Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
SERBIA

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION

SERBIA

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT HUMAN COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP efficiency relevance COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP sustainability HUMAN DEVELOPMENT relevance HUMAN DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP effectiveness relevance COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP sustainability HUMAN DEVELOPMENT relevance HUMAN DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability responsiveness MANAGING FOR RESULTS relevance COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP effectiveness

REPORTS PUBLISHED UNDER THE ICPE SERIES

Afghanistan (Islamic Republic of)
Albania
Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados and OECS
Belarus
Benin
Bhutan
Bolivia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Botswana
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Cabo Verde
Cambodia
Cameroon
Central African Republic
Chad
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo (Democratic Republic of)
Congo (Republic of)
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Djibouti
Dominican Republic
DRC
Ecuador
Equatorial Guinea
Egypt
El Salvador
Eswatini
Ethiopia
Gabon
Georgia
Ghana
Guatemala
Guinea-Bissau
Guyana
Honduras
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Jamaica
Jordan
Kenya
Kosovo
Kuwait
Kyrgyzstan
Lao People's
Democratic Republic
Liberia
Libya
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mali
Mauritania
Mexico
Moldova (Republic of)
Mongolia
Montenegro
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria
North Macedonia
Pacific Islands
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Senegal
Serbia
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
South Sudan
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syria
Tajikistan
Tanzania
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Togo
Tunisia
Türkiye
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Viet Nam
Yemen
Zambia
Zimbabwe

INDEPENDENT UNDP PROGRAMME EVALUATION: SERBIA
Copyright © UNDP June 2025

The analysis and recommendations of this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Development Programme, its Executive Board or the United Nations Member States. This is an independent publication by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would like to thank all those who have contributed to this evaluation.

IEO TEAM

Directorate: Isabelle Mercier (Director) and Richard Jones (Deputy Director)

CPE section chief: Richard Jones

Lead evaluator: Yogesh Kumar Bhatt

Research analysts: Cheayoon Cho, Solomon Mano and Sarah Bashir

Internal peer reviewers: Richard Jones and Juan David Gonzales

External peer reviewer: Jim Newkirk

Evaluation consultants: Zehra Kačapor-Džihić and Jasna Žarković

Publishing and outreach: Flora Jimenez and Iben Hjorth

The IEO could not have completed the evaluation without the support of the following:

STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

UNDP Serbia: Yakup Beris (Resident Representative), Fabrizio Andreuzzi (Deputy Resident Representative), Daniel Varga (Programme Analyst – Assurance, M&E and Reporting), Milos Krivokuca (Operations Manager) and UNDP staff in Serbia.

Other stakeholders and partners: Representatives from the Government of Serbia, United Nations agencies, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and bilateral and multilateral development partners.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS i

ACRONYMS iii

EVALUATION BRIEF 1

CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION 3

1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation 4

1.2 Evaluation methodology 4

1.3 Country context 6

1.4 UNDP programme under review 10

CHAPTER 2. FINDINGS 14

2.1 Programme relevance and coherence 15

2.2 UNDP's contributions to programme objectives and sustainable development results 17

2.3 Factors influencing programme performance and cross-cutting issues 32

CHAPTER 3. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE 40

3.1 Conclusions 41

3.2 Recommendations 43

3.3 Key recommendations and management response 46

ANNEXES 52

FIGURES

Figure 1. Programme Expenditure by Thematic Area, 2021–2024 1

Figure 2. Country Programme Funding Sources, 2021–2024 1

Figure 3. Reconstructed Theory of Change of the UNDP Country Programme 2021–2025 5

Figure 4. Timeline of Strategic and Legal Development, Context Overview 9

Figure 5. Top 10 Programme Funders (2021–2024) 13

TABLE

Table 1. Country Programme Outcomes and Resources (2021–2025) as of 31 October 2024 11

BOX

Box 1. Evaluations questions 4

ACRONYMS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CO_2	Carbon Dioxide
CPD	Country Programme Document
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DIM	Civil Society Organization
EMIS	Energy Management Information Systems
ESCO	Energy Service Company
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IPPC	Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ReLOaD	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans
ROAR	Results Oriented Annual Report
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Evaluation Brief: Serbia

With the establishment of its legal framework for operating in Serbia in 1988, UNDP has focused on fostering sustainable human development, human security and equal opportunities. UNDP has supported Serbia's progress towards the country's development goals by collaborating with a range of stakeholders (including the Government of Serbia, development partners, UN agencies, civil society and local communities) to address national and global development challenges.

UNDP's Country Programme (2021–2025) in Serbia responds to three strategic priorities and contributes to four outcomes under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, signed with the Government of Serbia in February 2022. These priorities included harnessing the full potential of a green, sustainable and inclusive economy; promoting well-being, social equity and human potential; and fostering trust and mutual accountability through a rule of law and rights-based agenda. The programme directly contributed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDGs 5, 9, 12 and 15, while also supporting progress towards other SDGs.

FIGURE 1: PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2021–2024

FIGURE 2: COUNTRY PROGRAMME FUNDING SOURCES, 2021–2024

Findings and Conclusions

UNDP has played a key role in Serbia's development and delivered notable results across multiple sectors, reflecting its contribution to advancing the country's development objectives and EU accession priorities. A significant focus has been on digitalization, where UNDP supported the modernization of public services, the e-parliament system, digital government platforms and open data initiatives. These efforts improved efficiency in public administration, reduced bureaucratic delays and enhanced citizens' access to services. Training programmes for civil servants—covering areas such as energy efficiency, environmental management, disaster risk reduction, digital transformation, public finance management and ethical AI applications—have further strengthened institutional capacities.

UNDP has contributed to Serbia's alignment with international and EU environmental standards by supporting the development of key legislation, improving energy efficiency in public buildings and mobilizing resources, including through the issuance of the country's first green bond. Efforts in air

quality management, waste reduction and biodiversity conservation have yielded innovative and scalable solutions, though broader implementation has been hindered by institutional capacity and financing gaps. In the area of disaster risk reduction, UNDP has enhanced preparedness through tools such as a real-time disaster risk register and climate atlas, alongside targeted local interventions to strengthen community resilience and improve municipal planning.

UNDP's efforts on social inclusion and gender equality have supported legislative reforms, such as gender equality laws and strategies to combat gender-based violence, and delivered initiatives to improve digital literacy and employability among marginalized groups such as youth, women and Roma communities. While these efforts have contributed to economic and social integration, the evaluation highlights the need for stronger mechanisms to scale and sustain results. Initiatives to engage the diaspora in addressing demographic challenges have shown promising results; however, they could benefit from more targeted resources and clearer pathways for scaling successful models.

Challenges to results included limited scalability of pilot initiatives, resource constraints and high turnover among government and project staff, which affect continuity and institutional memory. Coordination gaps among stakeholders, delays in regulatory adoption and underdeveloped local financing mechanisms have also slowed implementation—particularly in energy efficiency and environmental projects.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. For the upcoming programme cycle, UNDP should pursue a more integrated country programme, maximizing the potential of the portfolio approach to ensure that areas of investment like the green agenda, demographic policies, digitalization, AI and gender equality are clearly tied together and consolidated.

Recommendation 2. UNDP should actively collaborate with the government to explore possibilities for scaling up successful models in addressing depopulation. This will ensure a comprehensive and sustainable approach to tackle Serbia's demographic challenges.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should continue to support the Green Agenda in Serbia by strengthening key actors' capacities for its implementation.

Recommendation 4. UNDP should adopt a flexible and fit-for-purpose business model to adapt to the changing financial landscape and boost its capacity to partner with international finance institutions in line with government priorities and Serbia's European Union accession aspirations.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should continue to enhance its gender mainstreaming efforts by conducting thorough gender analyses at the project design stage to ensure gender considerations are central, thereby improving gender marker scores and fostering more inclusive and impactful outcomes. More emphasis is needed on thoroughly incorporating LNOB and human rights principles and approaches.

CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation, as well as the methodology applied. It outlines the development context of Serbia, before introducing the UNDP country programme.

1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) in line with the UNDP Evaluation Policy.[1] The purpose of ICPEs is to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to national development priorities, and to assess the effectiveness of its strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts to achieve development results. An ICPE aims to: i) support the development of the next UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD), taking into account national development priorities, the forthcoming UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ii) strengthen UNDP's accountability to national stakeholders, iii) strengthen UNDP's accountability to the Executive Board, and iv) contribute to institutional learning, knowledge generation and sharing.

The IEO carried out an Independent Country Programme Evaluation of UNDP in Serbia for the 2021–2025 programme cycle, building on the previous ICPE conducted in 2018/2019.[2] The scope of the current ICPE covered all UNDP activities in the country, including those funded by UNDP core resources, donor contributions and government co-financing. It also included projects and initiatives from the previous programme cycle that continued or concluded during the current cycle, in line with the evaluation Terms of Reference (Annex 1). The ICPE was guided by four main evaluation questions (Box 1) and conducted in close collaboration with the Government of Serbia, UNDP Serbia and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The primary audiences for the evaluation are the UNDP Serbia Country Office (CO), the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the UNDP Executive Board and the Government of Serbia.

BOX 1. Evaluation questions

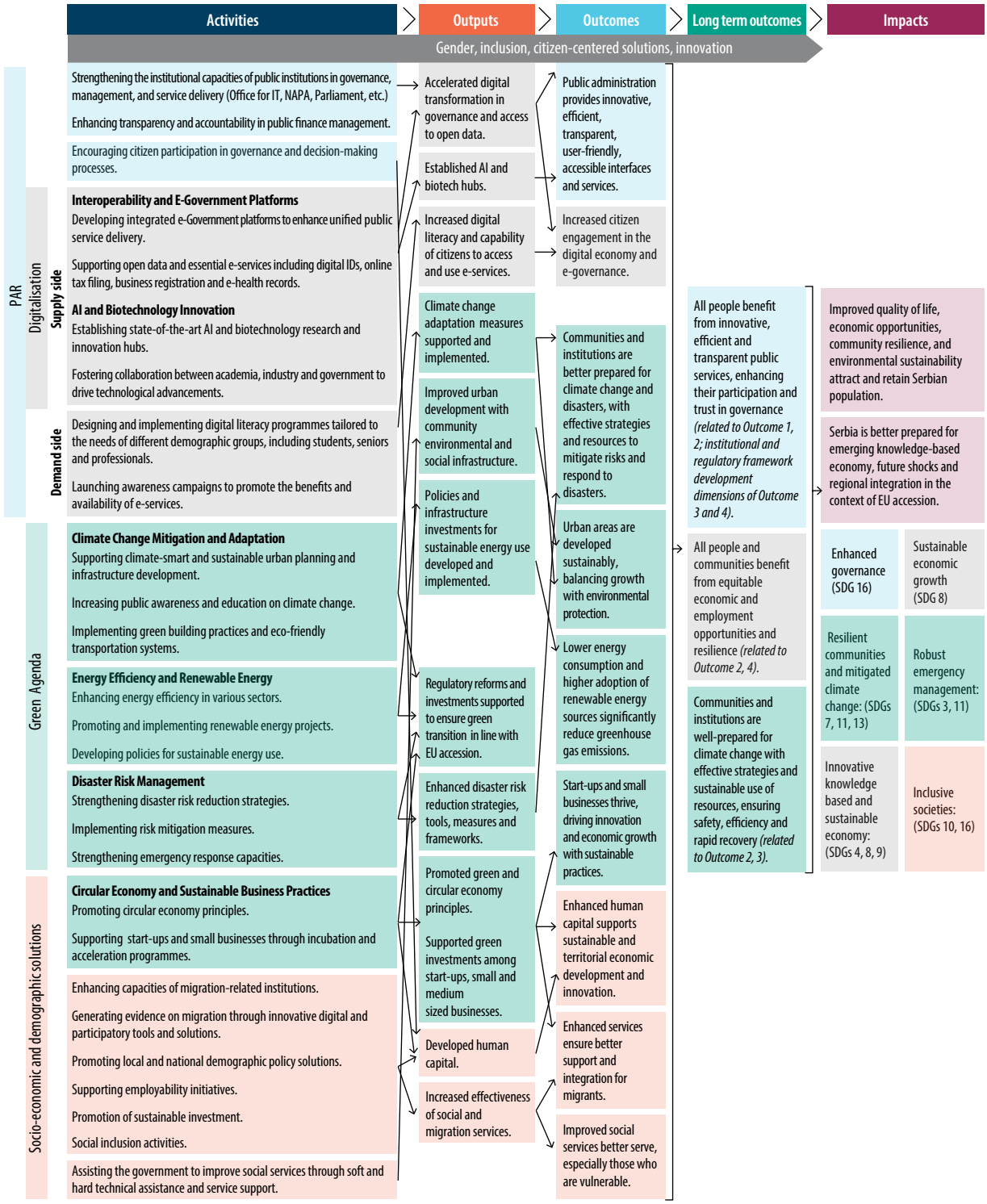
1. To what extent has the UNDP country programme strategically addressed key national development priorities and the needs of its main stakeholders, including those at risk of being left behind?
2. To what extent was UNDP able to adapt its positioning and programmatic response to shifts in context and other changes in the operating environment, leveraging comparative strengths?
3. To what extent were UNDP approaches and interventions successful in achieving the intended objectives of the country programme and contributing to broader, longer-term national development goals?
4. To what extent did internal and external factors influence UNDP's ability to deliver its programme efficiently and maximize contributions?

1.2 Evaluation methodology

The ICPE was conducted in accordance with the approved IEO process and adhered to United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.[3] It applied a theory-based methodology, reviewing and updating the Theory of Change (ToC) presented in the CPD. The evaluation team reconstructed and finalized the ToC in consultation with the CO, thus ensuring that it accurately reflected the programme's adaptations and underlying logic. This reconstructed ToC provided the foundation for the subsequent assessment, providing a clear and comprehensive basis for evaluating interventions' effectiveness in achieving the intended outcomes (Figure 3).

1 http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/evaluation-policy.pdf
2 http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/assessment-of-development-results.shtml
3 United Nations Evaluation Group: http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914

FIGURE 3: RECONSTRUCTED THEORY OF CHANGE OF THE UNDP COUNTRY PROGRAMME 2021–2025



Assumptions from activities to Output level

- CO efficiently mobilizes and allocates resources.
- UNDP CO's organizational structure facilitates efficient delivery of results (i.e. adequate staffing structure and competencies).
- UNDP maintains active partnerships with the government, donors, UN agencies and other development actors and local communities, ensuring interventions are adaptable to changing needs and opportunities.
- Government institutions, community leaders and local organizations are proactively engaged in planning and implementing interventions, ensuring implemented interventions bring results.

Assumptions from Outputs to Outcomes

- UNDP beneficiaries and partners possess the necessary awareness, skills and knowledge to utilize provided services and opportunities effectively.
- The contextual environment, including political, economic and social factors, enables the effective translation of enhanced institutional capacities into tangible and improved services for citizens, leading to systemic improvements in service delivery.
- External shocks, such as natural disasters or economic downturns, do not significantly undermine the progress of interventions.

Assumptions from Outcomes to Impacts

- Economy and political situation remain stable without deterioration.
- Continued donor support and funding stability.
- Partnerships with local and international partners continue to strengthen.
- Governmental and institutional reforms support the initiatives, ensuring alignment with broader development strategies and facilitating smoother implementation.
- The global and regional economic environment remains conducive to the success of interventions.

The evaluation team collected and analysed qualitative data from both primary and secondary sources to inform, triangulate and validate findings, conclusions and recommendations. In addition to a document review (Annex 7),[4] the evaluation team conducted online and in-person semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 103 internal and external stakeholders (52 male and 51 female) from a range of institutions and sectors, based on their engagement with UNDP. Participants included representatives from UNDP, the government, public institutions and the civil service (at both national and subnational levels), the UN Country Team, development partners, donors, civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, academia and final beneficiaries (Annex 5). Field visits were conducted in Kragujevac and Čačak.

The evaluation assessed UNDP's performance using the reconstructed ToC and the CPD output and outcome framework, taking into account two key parameters: 1) Serbia's EU accession aspirations and the SDGs; and 2) exogenous factors such as the national context, the COVID-19 pandemic and global socio-economic and political developments. The performance of the CO was scored against each indicator in the evaluation matrix using a four-point scale, with results presented in Annex 9.

Evaluation limitations

The evaluation did not encounter significant limitations. The evaluation team was able to meet most planned interlocutors and institutional representatives. Meetings that could not take place during the field mission were conducted remotely. In some cases, where documentation was limited, the evaluation team relied on interviews to assess the outcomes of some interventions.

1.3 Country context

Demography. Serbia is an upper middle-income country located in the Western Balkans, with a population of 6.7 million.[5] It has experienced population decline in all regions except Belgrade.[6] This decline has been driven by ageing, low fertility, youth emigration and other factors. The country's average age is 43.5 years, and its old-age dependency ratio is 33 percent.[7] Life expectancy in Serbia is approximately five years lower than the EU average, due to the prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases, uneven access to healthcare, environmental factors, dietary habits and other health-related behaviours.

Migration. Over the last decade, Serbia has experienced a net emigration trend, with the OECD estimating that more than 650,000 people have left the country over the past two decades. Motivations for emigration include access to larger labour markets, better employment opportunities and higher salaries, which are seen as pathways to professional fulfilment and improved quality of life for the next generation.[8,9] Immigration has also increased, particularly as a result of the Russia–Ukraine war.[10]

---

4 Based on an analysis of the Country Office portfolio, the team selected 22 projects (27 percent) and one regional project for in-depth review and analysis, representing a cross-section of UNDP's work in the country across the four outcomes. The sampling was based on the following criteria: a) programme coverage (interventions spanning various thematic and cross-cutting areas); b) financial expenditure (a mix of large and smaller projects); c) maturity (including both completed and ongoing projects); and d) degree of learning value (covering successful interventions as well as projects that encountered challenges from which lessons can be drawn). In addition, the evaluation considered the results of other projects that emerged during discussions conducted in the field-based data collection phase.

5 Population declined from 7.2 million (2011 Census) to 6.7 million (2022 Census). Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2022); First Results of the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings, 2022.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 UNDP (2020); CPD 2021–2025.

