



# WOMEN AND MEN IN SERBIA: AT A GLANCE

## KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN SERBIA

Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatovic, published a [report](#) in September 2023, following her earlier visit to Serbia, on women's rights and gender equality, among other topics. Although the Commissioner recognized the efforts of institutions to adopt laws and policies in the field of gender equality, she noted that progress in this area is very slow and is particularly concerned about high prevalence of all forms of violence against women. She called for an end to misogynistic and discriminatory statements against women. She also called to double the efforts to improve access to support and protection services for women with disabilities, Roma and migrant women, and strengthen fight against discrimination and prejudice these women are exposed to. She called on institutions to recognize the work of NGOs on the protection of women's rights and gender equality and provide them with stable funding and unequivocal support.

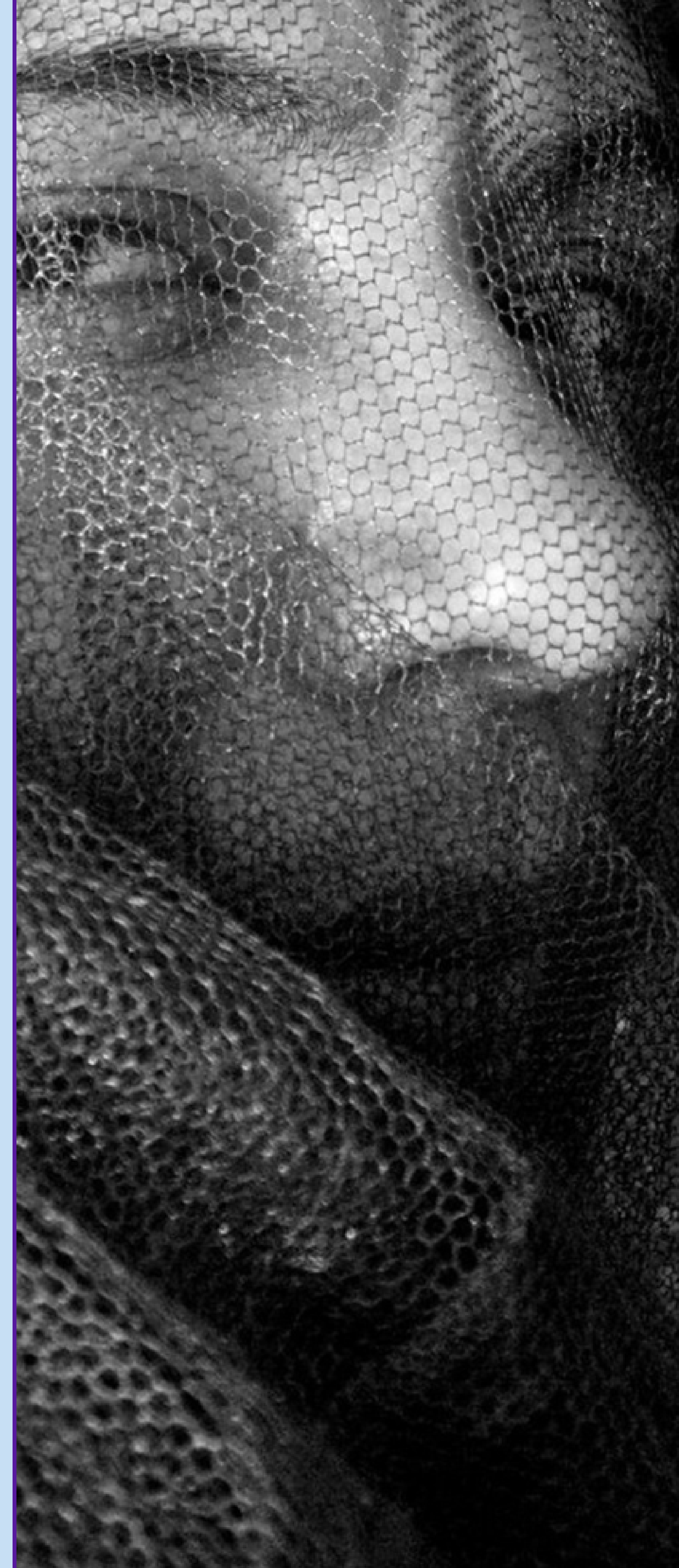
The adoption of the Action Plan for the National Strategy for Combating Gender Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-2025 is still pending. National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2030 is also pending and so is the NAP for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Security Agenda, as previous one expired in 2020.

When it comes to international commitments, the State will go through simplified procedure for CEDAW 5th cycle. Simplified reporting procedure means: "The Committee offers States parties the possibility to submit periodic reports under a simplified reporting procedure, provided that they have submitted an updated common core document within the

past five years. As part of this simplified procedure, the pre-sessional working group adopts a list of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR), in other words, prior to the submission of the State party's periodic report..." An Independent report of the SOS Vojvodina Network to the CEDAW Committee on the occasion of the Fifth Periodic Report of the Republic of Serbia, for the period 2018-2022, was published in December 2022, supported by UN Women.

To help take stock of progress and expand existing commitments to the Generation Equality initiative in the areas of innovation and technology, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and UN Women hosted Generation Equality Regional Midpoint event entitled "Innovation and Technology for Women's Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality" in Almaty, Kazakhstan in November 2023. Stakeholders from various sectors were invited to assess their engagement in the Technology and Innovation Action Coalition. On this occasion, Natasa Colic, researcher from The Institute for Architecture and Urban and Spatial Planning in Serbia joined the Generation Equality Initiative as new Commitment-Maker.

Actress Milena Radulovic started giving testimony in a high-profile trial in Belgrade, telling the court how she trusted and admired well-known drama teacher Miroslav Aleksic before he sexually assaulted her when she was 17. "It's a feeling of such betrayal because a man who I trusted so much, who was a supreme authority and who I felt in awe of, caused me such pain," Radulovic told the court. The trial continues.





## COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

### SAFER PUBLIC PLACES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Within the project „Safeguarding Women and Girls in Serbia“ funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), a total of 12 partnerships were established with civil society organizations and local self-governments units. Out of those 12 partnerships, 10 focus on advancing safety of women and girls in public spaces in five selected cities in Serbia, where the activities implemented by the local self-governments are in synergy with those implemented by the partner CSOs. In the period from August to January 2024, here are some of the key results of our partners, accomplished with the support of UN Women's granting scheme:

- Femplatz held two workshops with women citizens of Sombor with the aim to select a model/way for the active participation of different groups of women and girls in the process of improving safety in public spaces with mapping of unsafe places in the city and proposals for solving specific problems. Also, the participants mapped unsafe places in Sombor based on which an Interactive map has been created with all unsafe places for women and girls marked.

- Association Mikser formed a Facebook Support group "Ona hoda sama kroz grad – Bezbedniji Kragujevac za sve" with an aim of giving a voice to women and girls, with the support of the local initiative of the City of Kragujevac to recognize the challenges, personal experiences, and tactics that women develop in order to feel safer and more secure in their city, but also to raise awareness about the tolerance of violence against women in all those situations where justification is found and violent behaviour is rationalized.

- CSO Monitor made the Report on the conducted research on the security needs of girls and women in selected public areas in Novi Pazar with recommendations. Within this report, 14 risks and threats to the safety of girls and women in selected 5 public areas in Novi Pazar were identified. Also, a total of 25 recommendations are given for improving the sense of protection of the safety of women and girls in selected public areas in Novi Pazar. The most important achievement is the fact that the LSGU has adopted 5 proposed measures in their LAP for Gender Equality.

- CSO Sandglass conducted a training for the officials and women's rights activists on women's safety in public places, which was according to results of pre-testing and post-testing very useful and provided new knowledge to the participants. Also, the Sandglass' representative took part in the working group's for making Local Action plan on gender equality of the City of Krusevac.

- CSO Center for Girls surveyed 241 girls and young women about how safe they feel in public spaces in Nis. Based on survey results, risk map with locations in Niš where girls and young women do not feel safe has been created in the Google maps application. The locations that the girls rated as unsafe were highlighted and marked with different colours, from red, which is the safe, to green, which is the safest.

- The City of Novi Pazar developed Local Action Plan for improving the position of women and promoting gender equality for the period 2023-2027. Regarding safety of women and girls in public spaces, 5 activities were formulated.

- The City of Nis in cooperation with Roma WCSO Osvit held a two-day workshop on the topics of "Gender equality" and "Safety in public space". The workshop was attended by 30 Roma women from 3 Roma settlements in Nis. The aim of the workshop was to bring the concept of gender equality closer to Roma women and to map the unsafe spaces in the public spaces in Nis where Roma women move.

- The City of Krusevac developed the Local Action Plan for Gender Equality of the City of Kruševac 2024-2027. The LAP contains the Special Objective 3: "Improving the safety of all citizens, especially women in the community". Furthermore, work was carried out on the installation of two reflectors at the Sveti Sava school, in rural settlement Globoder. On that occasion, the school yard was illuminated, i.e. the sports field. Finally, work was also carried out on the installation of concrete pillars, the installation of electricity and two reflectors on the newly built park in the residential area of Rasadnik.

- The City of Kragujevac has installed public lighting in the Creative Park in order to contribute to the sense of security of citizens in public place, while damaged lighting in the Memorial Park has been replaced. Also, in the locations that were mapped by fellow citizens, the schedule of bus lines has been changed.



## ROADMAP FOR IMPLEMENTING URBAN SAFETY MEASURES IN URBAN PLANNING PROCESS

Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia – IAUS in cooperation with 7 thematic bodies was tasked with drafting measures established within the Roadmap: decision makers, police, urbanism and planning, academia, civil society organizations, utility companies and transport. Five thematic workshops served to use the "collective" professional potential of the gathered to gather ideas on the possibilities of introducing into practice the obligation to implement preventive measures for a greater degree of security and improvement of security in public urban areas, especially from the aspect of women and girls as recognized vulnerable groups of residents. The Roadmap determined two recommendations of national measures and the Roadmap was delivered to the Ministry of Construction, infrastructure and transportation which also, through its representatives, participated in the drafting of this important document.

## DRAFT OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGY FOR PREVENTION AND COMBATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In order for national authorities to adopt measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence against women and girls in public and private spaces, in close cooperation with the MOLEVSA, three measures related to improving the safety of women and girls in public space have been included in the National Action Plan: 1) Holding public events, expert meetings and conferences on protection measures against gender-based violence against women and girls, as well as domestic violence, with an emphasis on the protection of women and girls from violence in public places; 2) Formulation and launching of initiatives for gendering local planning documents related to urban planning of the city in order to ensure that the gender perspective is included in the future planning of public places; 3) Informing local self-government units about the Women Safety Audit Tool developed within the project "Safeguarding Women and Girls in Serbia" and initiating the implementation of this tool in local self-government units.

