counselling services should be more tailored to the needs of young people and more accessible (through digital technology, via the Internet, telephone, etc.) Remote counselling (through ICT) should be made available, especially for children and young people living in remote areas or areas where such specialised services are not available.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



## Sustainable Development Goal 4

# Quality Education

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

### Some Facts

Coverage of preschool children in Serbia is just 50% which means that half of the children miss the opportunity to exercise and develop their full potential. Inequality in access to quality preschool education services is particularly pronounced when it comes to poor and marginalised children. In the past decade, significant improvements have been made in the preparation of children for school through the preparatory pre-school program-the attendance rate increased from 87.2% in 2009 to 98.2% in 2017. Secondary vocational education encompasses just over 70% of students, and it is considered as part of the education system that has the potential to improve the transition from education to the labour market. In secondary vocational education, the introduction of dual education, which is taking place in school and through work, is underway, focusing more on current demand in the labour market than anticipating the skills that will be sought in the future. Although inclusive education is a strategic focus when it comes to the education of children with disabilities and difficulties in Serbia, there are still two parallel systems - inclusive education in the regular system and special schools. The state system has made significant efforts to ensure the inclusiveness of formal education for refugee and migrant children.

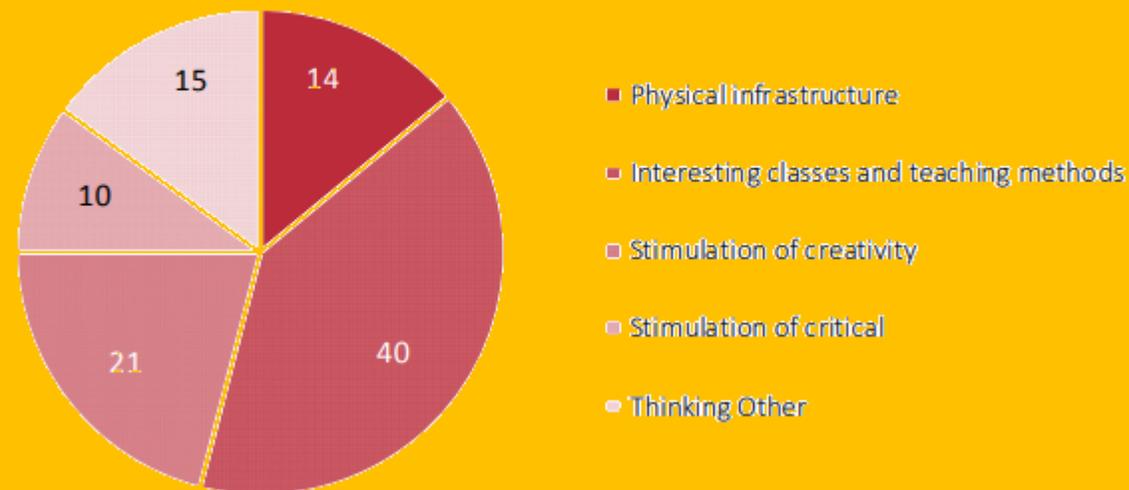
### Youth perspective and key messages

Young people emphasised the importance of teaching methods used in various subjects and lack of interactivity, encouraging student creativity, enhancing physical infrastructure and encouraging critical thinking. In terms of university education, 42% of survey respondents indicated the need to provide more scholarships for students, and 27% the need to improve lectures that lack interactivity and critical thinking. Gender equality should be monitored more closely and measures should be implemented to increase boys' participation in secondary and university education. Specific measures should be put in place for gender segregation in education, and relevant national policies (education, gender equality and employment) should be prioritised in their key objectives.

## What would you like to improve in your school?

The Strategy for Development of Education in Serbia until 2020 shapes the reform of the education system at all levels. Objectives and measures correspond with SDG targets, such as increased participation, better quality of education, improved infrastructure, particularly in remote areas, improved services related to inclusive education.

The Strategy for Youth also envisages development of an open, effective, efficient and equitable system of formal and informal education, available to all young people and in line with international trends in education. Specific objectives include an increase of participation of young people in formal and informal education, their higher influence on decision making related to education, quality assurance and establishment of standards in formal and informal education, measures for increased efficiency in education, better adjustment of education to the labour market needs.



Source: U-Report Serbia

### Existing gaps and challenges / desirable solutions

*“Young people are not involved in designing educational programmes. They should express their needs, and their voice should be heard and appreciated.”*

*“The education system limits learning opportunities for young people too much and expects them to be uniform. It would be necessary to encourage the creativity and individuality of students and logical thinking. This might be easier in smaller groups, but also with overcoming the traditional way of learning and the use of higher technologies.”*

Participants in the youth consultations



## Sustainable Development Goal 5

# Gender Equality

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

### Some Facts

According to a youth survey in Serbia, 31% of young women (15-29) have experienced gender-based discrimination.

Early marriages have a low prevalence in the general population but are still widespread among the population in Roma settlements, which seriously undermines the chances of Roma girls to complete their education. Among women aged 20-49, 17.3% of them married before the age of 15, while 57% did so before the age of 18. Young women also have a disproportionate amount of responsibility for the household and the family, especially in rural areas.

### Youth perspective and key messages

Young men and women have different views on the gender situation. Among the participants in the U-Report, 56% of young women stated that girls and young women did not have the same rights as boys and young men, while most male respondents (63%) stated that girls had equal rights. Violence against girls and women has been recognised (by both groups, young women and men) as an area of gender equality that should be given the highest priority in public policies. At the national and local level, prevention of early marriages should be taken more decisively and effectively. The second opportunity in education and tailored programs that will allow young mothers to return to school but also improve opportunities for reconciling family responsibilities through the introduction of a non-transferable right to parental leave for fathers.