9 Serbian residence permits in the EU nearly doubled, reaching 44,078 in 2021 from 23,770 in 2013, peaking at 62,373 in 2019. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_RESFIRST__custom_5802405/default/line?lang=en

10 Over 100,000 Russians and 18,000 Ukrainians reportedly immigrated to Serbia between March and November 2022. Source: https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/drustvo/5021133/rusi-ukrajinci-srbija-stanovi-skole.html

Economy and inequality. Serbia has seen a steady increase in per capita GDP, rising from US$9,184 in 2021 to an estimated $12,357 in 2024,[11] accompanied by a 3.7 percentage point increase in the labour force participation rate.[12] The poverty rate declined during this period,[13] while the at-risk-of-poverty rate fell to 20 percent in 2022.[14] Poverty risk was highest among individuals aged 18–24, those aged 65 and over, families with two adults and three or more children, and the unemployed.[15] Inequality has decreased over time but remains above the EU-27 average.[16]

Labour market. The unemployment rate declined from 23.9 percent in 2012 to 11.1 percent in 2021 and then to 9.4 percent in 2023, reflecting Serbia's economic recovery in recent years. However, youth unemployment remained high at 25 percent in 2023.[17] The NEET rate (not in education, employment or training) has gradually decreased but still exceeds the EU average.[18] A significant portion of the workforce, particularly women, remains inactive.[19] Contributing factors to women's labour force participation include maternity leave provisions, access to flexible work arrangements, financial support and care-related services.[20] Emigration has had a significant impact on urban labour markets, contributing to high levels of inactivity and a mismatch between available skills and the needs of local employers.[21]

The EU accession process. Since the official launch of EU–Serbia accession negotiations in January 2014, Serbia has opened 20 chapters, covering areas such as the judiciary, fundamental rights, justice, freedom and security. Serbia's progress in the accession process depends on the effective implementation of reforms and the resolution of outstanding issues, including strengthening the rule of law and normalizing relations with Kosovo.[22] Advances have been made in areas such as the rule of law, public administration and economic governance.[23] However, key challenges persist in relation to judicial reform, anti-corruption measures and media freedom.[24]

Governance. Serbia has taken steps to improve the business environment, with reforms targeting areas such as business registration and construction permitting.[25] Notable progress has been made in enhancing the efficiency and quality of public administration at both regional and global levels.[26] E-governance efforts were strengthened through the establishment of 55 one-stop shops between 2019 and 2023, covering around

---

11 International Monetary Fund; World Economic Outlook Database, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2023/October/download-entire-database

12 Labour force participation rate was 52.3 percent in Q1 2024 and 56.0 percent in Q2 2024. https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/240003010402?languageCode=en-US

13 Upper-middle-income poverty rate ($6.85) declined from 7.9 percent to 7.1 percent in 2023. https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-srb.pdf

14 Lowered by 4.5 percentage points from 2013. https://sdg.indikatori.rs/sr-latn/area/no-poverty/?subarea=SDGUN010201&indicator=01020501IND01

15 https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/statisticalrelease/?p=8870&a=01&s=0102?s=0102

16 32.0 percent in 2022 compared to 33.3 in 2021 and 38.3 percent in 2014. EU-27 average was 29.6 percent in 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_di12/default/table?lang=en

17 https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/240003020304?languageCode=sr-Latn

18 From 28.6 percent (2012) to 19.8 percent (2021) and to 16.3 (2023). EU-27 average was 12.4 percent in 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_20/default/table?lang=en

19 Activity rate increased from 46.7 percent in 2012 to 55.4 percent in 2023, leaving 44.6 percent of the working-age population inactive (51.4 percent of females, and 37.3 percent of males). Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

20 UNECE (2021); UNECE – UN Women series: Rethinking the Care Economy and Empowering Women for Building Back Better Childcare, Women's Employment and COVID-19 Impacts: The Case of Serbia.

21 UNDP ROAR 2023. In the past two decades, Serbia lost 12 percent of its population, while 58 percent of municipalities lost over 20 percent of their population.

22 All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

23 European Commission (2023); Serbia Report.

24 Ibid.

25 World Bank (2023); Doing Business Report 2022, https://archive.doingbusiness.org/en/doingbusiness

26 Impact is reflected in the visible progress of the Republic of Serbia at the global level, where, according to World Bank standards, the effectiveness (efficiency) of public administration in 2022 was 57.08—an improvement compared to 2020 (51.43). The ranking value ranges from 0 to 100, with a higher value indicating better performance, and is based on perceptions from various sources regarding the quality of public services and public administration. Source: Ministry of Public Administration (2023); Mid-term Review of the Public Administration Reform Strategy.

one-third of local governance units across the country.[27,28] According to the United Nations e-Government Development Index 2022, Serbia ranked 40th out of 193 countries (up from 50th in 2020), with an index of 0.82 out of 1.[29] The World Bank's GovTech Maturity Index for 2022, which tracks digital transformation in the public sector, placed Serbia among the leading countries globally, alongside 62 others.[30] A review of government effectiveness indicators shows a general upward trend, with some fluctuation over the past decade (Annex 3). However, the World Bank's Governance Indicators (2022) identify political stability as an ongoing concern, affecting the efficiency of governance systems and hindering the development of cohesive strategies.

Rule of law. Serbia aims to accelerate judicial and broader governance reforms[31] under the framework of its Reform Agenda.[32] Despite reform efforts led by the 'Judiciary Reform Strategy (2019–2023)',[33] which sought to improve judicial independence and efficiency, challenges persist in ensuring the rule of law. The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (2022) ranked Serbia below the regional average, citing issues such as limited checks on executive power and corruption.[34,35] A new anti-corruption strategy was adopted in 2024,[36] several years after the previous strategy (2013–2018) had expired. According to World Bank governance indicators, public perceptions of the rule of law have steadily improved over the past decade, though signs of stagnation remain (Annex 3).

Environment and climate change. Serbia ranked 79th in the 2022 Environmental Performance Index.[37] The country faces considerable environmental challenges, including poor air and water quality and high levels of pollution. Air quality monitoring shows that cities such as Belgrade experience elevated levels of particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), with annual average concentrations exceeding World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.[38] Serbia has been investing in transitioning to renewable energy sources, with around a 26.3 percent share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption in 2020.[39] It has committed to increasing this share to 33.6 percent by 2030, in line with the 'Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan' adopted in July 2024.[40]

Serbia has also been actively participating in international climate initiatives and has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 33.3 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.[41] Despite these efforts, the country faces persistent tensions between economic development, environmental protection and preservation of natural capital. Key challenges include industrial emissions, outdated infrastructure and inadequate waste and wastewater treatment systems.

---

27 These centres consolidate multiple service applications into a single location, embodying the "once only" principle and enhancing the ease of administrative access.

28 Moreover, the optimization of 400 administrative procedures pertinent to business operations, including the elimination of 21 processes, has culminated in an annual economic benefit of 32 million euros. https://mduls.gov.rs/publikacije/

29 European Policy Centre (2023); National Public Administration Reform Monitor 2021/2022, p.118.

30 Ibid.

31 Reforms in the policy area on Fundamentals encompass topics covering democracy, fundamental rights, the fight against organized crime, security and migration, the fight against corruption and the judiciary.

32 Reform Agenda of the Republic of Serbia available at https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/adopted_reform_agenda_narrative_-_republic_of_serbia.pdf

33 https://www.mpravde.gov.rs/files/New%20Working%20Text%20of%20the%20JDS%20_ENG_%20public%20discussion%20comments%20incorporated.pdf

34 https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiAoeGuBhCBARIsAGfKY7yOG_2Q0F1wdjinasn_JTOqTQs9mQQSjmP_pQGxfw9OGV-ykOdrePQaAkJYEALw_wcB

35 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2022) ranks Serbia at 42 out of 180 countries, indicating room for improvement. Transparency International, Global Corruption Barometer, https://www.transparency.org/en

36 On 25 July 2024, the Government adopted the new Anti-Corruption Strategy for the 2024–2028 period. Available at https://www.srbija.gov.rs/extfile/sr/802696/nac_strat_borba_protiv_korupc_2024-2028_0017_cyr.zip.

37 https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2022/component/epi

38 https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/AQ_City_briefings_Belgrade.pdf

39 Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan, available at https://www.mre.gov.rs/extfile/sr/2716/Public_consultations_report_INECP_SEA_EN_clean.pdf

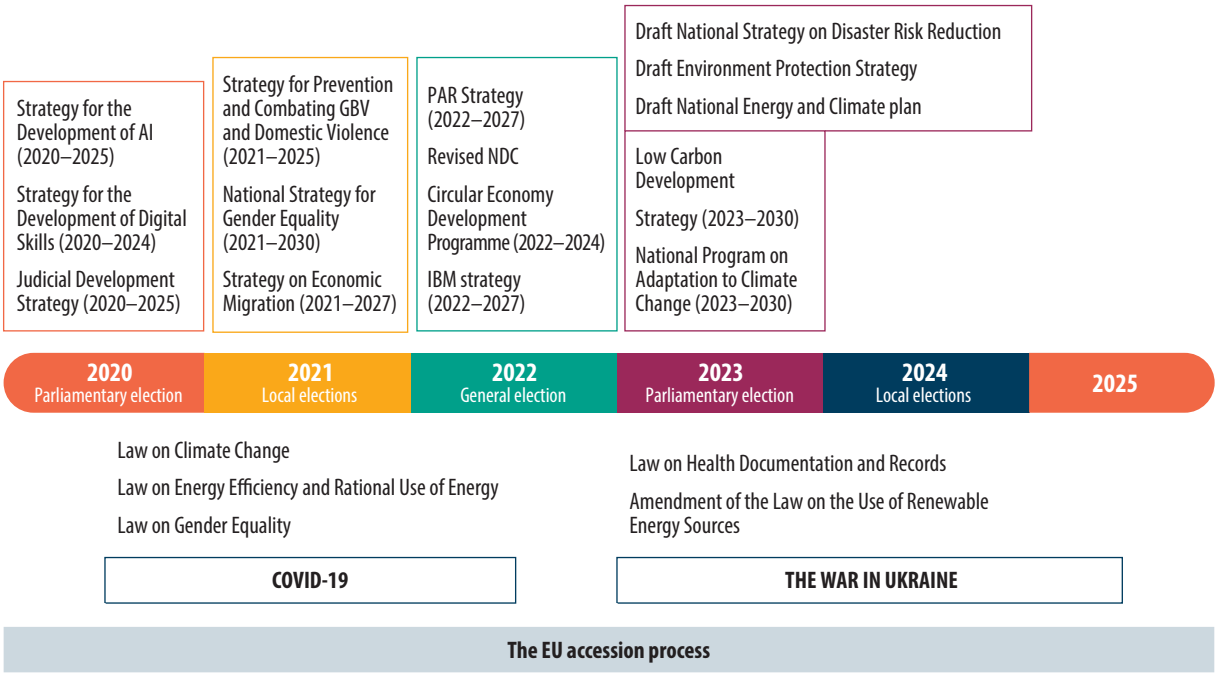
40 Ibid.

41 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) of the Republic of Serbia for the 2021–2030 period, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-08/NDC%20Final_Serbia%20english.pdf

Gender equality and gender-based violence. Serbia ranked 26th out of 146 countries, with a Global Gender Gap Index score of 0.779 for 2024,[42] representing a slight decline of 0.021 points from 2021.[43] A review of the World Bank's Gender Inequality Index shows a downward trend over the past decade (Annex 3). A separate survey that focused on women in business found that 54 percent of women earn less than their male partners, and 78 percent of people believe that women and men are not treated equally in the workplace.[44] Gender-based violence remains prevalent in Serbia, with half of all women reporting some form of violence.[45] Serbia has yet to adopt the 'Action Plan for the National Strategy for Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2021–2025)'.

Women in politics. Following the 2023 elections, women's representation in the national parliament reached 36.4 percent, with 91 out of 250 members being female (Annex 3). This exceeds the regional average, as well as the averages in EU countries and globally. Between 2022 and 2023, women held 32 percent of ministerial positions, rising slightly to 33 percent following the 2023 elections. However, local leadership remains male-dominated, with only 11.7 percent of municipal presidents and 17 percent of city mayors being female as of 2022.[46]

FIGURE 4: TIMELINE OF STRATEGIC AND LEGAL DEVELOPMENT, CONTEXT OVERVIEW



[42] https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2024-2e5f5cd886/#performance-by-region
[43] https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2021/in-full/gggr2-benchmarking-gender-gaps-findings-from-the-global-gender-gap-index-2021/
[44] UN Women (2022); Women and Men in Serbia: At a Glance, https://serbia.un.org/en/177164-women-and-men-serbia-glance
[45] https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/serbia/ending-violence-against-women
[46] https://serbia.un.org/en/226414-17th-issue-gender-brief-serbia

1.4 UNDP programme under review

UNDP has operated under a formal legal framework in Serbia since 1988,[47] focusing on fostering sustainable human development, human security and equal opportunities. It supports Serbia's advancement towards EU accession, collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders (including the Government of Serbia, development partners, UN agencies, civil society and local communities) to address national and global development challenges.

The UNDP country programme in Serbia responded to three strategic priorities and contributed primarily to four outcomes under the 'UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021–2025', signed with the Government of Serbia in February 2022.[48, 49] These outcomes include harnessing the full potential of a green, sustainable and inclusive economy; promoting well-being, social equity and human potential; and building trust and mutual accountability through a rule of law, rights and duties agenda. Overall, the UNDP programme in Serbia directly contributes to SDGs 5, 9, 12 and 15, while also supporting progress towards other SDGs.

As set out in the reconstructed ToC for the 2021–2025 CPD (Figure 1), UNDP intervened in a wide range of areas in support of national priorities and needs across nearly all regions of the country. UNDP's environment and climate change interventions addressed multiple interconnected areas, including climate mitigation and adaptation, energy efficiency, renewable energy and disaster risk management. Support focused on aligning Serbia's policy and regulatory frameworks with the EU climate and environment acquis (most recently the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans), as well as with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and global development objectives. In parallel, UNDP supported the identification, testing and financing of green investments and projects contributing to the broader green transition and decarbonization of the economy. UNDP also promoted stakeholder engagement on environmental and climate issues, with an emphasis on partnerships involving the private sector, academia, CSOs and financial institutions, including commercial banks. Together, these efforts contribute to long-term outcomes such as the sustainable use of resources, enhanced resilience to climate shocks and increased economic and employment opportunities—aligning with both Serbia's EU accession process and environmental sustainability goals.

UNDP's support for economic empowerment and demographic solutions has focused on promoting inclusive economic growth, improving employment opportunities and addressing demographic challenges such as migration and population decline. Its intervention logic emphasized support to start-ups and small businesses, particularly those aligned with green and circular economy principles, to foster innovation and sustainable economic development. Activities also included efforts to strengthen human capital through education, skills development and innovation, helping individuals participate more effectively in a rapidly evolving labour market.

On the demographic front, UNDP developed innovative, data-driven solutions to support return migration and the repatriation of skilled workers, aiming to better align human capital with Serbia's economic needs. This includes localizing the depopulation portfolio and partnering with mid-sized towns to pioneer a new approach to local policy development—one that not only tailors solutions to complex local realities, but also integrates flexible management models to allow for the design, testing and adaptation of responses based on emerging evidence. These interventions aimed to expand equitable access to economic

[47] The Standard Basic Framework Agreement applicable to UNDP activities in Serbia was initially signed by the Government (Federal Executive Council) of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1988. Source: https://www.undp.org/serbia/legal-framework

[48] https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/un-cooperation-framework-serbia-2021-2025.pdf

[49] UNDP has also contributed to other outcomes of the UNSDCF 2021–2025.

opportunities and improve public services, contributing to a more resilient and inclusive society while addressing demographic trends that impact Serbia's long-term development. UNDP's intervention logic for governance and civic engagement focuses on strengthening institutional capacities to promote transparent, accountable and inclusive governance, while encouraging active citizen participation in decision-making processes. Emphasis was placed on enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of public institutions through improved governance frameworks, digital transformation and e-Government platforms that facilitate easier access to services for citizens, such as digital IDs, health records and more. UNDP also promoted the use of AI and biotechnology innovation to improve public services and foster collaboration between government, academia and industry.

An integral part of UNDP's governance efforts focused on increasing civic engagement, particularly by encouraging citizens' involvement in governance and policymaking through digital literacy programmes and tailored platforms for different demographic groups. This also included awareness campaigns to strengthen public understanding of governance and accountability mechanisms. These efforts aimed to create an environment where public administration is more efficient, transparent and accessible, resulting in increased trust in governance and enhanced citizen participation in shaping public policies. The long-term goal is to develop resilient, responsive and inclusive governance systems that support democratic processes and align with EU standards for public-sector reform and civic engagement. Across all areas, UNDP has promoted the integration of interventions specifically targeting vulnerable groups such as women, youth and the Roma community.

The estimated budget target for the CPD 2021–2025 was $92 million.[50] As of 31 October 2024, the CO had already exceeded this target, raising $160.2 million, with a delivery rate of 72 percent (Table 1).[51] The project portfolio included a total of 80 projects, some implemented in multiple phases and some continuing from the previous programme cycle. Projects were implemented through a balanced mix of Direct Implementation, National Implementation (NIM) and the CO's support to NIM across all outcomes.

TABLE 1: COUNTRY PROGRAMME OUTCOMES AND RESOURCES IN MILLION US$ AS OF 31 OCTOBER 2024

UNSDCF Priority Area	Country Programme Outcome	CPD target budget (2021-2025)	Actual Budget (2021-24)	Actual Expenditure (2021-24)	Actual Delivery (2021-2024)
Strategic priority 3: Building trust and mutual accountability through the rule of law, rights and duties agenda	OUTCOME 1: All people benefit from effective governance and meaningful civic engagement.	32,004,000	43,705,107	34,062,218	78%

[50] UNDP (2020); CPD for Serbia 2021–2025.

[51] There was a difference in financial figures extracted from the UNDP corporate dashboard and those reported by UNDP Serbia. For the same period, UNDP Serbia reported $174,504,422 (actual budget) and $ 133,186,710 (actual expenditure).

UNSDCF Priority Area	Country Programme Outcome	CPD target budget (2021-2025)	Actual Budget (2021-24)	Actual Expenditure (2021-24)	Actual Delivery (2021-2024)
Strategic priority 2: Well-being, social equity and human potential are at the heart of systems, policies and practices	OUTCOME 2: Equitable economic and employment opportunities are promoted through innovation and circularity.	16,539,000	50,244,728	34,753,522	69%
	OUTCOME 4: Mobility and demographic transition become vectors for positive change and prosperity for all people.	10,539,000	8,580,472	3,862,059	45%
Strategic priority 1: Serbia harnesses the full potential of a green, sustainable and inclusive economy	OUTCOME 3: Serbia adopts and implements climate change and environmentally friendly strategies that increase community resilience, decrease carbon footprint and boost the benefits of national investments.	33,033,695	57,683,932	41,942,278	73%
Total		**92,115,695**	**160,214,240**	**114,620,076**	**72%**

Source: UNDP Quantum & Atlas, extracted on 31 October 2024

UNDP Serbia is organized into three programme clusters (Resilient Development, Good Governance[52] and the SDG Integration Centre), along with the ICT Tech Cell, Engineering Tech Cell, Programme Management Support Team, Development Solutions Team, Operations Unit, Communications Unit and the Accelerator Lab. The CO has established horizontal roles that provide support across programme clusters and projects and help identify synergies.