## ASSISTANCE TO SHELTERS FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SERBIA

As part of the efforts to strengthen capacity of shelters for victims of domestic and gender-based violence, the Community of Practice (CoP) created within the project „Safeguarding Women and Girls in Serbia“, had its fourth meeting in December 2023. At the meeting, representatives of Safe Houses had an opportunity to learn more about stalking and sexual harassment as well as the Expert methodological guidance related to visiting children with violent parent. Also, two selected CSOs (Atina and Center for Support of Women) implemented projects and improved performance and increased functional and structural capacity among all 11 functioning Safe Houses through a detailed assessment of needs among shelters, followed by technical assistance for preparation of missing rulebooks, development plans, specialized programs, security standards and organization of training for service providers. Small-scale purchase of necessary materials to facilitate the implementation of programs and improvement of quality standards of services were provided as well as a small-scale local visibility campaign.



“IT WAS JUST ONCE.”



**NOT EVEN**

“IT WAS JUST ONCE.”



## IMPROVING SAFETY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH ELECTRONIC MONITORING SYSTEM

The project "Improved Safety of Women in Serbia" has been focused on enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Justice in Montenegro to implement the electronic monitoring system of restraining order (EMS) for both victims and perpetrators of violence against women. The support from UN Women has led to the permanent employment of consultants within the Ministry of Justice-related directorates, who were initially engaged with UNW support. Additionally, UN Women has collaborated with prominent women's civil society organizations in Montenegro to conduct joint awareness-raising activities regarding violence against women and the EMS. These activities aimed to educate survivors, perpetrators, the judiciary, other stakeholders involved in prevention and response to VAWG, and the general public, about the use of EMS for monitoring restraining orders and enhancing the protection of women experiencing gender-based violence. Information sessions and workshops have been organized for various stakeholders, including women survivors, judiciary, social, police, and health service employees, as well as experts in criminal proceedings and specialized women's CSOs, to improve understanding and implementation of restraining orders and EMS in combating gender-based violence.

## COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST RURAL WOMEN

Under the project "Improved Safety of Women in Serbia," UN Women provided support to the Commissioner for Protection of Equality to raise awareness and foster confidence in rural women to recognize gender-based violence and discrimination against them and to utilize measures and authorities responsible for addressing such issues. The initiative involved capacitating eight less experienced CSOs focused on rural women and girls' human rights in the Moravica and Zlatibor regions. These CSOs received technical equipment to aid their operations, along with training to deepen their understanding of issues related to gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls, and prevention and protection mechanisms. They were trained to serve as referrals for cases of gender-based discrimination and violence against rural women, including in online spaces. Partnerships were established with the Women's Association "Nadežda Petrovic" from Cacak and the Women's Association "Let's Save the Village" from Priboj to provide this support.

Through a comprehensive media campaign utilizing printed and social media, the Commissioner's office reached over 200,000 women and men, raising awareness about the situation of women and girls in rural areas, with a particular focus on gender-based discrimination and violence. Additionally, context-specific outreach programs and awareness-raising activities targeted rural women, including events like the Festival of Women and Girls in rural areas, commemorating Rural Women's Day, were conducted. This festival served as a platform for presenting and marketing rural women's products to enhance their economic independence. Five local events and fairs organized by local CSOs and covered by local media outlets, were supported as well. The project recognized and rewarded journalists who promoted anti-discrimination, tolerance, and equality for rural women and girls, as well as those who highlighted rural women's entrepreneurship and creativity, further contributing to the project's results.



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IT IS  
NOT MY  
BUSINESS.”



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## GENDER RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE

### 2146 WOMEN ACROSS SERBIA SUPPORTED LOCAL INITIATIVES

Around 1,169 women mostly from Kolubara and Zlatibor districts improved knowledge on their rights to inheritance, received legal advice and raised awareness about negative consequences of stereotypes and patterns in this area, while over 3 million people were informed about this stereotype through flyers, brochures, participation at TV shows, news and articles, produced media content not only in Serbia, but also in the region. Great results achieved by the Women's Forum Prijepolje and Women's Association of Kolubara District will continue through the work of the informal CSOs Coalition on Equal Inheritance. In total 977 women directly benefited from support, through increasing their knowledge and skills about advocacy techniques, monitoring the gender equality policies, collecting data, and advocating for evidence-based policies at the local level, as well as improving the agricultural production, while 600 women and girls are informed about their patent's rights, with an emphasis on induced abortion through human rights caravans in 6 cities in Serbia. Projects resulted in developing advocacy tools and policy documents which will serve as a basis for introducing and advocating for different initiatives at national and local level by CSOs Amity, Belgrade Centre for Human rights, Save the Village Priboj, FemPlatz, and Women's Center Uzice.

### WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO INHERITANCE

To raise public awareness about stereotypes and traditional patterns related women's right to inheritance and property disposal, UN Women joined forces with Commissioner for Protection of Equality and UN Women and Center for research and social development IDEAS and organized National Conference: the Right to Inheritance – a Path to Gender Equality and Ending Violence. The conference brought together almost 90 relevant government and civil society actors, academia, independent institutions, development partners. Guide to inheritance rights 'The right to inheritance - equal for all' was presented and followed by the two panel discussions tackling various relevant topics, such as historical aspect of inheritance, judicial practice, the role of institutions and the media in breaking stereotypes related to inheritance, the connection between women's economic independence and the increased risk of violence.

The conference was a final event summarizing the two-year work on the inheritance rights jointly with Women's Forum Prijepolje and Women's Association of Kolubara District through the EU project "Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II".. As a result of direct support and work on the filed 438 high school aged young people, (250 girls) were educated on negative impact of gender stereotypes related to inheritance rights, while 245 women from Zlatibor district improved knowledge on their

rights to inherit and raised awareness about negative consequences of stereotypes. Free legal advice was used by 674 women received free legal support and advice. When it comes to visibility actions, 42 media contents were produced by TV Form Prijepolje with a reach of 915.650 women and men. Campaign on social media related to the inheritance "What is my share" by WAKD reached over 3 million not only in Serbia, but also in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

A Coalition for Equal Inheritance was established as an informal network of 15 civil society organizations and independent experts for gender equality and inheritance issues to empower women to fully exercise their rights and build their economic independence and on public advocacy and lobbying. They will continue the advocacy work initiated through the projects.





## RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS DURING THE PROCEDURE OF INDUCED ABORTION

UN Women Serbia supported the CSO Belgrade Center for Human Rights in implementing research “Rights of women and girls during the procedure of induced abortion” including interviews with 30 women from different parts of Serbia who had the experience of induced abortion, while 165 women filled out the online survey. Research showed that “48% of the respondents stated that the induced abortion procedure was performed without the presence of health workers, despite the fact that the patients that were present and the patient on whom the procedure was performed asked for assistance. Almost half of the respondents stated that they were not informed at all about the procedure itself, the risks and the available medications or mechanisms that would help ease the pain and suffering”. The research concludes that induced abortion procedure is performed in an outdated way that deviates from the latest medical advances in the field resulting in numerous painful and traumatic experiences of women. It defines 33 recommendations for healthcare institutions. Research was presented as part of the marking of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and through an awareness raising campaign #myrighttoknow. The Belgrade Center for Human Rights embarked on a tour of six cities in Serbia in a Caravan action. During a month of field work, 600 were informed about their patient rights. The initiative was implemented in the framework of the EU project “Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II”.

## SUPPORTING GENDER EQUALITY LAW IMPLEMENTATION

In partnership with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, as the lead institution for the monitoring and reporting on gender equality commitments, UN Women supported the training of gender focal points in line ministries to effectively lead the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality. Having in mind that gender focal points are obliged to report based on the bylaws on record keeping and reporting on achieving gender equality, at the training 26 participants (24 women and 2 men) received the instructions and had chance to discuss directly with Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. Main goal of the training was to review the obligations of public authorities in the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and monitoring of the implementation.

## SUPPORTING LOCAL GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVES

UN Women supported 9 local self-governments through mechanisms for gender equality from: Backa Palanka, Trstenik, Krusevac, Knic, Aleksinac, Despotovac, Uzice, Zajecar and Petrovac na Mlavi to develop and/or implement the activities from their Local Action Plans for Gender Equality. Most of the LSGs supported rural women, and women from disadvantage group to develop or improve their businesses. All LSGs were supported for the implementation of activities from existing LAPs, while 3 LSGs devel-

oped LAPs for GE within the framework of this support. The focus of the implementation was on the economic empowerment of women, with delivering the trainings for the development of business ideas, product promotion, marketing, product placement, etc. On the other side, several cooperations between municipalities were established through study visits and exchange of experience.

## CONTINUOUS SUPPORT TO GRB IMPLEMENTATION AT NATIONAL, PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

As national, provincial and local governments continue to integrate gender equality principles in public financing processes, the GRB implementation expands further in line with the Budget System Law and the Gender Equality Law, despite postponement of the deadline for full GRB implementation to 2025. UN Women contributed to the increase of GRB skills of 67 civil servants employed in 35 institutions at national level (56 women and 11 men), newcomers to the process of GRB implementation in line with the Minister of Finance’s Annual GRB Plan. The mentorship allowed each institution to analyze its unique situation, functions, budgets, activities, and priorities to find the most effective way to implement gender-responsive budgeting for the 2024 budget.

GRB monitoring was supported through development of the GRB Impact and Progress report, marking the examples of good practice in GRB implementation and 2022 Budget and GRB planning in 2023 budget.

At the local level, UNW continued to provide support to 5 LSGUs in GRB introduction and evidence based and gender sensitive budget planning, conducting budget gender analyses of various sectors selected by LSGUs: culture and information (Topola), political system of LSGU (Trstenik), transport (Zajecar, Lazarevac and Uzice). As part of the support provided by UN Women, more than 200 members of LSGUs administration, local gender equality mechanisms and public utility companies learned more about GRB implementation and how their institutions can contribute to gender equality by closing the gender gap and reduce inequalities in their respective areas, covered by their specific mandate. In addition, 54 employees in these LSGUs (40 women and 14 men) received mentorship, comprised of individual support in identifying gender equality priorities in budget programmes encompassed by their Annual GRB Plans and defining gender sensitive budget objectives.



## EVALUATING MEASURES FOR BETTER TARGETING AND ADAPTATION TO WOMEN'S NEEDS

To support development of evidence-based measures and programmes, UN Women conducted the budget gender analysis of measures to support women's and social entrepreneurship, in partnership with the Provincial Secretariat of Economy and Tourism. The analysis, presented to the relevant stakeholders and the public on 28 November 2023 in Novi Sad Chamber of Commerce, showed that more women entrepreneurs are receiving support (42% of support recipients in 2021 and 2022 were women), however funds are much less than the funds allocated to men's businesses (17%), confirming the need for further improvement of public calls to respond to the different needs of women's entrepreneurs. In addition, UN Women supported the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management by conducting the ex-post gender analyses of measures in agriculture and rural development, to improve GRB application in this sector and to better target rural women with financed measures.

## SUPPORTING THE NAP FOR GE 2024-2025

In partnership with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, UN Women, jointly through GRB and GEF project, supported the development and costing of Action Plan 2024-2025 for the Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030. To ensure that the new AP is based on the results of previously conducted activities and contributes further to the implementation

of the Strategy, UN Women supported the ex-post evaluation of AP 2022-2023. In addition, to secure that the challenges and proposals of women's organizations are included in the proposal of activities, UN Women organized consultations with women's CSOs, gathering 14 women's CSOs.