**8** DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



## Sustainable Development Goal 8

### Decent Work and Economic Growth

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

#### Some Facts

Achieving this goal for children and young people means safeguarding against harmful child labour on the one hand and good socialisation of work, a timely transition to the labour market and decent employment on the other. Young people face serious barriers to employment. The unemployment rate of young men and women is more than twice the unemployment rate of the working-age population (32% for young women and 28% for young men as compared to 13% for the working-age population). Young women face greater barriers to employment than young men. In 2014, 9.5% of children aged 5-17 were involved in child labour, with more boys (12.2%) than girls (6.6%) involved in some form of child labour. It is mainly present in rural areas (16.2%) and is associated with farm work on family farms.

#### Youth perspective and key messages

The young people who participated in the consultations see the lack of preparation for self-employment and entrepreneurship as the main reason for low youth unemployment. They emphasised the need to better help young people develop their career plans after completing formal education. They pointed to gender inequality in the labour market and expressed concern about the ineffective elimination of discrimination against young women in employment.

**9** INDUSTRY, INNOVATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



## Sustainable Development Goal 9

### Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

#### Some Facts

Promoting research and innovation, enhancing small innovative entrepreneurship and access new technologies are key to the economic development of Serbia. Young people are those who come up with new ideas, they are more open to doing things in new ways and using new technologies. Among the young population in Serbia (16-24) usage of computers is very high. Resources available for financing startups or business development are very scarce because they do not meet the requirements of the financial market (lack of experience, mortgage or track records of previous success).

#### Youth perspective and key messages

Most young people state that in addition to improving infrastructure in terms of roads, better energy sources, faster internet, especially stressed that upgrading the infrastructure also meant removing barriers to access public transportation, public areas and other resources for people with disabilities, as well as the elderly population. Support for young researchers, scientists, innovators should be continued and improved, with more attention paid to areas that contribute to sustainable development and represent Serbia's comparative advantage. A very important part is to enable the systematic support and access to the newest technology, resources and knowledge for young men and women from rural areas, young agriculturists but also to provide special programmes and support for youth entrepreneurship.

**10** REDUCED  
INEQUALITIES



## Sustainable Development Goal 10

### Reduced Inequalities

Reduce inequality within and among countries.

#### Some Facts

Young people in Serbia in different areas of social life have a less favourable position than the older population. Among young generation there are inequalities that reveal the particularly vulnerable position of certain youth groups, such as are those who come from rural and remote areas, children living with disabilities, children living in deprived Roma settlements or in very poor households, children living in foster families or in social care institutions, or those who live and /or work on the street, victims of the worst forms of child labor and trafficking.

#### Youth perspective and key messages

In their view, raising awareness of the problems that people are facing poverty and increased solidarity are prerequisites for poverty reduction and inequality. Youth from the majority population should be encouraged to engage in various forms of volunteerism to support children and young people from vulnerable groups. These can be daycare centres, supported learning activities or other initiatives. Non-governmental organisations working with disadvantaged children and young people should receive greater support from public budgets at various levels (state, provincial, local) to provide significant social care services to improve their reach, accessibility and quality.



## Climate Action

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

### Some Facts

The survey states that young people in Serbia are more environmentally active than the elderly generation. Almost a quarter of young people (18-34 years old) participated in public meetings related to environmental issues, nearly a third are petitioners, 17% have participated in environmental issues protests, 11% funded environmental organisations and 6% contacted politicians to advocate for more responsible environmental policies.

### Youth perspective and key messages

Young people believe that climate change is an important issue, which is not getting sufficient political or public attention. They think that more education is needed on climate change and environmental protection within the formal education system. In their opinion, ecology should be introduced as a compulsory subject in elementary and secondary education. Besides, other subjects should include climate lessons to a greater extent of change and environmental protection. Schools should organise actions that will encourage young people to get involved in specific events related to climate change and environmental protection.

## Some Facts

**16** PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS



## Sustainable Development Goal 16

### Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

### Youth perspective and key messages

According to a survey on youth in Serbia more than one third (37%) are dissatisfied with democracy, 12% are satisfied while the majority do not have an opinion or do not know how to assess this phenomenon (26% and 25%). Slightly less than one quarter claimed that they would accept some political function, while the majority of almost three quarters would refuse such a function.

Young people are experiencing different types of discrimination but the most obvious one is when it comes to education and health care. Children with different types of physical, mental or intellectual disability are mostly discriminated.

Young people are emphasising the need to be more secure in their environments and on the Internet. They are most familiar with different forms of violence but because of the fear, many of them would not report it to the competent authorities. They think that the support of psychologists is a must but also continuous work with parents and teachers about proper education. The political participation of young people should be encouraged, not only through membership in political parties but also through the active participation of citizens who propose and comment on public policies and laws and monitor their implementation.



## Sustainable Development Goal 17

### Partnerships for the Goals

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

For Serbia to be sustainably developed very important is global partnership and partnerships within and across borders that mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources. Government of Republic of Serbia, with the support of the United Nations team in Serbia and the German Organisation for International Cooperation (GIZ), organised a Sub-Regional Conference entitled “Promoting Progress in Implementation Agenda 2030” in September 2018. The conference confirmed that through developed partnership cooperation achieves a common goal - to create a prosperous society that contributes to the global stability and progress and, above all, take care of the well-being of its citizens.

Serbia is receiving assistance from numerous partners, including the UN agencies and multilateral and bilateral donors. Making a comparative assessment of the support received is not easy, because support is provided in different forms, for different purposes, and is reported on in different ways. The Government of Serbia and the World Bank estimate that the country receives between USD 0.5 and 1 billion each year from development partners. It would be useful if Serbia (and other receiving countries) could better map the support provided in relation to SDG criteria and aspirations, as this would help ensure that the aid supports sustainability goals.