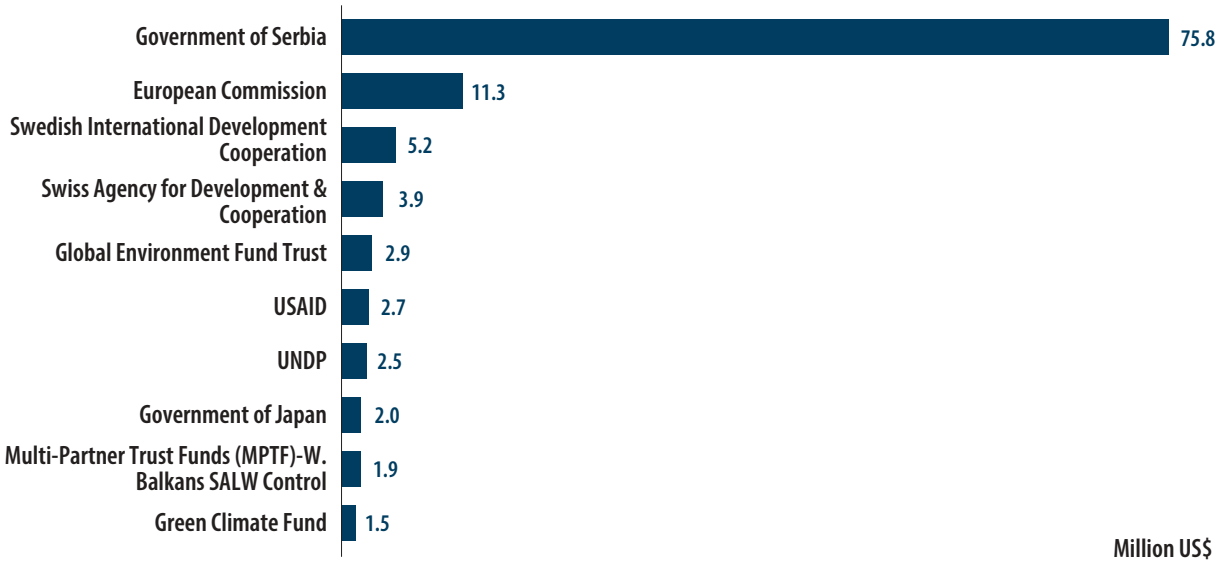
The CO currently has 375 personnel, of whom 341 are employed under Personnel Services Agreements (335 under National Personnel Services Agreements and six under International Personnel Services Agreements). There are also 31 staff under Fixed-Term Appointments, one under a Temporary Appointment, and two United Nations Volunteers. The total includes 38 staff working on the Southeastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons Regional Project[53] who are based in Serbia. Gender distribution across the workforce is 183 female (48.8 percent) and 192 male (51.2 percent).[54]

A number of donors supported UNDP's work over the reference period. The Government of Serbia was the top donor, contributing $75.8 million, followed by the European Commission ($11.3 million) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) ($5.2 million) (Figure 5).[55] EU funding to the CO and government cost-sharing increased significantly as a result of UNDP's technical assistance to

[52] Name has been changed in 2024 to Good Governance and Inclusive Growth Cluster.
[53] https://www.seesac.org/Team/
[54] UNDP data from March 2024.
[55] There was a difference in financial figures extracted from the UNDP corporate dashboard and those reported by UNDP Serbia. For the same period, UNDP Serbia reported $110.8 million as Government of Serbia contributions, followed by $24.1 million from the EU and $6.8 million from Sida.

government projects funded by international financial institutions and foreign direct investments. UNDP strengthened joint coordination and advocacy on the Green Agenda by supporting the Government of Serbia in establishing a Green Agenda Partnerships and Engagement Platform. The Platform was financially supported by the EU and the Governments of Serbia, Sweden and Switzerland, and implemented by UNDP in partnership with the European Investment Bank[56] and SIDA. Partnerships with international financial institutions were also evident in the implementation of green initiatives and in providing technical preconditions for the Renovation of Central Government Buildings Programme to Improve Energy Efficiency, which was funded through a Council of Europe Development Bank loan.

FIGURE 5: TOP 10 PROGRAMME FUNDERS (2021–2024)



Source: UNDP Quantum & Atlas, extracted on 31 October 2024

[56] The Platform also attracted other donors and development partners to contribute, such as the governments of Japan and Slovakia, while France, Germany and Italy have observer partner status. As per UNDP CO data, the Platform mobilized $18 million of donor funds.

CHAPTER 2
FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the Serbia Country Programme and a contribution analysis, along with an assessment of operational and cross-cutting issues. The findings are organized into three sections, aligned with the key evaluation questions and criteria.[57] These focus on: 1) UNDP's strategic and programmatic responsiveness and coherence; 2) UNDP's contributions to programme objectives and sustainable development results; and 3) key factors, including strategies, approaches and cross-cutting aspects that influenced UNDP's performance and broader adoption of results. The analysis is guided by the reconstructed Theory of Change for the country programme and aggregates results achieved by the Country Office across the outcomes listed in the CPD.

2.1 Programme relevance and coherence

Finding 1. UNDP efforts have been closely aligned with Serbia's national priorities, the SDGs and EU accession aspirations. Key features of UNDP's value offer in Serbia include its efficient procurement processes, innovation, technical expertise and advisory support on key reforms and policies and its adaptability—all of which have contributed to its responsiveness, strong partnerships and substantial government funding.

UNDP's strategic efforts have been closely aligned with Serbia's national priorities,[58] the SDGs and Serbia's EU accession aspirations.[59] This includes alignment with local and national socio-economic priorities such as demographic policies, employment, education, waste and wastewater treatment, nature protection, climate action and adaptation, air quality improvement and decarbonization. Additionally, UNDP activities are aligned with the EU Green Deal policy[60] to support Serbia's EU accession process through a focus on circular economy and sustainable development reforms and policies. During the review period, UNDP contributed to the development of legislative and policy frameworks, both through direct advisory support and through investments in strengthening the capacities of key institutions (see Finding 2).

Considering Serbia's status as an upper-middle-income country, UNDP positioned itself as a strong partner to the government and donors, offering support at the upstream level[61] (supply side,[62] as depicted in the ToC, Figure 1) in shaping and supporting national policies and systems that enable sustainable development and advance EU accession. UNDP's support was less prominent in direct, on-the-ground or local interventions, or in addressing the demand side[63] (ToC, Figure 1). At this level, UNDP responded to the needs of rights holders for improved service delivery, providing grants to CSOs to support local interventions related to

[57] The criteria – relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability – are addressed within the four KEQs and the sub-questions, in accordance with the Performance Rating System. Details and results of the Performance Rating are presented in Annex 8.

[58] 'Serbia and the 2030 Agenda - Mapping the National Strategic Framework in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals', available at https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Srbija-i-Agenda-2030.-februar-2024.-lat.pdf; Action Plan for the Implementation of the Government Programme 2023–2026, available at https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/APSPV-2023-2026-1.pdf, Action Plan for the Implementation of the Government Programme 2020–2022, available at https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/APSPV-2020-2022.pdf

[59] As evident in the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) 2022–2025, https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/npaa/NPAA_2022-2025_EN.pdf

[60] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/#what, European Commission (2020); Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, available at https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/green_agenda_for_the_western_balkans_en.pdf

[61] This upstream approach is typical in UMIC contexts, where national capacities are relatively stronger, and the role of UNDP is more about providing strategic support and fostering long-term development goals rather than direct service provision. This means that UNDP is more involved in shaping policies, enhancing institutional capacities and supporting governance frameworks rather than direct service delivery at the community level.

[62] Such as strengthening institutions and policy environments, modelling mechanisms and approaches for scale-up by government institutions, etc.

[63] Investments in issues such as community engagement or grassroots service needs.

Roma inclusion, gender equality, digitalization and youth[64] engagement. However, interventions such as digital literacy,[65] economic opportunity, diaspora engagement, green jobs[66] and citizen participation in public policy were inherently less prominent than institutional and infrastructure support.

UNDP successfully mobilized resources, exceeding its overall targets. The CPD was largely shaped by funding opportunities and the government's agenda, with the Serbian government emerging as the largest donor, contributing approximately $75.8 million[67] between 2021 and 2024—primarily for interventions in governance, socio-economic development, employment and environmental and social infrastructure. Much of this funding was directed to interventions that involved the procurement of goods and services—an area seen as central to UNDP's value offer. Interlocutors confirmed that government funding was especially strong in areas where UNDP could respond more promptly and with fewer bureaucratic constraints than government systems, such as procurement and outsourcing of experts or services, thereby facilitating the timely delivery of needed support. In addition, UNDP contributed technical expertise, international standards for sustainable infrastructure and, to some extent, the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) approach—elements which, according to interlocutors, would likely not have been incorporated had the government directly implemented the interventions.

UNDP's strong innovation capacity and responsiveness to stakeholder needs were widely recognized by all stakeholders. The evaluation found that innovation was at the core of UNDP's work across various sectors, including AI, digital transformation, public administration, biotechnology and green solutions, as explored further in Section 2.2. UNDP has also strategically positioned itself to address the green financing gap in Serbia by supporting SMEs, academia and CSOs to use technology and innovation in developing solutions related to decarbonization, the circular economy, air quality, waste and wastewater treatment, nature protection and sustainable food production. The development of the Liquid Tree—an air purification biotechnology innovation—is a notable example.[68]

UNDP's strategic position has also been reinforced by its flexible and agile approaches. For example, UNDP's comprehensive, timely and adaptive response to the COVID-19 crisis significantly supported the government and other donor efforts. Notably, UNDP arranged the delivery of 720 tons of medical supplies through 15 EU-funded cargo flights and facilitated eight additional flights funded by the Serbian government.[69] The 'UN COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan' and the UNSDCF 2021–2025 Emergency-related Output[70] framed UNDP's support for the government's post-COVID recovery, with many recommendations being taken forward—such as the socio-economic integration of returnees, the digital transformation of the health system and the green recovery. This support was highly praised by all interviewed stakeholders.

64 UNDP ReLOaD and PBF projects' data.
65 UNDP (2022); Decentralized evaluation 'Open Data for Sustainable Development', https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/20331
66 According to the UNDP 2023 Interim Narrative Report 'EU for Green Agenda in Serbia: Get Started, Take Action, Scale-up', there are over 5,000 direct beneficiaries with improved socio-economic conditions due to pilot projects.
67 There was a difference in financial figures extracted from the UNDP corporate dashboard and those reported by UNDP Serbia. For the same period, UNDP Serbia reported $110.8 million as Government of Serbia contributions.
68 https://worldbiomarketinsights.com/a-liquid-tree-scientists-in-serbia-make-incredible-innovation/
69 UNDP (2022); Interim Disaster Risk Reduction report.
70 Outcome 3.2, output 'Emergency preparedness and response guarantees that all lives are equal'.

2.2 UNDP's contributions to programme objectives and sustainable development results

Inclusive, Efficient and Transparent Governance — linked to CPD Outcomes 1 and 2

Legislative and institutional development

Finding 2. UNDP's support for regulatory reform and institutional strengthening has contributed to Serbia's reforms and EU accession aspirations. However, at times, UNDP's efforts have been reactive and not always strategically prioritized, resulting in fragmented outcomes in some cases.

UNDP's legislative and policy support has significantly advanced Serbia's alignment with EU standards and helped modernize national frameworks to better address pressing social, environmental and governance challenges, laying the foundation for future reforms. Complementing these efforts, UNDP's institution-building work has focused on strengthening the capacity of national and, to a lesser extent, local authorities to effectively implement reforms. For example, within its support to Public Finance Management, UNDP played a key role in harmonizing the Public Investment Management (PIM) methodology and in developing secondary legislation for implementing the new PIM system.[71]

This support for financial control regulations was complemented by comprehensive training on project cycle management and financial oversight, enabling ministries and local authorities to better manage public investments. According to stakeholder feedback, these interventions helped promote more transparent and efficient use of resources, in line with EU financial governance standards and the EU acquis Chapter 32 on Financial Control. This Chapter is still under negotiation between the Government of Serbia and the EU, and UNDP's contributions support progress toward meeting the benchmarks for its provisional closure.[72]

Similarly, UNDP contributed to the development of key environmental laws[73] and national policies.[74] Stakeholders particularly praised UNDP's participatory approach in developing the National Environmental Protection Strategy ('Green Agenda for Serbia'), which serves as a backbone for Serbia's green transition in line with the five pillars of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. However, at the time of writing, the strategy had not yet been formally adopted. To complement these efforts, UNDP strengthened the institutional capacities of ministries and local authorities to implement the new regulatory frameworks. Evaluation findings suggest that these interventions have helped Serbia become better equipped to meet its international obligations and EU standards on environmental sustainability—specifically under Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change),[75] as also corroborated by interviewed stakeholders.

[71] UNDP (2024); Support to Strengthening Technical Capacity and Institutional Development of the Ministry of Finance and Coordination in the Field of Economic Governance, Progress Report, 1 January 2023 – 31 December 2023.

[72] https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-06/20190529-serbia-state-of-play.pdf

[73] E.g. the Law on Climate Change, Law on Waste Management, Law on Protection of Air Quality, Law on Nature Protection, Law on Industrial Pollution Prevention and Control. A draft Law on Organic Farming is under preparation with support from UNDP.

[74] I.e. National Environmental Protection Strategy, National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Circular Economy Development Programme in the Republic of Serbia 2022–2024, Low Carbon Development Strategy with Action Plan, National Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2023–2030, Waste Management Strategy, Sludge Management Programme and the revized Serbia's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). UNDP supported initiation of drafting of the Industrial Safety Strategy.

[75] UNDP support contributed to Serbia's NDC adaptation commitments, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in particular SDG 13), as well as to the country's performance under Chapter 27 (Environment) of the EU accession negotiations, as confirmed by interviewed stakeholders from government and donors, and as evident in environmental UNDP evaluation reports (e.g. 'Advancing Medium and Long-term Adaptation Planning in the Republic of Serbia' and 'Climate-Smart Urban Development (CSUD) Challenge').

Additionally, UNDP's healthcare interventions,[76] specifically through support for the Law on Health Documentation and Records,[77] facilitated the creation of the Republic Integrated Health Information System[78] and innovations such as the Register of Genetic and Biomedical Data.[79] UNDP is currently partnering with the Ministry of Health and WHO to modernize laboratories in Belgrade, Kragujevac and Niš, including the use of artificial intelligence to further improve their work.[80] According to stakeholders, these systems and tools have the potential to significantly improve patient care by providing comprehensive access to treatment details across health institutions, resulting in more coordinated and efficient healthcare delivery.

In the social sector, UNDP—together with other UN agencies such as UN Women—supported the enactment of the Law on Gender Equality[81] and the Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence (2021–2025).[82] Interviewed stakeholders confirmed that UNDP's legislative support, together with assistance for gender-based violence prevention practices, support for the establishment of victim support services, public awareness campaigns, the creation of safe spaces for survivors, and capacity-building for law enforcement and the judiciary, have significantly strengthened protections and support systems for women, increasing both reporting and prosecution of gender-based violence cases.

UNDP's work on small arms and light weapons control, through technical assistance to the Ministry of Interior,[83] resulted in the development and application of standard operating procedures in areas such as crime scene investigation, chain of custody and ballistics.[84] It also supported the accreditation process of the first ballistic laboratory in Belgrade, thereby improving law enforcement's forensic capabilities. Interviewed stakeholders assessed this as a crucial step towards ensuring that evidence and forensic data are valid for criminal proceedings and eligible for cross-border exchange.

Evaluation findings reveal that these efforts have generated substantial momentum for reform across the respective sectors. The findings also suggest that UNDP's current legislative and institution-building approach has largely been driven by government demand and linked to Serbia's commitment to fulfil international and EU accession-related obligations, rather than by UNDP's internal strategic prioritization, which has resulted in a wide diversity of dispersed interventions. Likewise, its capacity-building approach has at times been reactive to government requests rather than informed by a cohesive long-term strategy, contributing to fragmentation. In addition, exogenous factors—such as frequent elections and the turnover of key institutional stakeholders—also affected the consistency of UNDP's engagement during the reference period.

Civic engagement in public policy

Finding 3. UNDP efforts to foster civic engagement had limited success in promoting transparency and accountability and enhancing public participation in democratic processes and decision-making. The short duration of actions, limited outreach—partly due to COVID—and a shifting political context posed ongoing challenges to achieving broader and more sustainable civic engagement.

[76] Related to UNSDCF Outcome 4 (Health).

[77] The Law on Health Documentation and Health Records was adopted by the National Assembly in November 2023, developed within the UNDP project Serbia at Your Fingertips – Digital Transformation for Development; https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon-o-zdravstvenoj-dokumentaciji-i-evidencijama-u-oblasti-zdravstva.html

[78] The Republic Integrated Health Information System is currently under development with support from UNDP and should be completed by December 2024. https://procurement-notices.undp.org/view_negotiation.cfm?nego_id=18379

[79] The Register of Genetic and Biomedical Data aids in modern diagnostics and early disease detection.

[80] https://www.undp.org/serbia/news/strengthening-preparedness-health-system-crisis

[81] https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti.html

[82] http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/srb204602.pdf

[83] Support was provided in terms of training for 310 forensic technicians and police officers from the Police Administrative Affairs Directorate on basic SALW in regional police directorates; development of standard operating procedures; IT databases (related to crime scene investigation and SALW control, Administrative Policy Directorate); forensic equipment, etc.

[84] UNDP (2023); Advancing the Capacities of the Ministry of Interior in the SALW Control-Related Field, Phase II, Annual Narrative Report 2022. This finding was also confirmed by interviewed stakeholders.

UNDP's efforts to foster civic engagement have been multifaceted, aiming to enhance citizen participation in democratic processes. Public hearings and consultations on topics such as the environment, SDGs, development, anti-corruption and gender equality have increased engagement in local decision-making processes. These forums have involved a broad cross-section of society, including citizens, CSOs and other stakeholders, and have promoted a culture of transparency and accountability in governance. In addition, UNDP provided 150 grants—totalling over $4 million—to CSOs to support local interventions focused on Roma inclusion, gender equality, digitalization, youth engagement and related issues.[85]

Stakeholders considered UNDP-facilitated initiatives that connected Members of Parliament with local communities[86] to be helpful in promoting cross-party dialogue and offering citizens opportunities to engage directly with their elected representatives. In some communities, such as Lučani and Sombor, several consecutive local-level follow-up forums resulted in the adoption of local policies. However, stakeholders raised concerns that, while these events facilitated direct engagement with policymakers and provided an inclusive platform for dialogue, in most communities they were mostly one-off events without proper follow-up, which diminished their potential for sustained engagement.

UNDP's ReLOaD project, along with several smaller initiatives, supported local self-governments in strengthening their capacities to increase stakeholder participation and improve engagement mechanisms and processes. These efforts also aimed to empower CSOs to take a more active role in community development. However, the country-specific scope of the ReLOaD project was limited, covering only seven municipalities[87]—too few to generate a wider transformative effect on the local authorities' approach to engaging civil society. Other interventions[88] were similarly fragmented and dispersed across different thematic sectors.