## BRINGING TO CLOSE THE REGIONAL PARALLEL AUDIT OF SDG5 TARGET, WITH FOCUS ON GRB IMPLEMENTATION

UN Women continues providing assistance to the State Audit Institution (SAI) of Serbia in the process of the regional parallel audit with focus on GRB implementation, performed together with 4 SAIs from BiH and Montenegro. SAI Serbia focused on the SDG5c1 and GRB implementation at all governmental levels. UN Women supported this process through provision of expert support and organization of the 4th regional meeting in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 14 September 2023, where draft audit reports and preliminary recommendations were presented, as well as the 5th regional meeting organized on 5 December in Belgrade, where the final findings of the audits were discussed and the next steps in terms of publishing and promotion of the joint publication were agreed on. SAI Serbia presented the results of GRB audit and recommendations provided to key stakeholders, to be taken into account when planning future steps and support to GRB implementation, highlighting that the initiated processes towards elimination of gender gap should be intensified by integrating the gender perspective into all public policies and the budget.

## TURNING THE SPOTLIGHT ON GENDER EQUALITY IN CLIMATE ACTIONS

As one of the major accomplishments of the work done on GRB and climate finance, Gender and Climate Financing Baseline Study: Overview of key denominators, policy and programming options (GRBCC Methodology) and the results of its piloting at local level in Kragujevac, Uzice, and Lazarevac, were presented to relevant stakeholders at national and regional level in multiple events during the last quarter of 2023, including representatives of ministries, CSOs and IFIs.

## FOR BETTER USAGE OF GENDER STATISTICS IN PLANNING AND BUDGETING

As a continuation of the established cooperation with the Republic Statistics Office (RSO), a joint training on usage of gender statistics in planning and budgeting was organized on 7-8 November 2023 in Arandjelovac. It gathered 23 representatives of line-ministries and other relevant institutions (21 women, 2 men), who learned how to use gender data in planning stages, aiming to enhance and synchronize sectoral spending strategies with existing gender equality policies, thereby ensuring a comprehensive and gender-sensitive approach to budgeting.

#16DAYS



**END VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN  
IN ALL FORMS.**

**EVERYWHERE.**



## WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

The partnership between UN Women and the Network of Women in the Police of the Republic of Serbia, as outlined in the signed Letter of Cooperation, focused on promoting gender equality, empowering women within the police force, and enhancing women's safety.

As part of this collaboration, a significant event was the regional conference “Women in Police and Leadership: Challenges and Good Practices,” which took place on October 13, 2023, in Belgrade. The conference served as a platform for women in the police force across the region (from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation, Bosnia and Herzegovina Republic of Srpska, Bulgaria, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Slovenia, and the European Network of Women in Police- Austira), to exchange experiences, discuss good practices, and address challenges encountered by women leaders in the security sector. Through interactive discussions, participants shared insights on overcoming the obstacles faced by women in law enforcement and highlighted strategies for enhancing gender equality within the sector. The conference facilitated networking opportunities and strengthened cooperation among participants through mutual support and collaborative initiatives.

A notable outcome was the signing of the Declaration on cooperation among networks of women in the police from the region, aimed at improving the position of women police officers. This declaration underlines a collective commitment to advancing gender equality, fostering supportive environments for women in law enforcement, and promoting their professional development and safety.

## WOMEN AND JUSTICE

UN Women continued its cooperation with the Ministry of Justice to enhance the capacities of the judiciary in addressing violence against women and its specific forms, in line with national and international obligations. A key aspect of this cooperation was the support provided in drafting the new General Protocol for Action and Cooperation of Institutions, Bodies, and Organizations in Situations of Violence against Women within the Family and in Intimate Partner Relationships.

Furthermore, UN Women facilitated training sessions in Belgrade and Novi Sad for misdemeanor judges and representatives of the judiciary focused on responding to domestic violence and violence against women. These workshops covered essential topics such as misconceptions and prejudices about domestic violence and violence against women, international standards, and the domestic legal framework for protection against such violence.

The workshops highlighted the significant need and interest among misdemeanor judges for training in these areas. They provided a valuable opportunity for judges to share their experiences and address controversial issues they encounter in their daily work. Additionally, the workshops highlighted the importance of enhancing the efficiency of competent authorities and the necessity for local self-government units to develop social services tailored to meet the specific needs of victims of gender-based violence.



**“WE CAN'T AFFORD TO  
WE CAN'T AFFORD TO  
INVEST IN PREVENTION.”**





## PEER MENTORING PROGRAM FOR PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND INCREASED YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SERBIA

Joint project Peer Mentoring Program for promotion of human rights, gender equality and increased youth participation in Serbia implemented by UNFPA and UN Women continued in 2023. In a demonstration of youth empowerment and collaboration, young individuals from six diverse municipalities across Serbia, including Sremski Karlovci, Knjazevac, Novi Paz, Bajina Basta, Kragujevac, and Sombor, organized a range of impactful activities centered around different social, gender and youth issues. Guided by their peer mentors from the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) of the United Nations in Serbia, these young change-makers addressed topics such as gender equality, environmental concerns, anti-discrimination, media literacy, youth engagement, and social entrepreneurship.

On December 13, UNFPA and UN Women, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and Youth, the Embassy of Italy, and RCO, convened to commemorate the successful conclusion of the "Peer Mentoring Program for promoting human rights, gender equality, and increased youth participation in Serbia." This event celebrated the project's accomplishments and fostered collaboration among key partners to advocate for greater youth engagement in Serbia. It provided a platform for young individuals to share their inspiring success stories, amplifying their voices.

Additionally, the project's campaign, #YouthHaveTheirSay, utilized social media platforms to reach a considerable audience, generating 500K impressions and engaging over 350K individuals. This digital outreach extended the impact of the project, disseminating messages of empowerment and youth-led change beyond the event itself and respective local communities.

IT IS NOT MY BUSINESS •  
IT WAS JUST ONCE • IT'S  
A CULTURAL THING • HE  
DIDN'T MEAN IT • WE  
#NO  
EXCUSE  
CAN'T AFFORD TO  
INVEST IN PREVENTION •  
PREVENTING VIOLENCE  
IS NOT A PRIORITY •  
THERE IS NOT ENOUGH  
FUNDING • SHE DESERVE  
IT • IT'S NOT A POLICY  
PRIORITY • I DON'T KNOW



## GENERAL

UNFPA Serbia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the office of The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on 12 December 2023. The MoU will create a framework for joint efforts in advancing the implementation of various measures enhancing young people's potential by creating an equal society. UNFPA and the GIZ will continue with joint advocacy for inclusive youth empowerment and implementation of a comprehensive youth policy framework, applying leaving no one behind (LNOB) principle in all joint activities and focusing on marginalized groups, specifically in rural areas.

### SUPPORT TO STRATEGY ON PRESERVING AND IMPROVING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH DEVELOPMENT

In 2023 UNFPA supported development of the new comprehensive Strategy for preserving and improving reproductive health 2024-2030, by supporting ex-ante and ex-post analysis and actively participating in the work of the multi-sectoral working group for document development. In December 2023 Working group agreed on the final draft document which was transferred to the Ministry for Family Welfare and

Demography to initiate the procedure of adoption. Document contains objectives related to family planning, maternal and infant health, prevention of reproductive cancers and sexually transmitted diseases, treatment of infertility, and promotion of reproductive health and rights among sensitive groups. In 2024, the UNFPA CO will continue its support to the development of the first Action Plan 2024-2026 for Strategy implementation.

### RESEARCH ON WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE IN MATERNITY WARDS IN SERBIA FINALISED

In 2023 UNFPA conducted an exploratory research on maternal healthcare in order to gain contextual insight into women's perception of maternal care in Serbia, with a particular focus on childbirth experience. Report provides a set of recommendations for actionable policies and advocacy in Serbia in the field of maternal healthcare and respectful childbirth, related to: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the experience of childbirth; Medical interventions; Continuity of care during the stay in the maternity ward; Providing information and seeking informed consent during childbirth, Women's participation in decision-making during delivery, Breastfeeding support, Violation of the privacy and dignity of pregnant women and mothers in labor by routinized institutional practices.

In line with strategic priorities of the Ministry of Health, main results on maternal healthcare and childbirth perception were presented to the Ministry of Health at the end of 2023, while all results and recommendations will be presented to the key actors and general public for further advocacy actions, at the end of Q1 2024.

### INCREASED CAPACITY OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITY TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

As a continuation of long-term cooperation with NGO... Iz Kruga Vojvodina, UNFPA continued with capacity building and empowerment of women with disabilities to raise awareness and advocate for their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and improvement of the quality/availability and accessibility of health care and services for women with disabilities. Over the course of the project: - 66 women with disabilities from 6 municipalities (Pancevo, Mramorak, Kovin, Kruševac, Ruma and Sremska Mitrovica) built capacity to recognize, map and document the obstacles in their communities, engage in dialogue with health professionals and decision makers and advocate for their sexual and reproductive rights. In addition, 32 health professionals and stakeholders from

the same municipalities raised awareness and built capacities for working with women with disabilities. Through this project UNFPA continued support to the informal network "Initiative of women with disabilities for their sexual and reproductive rights in Serbia", created in 2020.

### RAISING AWARENESS AMONG ROMA WOMEN AND GIRLS ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Within the project on improving Roma women's knowledge about sexual and reproductive health through age-appropriate education, UNFPA, in partnership with BIBIJA - Roma Women Centre, conducted 84 age-appropriate workshops in six Roma settlements covering a range of topics such as: gender-based violence, early marriages, bodily autonomy, use of contraception, family planning, etc. Capacity of 150 women and girls were raised to exercise their sexual reproductive rights, including the right to family planning, and identify barriers that they are facing in access to healthcare services. All capacity building and awareness raising activities were led by Roma women, previously trained as peer educators. The added value of the project was de-stigmatization of the SRHR topics within selected Roma communities.



## BODYRIGHT CAMPAIGN “OWN YOUR BODY ONLINE!” CONTINUES

UNFPA launched the second phase of the body-right campaign “Own your body online”, during 16 Days of Activism 2023, via social media to raise awareness on the issue of bodily autonomy online. As part of the campaign, an educational Instagram quiz was conducted to educate people about the importance of bodily autonomy in online spaces. The quiz focused on different aspects of bodily autonomy, such as consent, privacy, and security, and aimed to foster a better understanding of the issue among the younger population. In December, UNFPA took part in the “World in 2023” conference organized by Color Press Group. At the panel dedicated to bodyright, together with the Ministry of Education, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, local experts and influencers UNFPA promoted successes of the local campaign launched in 2022, localized Glossary of Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence and united to say no to online violence.