In contrast, UNDP partnered with some larger and more established civil society organizations to implement various initiatives (e.g. Petlja, Tačka povratka, youth centres). These partnerships yielded positive results in areas such as diaspora engagement, environmental protection and digital literacy. Nevertheless, according to interviewed stakeholders, challenges remain in ensuring the sustainability of these efforts.

COVID-19 restrictions, the short duration of supported actions and the limited number of local governments and CSOs involved in UNDP interventions have constrained the initiatives' broader impacts. Furthermore, shrinking donor resources for civil society support, along with a frequently changing political landscape and shifting national priorities, have created additional barriers to achieving broader civic engagement and participation.

Digital transformation

Finding 4. UNDP's digital transformation efforts at both the legislative and institutional levels, alongside the digitalization of public services and the introduction of e-parliament systems, have significantly modernized governance in Serbia, strengthening the country's position as a potential leader in digital innovation.

[85] UNDP ReLOaD and PBF projects' data.
[86] E.g. initiatives such as the project on 'Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy and Inclusive Political Dialogue'
[87] These municipalities include Babušnica, Kruševac, Novi Sad, Subotica, Topola, Vladičin Han and Vrnjačka Banja.
[88] E.g. SIDA supported a two-year UNDP-implemented project, Accountable Public Finance Management Platform (2020–2021), based on the ReLOaD model. This project introduced more transparent public fund disbursement to CSOs in five additional local governments: Bač, Niš, Raška, Valjevo and Vrnjačka Banja.

UNDP's digital transformation efforts have been extensive, targeting legislative and regulatory frameworks, supporting the modelling of interventions, establishing institutions and enhancing the capacity of public services through digital solutions and e-governance initiatives. A key legislative contribution was support for the development of ethical AI guidelines within Serbia's Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence (2020–2025).[89] According to stakeholder interviews, this Strategy is considered a cornerstone of future digital transformation efforts in the country.

UNDP's investments in digital innovation have extended across both its internal operations (e.g. the development of internal UNDP AI tools for monitoring and reporting) as well as its support to the government's innovation initiatives (e.g. the Innovation District in Kragujevac, the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution,[90] the Institute for Artificial Intelligence of Serbia,[91] AI Master Classes[92] and the promotion and use of AI in the medical and biotech sectors through the BIO4 campus).[93] UNDP has also played a role in convening partners through events such as the Biotech Future Forum, held in cooperation with the World Economic Forum.[94] According to stakeholder feedback and observations of the Innovation District in Kragujevac, these institutions have the potential to strengthen Serbia's AI and biotech capabilities and position the country as a leader in digital innovation by advancing cutting-edge research and supporting the development of a knowledge-based economy.

To support cumulative government digital capacity, UNDP implemented initiatives to prepare civil servants[95] and Members of Parliament[96] for the digital era. It also developed service design manuals, ethical AI guidelines and training on the legal and ethical challenges of AI. UNDP's incubation of IT retraining initiatives further contributed to the AI ecosystem and supported the transition of professionals into IT roles.[97] However, the evaluation could not find sufficient evidence to corroborate the utility of such trainings.

UNDP's digital transformation efforts have also contributed to the modernization of public services in Serbia, in line with government priorities. These contributions have further strengthened UNDP's value proposition, as confirmed by interviewed stakeholders. The digitization of 42 government services and the development of an e-parliament system in seven local assemblies are clear examples of how technology can enhance service delivery and improve accessibility. Stakeholder interviews and document review indicate that these processes and services have contributed to significantly reducing bureaucratic delays and improving efficiency in public service delivery. In addition, UNDP's support to the development of the National Open Data Portal led to the release of nearly 2,200 datasets[98] by public institutions, increasing data openness and utility. UNDP's efforts to foster community use of open data led to practical improvements, such as better navigation of public transport in several cities (e.g. Ekobus),[99] integration of air quality alerts into monitoring applications (xEco Top PM),[100] and the inclusion of pollen concentration data (xEco Polen application).[101] However, as confirmed by stakeholders, the use of open government data remains in its early stages.

89 https://www.srbija.gov.rs/extfile/sr/437310/strategy_artificial_intelligence-condensed261219_2.docx

90 https://c4ir.rs/en/biotechbeg-en/

91 UNDP helped establish the National AI Institute, form an AI team in the Prime Minister's Office and is actively involved in AI pilot projects in public administration. https://www.undp.org/serbia/blog/serbia-prepares-ai-revolution. More information about the National AI Institute is available at https://ivi.ac.rs/en/about-us/

92 https://ai-master-class.com/

93 https://bio4.rs/#news

94 UNDP supported the Government of Serbia in organizing the Biotech Future Forum in 2022 and 2023 in cooperation with the World Economic Forum. This international conference aimed to enhance access to AI and biotech and gathered over 1,500 participants and 100 speakers from across the world over two years. https://c4ir.rs/en/biotechbeg-en/

95 For instance, UNDP reported including 11,181 civil servants (68 percent women) in IT trainings.

96 UNDP reported that 20 Members of Parliament received data literacy trainings.

97 UNDP (2024); Results Oriented Annual Report 2023, https://digital.undp.org.rs/digital-skills/

98 https://data.gov.rs/sl/

99 The site Ekobus.rs analyses open geospatial data on public transport in Kragujevac in order to determine how much public transport contributes to air pollution in this city. See: https://www.ekobus.rs/#13/44.0143/20.9188

100 https://xeco.info/xeco/toppm/

101 https://xeco.info/xeco/polen/

Digital literacy

Finding 5. UNDP's digital literacy initiatives targeting youth and vulnerable groups have contributed to enhancing digital skills and boosting employment potential in the IT sector. However, challenges such as scaling up training programmes, ensuring sustainability, limited access to digital devices and resistance to change continue to pose significant hurdles to broader implementation.

Despite UNDP's well-structured efforts to promote digital transformation in Serbia, widespread uptake remains hindered by digital literacy challenges—particularly among persons with disabilities, the elderly and other underserved groups—and by foundational gaps in digital literacy within the formal education system, which leaves many individuals ill-prepared to effectively engage with digital technologies. To address these barriers, UNDP invested in promoting digital literacy among vulnerable groups (notably older persons, women, persons with disabilities and young people), complementing its upstream work with the government. These investments in building digital skills among vulnerable populations have yielded important results.

For example, with UNDP support, the Ministry of Education integrated IT and Computer Science as mandatory subjects in primary and secondary school curricula, developed digital literacy programmes, trained teachers and launched awareness campaigns.[102] In parallel, UNDP implemented the National IT Retraining Programme, equipping over 700 participants (55 percent of whom were women) with coding skills to enhance their employment potential in the IT sector.[103]

Successful collaboration with the Petlja Foundation also resulted in free digital literacy and programming resources for teachers and students, supporting employment growth in the IT sector and promoting gender equality in digital literacy. The integration of IT and Computer Science into the national curriculum, supported by UNDP, provides a strong foundation for long-term sustainability and future upgrades. However, interviewed stakeholders noted that sustaining these gains requires continued investment in infrastructure and equipment in schools, as well as in institutions providing non-formal education—such as youth centres and elderly homes—alongside regular updates to training programmes and targeted efforts to engage underserved groups.

Interviewed stakeholders praised UNDP's pilot programmes for improving digital literacy among older persons in Serbia, particularly in 20 retirement homes, where 600 seniors received tailored training and access to tablets, helping them stay connected and access essential services, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.[104] Public awareness campaigns such as the Digital Expedition reached 35,000 citizens in 16 cities, with targeted workshops for older persons in eight cities, further enhancing digital engagement and access to electronic services.[105] Additionally, UNDP made efforts to ensure that IT retraining programmes for persons with disabilities complied with relevant laws, although the evaluation found no evidence of follow-up activities or related results.

Stakeholders highlighted that UNDP could have established stronger follow-up mechanisms in the digital literacy domain to ensure lasting results and address the broader challenge of the widening digital divide, which could hinder the equitable distribution of technological advancements across the country.

[102] UNDP (2024); 'Creating a Digital Society for All' project: Annual Progress Report 2023.
[103] This programme equipped 1,250 participants in eight cities with coding skills between 2017 and 2020 and benefitted another 220 participants through an online programme adapted for COVID-19. UNDP (2024); IT Retraining Annual Report 2023.
[104] Ibid.
[105] UNDP (2024); Serbia at Your Fingertips – Digital Transformation for Development, Annual Narrative Project Report, January – December 2023, p. 33.

Socio-economic and demographic solutions– linked to CPD Outcomes 2 and 4

Sustainable economic growth and urban development

Finding 6. UNDP's cumulative efforts over the years have contributed to Serbia's progress towards innovative, sustainable and inclusive growth. While there is strong national government ownership of results in promoting and attracting sustainable investment and innovation opportunities, implementation capacity gaps remain, with high demand for continued UNDP assistance.

UNDP's work in Serbia has supported sustainable economic growth and resilience, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19, by attracting foreign direct investment, strengthening private-sector capacities and fostering innovation. A key achievement that was widely praised by stakeholders included the development of the SDG Investor Map,[106] which identified 13 investment opportunities in high-potential sectors,[107] with an investment potential of $8 billion. This led to a notable €2 billion renewable energy investment, as confirmed by stakeholder interviews with government representatives.[108,109] Additionally, UNDP's efforts to build private-sector capacities through the Innovation Challenge Mechanism and co-financing models have generated 66 investment initiatives.[110]

As most of these initiatives are relatively new and still under implementation or were only recently finalized at the time of the evaluation, it could not find consistent evidence of their long-term impacts on sustainable growth and emissions reduction (see also Finding 12). Document review and stakeholder feedback also highlighted the value of familiarizing SMEs with environmental, social and governance requirements, although these efforts were seen as fragmented and not part of a cohesive strategy.[111] Similarly, UNDP's partnership with the private sector in sustainable tourism development has been *ad hoc*,[112] and broader engagement with the private sector has been limited by UNDP's internal time-consuming due diligence policies and regulations, as confirmed by interviewed stakeholders.

In the area of infrastructure development, UNDP has leveraged $1.4 billion since 2014 to promote sustainable and inclusive development through initiatives such as the State Data Centre in Kragujevac,[113] wastewater treatment facilities[114] and investments in energy, environmental and climate-related infrastructure.[115] Additionally, as part of its support to social infrastructure, UNDP has actively promoted inclusivity in project

---

106 In this effort, UNDP utilized its comprehensive SDG Investor Map Methodology 2.0, a comprehensive step-by-step UNDP methodology.

107 Food and beverages, renewable energy, infrastructure, technology and communications, and healthcare. The SDG Investor Map is available at https://sdginvestorplatform.undp.org/country/serbia?page=0

108 As per the Brief on UNDP Moonshot Achievement in Serbia, the SDG Investor Map helped attract the attention of Shanghai Fengling Renewables, which announced an investment of approximately EUR 2 billion into renewable energy in Serbia.

109 The evaluation also found that the Government has shown strong ownership by presenting the map at various investment forums, planning to use the investor map methodology to guide the development of its foreign direct investment strategy, and to support the update of the map.

110 Over the course of CPD implementation, UNDP reported support to 66 investment initiatives contributing to sustainable economic growth, including the circular economy, thereby already surpassing its 2025 target of 40 initiatives.

111 UNDP conducted "Environmental, Social and Governance Practitioner" training sessions for SMEs to familiarise them with the new EU Directive on corporate sustainability and due diligence (Directive 2024/1760), which came into force in January 2024. This directive is available at https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/doing-business-eu/sustainability-due-diligence-responsible-business/corporate-sustainability-due-diligence_en

112 Engaging with the private sector is being explored through collaboration with Coca-Cola Hellenic in the development of sustainable tourism practices in the protected area of Vlasina Lake, which, among other results, led to the improvement of 47 kilometres of hiking trails and the creation of educational trails for youth. https://rs.coca-colahellenic.com/en/mediji/vesti/corporate/2023/vlasina---_ista-ljubav-2-0--vlasina-bogatija-za-47-km-ureenih-pl

113 The data centre ensures reliable operation of e-government services and safe storage of data from the world's largest corporations, such as Oracle. This was a EUR 30 million investment by the Government of Serbia, complemented by UNDP expert support in conceptualization and design, as well as financial analysis of the business model. See more at https://www.dct.rs/en/, https://www.dct.rs/en/news/oracle-strengthens-serbia-s-it-landscape-with-the-launch-of-its-first-regional-center-in-kragujevac.html

114 The wastewater facility is used by food processing industries, contributing to the reduction of organic pollution in rivers in Serbia. https://www.undp.org/serbia/news/wastewater-treatment-reduction-industrial-pollution

115 UNDP internal document 'Brief on UNDP Moonshot Achievement in Serbia' notes that 87 percent of the total value was related to social infrastructure, while the rest refers to recovery, environmental and climate infrastructure.

design by considering the needs of persons with disabilities, women and older persons. However, its focus on improving the provision of social protection services has been limited, which several stakeholders identified as a missed opportunity.

Stakeholders emphasized that UNDP's technical expertise, efficient procurement and transparent processes are key advantages in accelerating infrastructure projects[116] and improving service delivery.[117] However, they also noted the government's continued reliance on UNDP for the implementation of infrastructure investments, suggesting a lack of national capacity to independently manage such projects. Despite strong national ownership in attracting investment and driving innovation, stakeholders confirmed a sustained demand for UNDP's support to the government in managing large-scale infrastructure projects. For example, the Ministry of Public Investment and other ministries indicated that they require further assistance in implementing similar infrastructure investments. The evaluation also noted that similar capacity gaps persist in the areas of energy efficiency investments and social protection services.[118]

Enhanced human capital

Finding 7. In line with national development priorities, UNDP has supported the professional development of civil servants and facilitated key investments in educational infrastructure and employability programmes. Despite progress in improving employability, persistent gender segregation in employment and the gender wage gap underscore the need for continued focus on gender equality and inclusive policies.

UNDP has contributed to strengthening access to education by supporting the Government of Serbia in its efforts to upgrade educational infrastructure[119] that was previously unsuitable for accommodating growing student populations.[120] UNDP has been the government's preferred partner in this area, due to the technical expertise available through UNDP's Engineering Tech Cell and its ability to provide hands-on support throughout design and implementation processes. These efforts are ongoing, with visible results in the development of technical design documentation.[121]

In the area of professional development for civil servants, UNDP has contributed to strengthening the institutional capacity of the National Academy for Public Administration by training staff in the development of innovative learning tools to conduct training programmes that align civil servants' skills and knowledge with the strategies and objectives of public administration reform.[122] However, the sustainability of this intervention is at risk due to the turnover of highly qualified staff and frequent changes in institutional leadership, which contribute to a loss of institutional memory and expertise—factors beyond UNDP's control.

To increase employability, the majority of UNDP's interventions have focused on promoting digital literacy and workforce integration, with particular attention to women's participation in technology. Evaluation evidence suggests that UNDP's support to the government in implementing IT retraining programmes has enabled women, youth and persons with disabilities to improve their IT skills and enhance their employment

116 UNDP's support helped the Government accelerate the implementation of infrastructure projects financed through international financial institution loans, thereby avoiding payment of fees for unused borrowed funds and improving infrastructure for citizens.

117 Expertise included conducting relevant design and feasibility studies and supervising works.

118 Stakeholders also noted that UNDP's procurement procedures have been prolonged over the last year and a half, which has affected the speed of infrastructural project implementation, such as the European Central Bank loan for energy efficiency infrastructure.

119 The Faculty of Fine Arts, the Faculty of Music and the Faculty of Applied Arts have been supported within the project 'Support to Strategic Investments in Education', while infrastructure work on student housing in Belgrade and Niš is part of the project Education for Social Inclusion – Technical Support.

120 UNDP (2024); Results Oriented Annual Report 2023.

121 Social considerations were embedded in technical documentation designs to ensure that persons with disabilities could have equal access to faculty premises.

122 This was achieved by training 27 staff members, developing innovative learning tools and establishing a Centre of Excellence, as confirmed by interviewed stakeholders. Source: UNDP (2023); Final Evaluation of the project Civil Service Training for the 21st Century in the Republic of Serbia.

prospects in this rapidly growing sector (see Finding 5).[123,124] Most stakeholder interviewees noted UNDP's positive contributions to strengthening human capital among vulnerable and hard-to-employ groups, including the engagement of youth—such as young Roma and refugees—as United Nations Volunteers in local government institutions and NGOs.[125]

UNDP has also encouraged local governments to design innovative actions for youth activation in the workforce.[126] Furthermore, UNDP promoted gender equality in STEM,[127] although this remains an emerging area of UNDP work. Stakeholders highlighted the benefits of partnering with UNDP when piloting initiatives such as the IT retraining programme, particularly due to UNDP's competitive and transparent procurement processes, which help ensure value for money and operational efficiency. However, the integration of these initiatives into national programmes has yet to materialize, largely due to the slow pace of institutional procedural change and rigid national procurement systems, as corroborated by stakeholder interviews.

Gender segregation in education and the labour market, alongside the pronounced gender pay gap, remain critical areas requiring further improvement. According to UNDP data, UNDP dedicated $41.1 million to fostering economic and employment opportunities, contributing to an improvement in the employment rate to an average of 50.4 percent in 2023.[128] Despite this progress, gender disparities persist, with women underrepresented in leadership positions—particularly in ICT—and earning on average 9.1 percent less than men.[129] Over the CPD period, UNDP has systematically integrated a gender-sensitive approach into its programming through the efforts of the cross-office Development Solutions Team[130] and Gender Focal Team. This approach has the potential to advance gender equality and reduce labour market disparities, which, according to stakeholder feedback, remain priority areas for further improvement.

Demographic solutions

Finding 8. UNDP has promoted favourable socio-economic conditions for circular migration and the reintegration of the Serbian diaspora through strategic partnerships and initiatives, including collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Demography, the International Organization for Migration and UNFPA. This support has laid the groundwork for further efforts to address Serbia's persistent challenges related to depopulation and outmigration.

UNDP has contributed to addressing the demographic challenges of depopulation and migration management in Serbia through a series of strategic initiatives and partnerships, implemented via its modest $1.5 million depopulation portfolio. This portfolio focused on mitigating depopulation trends, enhancing diaspora support and improving aid to migrants. For example, UNDP closely collaborated with and supported the Ministry of Family and Demography in promoting and leveraging digital and green

[123] According to Serbia's Statistical Office, in 2024, the country generated 10 percent of its GDP from the ICT sector, ranking among the top four export sectors, along with steel, cars and agriculture. There has been demand for IT specialists due to rising private sector needs. Source: https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/serbia-information-and-communications-technology-market

[124] For example, 335 people completed a market-relevant IT retraining programme (on Java, JavaScript, PHP, Python, System Administration) in 2023, and 44.2 percent of them found a job in the IT sector. In addition, 25 percent of 36 people with disabilities who completed IT retraining between 2019 and 2021 found a job in the IT sector. Source: UNDP (2024); IT Retraining Annual Report 2023.

[125] As of UNDP data, out of 65 youth (young Roma and refugees) engaged by UNDP as United Nations Volunteers in local government institutions and non-governmental organizations, 26 continued employment or were employed after volunteering. https://www.undp.org/serbia/projects/local-initiatives-improved-social-inclusion-young-roma

[126] As part of the Population Development Facility Programme, funded by the government.

[127] Through research on women's underrepresentation in ICT. https://lab.undp.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Research-eng-web_26_02_2024.pdf; and user journey maps of women in STEM in Serbia, which explored the narratives of women in STEM: https://www.undp.org/serbia/blog/unveiling-insights-exploring-narratives-women-serbian-ict-industry#new_tab

[128] As per UNDP PowerBI data on CPD Outcome Output Indicators.

[129] UNDP (2024); Results Oriented Annual Report 2023.

[130] The UNDP CO Development Solutions Team has a comprehensive mandate to integrate the various thematic areas of UNDP's involvement in Serbia. This includes ensuring gender equality, innovative approaches, digital solutions and the inclusion of persons with disabilities and minorities in UNDP's work.

transitions in support of growth through localized development initiatives in mid-sized cities. A notable example is the City of Čačak, where UNDP played a key role in piloting population policies by supporting the development of a local Population Policy and Action Plan. Under this plan, a range of activities were implemented to promote Čačak as a family-centred city, including measures to enhance work-life balance, redesign spaces for families and children, and provide career guidance for students.[131]

The evaluation found that UNDP's collaboration significantly strengthened the City of Čačak's capacity to attract investment, support families and promote population growth through a synergistic approach involving both public and private sectors, as also confirmed by local stakeholders. The approach highlights valuable lessons and best practices with strong potential for scaling up in other local communities, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas facing rising depopulation.

Within the realm of migration management, UNDP provided comprehensive support to the creation of a socio-economic environment that is conducive to encouraging the return and circular migration of the working-age population, while also strengthening engagement with the Serbian diaspora. Through collaborations with the International Organization for Migration and UNFPA, UNDP focused on supporting local communities and promoting inclusive migration management that emphasized social protection, human rights and the integration of migrants.

These efforts included the development of local migration plans, implemented in partnership with CSOs. UNDP also undertook outreach to the Serbian diaspora, providing essential information on Serbian legislation, administrative procedures and other resources useful to potential returnees. In addition, UNDP facilitated networking and exchanges to enhance the likelihood that young Serbians living abroad would consider returning.

As part of this effort, the establishment of the 'Returning Point' as a diaspora engagement mechanism and the successful facilitation of individual repatriation efforts have contributed to diaspora community-building and support for returnees. Stakeholder interviews and document reviews indicated that the Serbian Diaspora Viber community, repatriate stories, annual Talent Meetup conferences and access to information on return possibilities and administrative requirements have helped promote a sense of community and belonging among Serbians abroad.

Despite progress in addressing the depopulation crisis, challenges remain—particularly in aligning legislation and policies to comprehensively support depopulation strategies. Persistent inequality and territorial disparities, marked by the concentration of economic activity in larger cities, continue to drive depopulation in smaller communities and create labour market imbalances. These are areas where further investment is needed to support long-term outcomes for demographic transition, as emphasized by stakeholders.

Climate change and sustainable use of resources – linked to CPD Outcomes 2 and 3

Preparedness for climate change adaptation and resilience

Finding 9. UNDP has made notable contributions to Serbia's progress towards climate change resilience. Its multifaceted approach, ranging from policy support to on-the-ground project implementation, has laid a strong foundation for the country's continued development in this area. However, further efforts are needed to more deeply integrate climate change adaptation measures into national planning and implementation processes, and to improve access to finance for climate action, biodiversity conservation and disaster risk reduction.

[131] UNDP (2023); Population Policy Facility.

Climate change reforms: UNDP has made important contributions in formulating and supporting the adoption of key legislative and policy documents that advance Serbia's alignment with EU and international climate goals. These include the first Law on Climate Change, adopted in 2021, and the National Climate Change Adaptation Programme, adopted in December 2023. The evaluation found that Serbia's implementation of climate change adaptation measures has been hindered by their weak integration into national budgeting and policy frameworks across sectors,[132] along with limited institutional capacities and investment planning.[133] Nonetheless, some measures from the programme have been implemented with UNDP support, such as strengthening early warning systems for climate hazards[134] and developing climate projections through the Digital Climate Atlas of Serbia.[135]

UNDP's advocacy efforts, including the Serbia Climate Talks held in advance of UN global climate conferences, have stimulated dialogue on climate change among a range of national stakeholders.[136] UNDP support has also enhanced the preparation of local climate change adaptation and mitigation plans in four local self-governments.[137] However, the broader practice of plan development at the local level remains limited.[138]

The launch of Serbia's first Monitoring, Reporting and Verification system, supported by UNDP, has enabled more accurate data provision for climate change mitigation.[139] However, the system has not yet been operationalized, as the legal obligation to input data is not embedded in the Law on Climate Change.[140] UNDP has continued to support specific components of the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification system, such as the operationalization of the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Permitting System, which will enable monitoring, reporting and verification of companies' greenhouse gas emissions (see Finding 10).

Nature-based solutions for biodiversity and climate: UNDP's work in biodiversity conservation, water and wetlands protection, and climate resilience has focused on supporting legal frameworks[141] and institutional capacities, piloting nature-based solutions and promoting biodiversity and climate finance. Initial results are evident in the implementation of 13 nature-based solutions[142] by CSOs that improved conditions for the survival of various endangered wild animal and plant species in protected areas across the country.[143] Some of these initiatives include early fire detection and suppression in the Lalinačka Slatina nature monument, rehabilitation of injured birds and the installation of artificial nests to support the recovery of endangered bird species.[144] Additionally, UNDP data indicates support for afforestation and forest ecosystem restoration on 200 hectares of land, including previously abandoned agricultural plots. Despite these achievements, significant challenges remain in addressing gaps in biodiversity financing at the government level.

---

132 Agriculture, biodiversity, energy, forestry, health, infrastructure and water management.

133 The absence of detailed budgeting for adaptation measures and sectoral adaptation plans underscores the need for more integrated financial and policy frameworks to ensure the effectiveness of climate adaptation strategies.

134 For example, by including drought as a climate hazard to better inform agricultural producers of potential risks.

135 The Digital Climate Atlas of Serbia makes data on climate parameters available at the level of local self-governments, along with projections of climate change by the end of the century. https://atlas-klime.eko.gov.rs/eng/about

136 These talks were held in 2021 (https://www.klimatskepromene.rs/en/news/serbia-s-climate-talks-on-the-way-to-glasgow), 2022 (https://serbia.un.org/en/205445-climate-talks-%E2%80%93-pre-cop27-%E2%80%93-unrc-tps) and 2023 (https://www.klimatskepromene.rs/en/climate-talks/).

137 Bečej adopted its local climate change adaptation plan, while for other LSGs (Kraljevo, Ub, Zrenjanin), adoption is still pending.

138 Local self-governments are not yet obligated by the existing Law on Climate Change to adopt local climate change adaptation plans as public policy documents. However, they are required to report on their planned and implemented climate change adaptation actions in line with the Law on Climate Change and the Climate Change Adaptation Programme.

139 This system is envisaged to improve the quality and availability of climate change-related data and information, including information on climate change financing (spent and needed), capacity building and technology needs.

140 Amendments to this law are planned under an IPA-funded project to be implemented in Q4 2024 and through 2025. The current Law on Climate Change is available at https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon-o-klimatskim-promenama.html

141 UNDP has supported the drafting of the new Law on Nature Protection and the Decree on Appropriate Assessment (in line with EU acquis requirements) to reduce adverse effects of plans or projects on Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, which are still not finalized.

142 https://zelena-agenda.euzatebe.rs/en/news/civil-society-organizations-contribute-to-the-preservation-of-serbias-natural-diversity

143 https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-10/list_of_selected_projects_forests_and_green_infrastructure.pdf

144 https://zelena-agenda.euzatebe.rs/en/news/civil-society-organizations-contribute-to-the-preservation-of-serbias-natural-diversity

Building resilience to the impacts of climate change: UNDP has made vital contributions to strengthening Serbia's emergency preparedness and response mechanisms during this CPD period. These contributions were aligned with the previously achieved results of a long-term partnership with the government that began after the 2014 climate change-linked floods.[145] Notable achievements include the development of a fully operational Disaster Risk Register,[146] which provides observed climate data and climate projections at the level of local self-governments and is also integrated into the register. These data can be used to inform policymaking and investment planning. Nonetheless, broader use of these tools by different stakeholders and the integration of health and other related risks remains a challenge.

Stakeholder interviews highlighted that UNDP's support increased the operational capacity of specialized firefighting units,[147] the Sector for Emergency Management and local civil protection actors, in line with the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.[148] However, some planned infrastructure improvements remain pending[149] due to various issues, including insufficient project maturity, unresolved property rights, regulatory obstacles, delays in preparing project documentation and inflation, which significantly hindered infrastructure budgets. At the time of the evaluation, the draft National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy was still awaiting adoption.

Overall, UNDP's efforts in this area have contributed to improved government preparedness and response capacities. Document review and stakeholder interviews indicate that key risks and challenges within these areas include limited local-level financial capacity to implement disaster risk reduction action plans and fund post-disaster financing, high turnover of technical experts, and coordination challenges among government bodies, international organizations and other stakeholders. In addition, the dynamic nature of disaster risks—exacerbated by climate change and other external factors—requires an adaptable and forward-looking disaster risk reduction strategy, including regular updates to risk assessments, strategies and plans to effectively respond to emerging threats.

Reducing energy consumption and prevention of air pollution

Finding 10. UNDP has made positive contributions to Serbia's transition towards sustainable energy practices and pollution prevention, although the implementation of energy efficiency interventions has progressed slowly.

To support energy transition in Serbia, UNDP implemented interventions to improve energy efficiency and increase the share of renewables. These efforts focused on several key areas such as clean energy adoption and improving the energy efficiency of public buildings. They also produced a range of environmental and climate change-related benefits, including reduced air pollution through pilot projects, lower greenhouse gas emissions, support for the green transition (see Finding 11), increased public awareness of climate change and strengthened infrastructure to withstand climate-related impacts (see Finding 6).

[145] UNDP has engaged in the topic of resilience in Serbia since the severe floods in 2014, which were a result of climate change.

[146] The Disaster Risk Register offers free real-time data for decision-making concerning risks in specific locations and enables local self-governments, citizens and the private sector to undertake timely prevention measures. Available at https://drr.geosrbija.rs/drr/home. The Disaster Risk Register contains more than 250 datasets.

[147] E.g. by procurement of seven cistern trucks.

[148] By providing equipment and training for 1,626 local actors in civil protection. As stated by interviewed stakeholders and the Interim Narrative Report of the project EU for Civil Protection and Disaster Resilience Strengthening in the Republic of Serbia, 1 February 2023 – 25 July 2023.

[149] Reconstruction of the Education Centre in Rudno and reconstruction of the building housing the Sector for Emergency Management.

Energy efficiency: UNDP supported the implementation of a EUR 40 million loan from the Council of Europe Development Bank aimed at reducing energy consumption in 26 public buildings.[150] UNDP also supported the use of Energy Management Information Systems (EMIS)[151] by public building owners and introduced the financial Energy Service Company (ESCO) model.[152] UNDP's longstanding experience in supporting energy efficiency reforms in Serbia has made it a key government partner in this sector and a valued implementation partner of the Council of Europe Development Bank for energy efficiency renovations of public buildings.

The evaluation noted several challenges, including a slower than expected execution pace in retrofitting public buildings,[153] prolonged loan negotiations, delays in UNDP's contracting procedures, turnover of government staff and unresolved legal property issues.[154] Progress in the use of EMIS has also been slow. According to the document review and stakeholder interviews, UNDP has planned to ensure that all retrofitted public buildings eventually operate under the EMIS system. Additional plans include collaboration with the Ministry of Mining and Energy and the University of Belgrade to upgrade the EMIS system in the upcoming period to expand its use across Serbia.[155] The evaluation found limited evidence of the effectiveness of UNDP's support for piloting the ESCO model, as it remains in the early stages of implementation.

GHG emission control: Serbia, as an EU accession country, is not required to apply the EU Emissions Trading System until the moment of accession. However, the new e-GHG system, developed with UNDP's support, will enable Serbia to establish a comprehensive greenhouse gas monitoring, reporting and verification system. This marks a significant step towards alignment with the EU Emissions Trading System and will strengthen the government's capacity to issue GHG emissions permits and conduct regular monitoring, reporting and verification processes.

Industrial emissions control: In addition, with UNDP's support, the government accelerated efforts to assist industries that are required to obtain Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) permits. Through the Green Agenda in Serbia, implemented by UNDP, IPPC-regulated companies improved their knowledge of options for greening their industrial processes.[156] Some have also received financial support to identify and apply best available techniques, as prescribed by national legislation. This includes measures to improve energy efficiency, enhance resource efficiency and apply circular economy practices. However, interviewed stakeholders confirmed that many private-sector companies—particularly those that are among the largest GHG emitters—are still unaware of the complexity involved in obtaining IPPC permits and the importance of greening their operations. This is consistent with official statistics: as of December 2023, only 47 out of 220 facilities subject to IPPC regulation had obtained the required permits.[157]

---

150 UNDP has assisted the Ministry of Mining and Energy in setting minimum energy efficiency requirements, conducting detailed energy audits and preparing feasibility studies and design documents for the rehabilitation of 26 central government buildings, half of which have heritage status. This loan from the Council of Europe Development Bank was agreed by the Government of Serbia and the Ministry of Mining and Energy in November 2019. Expected results include a 20 percent reduction in CO_2 emissions, improved working conditions and workplace safety, and a 29 percent saving in operating costs for energy. https://www.undp.org/serbia/news/actions-enhance-energy-efficiency-25-central-government-buildings-decided

151 EMIS is a tool for energy management in buildings, introduced with the support of UNDP in previous CPD cycles. Its rulebook was only adopted in 2023. https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2023/18/1/re; see also https://isem.mre.gov.rs/login.xhtml

152 ESCO is a public–private partnership modality for increasing the energy efficiency of public buildings at national and local levels.

153 Interviewed stakeholders confirmed that design and technical documents are currently under preparation for five central government buildings, while only one of the 26 public buildings was under renovation at the time of the evaluation (Institute for the Improvement of Education).

154 In a few cases, public buildings are in private ownership.

155 The project Enhancing the Energy Management System to Scale up Energy Efficiency Investments in Public Buildings in Serbia. https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/SRB/1%20ENG%206388%20SERBIA%20EE%20PRODOC%20signed.pdf; https://semus.mas.bg.ac.rs/sr/gef-projekt/o-projektu/

156 https://zelena-agenda.euzatebe.rs/en/news/new-knowledge-for-pollution-prevention-and-control

157 Based on interviews and the report RERI (2024), Analysis of Implementation of the Law on IPPT . https://reri.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Analiza-sprovodjenja-Zakona-o-integrisanom-sprecavanju-i-kontroli-zagadjivanja-zivotne-sredine.pdf

Air protection: UNDP supported a range of pilot initiatives aimed at addressing air pollution in Serbia, along with support for the development of local air quality plans.[158] These activities generated several innovative ideas, products and technological solutions for reducing air pollution[159] and improving air quality monitoring. Examples include the use of AI-based software to predict pollutant concentrations, air purification technologies, upgrades to individual heating units and awareness-raising activities targeting schoolchildren in areas most affected by poor air quality.[160,161] Stakeholders confirmed that some of these innovations—such as the use of waste geothermal water to heat public buildings[162]—have strong potential for scaling up. Collaboration with academia and innovative companies through calls for innovative solutions has proven to be a good practice in addressing air quality challenges. The evaluation found that household heating systems, which are major contributors to air pollution, were not broadly addressed under this CPD. However, some steps were taken, such as the establishment of a fund by the municipality of Užice to support the replacement of individual heating units in socially vulnerable households.[163]

Overall, through its advisory, technical and financial support to the government—as well as its public outreach and advocacy efforts on environmental and climate issues—UNDP has helped raise public awareness of the need for and benefits of energy transition and pollution prevention and control. This includes efforts related to air, water and soil protection, waste and water treatment and the reduction of industrial emissions. UNDP's work has also helped mobilize action and promote positive practices in these areas.

Finding 11. UNDP has been successful in leveraging financial resources for green bonds and investment mobilization, and in encouraging the national government to prioritize green financing.

UNDP made important contributions to mobilizing and channelling finance for pollution prevention and green and energy transition initiatives through its global network, access to international financing mechanisms, cost-sharing with government and the private sector, and the development of innovative financial instruments. UNDP data indicates that since 2017, it has had the potential to leverage between $9–10 for every $1 of grant funding.[164] For example, UNDP has successfully leveraged $122.18 million in investments targeting decarbonization, the circular economy, air quality and natural capital.[165]

During the CPD period, under the Green Agenda Platform, UNDP mobilized private-sector capital for green transition and decarbonization of the economy through UNDP-branded instruments that support private-sector engagement in achieving national development goals,[166] combined with strong technical assistance via a Green Investment Accelerator. This resulted in the preparation of over 159 entities[167](with proposed initiatives worth over $90 million), which benefited from technical assistance provided through

[158] https://www.undp.org/serbia/news/regional-cooperation-improving-air-quality

[159] UNDP, UNICEF and WHO launched the call for proposals for the Clean Air Innovation Challenge, which supported 14 innovative products and technological solutions to reduce air pollution in Serbia and improve air quality. Additionally, 11 innovative and climate-smart solutions were supported within the project Climate Smart Urban Development, implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, with financial support from the GEF.

[160] A good example of this support is the Liquid Tree project, which has spearheaded biotech innovation in urban air purification and is gaining international popularity. The project used a combination of a solar-powered bench and an aquarium with 600 litres of water hosting microalgae that bind CO_2 and produce oxygen in urban areas that lack space for trees. https://www.undp.org/serbia/blog/catalysing-serbias-green-transformation

[161] Another example is the project to replace the old coal boiler in two schools with a heating system using waste geothermal water, contributing to cleaner air in the municipality of Sokobanja. This project is one of 52 innovative green solutions, with a total value of $17 million, implemented within the project EU for Green Agenda in Serbia through the call Challenge for Innovative Solutions.

[162] According to UNDP data, a total of nine innovative solutions for improving air quality, supported through the 2022 and 2023 Challenge Call, worth nearly $1 million, contributed to the prevention of nearly 150 tons of air pollutants annually.