## CAPACITY BUILDING OF YOUNG PEOPLE ON TFGBV AND BODYRIGHT

In partnership with the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, UNFPA continued implementation of the localized UNFPA bodyright campaign „Own your body online”, that was launched in 2022 in Serbia to raise awareness

about technology facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and its consequences. During 2023, more than 120 secondary school students from six municipalities raised their capacity to recognize, name, report and/or respond to TFGBV and to transfer some knowledge through peer-to-peer activities in their communities. Disaggregated data shows that 60% of participants were girls compared to 40% of boys.

## YOUTH WELLBEING INDEX DEVELOPMENT CONTINUES

In partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and Youth, and the IP Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation, UNFPA continued development of the Youth Wellbeing Index, as a novel way to monitor the status of youth and progress in implementation of the youth policies at national and local (municipal) level. The structure of the index corresponds to the general and specific objectives of the Strategy. Methodology of the Index, including the proposed indicators, developed by the experts was considered and verified by a multisectoral working group composed of all relevant national partners, institutions and CSOs, established by the Ministry of Tourism and Youth. The proposed indicators were tested and adapted for zero measurement at national and local level that was conducted in 17 selected cities and municipalities) in late 2023. The methodology will be reviewed and fine-tuned in early 2024, before initiating the first Index measurement. The first results of the Youth Wellbeing Index will be available in the second half of 2024.





## HANDBOOK ON YOUTH WELLBEING FOR YOUTH OFFICES AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In line with the priority of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth to improve the mental health, life skills and well-being of young people, UNFPA, in partnership with the IP Psychosocial Innovation Network, (PIN), developed a Handbook on mental health, social wellbeing and healthy lifestyle with an aim of providing young people, youth workers and coordinators of the local youth offices with information, essential skills, practical guidance and variety of activities to enhance their daily efforts to strengthen capacities of all relevant stakeholders in this area. The Handbook includes three different modules which provide basic knowledge about the developmental characteristics of youth, challenges in interpersonal relationships and psychosocial difficulties that young people may encounter, forms of health-risk behaviors that most often appear for the first time, as well as recommended approaches for improving youth psychosocial and physical well-being. All three modules were piloted and tested in the Youth office of Kragujevac, in agreement with the Ministry of Tourism and Youth. All the materials including the Handbook were prepared in co-creation with young people.

## ADOPTION OF THE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR ACTIVE AND HEALTHY AGING

UNFPA has supported the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography in creating the Strategy for Active and Healthy Aging (2024-2030),

and its accompanying first Action Plan (2024-2026). Effective since January 2024, the newly adopted Strategy and the Action Plan, notably prioritize older women who are particularly vulnerable. Both documents put more focus on active and healthy aging, seeking to empower older persons as valuable community resources amidst the significant demographic shifts in Serbia. Highlighting the unique needs and potential of older individuals, the documents advocate for increased awareness among the general population. They also stress a focused approach on gender-related aspects, including improved access to public services, lifelong learning programs, sports and cultural initiatives, strengthened volunteering activities, and enhanced institutional and non-institutional protection for older persons.

## CONSULTATIONS FOR THE EX-POST ANALYSIS OF THE BIRTH PROMOTION STRATEGY

In accordance with its commitment to gender equality, UNFPA is supporting the process of drafting the ex-post analysis of the Birth Promotion Strategy. Comprehensive consultations involving interested stakeholders regarding the creation of the ex-post analysis for the Birth Promotion Strategy were successfully conducted on 20 November 2023. The consultations convened around 20 experts, including members of the academic community and the non-governmental sector. Their focus was on analyzing the Birth Promotion Strategy's measures and offering recommendations for the development of a new Strategy and its accompanying Action

Plan, with a consideration of gender-related factors. The outcomes of these consultations, incorporating a gender-inclusive perspective, will be integrated into the ex-post analysis of the Birth Promotion Strategy.

## SOCIAL DIALOGUES FOR STRENGTHENING INTERGENERATIONAL COOPERATION AND PROTECTING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

UNFPA provided support to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in organizing two social dialogues addressing the enhancement of intergenerational cooperation (22 November 2023) and the protection of persons with disabilities (4 December 2023), ensuring a comprehensive approach to recommendations that considers the diverse needs and experiences of all individuals involved. The recommendations from the social dialogues have been disseminated to relevant stakeholders for improving social policy measures.

## ICPD30 "POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT: ENSURING RIGHTS AND CHOICES"

The Regional Conference on ICPD30, themed "Population and Development: Ensuring Rights and Choices," took place in Geneva from 19th to 20th October. UNFPA provided support to a Serbian Delegation led by the Minister for Family Welfare and Demography, underscoring a dedicated commitment to gender equality. The delegation actively participated in the High-level

Plenary Session. For this occasion, in collaboration with the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography and Prof. Mirjana Rašević, UNFPA contributed to the creation of a comprehensive report. This report assesses the progress of the Republic of Serbia in achieving the goals outlined in the ICPD Program of Action, with a focus on gender perspective.

## CONSULTATIONS FOR ENHANCING SOCIAL PROTECTION SERVICES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Within the new UN Joint Programme titled "PRO-Local Governance for People and Nature," three consultations were conducted to collect data for assessing local self-government capacities in improving social protection services and addressing specific user needs, with a particular emphasis on integrating a gender perspective. Over 70 participants, including representatives from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs (MoLEVSA), Institute for Social Protection, and social workers from 20 local self-government units, actively participated in these consultations. This initiative aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the capacities of local self-governments, centers for social work, and other stakeholders to establish diverse models for activating social assistance users, gradually reducing their dependence on the social protection system.



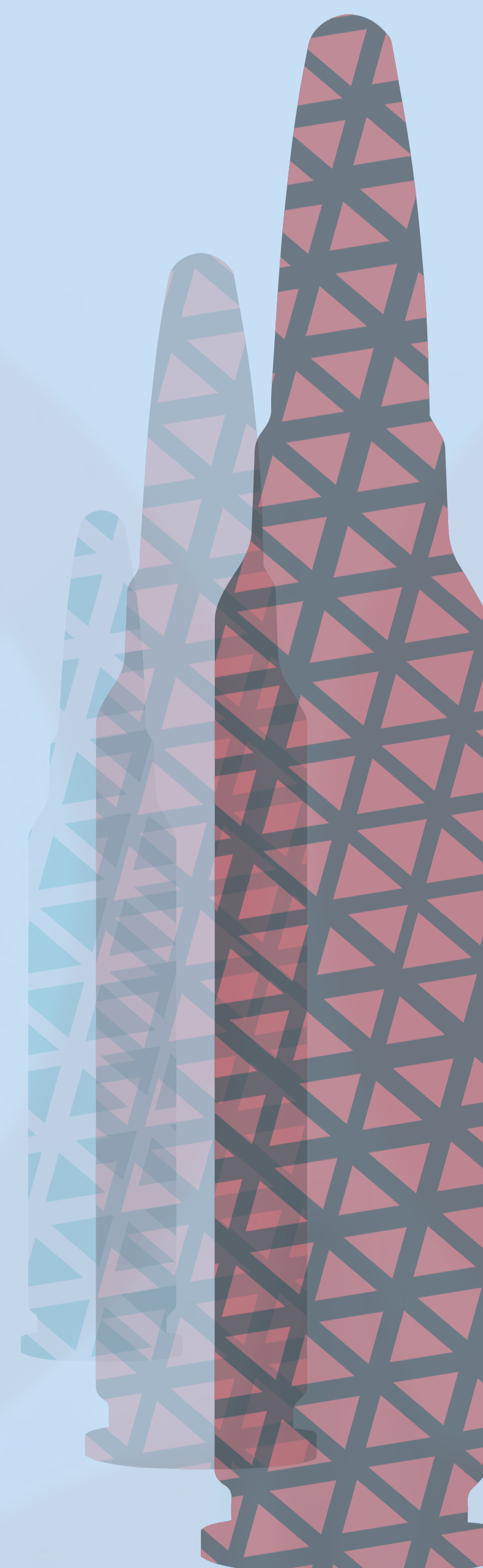
## GENDER AND SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS CONTROL - Western Balkan Authorities Raise Institutional Capacities for Effective Prevention and Combatting of the Misuse of Firearms in Domestic Violence

UNDP SEESAC has provided comprehensive support to authorities in the Western Balkans to combat the use of firearms in domestic violence effectively. Such support includes:

- Implementation of the regional Analysis of the institutional response to the use of firearms in domestic violence,
- Development of a Tool for a gender-sensitive firearm license approval and provision of training on its use,
- Development of a Tool for first-line responders to address risks related to firearms in domestic violence and provision of training on its use.

At the end of 2022, SEESAC initiated the development of a *Tool to address the risks related to firearms in domestic violence and the Tool for gender-sensitive firearm license approval*. In parallel, SEESAC commenced the regional *Analysis of the misuse of firearms in domestic violence*. For those purposes, two regional Working Groups were established to ensure that tools and the analysis build on the extensive experience of relevant professionals.

Based on inputs and contributions from the Working Groups and **focus group discussions** with police officers and women's organizations held across the region, SEESAC developed draft versions of Tools. From 21 November to 14 December 2023, 10 consultative meetings in Tirana, Podgorica, Skopje, Sarajevo, and Pristina were held with the members of the Working Groups to discuss the structure and content of the Tools and propose amendments to ensure their practical application. In addition, the preliminary findings of the Analysis of the institutional response to the misuse of firearms in domestic violence were presented, and the challenges encountered in data collection were discussed. The feedback received from Working Group members on the draft version of the Tools at the consultative meetings will be used to finalize the content of the Tools and, during 2024, to conduct training of relevant police officers on the use of Tools. In addition, SEESAC continued the Implementation of the regional Analysis of the women's and men's participation in SALW control in the Western Balkans, and more than 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant professionals in this field. These activities were implemented within the framework of the regional project **Support for Enhancing the Fight Against the Illegal Possession, Misuse, and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the Western Balkans**, funded by the European Union through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II).





## SUPPORT TO THE MINISTRIES OF DEFENCE (MODs) AND ARMED FORCES (AFs) IN THE WESTERN BALKANS (WB) IN IMPLEMENTING UNSCR 1325 AND INCREASING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MILITARY<sup>1</sup>

- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) of the Republic of Serbia is currently revising the Gender Training Manual published in 2014 to update information and further standardize gender training in the military. Gender trainers from the MoD and SAF initiated the revision, which is done with the UNDP SEESAC support.

- Regular bi-annual Regional Meetings of Gender Equality Mechanisms in the military (RGEMs) represent a regional platform for the exchange of knowledge and information among GEMs, military commanders, and decision-makers in the sector of defence and enable planning of joint regional activities resulting in gender-responsive policies and practices in the military. Seven Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) representatives participated in the 16th RGEM held in Sarajevo in October 2023. The 16th RGEM aimed to present the activities and plans of MoDs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Mace-

donia and Serbia, with a particular emphasis on standardization of gender training through launching the online basic gender awareness course. Development of such knowledge tool was aimed at reaching a broader pool of MoDs and AFs employees, thus equipping Gender Military Trainers with modern and up-to-date training materials. The course aims to standardize gender training, facilitate easier access to training programs for various target groups within the MoDs and AFs, and give Gender Military Trainers additional contemporary and up-to-date training material and methods. The course is structured in three modules: I) Introduction to fundamental terms and concepts; II) Raising awareness of gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, and abuse; and III) Normative legal framework for gender equality within the defence system. Each module is designed to provide applied knowledge interactively based on the lessons learned with practical examples from the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans.