[163] The fund is blending financial contributions from private companies with municipal budgets. Free eco-stoves and wood pellets were distributed to vulnerable households living in Užice. https://greennews.rs/projekat-od-5-miliona-dinara-za-cist-vazduh-u-uzicu-besplatni-eko-sporeti-i-palete-drva/

[164] Inclusive of statistics of supported investments since 2017.

[165] As per UNDP data presented in the ICPE pre-mission self-assessment questionnaire: UNDP Serbia.

[166] Innovation Challenges, Innovation Awards and Performance-Based Payment Agreements.

[167] Public and private companies, research institutions, civil society organizations, farmers' associations and cooperatives, and local governments.

the UNDP Green Accelerator and from financial assistance in the form of grants to implement Green Agenda priorities. UNDP provided financial assistance to 66 of these green investments (worth over $25 million) to support their implementation (see Finding 12).[168]

UNDP's engagement with private actors through the Green Agenda Platform demonstrates how SME-level companies can be supported in advancing green investments aligned with its initiative on the EU for Green Agenda. UNDP has also sought solutions to scale up these private-sector-led green investments by unlocking access to green borrowing schemes in partnership with the European Investment Bank (EIB) and other international financial institutions. Discussions with UNDP staff highlight that unlocking private-sector investments requires changes to UNDP's corporate policies and instruments, which currently limit the use of guarantees to incentivize private financing for the green transition.

UNDP also provided advisory support to the government for the issuance of Serbia's first-ever EUR 1 billion green bond on international markets, assisting the government in taking a significant step towards financing renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.[169] As a result of UNDP's support to the Serbia SDG Investor Map, opportunities in renewable and alternative energy, as well as environmental infrastructure (e.g. waste management and energy-efficient residential housing), have been identified for potential investors.[170]

Sustainable economic growth and circular economy

Finding 12. UNDP has made important contributions to creating an enabling environment for business transformation and innovation to accelerate the circular economy in Serbia. To achieve a full transition to low-carbon business models, further efforts are required to address existing regulatory and financial barriers.

UNDP has promoted circular economy models and practices among supported SMEs through competitive public calls. Selected innovative ideas first entered an accelerator phase, which included training and mentoring; mature projects then received co-financing to develop and implement green solutions.

According to UNDP data, 66 circular economy innovations[171] have been implemented or are under implementation, with allocated support of over $3 million and total investments nearing $25 million.[172] UNDP also supported the issuance of 25 circular vouchers,[173] 31 innovative circular solutions based on Performance-Based Payments Agreements[174] and six circular economy awards.[175] These initiatives range from the use of biowaste for energy production, composting and the development of new products to wastewater treatment for the creation of innovative materials.

[168] This included the implementation of projects that targeted decarbonization, circular economy initiatives, environmental pollution and biodiversity conservation, expected to yield significant CO_2 emissions savings.

[169] UNDP Serbia invested $160,000 into aligning the use of proceeds for Serbia's Sovereign Green Bond and assisting Serbia in monitoring and reporting on the use of these proceeds to investors.

[170] https://sdginvestorplatform.undp.org/

[171] Support to 66 circular economy innovations has been provided by two projects: Reducing the Carbon Footprint of Local Communities by Applying the Principles of the Circular Economy in the Republic of Serbia – Circular Communities (GEF), and EU for Green Agenda in Serbia (funded by EIB, EU, Serbia, Sweden and Switzerland).

[172] As per UNDP internal data on investments in the circular economy provided to the evaluation team.

[173] Circular vouchers, valued at $10,000 each, incentivize collaboration between research organizations and businesses by funding initiatives in the circular economy that mitigate climate change. As part of the Circular Communities project in Serbia, UNDP has supported innovations in financing models, technologies, digital solutions, transport, standardization, and eco-labelling. See more at https://www.cirkularnezajednice.rs/en/news/

[174] Innovative circular solutions were selected through Challenge Calls under the EU for Green Agenda in Serbia project. The most mature projects completing the acceleration phase receive up to 50 percent co-financing through performance-based payment contracts. See more at https://zelena-agenda.euzatebe.rs/en/about-project

[175] UNDP internal document on progress in boosting the circular economy by 2024.

It is too early to assess the overall impacts of this support on reducing GHG emissions, although some improvements are already visible.[176] Circular voucher contributions have boosted collaboration between research institutions, the private sector and local governments on developing innovative, sustainable solutions, which was corroborated by interviews.

Further provision of circular vouchers to strengthen cooperation between scientific research organizations and economic operators—aimed at implementing innovative solutions and advancing the transition to a circular economy model—has been secured for at least three additional cycles and is embedded in the draft Environmental Protection Strategy.[177] Some of the supported innovative circular solutions are showing promise for replication, such as a new eco-gym model that led to the opening of the first eco-gym in Vršac, Serbia.[178] Interviewed stakeholders indicated that two municipalities (Čajetina and Soko Banja) are already replicating the solution and that a few others have expressed interest in learning how to do so.

UNDP's piloting of food waste reduction initiatives has also shown positive results. In 2021, UNDP supported the development of a digital platform for food surplus donation, Plate by Plate, which is now fully operational and connects Delhaize Serbia stores in Belgrade with food banks.[179]

As a result of this cooperation, nearly 14,000 people in need received food in Belgrade and other parts of Serbia, while food nearing its 'sell by' date was diverted from waste. [180] UNDP records showed that a three-month pilot on food waste reduction in the hotel, restaurant and café/catering sector resulted in the collection of nearly 24 tons of food waste, which was converted into biogas, preventing 16.5 tons of CO_2 emissions.[181] However, broader scaling up of these approaches is not yet evident.

Furthermore, UNDP supported the development of a regulatory framework that had previously been lacking and had hindered the materialization of several circular economy initiatives. These included the innovative reuse or recycling of various waste streams, the absence of a by-product register and the lack of legislation regulating the use of waste for research and development purposes.[182] This support led to the adoption of rulebooks on by-products,[183] end-of-waste status[184] and construction and demolition waste.[185]

There are several challenges to circular economy development in Serbia that hinder the full realization of its transformative potential and the transition to low-carbon business models. There is no secondary raw material market, which limits the reintegration of recyclables into the production value chain, and the awareness level among businesses of waste's potential as a raw material remains low.

[176] For example, NewPen Ltd., which produces graphite pencils and crayons from newspapers, increased its production and export to the EU market by automating its production with support from the project EU for Green Agenda in Serbia, implemented by UNDP and the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

[177] As per a UNDP internal document on progress in boosting the circular economy and interviewed stakeholders.

[178] https://www.euzatebe.rs/en/news/the-first-eco-gym-in-serbia-opened-in-vrsac-an-innovative-solution-for-promoting-sustainable-exercise

[179] https://tanjirpotanjir.rs/

[180] The collaboration with this company also helped trace and map the entire value chain of the company, covering products 'from farm to fork', to show consumers the origins and processing of food products.

[181] https://www.undp.org/serbia/news/food-waste-collection-and-processing-hospitality-sector-benefit-both-environment-and-companies

[182] UNDP (2024); Results Oriented Annual Report 2023.

[183] https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2019/76/1

[184] http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2024_03/SG_019_2024_002.htm

[185] https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/uredba-o-nacinu-i-postupku-upravljanja-otpadom-od-gradjenja-i-rusenja.html

The sustainability of technical and financial support for the implementation of innovative ideas is also not fully ensured, as it remains heavily dependent on donor funding.[186] In addition, limited access to financial resources presents a significant barrier to business growth and innovation. An OECD study indicated that investment in research and development—particularly from the private sector—remained low, at 0.97 percent of GDP in 2022.[187]

2.3 Factors influencing programme performance and cross-cutting issues

Resource mobilization and programme delivery

Finding 13. UNDP's close alignment with national priorities and responsiveness is reflected in the substantial financial support it receives from the government. UNDP applies demand-driven approaches that yield results, but they also risk overcommitment and resource overextension, which may dilute its strategic focus and strain its capacity to effectively deliver results.

As discussed in Finding 1, UNDP's strategic positioning as a trusted and cross-sectoral implementing partner for the government has facilitated the mobilization of government funding and enabled close alignment with national priorities. This is reflected in the government's funding of approximately $75.8 million,[188] making the government the largest donor during the 2021–2024 period.

A review of UNDP's portfolio indicates that the bulk of government funding was invested in the procurement of goods and services. Government stakeholders noted that this was acceptable, as institutions benefited from UNDP's efficient procurement processes, reduced bureaucracy and the ability to outsource expert support—factors that facilitated the timely delivery of needed assistance.

Many projects were implemented under the NIM modality by the government itself to ensure intervention ownership and sustainability. In this context, the evaluation found that UNDP's support for the NIM modality—backed by significant technical assistance—was the preferred approach for building government absorptive capacity, as many institutions are still not sufficiently equipped to lead implementation independently.

Stakeholders noted that UNDP's support to national implementation[189] has been effective in helping line ministries build capacity to fully lead NIM projects, as exemplified by the Ministry of Environmental Protection's experience with the Circular Communities project.[190] Conversely, some stakeholders noted that UNDP's hands-on support can lead to overreliance on external assistance and reduced ownership of processes and results.

Resource mobilization from the EU and other donors was significant over the reference period, but these sources have become increasingly difficult to access due to shrinking donor assistance to Serbia and shifting EU priorities. The most notable shift is the EU's orientation towards the Team Europe approach,[191] which has become the backbone of Global Europe (2021–2027)[192] and its related programming.[193]

---

[186] This is in line with findings of the OECD 'Western Balkans Competitiveness Outlook 2024: Serbia', which indicates that technical support to the private sector is primarily donor-financed, mainly targeting improvements in the investment climate.

[187] https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/western-balkans-competitiveness-outlook-2024-serbia_1df89dd8/3699c0d5-en.pdf

[188] There was a difference in financial figures extracted from the UNDP corporate dashboard and those reported by UNDP Serbia. For the same period, UNDP Serbia reported $ 110.8 million as Government of Serbia contributions.

[189] https://popp.undp.org/procedure/undp-support-services-national-implementation-nim

[190] https://www.undp.org/serbia/projects/circular-communities-serbia

[191] Team Europe was initiated in 2021 based on the need to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive response between the EU and its Member States to the COVID-19 pandemic. See more at: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/team-europe-initiatives_en#:~:text=on%20the%20ground.-,What%20is%20Team%20Europe%3F,more%20effectiveness%20and%20greater%20impact

[192] This is the main financial tool for EU international cooperation from 2021 to 2027. See more on the Global Gateway website: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/funding-instruments/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument_en

[193] Global Europe Programming, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/funding-instruments/global-europe-programming_en

The introduction of this approach has raised questions among UN agencies, including UNDP, about the potential to continue accessing EU resources in the future. Interviewed stakeholders from UNDP and other UN agencies noted that this shift presents both challenges and opportunities for the UN to partner with EU Member States in joint interventions. However, the extent to which this will affect UNDP's operations could not be determined at the time of the evaluation.

Evaluation findings revealed that UNDP's demand-driven approach has yielded short-term advantages but also presents notable challenges. The unselective nature of UNDP's engagement, driven by the desire to meet the government's wide-ranging needs, risks overcommitment and overextension of its resources. By attempting to respond across a broad spectrum of issues, UNDP spreads its resources and capacities too thin, diluting its impact and risking compromise to its strategic focus. This overextension is particularly problematic given UNDP's limited human resources in Serbia. As UNDP responds to an increasing number of government requests, its capacity to maintain high-quality interventions across all areas becomes strained, diverting attention from a focused, long-term strategic vision. This results in inefficiencies, where the overall impact of UNDP's work may be less than the sum of its parts due to the fragmented nature of multiple interventions.

Programme efficiency

Finding 14. The efficiency of UNDP programme and project execution in Serbia has been affected by systemic bottlenecks, operational and administrative delays, and external shocks. UNDP's flexibility, agility and close cooperation with government institutions have helped to mitigate some of these challenges and sustain progress.

UNDP Serbia encountered a range of interconnected challenges spanning external systemic and structural bottlenecks, administrative and procedural delays, and external shocks, all of which affected overall programme efficiency. Systemic and structural bottlenecks related to frequent elections and high staff turnover across government institutions. These issues were compounded by rigid and cumbersome government approval processes, which were particularly evident in delays associated with securing funds and developing technical documentation.

Administrative and procedural delays, such as funding transfers from the government to UNDP, further exacerbated these challenges.[194] The process of obtaining approvals and preparing key documents, such as terms of reference and project technical documentation, often faced delays, which in turn postponed project activities and hindered timely execution.[195] In other cases, as discussed in Finding 10, energy efficiency projects encountered challenges linked to lengthy loan negotiations, atypically extended UNDP contracting procedures, staff turnover in government institutions and unresolved legal property issues.[196]

Additional external factors, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupted project timelines and budgets. The pandemic and government response measures led to delays in planned trainings and other activities, resulting in budgetary impacts and the need to reschedule critical activities. UNDP was agile in shifting activities online, which helped mitigate some of these disruptions.

[194] E.g. there were significant such delays in the implementation of the Support to Strategic Investments in Education project in 2022.
[195] Examples of such delays were found in several of UNDP's projects, such as the Energy Efficiency Renovation Programme of Central Government Buildings, Project Implementation Unit support for the Project Preparatory Activities, EU for Civil Protection and Disaster Resilience Strengthening in the Republic of Serbia, Energy Efficiency in Central Government Buildings, etc.
[196] In a few cases, public buildings are in private ownership.

Internally, the transition from Atlas to Quantum[197] as UNDP's ERP system created efficiency challenges, as the operationalization of Quantum has progressed slowly. Interviews with UNDP teams highlighted major issues related to the lack of accurate financial visibility at the country level, complicating donor reporting and financial transparency. Users consistently described Quantum's procurement features and processes as overly complicated and inefficient.[198] While many of these challenges relate to its ongoing implementation, stakeholders acknowledged that UNDP's overall procurement system remains more effective than the government's. Nonetheless, these issues threaten UNDP's operational effectiveness and risk undermining the sustainability of its business model.

Evaluation findings indicated that UNDP has remained flexible and agile in responding to and mitigating various challenges, largely by maintaining close cooperation and communication with key government institutions. This sustained engagement has helped mitigate efficiency challenges to some extent. One example was the establishment of the Technical Task Force, which supported planning and review of project activities for the Sustainable Investments along the Belt and Road project. The Technical Task Force was responsible for reviewing implementation status, updating the risk matrix and planning action steps.[199] Another example was the coordination mechanism for construction projects, in which UNDP organized regular stakeholder meetings as part of a quality assurance task force.[200] In parallel, UNDP and the Ministry of Finance maintained close collaboration to harmonize regulations and resolve practical implementation challenges, particularly in the context of ongoing public financial management reforms.[201]

Portfolio approach

Finding 15. UNDP Serbia actively promoted portfolio approaches to address complex, interconnected challenges in an integrated manner. This approach enhanced programming relevance by engaging a wide range of actors on pressing issues, fostering new partnerships and integrating a systems perspective across government reform efforts.

UNDP Serbia was among UNDP's global front-runners in shifting to the 'projects to portfolios' approach by designing two distinct portfolios: one focused on depopulation and the other on SME resilience. UNDP developed the depopulation portfolio based on evidence of Serbia's demographic challenges, including significant outmigration, particularly among skilled professionals. The Accelerator Lab initiated the portfolio in collaboration with external partners[202] as a cross-office effort aimed at transforming national population policy into a human resource policy, prioritizing human capital in response to new demographic realities.[203] The portfolio approach enabled a holistic response to demographic policy challenges, convening UNDP experts from across thematic areas to co-invest in innovative initiatives such as diaspora engagement, data-driven decision-making, remote work opportunities and localized solutions.

197 https://www.undp.org/quantum/what-quantum
198 For example, UNDP has been forced to issue multiple tenders for infrastructure projects instead of a single, comprehensive project, significantly affecting the interest of prospective applicants and overall procurement efficiency.
199 UNDP (2024); SIP Project Annual Report 2023.
200 UNDP (2023); EU for Civil Protection and Disaster Resilience Strengthening in the Republic of Serbia Annual Report 2022.
201 UNDP (2023); EU Public Financial Management Facility Inception Report.
202 E.g. the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry for Family Welfare and Demography, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, UNICEF, UNFPA, Government Secretariat, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Ministry of Science and Technology Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, National Academy for Public Administration, and a network of civil society partners.
203 UNDP (2024); Population Development Facility: Progress Report 2023.

Spin-offs from Accelerator Lab concepts under this portfolio led to two stand-alone initiatives. The Returning Point initiative, which was supported by the Accelerator Lab and the SDG Centre, promoted circular migration and became a point of contact for diaspora seeking to return or remain engaged with Serbia. The second initiative, Belgrade Gets Digital,[204] helped position Belgrade as a destination for digital nomads, a perception that was corroborated during stakeholder interviews.

UNDP's work on the 2022 National Human Development Report on depopulation[205] elevated depopulation as a key development issue in Serbia and contributed to a shared focus on identifying innovative responses, as elaborated in Finding 8. In parallel, the SME resilience portfolio was co-designed and led by the SDG Integration Centre as a means to address economic development from a sustainability perspective. This portfolio remained in the resource mobilization phase at the time of evaluation.

To operationalize the portfolio approach, the CO integrated horizontal functions into its structure to support project implementation across themes and help identify synergies. These roles included the Accelerator Lab, a senior economist, a sustainable finance specialist, a gender portfolio team providing mainstreaming assistance across the CO, a digital transformation advisor, and a communications unit that ensured cohesive messaging of results. This structure allowed for coordination across thematic boundaries and supported cross-cluster initiatives. The CO also experimented with different organizational models, including the establishment of the SDG Integration Centre in 2019. Together, these efforts have helped position the CO as a natural partner to government bodies with integrative mandates, such as the offices of the President, Prime Minister and the General Secretariat of the Government.

According to UNDP stakeholders, the portfolio approach has improved UNDP Serbia's programming strategy in several ways. It has elevated programming ambition and enabled more coherent engagement with complex and interconnected development challenges. The approach also enhanced programme relevance by engaging a wide range of actors as thought leaders on pressing issues, fostering new strategic partnerships and embedding a systems perspective across sectors.

However, discussions also noted several inherent challenges. These included the misalignment between holistic, portfolio-based methods and existing policy frameworks or donor funding mechanisms, which made political or financial stewardship more difficult to secure. Internally, motivating staff to adopt the portfolio approach was also challenging due to its multidimensional nature, the need to maintain consistent synergies without visible or easily attainable 'wins', and the considerable capacity required for thoughtful design. Additionally, the presence of multiple interpretations of the portfolio approach within UNDP posed further challenges to coherence and effective institutional uptake.

Programme monitoring and evaluation

Finding 16. UNDP Serbia's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function is well-structured and supported by a robust guiding framework for planning, reporting and risk management. Challenges remain in measuring post-project results and aligning M&E practices with portfolio-based approaches to support continuous learning.