The course content has been compiled using the Ministries of Defence resources and regional knowledge tools that have been developed and approved by the Ministries, such as the Second Regional Study on the Position of Women in the Armed Forces; the Regional Handbook for Combating Gender-Based Discrimination,

### Sexual Harassment, and Abuse; and the Baseline Study on Integrating Gender Perspective in Military Education.

The course was initiated and developed by the members of the Regional Network of Gender Military Trainers from the MoDs and AFs in the WBs with the support of UNDP SEESAC. The 16th regional meeting was opened by Mr. Aleksandar Goganovic, Deputy Minister of Defence for Resource Management of BiH, H.E. Mr. Olav Reinertsen, Ambassador of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Sarajevo, Ms. Lucia Balážová, the third Secretary of the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Sarajevo, Mr. Amer Kapetanovic, Head of the Political Department in Regional Cooperation Council and Mr Sylvain Merlen, Resident Representative ad interim, UNDP BiH.

- The 8th Regional Meeting of the Network of Gender Military Trainers in the Ministries of Defense and the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans gathered 23 representatives from the Ministries of Defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, and the Republic of Serbia on 5 and 6 December in Budva, Montenegro. Six Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) representatives participated in the meeting. The central topic of the regional meeting was the role of the Armed Forces in Gender Sen-

sitive Disaster Preparedness and Relief, which has led to a fruitful discussion and exchange of ideas, proving the importance of the regional network of gender trainers as an interactive platform for generating new initiatives. The consequences of climate change result in human catastrophes unseen before, both across the world and in the region, often involving the engagement of AFs in various capacities. The consequences of such disasters are felt long-term. Still, they most often disproportionately affect women, especially in places with low records of gender equality in which women are found in a more vulnerable position. As part of the regular knowledge sharing, the meeting also allowed the participants to reflect on past activities and achievements and update on the continuous efforts on gender mainstreaming in defence policy. The meeting enabled the launch of the online basic gender awareness course, a learning tool developed in collaboration with the four Ministries of Defense with the support of UNDP SEESAC.

<sup>1</sup> SEESAC's project *Strengthening of Regional Cooperation on Gender Mainstreaming in Security Sector Reform in the Western Balkans (WinMil)* provides support to four Ministries of Defence (MoDs) and Armed Forces (AFs) in the Western Balkans (WB) in implementing UNSCR 1325 and increasing gender equality in the military. Partners include MoDs and AFs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Republic of Serbia. Funding support is provided by the Kingdom of Norway and the Slovak Republic.



## EU PRO Plus - The European Union Local Development Programme

The EU PRO Plus Programme is strongly contributing to strengthening of women entrepreneurship and employment of women through continued support to the business sector. In September 2023, the Public Call for Proposals for Supporting Women and Youth Start-ups was concluded, covering 43 underdeveloped municipalities. The evaluation process was completed at the end of 2023, resulting in 45 start-ups endorsed for funding, 64% of which are owned by women. They will be supported through procurement of equipment and introduction of services. As a result of grant support to entrepreneurs, micro and small enterprises, a total of 270 new jobs have been created until now and 52% are occupied by women.

Within the efforts to improve social infrastructure and social cohesion, the EU PRO Plus continued to facilitate access to different public services for marginalised and vulnerable groups. For seven local infrastructure projects, the gender dimension was recognised by a number of capacity-building workshops, and sports activities supporting women involvement in the social and economic activities. In Lapovo, four capacity building workshops empowered 32 women from the rural areas to diversify economic activities. In Knjaževac,

90 girls of primary school age were involved in sports activities. The Sports Association of Krupanj municipality engaged three trainers to conduct sports activities for over 80 women, persons with disability and youth in a period of six months. The social inclusion and GE aspects represent the main focus of the activity for improvement of social services, where 20 projects until now established and/or improved 28 social services, creating direct benefit for over 6,300 people (63% of them are women and over 5,800 are coming from disadvantaged groups). These projects facilitated temporary and/or long-term employment for 62 women as service providers out of 68 people that are employed.



## EU SHAI - Contribution to improved living conditions for the most vulnerable groups

The EU SHAI Programme has made significant strides in improving living conditions for the most vulnerable women and men, girls and boys by implementing 19 grant projects in LSGs. Through these projects, housing solutions and social inclusion measures are being provided to 381 vulnerable families, comprising over 1,400 family members (Roma, persons with disabilities (PWDs), women victims of domestic violence, youth leaving the social care system). Eighteen (18) families were moved in the constructed social housing flats in Raška in August 2023 and 14 families in the newly constructed individual housing unit in Koceljeva and Žagubica, bringing a total of 141 families accommodated in the constructed housing units, 62 families moved to the purchased properties, while 104 privately owned houses were reconstructed, or in total 307 families with 1,033 family members (482 male and 551 female). All women are legally registered owners/users of the housing support solutions, together with their spouses and partners.

Gender mainstreaming is an integrated part of the projects and up to this period, 331 families have been selected with 1,142 family members, out of which 601 are female and 541 are male. Temporary work engagement is provided in five LSGs for 42 beneficiaries (16 male and 26 female), 29 beneficiaries (7 male and 22 female) acquired employment or self-employment, in 13 LSGs, 324 beneficiaries (104 male and 221 female) have finalised VET training. Up to date, 819 (372 male and 447 female) beneficiaries have been assisted with a variety of active inclusion measures. Thirty two women victims of domestic violence with their families are supported with social housing apartments and individual houses in ownership so far.







## PRO - Local Governance for People and Nature

The UN Joint Programme PRO - Local Governance for People and Nature is designed to contribute to improving the well-being and quality of life of citizens through improved local governance, social inclusion and environmental protection in 110 cities and municipalities throughout Serbia. Even in the first year of implementation, the PRO has already successfully achieved its initial results. The impact of comprehensive training programmes on 134 employees (102 women, 32 men) has been significant. By enhancing their understanding of good governance principles, social protection, and gender-responsive governance and budgeting, participants have become better equipped to promote accountability,

transparency, and participation. Moreover, their increased knowledge of social protection services and inter-municipal cooperation is facilitating more effective provision of services. Through 20 projects for social integrated services, implemented by CSOs in partnership with various local institutions a total of 1,316 beneficiaries from vulnerable groups, out of which 759 women, benefitted from easier access to public services with multi-sector approach. The majority of beneficiaries belong to the Roma national minority, PWDs including children with developmental disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Among these projects, social measures and services were established specifically targeting Roma women:

- Project “Safe Space” in Bujanovac, implemented by Roma Women Association Bujanovac, established a Counselling Centre, especial-

ly for Roma young women dealing with early marriage issues. Additionally, the Local Team for Prevention of Early Marriages was established through cooperation among various local stakeholders, such as CSW, LSG, Police, Health Centre, schools, service provider of SOS phone and the civil sector. So far, a total of 32 Roma women underwent the counselling process.

- Project “RoMala” in Kruševac, implemented by Association of Health Workers from Rasina District, established a Counselling Centre within the substandard Roma settlement Marko Orlovic with the aim of raising awareness of reproductive health and reduction of adolescent pregnancies. Partnership with the General Hospital enabled provision of workshops on reproductive health and medical checks. Collaboration with the education sector motivated Roma adolescents to continue their education

and provided support for their professional orientation. Currently, 60 Roma women attend workshops on reproductive health while 17 young Roma women are going to multi-sector counselling provided by gynaecologist, psychologist and social worker.

- Project “For a Life Without Violence” in Leskovac, implemented by Romani Women from Leskovac, conducts an extensive campaign and education about gender-based violence in seven Roma settlements in Leskovac, in partnership with the CSW. Currently, 33 Roma women attended workshops on domestic and partner violence.





## ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY AND COUNTERING GENDER- BASED DISCRIMINATION: Ending violence - Empowering change

A new project implemented jointly by four UN agencies - UNDP (lead agency), UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA in partnership with the Government of Serbia and the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, with support of the Government of Sweden, yielded from the results of the years-long efforts focusing on ending violence against women and girls. The new “Ending violence – Empowering change” project, to be implemented from January 2024 to end of 2026, moves beyond elimination of gender-based violence and seeks to advance gender equality by addressing the root causes of inequality. It will challenge harmful norms and stereotypes and strive to create a society where gender-based violence and discrimination are unacceptable, women’s rights are protected, and women can fully participate and contribute to all aspects of social life. Our focus is on the needs and perspectives of women and girls, including those from vulnerable groups, such as Roma girls,

women with disabilities, elderly women, women from rural areas. Bearing in mind the complexity of gender-based discrimination, the project will work at various levels — individual, community and society, engaging national to local level stakeholders.

The project will focus on the following key issues:

- Transforming Gender Attitudes and Roles - the project will work with boys and men, as well as with girls and young women, to change attitudes regarding relations and responsibilities in the sphere of private life. This will include promoting parenting based on positive disciplining of children, economic partnership based on respect and support, and prevention of exposure to health risks and violence in private relationships.
- Enhancing Institutional Response to domestic and gender-based violence – the project will strengthen institutional practices and collaboration and improve community services, so that women are better protected from violence. The project will especially work to improve protection against sexual violence and rape, which is still underreported in Serbia.

- Economic and career empowerment of women – support will be provided for development of policies and programs for activation of inactive women in the labour market and for combating occupational gender-based segregation. Tailored support for female entrepreneurs will be provided. The project will network women in STEM fields and support women in IT to advance their career.

- Legal and Cultural Transformation for Gender Equality - this implies work with local communities and higher education institutions, universities, and faculties to ensure that they have stronger structure for prevention of gender-based discrimination, sexism, sexual violence and harassment. At the same time, women’s leadership and advocacy skills will be strengthened, to enable women to participate in and integrate their interests in decision making processes regarding public and other policies.

**TOGETHER, WE CAN  
END VIOLENCE AGAINST  
WOMEN AND GIRLS.**

#NOEXCUSE

**WE MUST**  
~~“WE CAN’T AFFORD TO~~  
**INVEST IN PREVENTION.”**



## FROM STIGMA TO PREVENTION - REDUCING FIREARMS MISUSE FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SUICIDE

UNDP **efforts** to reduce firearms misuse for domestic violence and suicide in Serbia are continued through the recently initiated project "Reduce Risk - Increase Safety III". In Serbian society, firearms are misused for suicide - largely amongst men - while women are predominantly the victims of firearm-related domestic violence. The project's undertaking is made more challenging by the stigma associated with domestic violence and mental health issues, coupled with often inadequate **reporting** by media outlets. This atmosphere discourages individuals at risk from **seeking necessary help**. The mass shootings in Serbia in May 2023 strongly pointed to the urgency of addressing these issues and spotlighted the need for improved institutional and community responses to such situations. This project aims to alter negative societal norms that can lead to firearm misuse. Further objectives include strengthening the gender perspective in small arms and light weapons (SALW) control policies, elevating women's roles in these policies, and improving community response to firearm-related incidents. From October 2023 to October 2025, the project will focus on:

- bolstering institutional data collection practices to advance evidence-based policy making,
- ensuring that firearm misuse risks are included in regulations addressing domestic violence prevention,
- facilitating women's active participation in SALW control policies,

- helping professionals better identify and prevent potential firearms misuse, and
- increasing public awareness of the impact of practices leading to firearm misuse.

The project kicked off with a **joint event** hosted by the Ministry of Interior and Network of Women in the Police of the Republic of Serbia during the "16 Days of Activism" campaign, which saw representatives from 29 local police departments sharing practices related to domestic violence prevention, including cases involving firearms misuse.

## DISTANCE LEARNING PLATFORM OF THE JUDICIAL ACADEMY LAUNCHED

With the support of UNDP, the Judicial Academy of the Republic of Serbia **launched its online learning platform** in October 2023, along with seven training modules in the field of prevention of and protection from domestic violence. The platform enables judicial professionals to access various trainings and materials. The modules on domestic violence prevention are part of the obligatory professional training of public prosecutors, their deputies and judges that engage in the proceedings under the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence. They cover topics such as recognizing different forms of domestic violence, assessment of violence escalation and repetition risk (including risk of firearms misuse for violence), as well as multi-agency action to ensure long-term safety for victims, proving the criminal act of domestic violence, and international obligations. These modules of the Judicial Academy are also accessible to employees of the police, health care

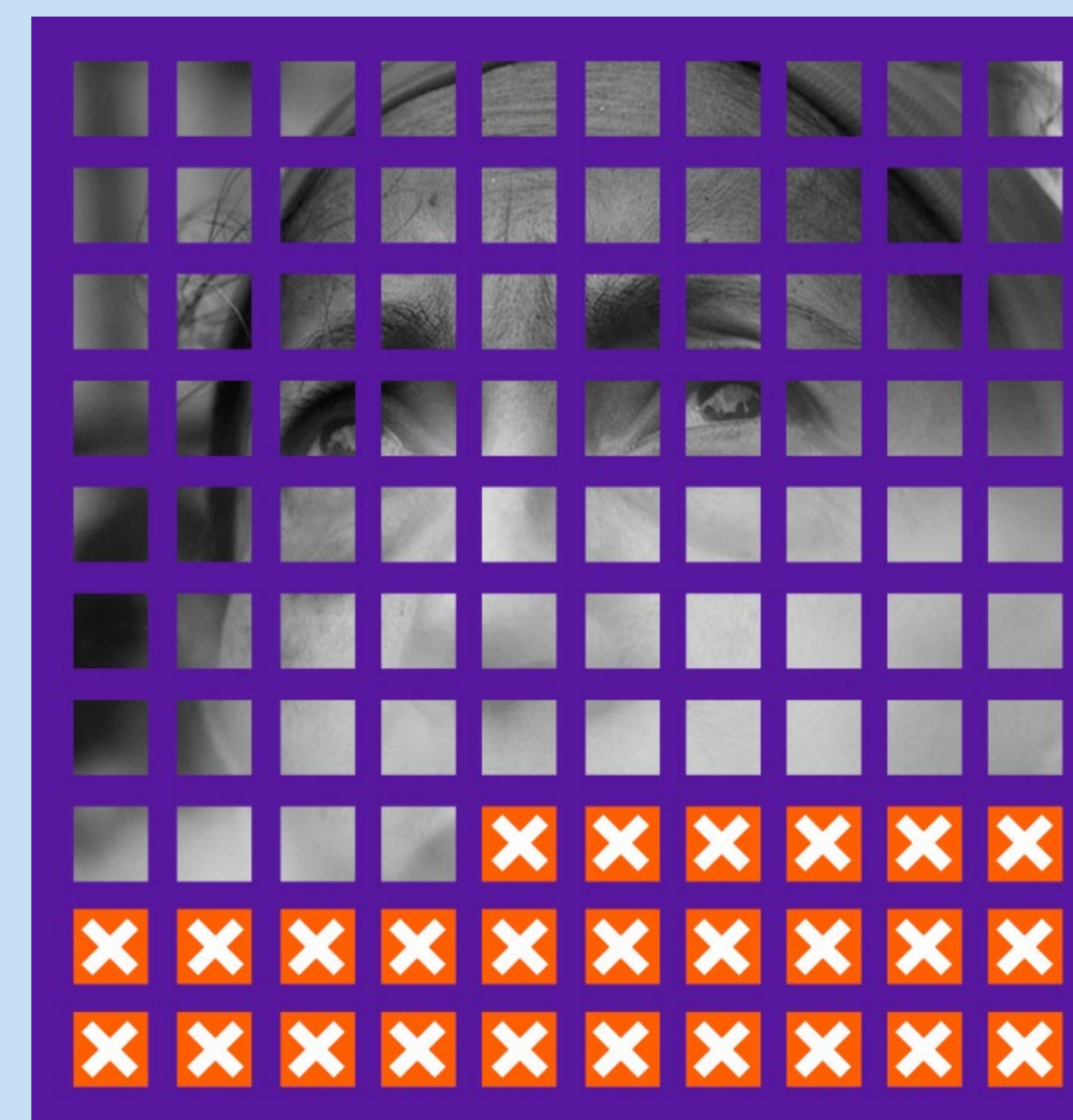
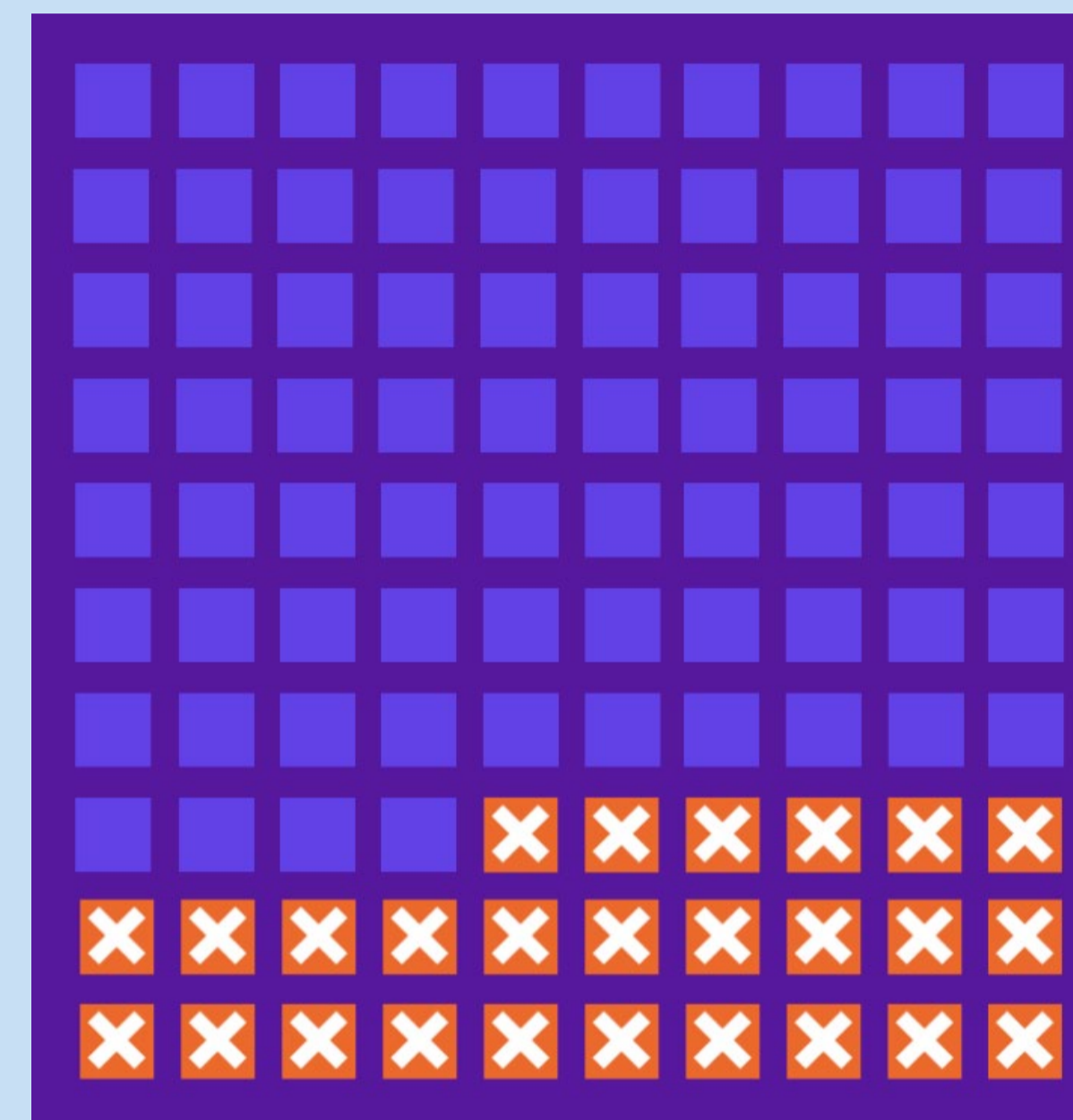
workers and centers for social work. In the first three months since the platform's launch, over 2700 users were registered.

## TOGETHER AGAINST GENDER BASED PREJUDICES

For the fifth year in a row, UNDP implemented its #TiceMeSe (#ItIsMyBusiness) campaign. The focus was on **countering prejudices** and gender social norms limiting both women's and men's choices and opportunities in private and public life. The campaign presented findings of UNDP's 2023 **Gender Social Norms Index**, showing that 76% of Serbian citizens have at least one prejudice about the roles of women and men in society. The social media campaign, reaching nearly 120 000 people, presented everyday life situations in which women face prejudice regarding their political participation, their right to economic independence and safety from violence and discrimination.

## WHAT'S IN MY BAG?

In collaboration with the **Fempower** initiative, UNDP supported **a photo exhibition** showcasing different items women carry in their bags for protection. From pepper spray to sharp keys, the exhibition drew attention to the fact that women still do not feel safe in public spaces and acknowledged women's strength to defy their fear and speak up for gender equality.





## SUPPORTING WOMEN THROUGH A JUST GREEN TRANSITION AND REDUCTION OF ENERGY POVERTY

UNDP, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Ministry of Mining and Energy have chosen 12 innovative business **solutions for just green transformation** of the economy and reduction of energy poverty, which will be implemented with the financial support of the Government of Japan. The selected innovations were proposed by companies from the private and public sector. By transitioning to the use of different renewable energy sources, they will contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and decarbonization, as well as more efficient use of natural resources. The implementation of these solutions will also lead to the opening of new, green jobs for members of vulnerable and less employable population groups. For example, one of the selected innovations is by the company "**AY-YA Products**" from Šid, which produces cold-pressed hazelnut oil. They are training women from vulnerable groups to work on new machines that will allow more than 80% of raw materials to be used in production, thus significantly reducing the amount of waste. Another solution is by the company "Mizan Line", which produces undergarments and sleepwear, and is replacing the use of fossil fuels in its plant in Sjenica with a solar power plant and a water-to-air heat pump. Two sources of

renewable energy enable sustainable business practices, which is of immense importance for the Sjenica region, a remote mountain town, employing predominantly women. These solutions will be implemented by March 2024.