[204] https://belgradegets.digital/

[205] UNDP (2022); National Human Development Report – Serbia 2022: Human Development in Response to Demographic Change, available at https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/national-report-document/national-human-development-report-serbia-2022.pdf

UNDP Serbia demonstrated a systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function, aligned with UNDP's corporate 'Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures' evaluation policy and United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) standards. Its CPD and project interventions integrated an annually reviewed M&E plan, ensuring ongoing relevance and effectiveness.[206] Stakeholder engagement through steering committees and regular reporting was noted as a good practice.

UNDP provides public access to project results and evaluations,[207] which stakeholders considered helpful for understanding UNDP's work. The UNDP Serbia Power BI Dashboard also contains project-related information and financial data. Internal process optimization has been carried out through the Business Process Review mission conducted by a support team from the Istanbul Regional Centre.

The CO's innovative use of an AI solution (a customized implementation of ChatGPT) interacts with internal databases, including reports and evaluations, and showed potential for broader UNDP replication. A review of the platform indicated significant potential to facilitate reporting processes. Additionally, the UNDP Accelerator Lab used open data and big data for data-driven decision-making, such as in the depopulation portfolio. However, the M&E approach was not fully aligned with the portfolio approach, as confirmed by staff and noted in the midterm evaluation of the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network, which called for redesigning evaluation and impact assessment systems to support learning through experimentation.[208]

Despite these strengths, challenges remained in measuring and reporting post-project results. Broad outcome indicators—such as the Corruption Perceptions Index, Ease of Doing Business score and employment rate—limited the precision with which UNDP's contributions under CPD outcome areas can be assessed. Challenges with outcome-level monitoring were also reflected in decentralized evaluations, many of which highlighted the need to strengthen the measurement of achieved outcomes. These issues were also corroborated by the review conducted as part of this evaluation.

Partnerships and collaboration

Finding 17. UNDP Serbia has effectively leveraged long-term partnerships with government institutions, fostering strong collaboration. Challenges persist across UNDP's partnership ecosystem,[209] particularly around information sharing, transparency, coordination and competition among UN agencies for leadership in overlapping mandate areas, which could undermine potential synergies in the long term.

UNDP has effectively acted as a facilitator in thematic areas, drawing on its ability to convene diverse stakeholder groups—including government, other UN agencies, donors and civil society—to promote dialogue and reforms, as confirmed by most stakeholders, including donors.[210] Stakeholder feedback described the cooperation as generally open and constructive, with clear divisions of roles and thematic responsibilities. However, some stakeholders noted that cross-cutting themes (e.g. gender) often present

[206] UNDP also effectively contributes to the UNSDCF Monitoring and Evaluation Group (MEG) and overall Cooperation Framework monitoring by providing progress data against output indicators for Joint Work Plans.

[207] Project information and results are published on the UNDP transparency portal and the UNDP CO website, while evaluation reports are available on the Evaluation Resource Centre.

[208] UNDP (2022); Midterm Evaluation of the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network, p. 46.

[209] The term 'partnership ecosystem', as used in this context, refers to the network of relationships and interactions between UNDP and its various partners, including government institutions, other UN agencies, donors, the private sector and civil society, to encompass a complex and interconnected system where challenges in one area can affect the overall functioning and effectiveness of partnerships.

[210] For example, UNDP has taken the lead among UN agencies, convening UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, as well as eleven ministries, local institutions, civil society organizations, and media organizations to address domestic violence and gender inequalities. In addition, UNDP is engaged in four joint projects with other UN agencies: Integrated Response to Violence Against Women and Girls in Serbia III (UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA); Promoting Evidence-Based Migration Governance for Maximizing Development Potential of Migration (International Organization for Migration, UNICEF, UNDP and UNHCR); Strengthening the Role of Youth in Promoting Increased Mutual Understanding, Constructive Narrative, Respect for Diversity, and Trust (UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNESCO); and EU for Healthcare in Serbia (UNDP, WHO).

challenges due to competition for leadership, with agencies occasionally encroaching on each other's mandates to assert positioning. Stakeholders also suggested that thematic collaboration between UNDP and other UN agencies could have been strengthened to avoid lost momentum and improve synergies.[211]

Some donors and UN agencies also noted shortcomings in joint advocacy among UN entities, particularly regarding the strategic integration of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) approach and principles into government policies and measures. Interviewees stressed that UNDP has not fully leveraged its position as a trusted partner of state institutions to promote wider adoption of the LNOB approach in government initiatives, which was seen as a missed opportunity. Additionally, stakeholders raised concerns about information sharing and transparency in planning and implementing UNDP support with the government. For example, some donors stated that they were not fully informed about dialogues between UNDP and government partners.

UNDP Serbia has made progress in collaborating with the private sector, despite constraints linked to UNDP's corporate policies and procedures. Successful initiatives include the Plate by Plate surplus food donation platform with Delhaize Serbia, which helped reduce food waste, and engaging SMEs in adopting environmental, social and governance; fostering female entrepreneurship; enhancing digital integration; and advancing technological innovation, ecological development and green solutions. UNDP's SME portfolio,[212] developed in partnership with Deloitte Consulting, was aimed at increasing SME resilience and promoting sustainable growth. It positioned SMEs at the centre of Serbia's technological and green transformation by identifying opportunities in supply chain integration, digitalization, sustainable finance and entrepreneurial development. These efforts have contributed to mobilizing private financing for the SDGs, which is particularly important in the context of constrained public resources and declining development assistance to Serbia. The development of the SDG investor map and support for green bond issuance were also praised by stakeholders for their potential to advance innovative financial models.

Gender mainstreaming

Finding 18. UNDP has made notable contributions to advancing gender equality, addressing gender-based violence and increasing women's participation in decision-making. While gender marker data suggest a limited degree of gender integration, UNDP's interventions reveal a far more comprehensive and impactful approach, highlighting limitations in the gender marker system.

UNDP made comprehensive, multipronged efforts to integrate gender into its programmes and projects. Through a combination of policy development, institutional support and gender-responsive implementation, UNDP Serbia has addressed persistent structural inequalities, gender-based segregation in education and employment, income disparities, the unequal burden of unpaid care work and women's roles in climate resilience. These efforts aligned with national legal frameworks (e.g. the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the Law on Gender Equality) and international obligations (e.g. CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention).

Notable contributions include advisory support for gender-related policy documents, institutional development such as support to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, and operational support for enforcing laws such as the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence.[213] UNDP has also served as a key

[211] For example, the final evaluation of the project Integrated Response to Violence against Women and Girls in Serbia III suggested "there is room to link different activities of national partners and UN agencies since the project participants engaged within the specific project components are not familiar with the activities of other institutions or organizations under other project components."

[212] https://www.undp.org/serbia/blog/how-can-serbian-smes-grow-be-more-resilient-shocks-future#new_tab

[213] This included assistance in the development of standard operating procedures and protocols of institutions in cases of domestic violence, as well as the development of bylaws and service provision standards in the domain of social protection—such as standards for the operation of SOS helplines for victims of domestic violence and standards for programmes working with perpetrators of violence.

convener, facilitating collaboration among UN agencies (UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA), ministries, local institutions, CSOs and the media to address domestic violence and gender inequalities. Among important results of these efforts was the 2021 adoption of the National Strategy for Combating Gender-Based Violence.[214] UNDP has further built the capacities of national stakeholders, such as legal professionals,[215] social workers, journalists[216] and civil society actors, addressing patriarchal norms through extensive partnerships with government, civil society and media actors.

Women's empowerment has been a core aspect of UNDP programming.[217] The organization has promoted gender equality and women's participation in both the green and digital transitions, working to increase women's visibility and career opportunities. Long-term support has also been provided for improving women's representation in decision-making, as seen through partnerships with the Women's Parliamentary Network and the establishment of the Women Mayors Network. Gender equality advocacy efforts have included strategic advocacy and outreach campaigns and events across traditional and social media outlets.[218]

Despite these advances, structural barriers and entrenched patriarchal norms—including gender segregation in the labour market and wage inequality—have continued to constrain progress and limit the full transformative potential of UNDP's gender equality efforts.

UNDP Serbia has effectively embedded its Gender Equality Strategy into the 2021–2025 CPD. Supported by a dedicated Gender Focal Team,[219] targeted initiatives have driven meaningful progress characterized by clear leadership commitment, strategic operational procedures and well-defined support mechanisms aimed at institutionalizing gender equality. The Gender Focal Team is supported by an in-house Gender Specialist, who has provided technical support to programme and operational units, while also leading the development and implementation of gender-focused and women-specific initiatives within the CO's Gender Equality Portfolio.[220]

UNDP has also contributed to the United Nations Country Team's Gender Theme Group, which facilitates coordination, information sharing and joint gender equality initiatives. The CO participated in the Gender Seal Initiative, achieving the Bronze Seal, which recognizes its progress in creating an enabling environment for gender equality, developing partnerships and advancing knowledge management. According to feedback from the CO, a gender portfolio review is currently underway to strengthen internal capacity and accountability for gender mainstreaming in programming and policy support. This process is intended

[214] In 2023, UNDP completed a joint project Integrated Response to Violence Against Women and Girls in Serbia III, implemented by four UN agencies (UNDP-led, UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA) and the Government of the Republic of Serbia, led by the Coordination Body for Gender Equality. The project was implemented with the support of the Swedish Government during 2020–2023 and focused on challenges that prevent women and girls in Serbia from living a life free from fear of violence. As the country's longest joint UN agency initiative, it transitioned into a new phase in January 2024 titled Ending Violence – Empowering Change, led by UNDP, with an expanded focus on gender equality.

[215] UNDP supported the development of the first official e-learning platform and training package on domestic violence for the Judicial Academy and the Ministry of Interior.

[216] In partnership with the B92 Fund, UNDP supported over seventy female journalists and media editors through the Journalists Against Violence group, formed in 2017 to improve the ethical reporting of violence against women in Serbian media. Fund B92 is a non-profit organization that designs and produces humanitarian, cultural, educational and socially responsible campaigns and projects to prevent and solve various social problems. More at: http://fondb92.org/en/home.1.1.html

[217] This included support to local women's organizations, facilitating their involvement in projects and advocating for women's active participation in innovative solutions for the green transition.

[218] UNDP has successfully engaged the public on gender equality issues, with campaigns like #TiceMeSe during the COVID-19 pandemic generating widespread support against gender-based violence.

[219] The Country Office also formed an interdisciplinary Gender Focal Team during the Gender Seal process (2021–23). The Gender Focal Team actively advises and supports the CO to improve gender-related performance and builds staff capacity to meet Gender Seal standards. In addition, the UNDP CO Development Solutions Team has a comprehensive mandate to integrate the various thematic areas of UNDP involvement in Serbia, including ensuring a gender equality approach in UNDP work.

[220] The portfolio is placed within the SDG Integration Cluster. UNDP Serbia also implements Standard Operating Procedures for all new project designs, with the gender focal point embedded within the Development Solutions Team. Such measures underscore UNDP's commitment to ensuring that gender considerations are integral to the planning and execution of projects.

to inform the development of the CO's strategic approach to gender equality in the context of the new CPD for the 2026–2030 period. Gender distribution within the CO workforce is balanced, with 48 percent female and 52 percent male staff (see Annex 4).

The gender marker system[221] shows a rather limited extent of gender integration, with more than two-thirds of projects (84) classified as GEN1, accounting for 80 percent of total expenditure.[222] However, evaluation findings indicated that this reflects limitations in the marker system itself, which tends to understate the actual breadth and depth of gender-responsive interventions across UNDP's portfolio.

This gap can be attributed to inherent limitations in the marker system, which may not fully capture the depth and breadth of UNDP's gender-focused efforts. While the system categorizes projects by primary objective, it may not reflect the extensive gender mainstreaming or the nuanced, context-specific gender impacts embedded within programmes. For example, initiatives such as policy advisory support, institutional operational assistance and strategic advocacy campaigns demonstrate a deeper integration of gender considerations that transcend projects' primary objectives. Thus, the actual on-the-ground interventions reveal a more integrated and impactful approach to gender equality, highlighting the limitations of relying solely on the gender marker classification to assess the true extent of gender integration.

[221] UNDP uses a gender marker system to classify projects based on the extent of gender integration. GEN0 indicates no gender relevance; GEN1 denotes some gender elements; GEN2 reflects gender as a significant objective; and GEN3 applies when gender equality is the principal objective of the intervention. See UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025, available at: https://www.undp.org/publications/gender-equality-strategy-2022-2025

[222] Forty-one projects are classified as GEN2, with 19 percent expenditure, and four GEN3 projects under Outcomes 2 and 3, with 1 percent expenditure. Source: UNDP Quantum & Atlas, extracted on 31 July 2024.

CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. UNDP's strategic value in Serbia lies in its ability to deliver international policy and technical expertise to drive reforms across key sectors in line with the country's EU aspirations and the SDGs. While responsive to demands, this broad engagement risks overstretching resources and fragmenting efforts, making it essential for UNDP to strike a balance between upstream and downstream interventions to maximize long-term impact.

UNDP's added value as a strategic partner to the government and other stakeholders in Serbia lies in its ability to bring international expertise and experience, paired with efficient and transparent procurement procedures. This combination forms the core of UNDP's value proposition in the country, enabling support for reform efforts across sectors, particularly in digital transformation and environmental sustainability.

UNDP's integrated programming and advisory services—especially in developing regulatory frameworks and model approaches—have further strengthened its role. Its contributions to environmental legislation and demographic policy have been instrumental in addressing key societal needs while aligning with government priorities, offering the potential for transformative impacts in areas such as climate change and demographic challenges like the outmigration of talent and human capital.

However, UNDP's prioritization of upstream work, consistent with Serbia's upper-middle-income country context, has at times sidelined issues such as civil society development and citizen engagement due to resource limitations. While downstream interventions, such as those promoting digital literacy, green transition, civil society support and local development planning, have yielded positive outcomes at the individual or municipal level, their broader transformative potential has been limited by a lack of consistent scale-up plans.

To date, UNDP has not fully achieved a balance between upstream and downstream efforts, a balance that is critical for maximizing long-term development results.

These challenges—combined with UNDP's broad engagement across nearly all sectors, often driven by its procurement capacity—present a risk of resource overstretch and dilution of interventions' and priorities' strategic focuses. This has contributed to a degree of fragmentation, with multiple support efforts lacking sufficient follow-up or integration into broader, more systematic initiatives.

UNDP's portfolio approach offers an opportunity to consolidate efforts and elevate its programming ambitions by enabling the organization to address complex, interconnected challenges and engage a broad range of stakeholders as thought leaders. However, the approach also brings challenges, including potential misalignment with existing policy and funding structures, difficulty securing political and financial support, and the need for dedicated design capacity and internal motivation.

Given the evolving donor and resource mobilization landscape in Serbia, these are critical areas for reflection going forward.

Conclusion 2. UNDP's interventions in Serbia have supported legislative development and demographic solutions with potential to increase the repatriation of skilled workers and strengthen family-friendly local policies. Outcomes for targeted individuals and local self-governments have been largely positive, providing opportunities for learning and replication. However, a more coherent and comprehensive scale-up strategy—currently lacking—is warranted to maximize such potential.

The added value of UNDP's engagement and strategic partnerships is evident in its work to address Serbia's demographic challenges, particularly through efforts to foster conditions conducive to circular migration and diaspora reintegration. Combining upstream and downstream interventions, UNDP has collaborated with the Ministry of Family and Demography, UN agencies and selected local governments to create environments that attract investment, support families, address population decline and facilitate diaspora reintegration.

Pilot initiatives have demonstrated how localized solutions can contribute to more transformative and sustainable demographic outcomes, underscoring the importance of a holistic and cohesive approach. However, further effort is needed to develop comprehensive, whole-of-society demographic solutions, and for UNDP to define its position and strategy on how it can best support them.

Drawing on promising practices from model cities like Čačak and from diaspora engagement initiatives, UNDP has a clear role in replicating effective approaches to enhance population policy, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions. However, the ability to scale such support depends heavily on government capacities to advance reforms and on the broader socio-economic context. These factors must be considered in planning a realistic, yet ambitious UNDP support agenda.

Conclusion 3. UNDP's innovations and support in public administration and digital transformation have driven legislative reforms, strengthened institutional capacities and modernized public services. To fully realize these benefits, UNDP must address challenges such as scalability, access to digital tools and sustainability, thereby enabling broader, long-term impacts across Serbian society.

UNDP has placed innovation at the core of its programming, particularly in digital transformation, AI, public administration and e-government. Its support in these areas has led to key legislative reforms and strengthened institutional capacities, promoting improved governance and service delivery in alignment with EU accession aspirations and the SDGs. Investments in digital transformation have modernized public services and fostered a knowledge-based economy, as illustrated by support to the Innovation District in Kragujevac and the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, while also enhancing digital skills among vulnerable groups.

These efforts have contributed to Serbia's digital progress by expanding access to public services and inclusion in the digital economy. However, the overall effectiveness of these initiatives has been constrained by limited scalability, restricted access to digital resources, low digital awareness and concerns regarding sustainability. Realizing the full potential of these programmes requires innovative approaches to improve access to digital tools, deeper integration of digital literacy into both formal and informal education systems, and the securing of sustainable funding to enable more widespread benefits across Serbian society.

Conclusion 4. UNDP Serbia has significantly influenced the development of Serbia's green agenda and climate change policies, supporting their alignment with international obligations and contributing to their implementation and to the leveraging of financial resources. Scaling up and financial challenges remain in further promoting the circular economy and advancing the green transition.

UNDP's effective support and results in strengthening the government's SDG investment processes, developing sustainable, inclusive and innovative infrastructure, attracting private-sector investors for green initiatives, and building disaster resilience have been enabled by its long-standing partnership with the government. These efforts have yielded positive outcomes, particularly in aligning Serbia with the EU Green Agenda by mobilizing financing for green and energy transitions, supporting local policy planning, increasing air quality solutions, and creating a more enabling environment for green transition.

Nevertheless, broader scaling and transformation of pilot solutions remain necessary to achieve significant impacts on Serbia's sustainable growth—particularly in energy efficiency and the integration of climate adaptation measures into national and local budgeting and policy frameworks. Persistent challenges include underdeveloped green infrastructure, regulatory and financial barriers, weak local government capacities, low private-sector awareness of green transition demands, and over-reliance on donor-driven support for circular economy and innovation.

Conclusion 5. UNDP has adopted a comprehensive and multipronged approach to gender integration that addresses structural inequalities and promotes women's empowerment across sectors.

UNDP Serbia has demonstrated a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to gender mainstreaming, aligning its efforts with national legislative frameworks and international standards. Through policy development and institutional support, UNDP Serbia has addressed structural inequalities, gender-based segregation, income disparities and the disproportionate responsibilities of unpaid domestic work on women. Initiatives such as training professionals, developing e-learning platforms and supporting local women's organizations have empowered women and promoted their active participation in green transition efforts and critical decision-making spaces.

Despite these significant contributions, challenges remain due to persistent structural barriers, entrenched patriarchal norms and gender segregation in Serbia's labour market. Internally, UNDP Serbia's commitment to gender equality is evident in its balanced workforce, with minor variations between National Office and General Service staff, reflecting efforts to promote gender parity within the organization. The interdisciplinary Gender Focal Team and the in-house Gender Specialist have played key roles in integrating gender considerations across the portfolio, contributing to the Country Office's achievement of the Bronze Seal under the Gender Seal Initiative.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. For the upcoming programme cycle, UNDP should pursue a more integrated country programme, maximizing the potential of the portfolio approach to ensure that areas of investment like the green agenda, demographic policies, digitalization, AI and gender equality are clearly tied together and consolidated.

The UNDP Country Office in Serbia has distinct comparative advantages in key sectors such as the green agenda, demographic policies, digitalization and AI, sustainable finance, SME development and gender equality. These areas offer significant opportunities for strategic, forward-thinking approaches that go beyond simply responding to government demands, in line with UNDP's corporate approach to portfolios.

To capitalize on these opportunities—and given the CO's existing capacities and structures to foster programme integration, including horizontal roles held by national specialists and advisers, as well as the cross-office Development Solutions Team—UNDP should continue investing in an ongoing process of strategic reflection and planning. This will allow the CO to refine its successful strategies and address areas that require improvement. These efforts should serve as the foundation for developing a targeted country framework that integrates core interventions where UNDP has comparative advantage, thus ensuring that their application is cohesive, strategic and forward-looking.

Setting clear milestones and pathways for change will support systematic progress tracking and enhance accountability. Strengthening coordination with local stakeholders, government entities and international partners will further ensure the development and implementation of comprehensive and impactful initiatives in which all actions are aligned and integrated into a unified strategy, maximizing the transformative potential of UNDP's development contributions in Serbia.

UNDP should support systemic change by keeping innovation at the core of its initiatives in order to drive transformative progress across sectors. For example, the advancement of biotech, the integration of AI and UNDP's pluriannual engagement in enabling digital transformation through inclusive digital literacy and open data support Serbia's transition to a knowledge-based economy as an upper-middle-income country. These efforts should be capitalized on to enable the adoption of e-government solutions that are essential to modernizing public administration.

UNDP should also build on its innovative approaches and solutions, such as the SDG Investor Map that promoted investments in renewable energy, along with the issuance of a green bond to support green finance. These efforts would not only boost Serbia's socio-economic growth but also reinforce UNDP's leadership in driving long-term innovation and sustainability.

Recommendation 2. UNDP should actively collaborate with the government to explore possibilities for scaling up successful models in addressing depopulation. This will ensure a comprehensive and sustainable approach to tackle Serbia's demographic challenges.

Building on its achievements in addressing the persistent challenges of depopulation and the outmigration of skilled talent in Serbia, particularly those achieved through models tested in communities, UNDP should actively collaborate with the government to explore options for scaling up successful approaches.

One avenue is to develop a comprehensive framework that outlines specific steps to replicate and build on effective packages of local measures, such as those piloted in the City of Čačak. These could include developing (1) clear guidelines for implementation by local governments wishing to adopt and adapt them to their local contexts; (2) a strategy for resource allocation; and (3) programmes to build the skills and capacities of local governments to design and deliver such interventions.

This will help ensure that local authorities are well prepared to adopt, effectively implement and sustain measures to prevent or counter depopulation. Joint investments by the government and UNDP, combined with awareness-raising efforts targeting the private sector and offering incentives for businesses to invest in economically disadvantaged regions, can help address territorial disparities and promote positive employment and demographic trends. These interventions should be complemented by active collaboration on green transition and digital transformation, ensuring a comprehensive and sustainable approach to Serbia's key development priorities.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should continue to support the Green Agenda in Serbia by strengthening key actors' capacities for its implementation.

UNDP should support the government in implementing the Environmental Protection Strategy (Green Agenda for Serbia), once adopted. This is essential for Serbia's fulfilment of the Sofia Declaration and the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Specific areas of focus include:

- **Decarbonization:** UNDP should accelerate work on energy efficiency in existing public buildings, which will significantly reduce emissions. It should further promote the use of the ESCO model as a mechanism for mobilizing private financing for energy efficiency improvements. UNDP should also expedite updates to the EMIS system and increase its use. In the residential sector, best practices in enhancing energy efficiency should be promoted, integrating Leave No One Behind principles.
- **Depollution:** To prepare Serbia for the effective implementation of relevant EU legislation on industrial pollution, such as the Industrial Emissions Directive, UNDP should build capacities to manage the issuance of IPPC permits and for advising local governments and industries throughout this process. In addition, UNDP should encourage the implementation of local air quality plans and promote best practices.

- **Circular economy:** UNDP should further support the shift of business operations towards circular economy models by providing technical and financial support to SMEs and academia for developing and upscaling innovative ideas, including the reduction of bio-waste. Support to SMEs in accessing investment is critical, as limited access to financial resources remains a key barrier to circular economy advancement.
- **Environmental protection and biodiversity:** UNDP should continue supporting the advancement of nature and biodiversity conservation in Serbia, promoting climate adaptation through nature-based solutions and aiding in the development of national biodiversity finance plans.
- **Climate change adaptation:** UNDP should support the implementation and monitoring of climate change adaptation measures and promote the wider use of developed e-tools for disaster risk assessment and for both climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Recommendation 4. UNDP should adopt a flexible and fit-for-purpose business model to adapt to the changing financial landscape and boost its capacity to partner with international finance institutions in line with government priorities and Serbia's European Union accession aspirations.

Considering Serbia's status as an upper-middle-income country and its European Union accession pathway, and in the context of the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, UNDP should assess its current and potential funding opportunities in line with the needs of its portfolio approach and new CPD financial targets. This assessment should inform the adoption of a UNDP business model that combines government cost-sharing programmes with financing from international financial institutions, leverages both domestic and foreign investment to accelerate progress on the SDGs, and supports the development of a knowledge-based economy alongside digital transformation and the green transition. These efforts should be accompanied by the strengthening of partnerships with other UN agencies.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should continue to enhance its gender mainstreaming efforts by conducting thorough gender analyses at the project design stage to ensure gender considerations are central, thereby improving gender marker scores and fostering more inclusive and impactful outcomes. More emphasis is needed on thoroughly incorporating LNOB and human rights principles and approaches.

Building on UNDP's progress in gender mainstreaming, the organization should continue to strengthen its approach by conducting thorough gender and vulnerability analyses during the project design stage. This proactive integration will ensure that gender considerations are embedded as a core component of planning rather than addressed as an afterthought. By assessing potential impacts on gender and other vulnerable groups from the outset, and in alignment with Leave No One Behind principles, UNDP can make realistic assessments, improve its gender marker scores and ensure that projects more clearly articulate how they address gender inequalities, leading to more inclusive and impactful initiatives. Particular attention should be paid to the integration of a human rights-based approach and Leave No One Behind principles across all Country Office interventions, including those related to green and just transitions, by promoting the development and use of the human and social capital of people at risk of being left behind.

3.3 Key Recommendations and Management Response

RECOMMENDATION 1.

For the upcoming programme cycle, UNDP should pursue a more integrated country programme, maximizing the potential of the portfolio approach to ensure that areas of investment like the green agenda, demographic policies, digitalization, AI and gender equality are clearly tied together and consolidated.

The UNDP Country Office in Serbia has distinct comparative advantages in key sectors such as the green agenda, demographic policies, digitalization and AI, sustainable finance, SME development and gender equality. These areas offer significant opportunities for strategic, forward-thinking approaches beyond merely responding to government demands, in line with UNDP's corporate approach on portfolios. To capitalize on these opportunities, and considering the CO's existing capacities and structures aimed at fostering programme integration (through horizontal roles covered by national specialists and advisers, and the cross-office Development Solutions Team), UNDP should continue investing in a continuous process of strategic reflection and planning to refine the successful strategies the office has applied and address areas needing improvement. This should form the foundation for developing a targeted country framework that integrates core interventions where UNDP has comparative advantage, ensuring they are applied in a cohesive, strategic and forward-looking manner. Setting clear milestones and pathways for change will allow for systematic tracking of progress and enhance accountability. Strengthening coordination with local stakeholders, government entities and international partners will further ensure comprehensive and impactful initiatives where all actions are aligned and integrated, creating a unified strategy to maximize the transformative potential of UNDP development contributions in Serbia.

UNDP should support systemic change by continuing to place innovation at the core of its initiatives to foster transformative progress across sectors. For instance, UNDP's pluriannual engagement in enabling digital transformation through inclusive digital literacy and open data, the advancement of biotech and the integration of artificial intelligence in supporting the transition towards a knowledge-based economy for a UMIC like Serbia should be capitalized on, enabling the adoption of e-government solutions essential for modernizing the public administration. UNDP should also build on its innovative approaches and solutions, such as the SDGs Investor Map that promoted investments in renewable energy, along with the issuance of a green bond to support green financing, as they not only propel Serbia's socio-economic growth but also solidify UNDP's leadership in fostering long-term innovation and sustainability.

Management response: Recommendation is accepted.

UNDP Serbia recognizes innovation as crucial for achieving sustainable development. In our new Country Programme Document, we are dedicated to refining our integrated portfolio approach and improving communication, reporting and cross-functional capabilities. This will ensure a cohesive, impactful and forward-thinking strategy for the next programme cycle.

UNDP Serbia will leverage the Development Solutions Team and horizontal capacities, including the Research & Development (R&D) and innovation functions within the Country Office (CO), to design new projects with an integrated approach, maximizing the potential of the portfolio. UNDP Serbia will strengthen communication and coordination with government entities (e.g. Government Council) and other national and international partners to ensure that initiatives are comprehensive and impactful, aligning with the integrated country programme approach. Additionally, UNDP Serbia will establish clear milestones and pathways for programme integration to systematically track progress, generate knowledge and enhance accountability. This will also help in producing a coherent narrative around the portfolio.

◀ Recommendation 1 (cont'd)

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Integrated programming in new projects by leveraging the Development Solutions Team (DST) and horizontal capacities, including Research & Development (R&D) and innovation function, in the CO.	End of 2025	DST		Initiated
1.2 Enhance communication and coordination with government entities (e.g. Government Council) and other national and international partners to ensure comprehensive and impactful initiatives	End of 2025	Management Team		
1.3 Set clear milestones and pathways for programme integration to systematically track progress, produce a clear narrative, generate knowledge and enhance accountability	End of 2025	Management Team		

RECOMMENDATION 2.

UNDP should actively collaborate with the government to explore possibilities for scaling up successful models in addressing depopulation. This will ensure a comprehensive and sustainable approach to tackle Serbia's demographic challenges.

Building on its achievements in addressing the persistent challenges of depopulation and brain drain in Serbia, especially with the models that were tested in the communities, UNDP should actively collaborate with the government to explore possibilities for scaling up successful models and initiatives around depopulation. One of the avenues is to develop a comprehensive framework that outlines specific steps for replicating successful packages of local measures and building on those that were, for instance, modelled in the City of Čačak. These include, but are not limited to: (1) developing clear guidelines on how to implement them for those local governments which choose to adopt and adapt them to their local context and possibilities; (2) a strategy for allocating necessary resources; and (3) programmes to build the skills and capacity of local governments to design and implement them. This will ensure that local authorities are well prepared to adopt, effectively implement and sustain such positive measures to prevent or counter depopulation. Joint investments by the government and UNDP, coupled with awareness-raising efforts targeting the private sector and offering incentives for businesses to invest in economically disadvantaged regions, can address territorial disparities and promote positive employment and demographic measures. These interventions should be complemented by active collaboration with the government on issues of green transition and digital transformation. This will ensure a comprehensive and sustainable approach to tackle Serbia's key development priorities.

Management response: Recommendation is accepted.

UNDP Serbia is committed to addressing the pressing issues of depopulation and brain drain. To achieve long-term impact, UNDP is considering a multidimensional, scalable and area-based approach. This involves integrating proven models with innovative solutions, leveraging partnerships and aligning with Serbia's national priorities. Through this comprehensive strategy, UNDP aims to tackle these challenges while fostering resilience and sustainability within local communities.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Set regular exchanges with the Government of Serbia and other stakeholders to invest in population development policies, mainstream population dynamics into key strategies, and strengthen their capacities	End of 2026	DST and Good Governance		
2.2 Systematization of Čačak model for adoption in other Serbian cities	End of 2026	Good Governance		

RECOMMENDATION 3.

UNDP should continue to support the Green Agenda in Serbia by strengthening key actors' capacities for its implementation.

UNDP should support the government in the implementation of the Environmental Protection Strategy (Green Agenda for Serbia), upon its adoption. This is critical for Serbia's fulfilment of the Sofia Declaration and the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Specific areas of focus include:

- **Decarbonization.** It is important that UNDP speeds up work on energy efficiency in public buildings, which will significantly contribute to the decarbonization of existing public buildings. UNDP should further promote the use of the ESCO model as a mechanism to mobilize private financing for energy efficiency improvements, as well as speed up the update of EMIS and increase its use. UNDP should promote best practice in enhancing energy efficiency in the residential sector, integrating Leave No One Behind principles.
- **Depollution of the environment.** To prepare Serbia for effective implementation of relevant EU legislation on industrial pollution, such as the Industrial Emissions Directive, UNDP should build capacity for managing the issuing of IPPC permits and advising local self-governments and industries on this process. In addition, UNDP should encourage the implementation of local air quality plans and promote best practices.

- **Circular economy.** UNDP should further support the shift of business operations to the circular economy model by providing technical and financial support to SMEs and academia in developing and upscaling innovative ideas, including the reduction of bio-waste. Support to SMEs to access investment is critical, as access to financial resources presents an important barrier to the circular economy.
- **Environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.** UNDP should continue to support advancing nature and biodiversity conservation in Serbia, promoting climate adaptation through nature-based solutions and the development of national biodiversity finance plans.
- **Climate change adaptation.** UNDP should promote the implementation and monitoring of climate change adaptation measures, as well as support wider use of developed e-tools for disaster risk assessment and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Management response: Recommendation is accepted.

UNDP Serbia is committed to advancing the Green Agenda by strengthening capacities, fostering innovation and creating pathways for systemic transformation. UNDP will adopt a phased approach to transferring knowledge and capacities, ensuring long-term sustainability. These efforts will align the Green Agenda with Serbia's broader Reform Agenda, enabling a holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Continuation of support by strengthening key actors' capacities for Green Agenda implementation and UNDP shall connect the Green Agenda with Serbia's Reform Agenda	End of 2025	Resilience Team		
3.2 Transfer experience to the Government from the Green Agenda Platform, to enable the Government to support innovative green projects and provide technical assistance to green companies, boosting the demand side and providing demand for international financial institutions, banks and other financing	End of 2027	Resilience Team		

RECOMMENDATION 4.

UNDP should adopt a flexible and fit-for-purpose business model to adapt to the changing financial landscape and boost its capacity to partner with international finance institutions in line with government priorities and Serbia's European Union accession aspirations.

Considering Serbia's upper-middle-income country status and European Union accession pathway, and in the context of the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, UNDP should assess its current and potential funding opportunities in line with the needs of its portfolio approach and new CPD financial targets. This should lead to the adoption of a UNDP business model that combines government cost-sharing programmes with financing from international finance institutions, leverages domestic and foreign investments to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs, and supports the development of a knowledge-based economy as well as digital transformation and the green transition. This should be accompanied by fostering partnerships with other UN agencies.

Management response: Recommendation is accepted.

The recommendation is accepted. UNDP Serbia aims to adopt a flexible business model that aligns with Serbia's evolving financial landscape, government priorities and EU accession goals. Strengthening partnerships with international finance institutions and developing a clear value proposition for stakeholders will be crucial for achieving transformative development outcomes. A robust partnership and communication plan for the next CPD cycle will ensure alignment with Serbia's priorities, boost stakeholder engagement and reaffirm the position of UNDP as a trusted development partner.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Develop UNDP Serbia value proposition and value addition to stakeholders based on achieved results, proven comparative advantage, and the PCAP accompanying the new CPD	By end of Q2 2025	DST		
4.2 Develop and roll out SDGs investment pipeline by leveraging the SDGs Investor Map and other initiatives to attract and leverage investments on SDGs	By end of Q1 2026	SDGi Cluster		

RECOMMENDATION 5.

UNDP should continue to enhance its gender mainstreaming efforts by conducting thorough gender analyses at the project design stage to ensure gender considerations are central, thereby improving gender marker scores and fostering more inclusive and impactful outcomes. More emphasis is needed on thoroughly incorporating Leave No One Behind (LNOB) and human rights principles and approaches.

Building on UNDP's advancements in gender mainstreaming, UNDP should continue to strengthen its approach by conducting thorough gender and vulnerability analyses at the project design stage. This proactive integration will ensure that gender considerations are not an afterthought but a core component of project planning. By assessing the potential impacts on gender and other vulnerable groups from the outset, in alignment with the Leave No One Behind principles, UNDP can make a realistic assessment, enhance its gender marker scores and ensure that projects more visibly present ways in which they tackle gender inequalities, leading to more inclusive and impactful initiatives. Particular attention should be placed on the integration of a human rights-based approach and Leave No One Behind principles across all Country Office interventions, including green and just transition initiatives, by promoting the development and use of the human and social capital of people who are at risk of being left behind.

Management response: Recommendation is accepted.

UNDP Serbia is dedicated to advancing gender equality and social inclusion by integrating gender considerations across all project stages. By embedding insights from the gender portfolio review into the new CPD, UNDP aims to enhance its gender integration efforts. This strategy aligns with the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) and human rights principles, ensuring that development outcomes are more inclusive, impactful and sustainable.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Implement recommendations from the gender portfolio review from 2024 into the new CPD	By end of 2025	DRR and DST		
5.2 The CO will continue to mainstream gender effectively into policies, programmes, operations and office structures, with the Gender Focal Team (GFT) overseeing the establishment of a robust gender mainstreaming mechanism and the Development Solutions Team (DST) conducting gender and vulnerability assessments at portfolio level, especially during the design phase, ensuring that gender considerations and the principles of LNOB and human rights-based approaches are integral to all interventions	By end of 2025	DST and GFT		

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the Evaluation Resource Centre website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/24551.

Annex 1. Terms of reference

Annex 2. Evaluation matrix

Annex 3. Country at a glance

Annex 4. Country office at a glance

Annex 5. Project list

Annex 6. Documents consulted

Annex 7. Status of country programme outcome & output indicators

Annex 8. Performance rating

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme
One UN Plaza, DC1-20th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel. +1 (646) 781 4200

/www.undp.org/evaluation
/UNDP_Evaluation
/evaluationoffice
/company/undp-ieo

Evaluations for a #strongerUNDP