## STRIVING FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

To prepare primary school girls and boys for the future and the jobs it may have in store for them, during July and August 2023, the Petlja Foundation organized the **Summer school of Programming**, with support of UNDP. This one-week intensive programme provided boys and girls aged 11 to 14 with an opportunity to delve deeper into the world of programming and to gain insight into the professions related to new technologies through conversations with IT industry professionals. The school offered a safe environment in which they could work together with their peers, learn from each other and exchange experiences. Learning was complemented with different recreational activities. Out of one hundred attendees, 23% were girls, who could find inspiration and encouragement to pursue further education and careers in programming. The 2023 cycle of the **IT retraining programme** was completed in August. Attendees who wanted to improve their skills necessary for the position of IT junior programmer,

participated in a 9-month programme that involved training in programming and gaining practical skills in IT companies. In addition, the programme supported participants to improve soft skills necessary for successful participation in the labour market. A total of 362 people attended the IT retraining programme, of which 159 (44%) were women, who enhanced their chances for employment in this fast-developing and sector with high earnings. This program is organized by the Office of the Prime Minister in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs and the Office for Information Technologies and eGovernment, in cooperation with UNDP.

**AI and gender equality – or reproducing inequalities**, was the title of a panel discussion organized by Ringier Serbia media company in December 2023, as part of the first "Equal Voice-Seeing is Believing" conference aiming to increasing the visibility of women in the media as expert interviewees. UNDP Serbia Gender Portfolio Manager Maja Brankovic Djundic spoke as one of the panelists, alongside philosopher Vladimir Đukanovic, World Bank expert Sanja Vraneš and Brankica Jankovic, Commissioner for Protection of Equality. The discussion focused on the ways AI system reflects and impacts gender bias and how to avoid gender-based prejudice and discrimination reflected through innovative technologies in the future.

## TECHNOLOGY- FACILITATED GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE

CAN THREATEN WOMEN'S  
AND GIRLS' RIGHTS &  
WELLBEING



## TECHNOLOGY- FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE TAKES MULTIPLE FORMS.



Here are some of them →



## EMPOWERMENT GOES LOCAL

Within the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans 2 (ReL0aD2) funded by the European Union, **twenty-nine Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** received funding for implementing various activities in seven cities and municipalities in Serbia. Most of their beneficiaries are women and girls, with over 60% of the projects focused on their welfare and four projects entirely dedicated to women's empowerment. In Vladicin Han, CSO Home Assistance for the Elderly will provide training for fourteen elderly care housekeepers. These women will be educated to provide home assistance services, empowering them for work opportunities, as well as contributing to local care needs. The organization CenTrir in Oplenac has **initiated a five-month program to train 15 women**, aiming to enhance farmers' abilities to apply sanitary and hygienic standards and sell their products effectively. The CSO Anahitas is focusing on the **mental well-being of pregnant women and women after labor**. They have conducted individual consultations and will hold workshops for recognizing and preventing postpartum symptoms. The program also includes training for new mothers, preparing them to manage parenting challenges more effectively.

## REMOVING BARRIERS TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

UNDP Regional Returnee Reintegration Project, funded by the European Union, is focused on the socio-economic integration of returnees in the Western Balkans, encompassing the principle of gender equality and women's empowerment. Within these UNDP efforts, in Serbia, local returnee reintegration strategies have been implemented in Valjevo, Novi Sad, and Bujanovac, tailored to specific local contexts. These strategies are aimed at removing institutional and administrative barriers and improving services, positively impacting returnees and addressing their needs, including those of women.

When it comes to capacity building, 117 practitioners from public agencies and CSOs (60% of them women) were trained to improve the quality of provided local services to returnees and vulnerable groups. Among the several innovations related to provision of local services that have been supported by UNDP, is the certification for social contracting of CSOs by local self-governments (LSG). In Bujanovac, this process has empowered a Roma women's civil society organization to certify for home care support service delivery and is currently in process of social contracting by the LSGs.

With a focus of supporting hard-to-employ individuals, 420 Roma and returnees were trained for better job preparedness and income

generation. Among them 295 women (70%) improved their soft skills, digital skills and received technical vocational training, enabling them to enter the formal labour market more easily. In addition, to enhance self-sustainability and economic independence and growth, 25 returnee women were guided to start their own business.

## YOUTH 4 INCLUSION, EQUALITY & TRUST

Within the regional Peacebuilding Fund-supported project implemented by UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO and UN Women, the regional **research** 'Voices of Youth: Gender Equality and Social Cohesion in the Western Balkans,' exploring intricate linkages between youth development, gender equality, and social cohesion challenges in the region, was published. The study reveals that toxic masculinity, entrenched gender stereotypes, hate speech, and the media's portrayal of traditional gender roles all increase the risk of violence. Notably, violence against women emerges as the most pervasive form of such incidents in the Western Balkans. The youth-led research engaged around 1,500 participants from the Western Balkans. Findings from the **research** concerning Serbia were presented at a UNCT **event**.





## ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Direct support to the National Coalition to End Child Marriage (NCECM) provided by UNICEF enabled a continuity of work by this forum which remained critical for bringing together key stakeholders for eliminating the practice. The Coalition continued to advocate for regulatory changes and the government publicly committed to amend two laws to ban child marriage and secure sanctioning of perpetrators. NCECM initiatives in the reporting period encompassed learning about interconnectedness between child marriage and statelessness in the country. On 26 September, UNHCR & UNICEF hosted in the UN House in Belgrade the 12th Meeting of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage, the aim of which was to discuss the connection between child and early marriage and statelessness in order to inform key actors and to draw attention of the public to this negative phenomenon. The efforts and the results of the national authorities on ensuring birth registration and activities of the civil society organisations on combatting child, early and forced marriages (CEFM) and statelessness were presented and discussed.

The national efforts to eliminate child marriage were recognized at a High-Level Side Event during the Seventy-Eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly on 21st September 2023. The event, titled 'Charting Brighter Futures: Utilizing Data for Accelerated Action to

End Child Marriage and Achieve SDG 5.3,' was a unique opportunity to dive into the power of data, engage in discussions on its utilization, and explore actions to fulfill the rights of girls everywhere. Leaders from the Governments of Canada, Zambia, Serbia, Nigeria, the United Kingdom and the United States spoke about their commitment to ending child marriage. The event was hosted by the Governments of Canada and Zambia, in partnership with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism. Serbia was represented by the Minister of Family Welfare and Demography (quoted below).

In the reporting period National Coalition to End Child Marriage developed and distributed two newsletter issues (September and December, respectively) as a tool to communicate the main achievements and information on the most relevant activities and results of the member organizations (such as good practice examples, success stories from the state institutions, CSOs, local community leaders in child marriage prevention and relevant ministries). Newsletters can be accessed on the link [here](#) and [here](#).

To secure continued support to synergetic efforts, support to the NCECM and strengthening Roma girls' and women leadership was mainstreamed into the Joint-UN three-year programme (starting in 2024) promoting gender equality and prevention of GBV.

## MATERNAL, CHILD HEALTH AND BREASTFEEDING

Endorsement of epidemiological guidelines enabling the presence of mothers and parents in Neonatal Intensive Care Units created a positive environment for improving quality of neonatal health care in Serbia. As a member of national expert working group for improving conditions in maternity wards, UNICEF got the opportunity for strong advocacy for humanization conditions during delivery, including active participation of partners during childbirth. Moreover, on the occasion of the World Prematurity Day, in November 2023 a [brochure for parents](#) of prematurely born children was released by the Institute of Neonatology in Belgrade with the support of UNICEF with the aim to empower mothers and fathers for nurturing first contacts with babies while in neonatal intensive care units (on family oriented developmental care: eg. on skin-to-skin contact, cuddling, reading and responding to child cues, etc).

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## GENDER-RESPONSIVE PARENTING PROGRAMME

Parental emotional well-being and father engagement more and more in the focus of innovated home visiting nurse practices of work with families of young children. Over 120 home visiting nurses from Serbia are capacitated for providing support to mothers and fathers in dealing with parental stress, improving resilience and responsiveness in child-parent dads, in organizing family routines with children and play activities from the very first day of life of a child (through an intensive UNICEF capacity building program "Caring for the Caregiver" which is implemented as part of the Playful Parenting Program supported by the LEGO Foundation). UNICEF partnered with the Association of Home Visiting Nurses of Serbia in reaching the shared goal - improving understanding, standards and skills of Early Childhood Development practitioners across Serbia in delivering culturally and gender sensitive, high-quality integrated early childhood development and parenting support programs for all children from conception to 6 years of age. Building responsiveness and gender-balance support services increase the likelihood that parents will engage in responsive, warm, play-based interactions with their children.

Serbia was welcomed in January 2024 to the in-person meeting of the Playful Parenting international Community of Practice in Rwanda (supported by the LEGO Foundation) as a good practice example in implemented integrated

gender-sensitive and responsive support practices through home visiting nurse service. The Playful Parenting program brought substantive changes in the way services are being provided to families of young children. Paradigm shift has been supported by UNICEF in moving the focus from child-care model to a family-centered, and strength-based care, in which capacities of mothers, fathers and other caregivers, their mental health and well-being, involvement in daily and play-based routines are equally important for outcomes of the child. These are key elements in promoting holistic health and optimal child development. The innovation of practice incorporates the pyramid of support from universal to progressive and targeted support to the most vulnerable families and builds on existing essential services which are widespread in the country.

A home visiting nurse from Bor, representatives of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and UNICEF Serbia showcased in Rwanda Serbian`s strategies and good practice examples and collected insights from other countries such as Rwanda, Guatemala, Bhutan and Zambia on integrating responsive, gender-balanced, playful parenting program at national level and in local communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION LEGAL FRAMEWORK

UNICEF supported development of the analysis of the compliance of Serbian national inclusive education legislative framework with the international standards, which provided significant recommendations for further development of gender sensitive and gender responsible education legislative. Recommendations include legal amendments necessary to address gender stereotypes, support to education of girls from vulnerable groups, prevention of gender related drop-out, introducing gender sensitive language, promoting gender equality and prevention of gender-based discrimination and violence. The recommendations are integrated in the National Report on Inclusive Education 2019-2021 which reached national consensus on further steps. The intersectoral Working Group for the further alignment of the legal framework with the international standards, including the gender equality standards set by the CEDAW and Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee on Serbian report, established by the Ministry of Education, developed the first set of legal amendments recommendations which included changes relevant to gender related drop-out prevention and gender sensitive monitoring of inclusive education.

# MYTH:

~~“GOVERNMENT BUDGETS  
ARE GENDER-NEUTRAL.”~~

# FACT:

THEY OFTEN OVERLOOK  
THE **SPECIFIC NEEDS** OF  
WOMEN AND GIRLS.



## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MONITORING FRAMEWORK – IE MONITORING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The first comprehensive IE Monitoring Framework, developed in 2014, has been revised with the indicators, descriptors, and mechanisms for inclusive education monitoring at the local level. Indicators targeting the position of girls, and implementation of the principles of gender equality, are included in the revised IE Monitoring Framework. The revised IE Monitoring Framework is in the process of setting up at the national level, and is being implemented in 20 municipalities, to inform the new local inclusive policies.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN EMERGENCIES (GBViE)

UNICEF supported direct GBV prevention and response services for refugee and migrant women, girls, and boys in three asylum and reception centers, one safe hub in Belgrade city center, and for Ukrainians in private accommodation. Collaborating with the two implementing

partners, Info Park and Danish Refugee Council, UNICEF reached 1,114 children and their caregivers. Services encompassed outreach, prevention, and psychosocial support, with a focus on survivors or individuals at risk of GBV. Activities included workshops, info-sessions, individual support via hotline, safe referrals, and case management for GBV cases.

UNICEF has continued to distribute dignity/hygiene kits for purposes of mitigating GBV risks reaching 875 beneficiaries including 315 unaccompanied and separated boys in this period. The kits included key hygiene and other vital items for women, girls and boys accommodated in reception and asylum centers, social protection institutions and NGO shelter. GBV info materials have been distributed to beneficiaries accommodated in all locations, reaching over 114 women, girls, and boys. UNICEF and Danish Refugee Council in cooperation with Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration organized 3-day training for 33 local trustees for refugees working together with them to strengthen their capacities to work with displaced populations and contribute to response to gender-based violence, human trafficking, child protection violations and other protection challenges.







## FIGURES AND STATISTICS

Among the 22,999 newly arrived persons observed between 1 August 2023 and January 2024, 90.7% were men, 5.9% were children, including 220 UASC, and only 3.4% were women. As per Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (SCRM) data, at end-January 2024, 1,212 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants were accommodated in 11 governmental asylum/reception/transit centers, of which 1,000 men (85.7%), 72 women (6.2 %) and 95 children (8.1%). Meanwhile 29% of all the children recorded in the centers were UASC (28). 2 persons were granted refugee status during the reporting period. UNHCR and partners provide legal assistance and an individualized integration support to recognized refugees.

## UKRAINIAN RESPONSE

Since the escalation of conflict in Ukraine, the Serbian Ministry of Interior (MOI) has noted a total of 327,219 persons who fled the country and entered Serbia. At end-January, 45 refugees from Ukraine were accommodated in Vranje Asylum Center, run by SCRM. Between August 2023 and January 2024, a total of 188 Ukrainians (69 men, 92 women, 10 boys and 17 girls) requested temporary protection (TP), 195 were granted the TP, and 12 TP were extended during the period considered.

## LOCAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and persons at risk of statelessness in community activities promotes inclusion and peaceful coexistence. UNHCR focuses on promoting their human capital, and on linking them with the local authorities, schools, youth, cultural centers and municipalities, and on supporting joint projects.

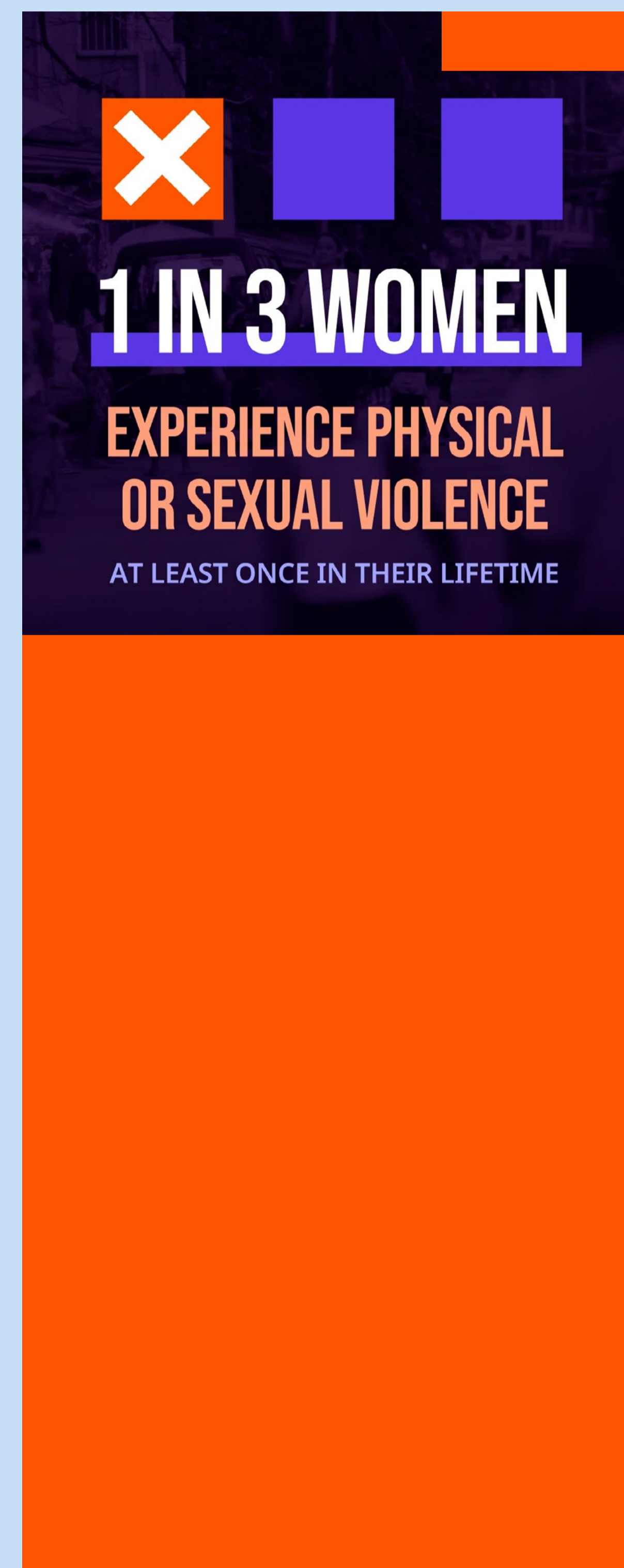
- “Dani Banice”: UNHCR and its Partner Sigma Plus supported the participation of five Ukrainian refugee women in a culinary event in Bela Palanka held on August 13. The women presented the Ukrainian national cuisine at the event attended by more than ten thousand visitors.

- “Dani Vranja”: Ukrainian refugees showcased their traditional handicrafts, crafted during Sigma Plus workshops, at the “Days of Vranje” event on August 30. Visitors had the opportunity to appreciate the beautiful creations and traditional sweets skilfully made by Ukrainian women. The event provided a chance for attendees to become more acquainted with the cultural traditions of southern Serbia.

- Women’s Run: On October 1, 2023, UNHCR and its partner DRC facilitated the participation of 11 refugee women from Burundi and Russia in the Women’s Run, an annual event organized by the Belgrade Marathon. This opportunity for inclusion and recreation for refugees was made possible through the ongoing collaboration between Belgrade Marathon Ltd. and UNHCR.

- Two Deli Monday events (10 in total in the past three years of this initiative’s existence) were organized by UNHCR/CRPC, the Italian Embassy in Serbia, and the School for Hospitality and Tourism from Belgrade at KC Grad. The event in was part of the Italian Cuisine Week, and attendees had the pleasure of savoring delicacies from Italy and Serbia. The delectable dishes were skillfully prepared by an Italian chef, local students, and two refugees from Iran and Syria. The two events drew over 320 visitors, including locals, representatives from various foreign and local organizations, as well as refugees and asylum-seekers.

- “Plavi krug oko Ade”: UNHCR Partner CRPC participated in the “Plavi krug oko Ade” Race on November 12 and supported a refugee woman from Ukraine who took part in the race. Over 900 individuals from the local and international community joined the event to contribute to the fight against diabetes.





## 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GBV

UNHCR collaborated with the City of Novi Sad, Cultural Centre of Novi Sad, the Novi Sad Technical School of Hospitality, local NGOs, and various UN agencies to organize on November 27, a themed event titled "Bridges of Hope: Brushstrokes of Resilience against Gender-Based Violence." This initiative aimed to reinforce the message that UN Serbia actively supports collaborative efforts for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The event also emphasized the promotion of responsive mechanisms inclusive of all women and girls in the country, be they local or refugees. Well-attended by representatives from local self-governments at the city and provincial levels, the event was organized under the auspices of the UN Resident Coordinator in Serbia.

- On November 28, high school students in Bosilegrad, prompted by Sigma Plus, actively supported the 16 Days of Activism Campaign by delivering a presentation titled "Gender-based violence - does it concern me?" at their school. They engaged in a group discussion with refugees and asylum-seekers residing in the Reception Centre Bosilegrad, focusing on the topic of gender-based violence within the premises of the Integration Corner with Library (IKB).

The collaborative effort resulted in paintings that depict their personal experiences with gender-based violence. The painting workshop was facilitated by a local female artist, marking the beginning of a partnership between Sigma Plus and the artist. Notably, all participants adorned orange ribbons crafted by Ukrainian refugees residing in Vranje.

- A workshop titled "Building Bonds through Movement and Circus Arts for a Safer Community" was organized by partner DRC in Belgrade on November 30.

- CRPC organized a PSEA Training for refugees and asylum-seekers residing in private accommodation at Prostor Miljenko Dereta in Belgrade on December 3.

- On December 4, the BCHR conducted a round table addressing the circumstances of SGBV and LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum-seekers in observance of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign. This event served as a continuation of the BCHR's series of focus groups involving representatives from state institutions and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Through a multisectoral approach and insights from various perspectives, these focus groups analyzed the specific challenges faced by SGBV and LGBTIQ+ individuals. They collaboratively formulated guidelines, which had earlier garnered support from many participants, aimed at enhancing the situation of these groups in Serbia.

- Partner International Aid Network (IAN) organized an educational quiz "Sve u 16" on November 27, in Café Bar 16, a social enterprise that employs children who previously lived and worked on the streets. It contained questions that checked and improved the knowledge of the participants about women's rights, the position of women and other vulnerable groups. The event was attended by refugees and asylum-seekers from African countries, Cuba, and Syria.

- As part of the 16 DoA against GBV Campaign, IAN conducted complimentary gynecological examinations in Belgrade, Bosilegrad, and Vranje for 28 female refugees and asylum-seekers.

## WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT IN REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

In order to reduce risk of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), to promote resilience and to aid recovery of communities, UNHCR and its partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) implemented a range of activities primarily focused on women and girls. These activities encompassed: identification of GBV survivors, empowerment activities, health raising awareness and protection monitoring. A total number of 10 GBV survivors, with 3 be-

ing newly identified cases, were provided assistance, and referred to specialized services. Legal assistance, including in-court representation, have been provided to the GBV survivors. During the reporting period, DRC, supported by UNHCR, held a total of 56 activities for refugee and asylum-seeking women accommodated in Krnja a Asylum Center, hosted mostly in the Women Safe Space within the asylum center. The core objective of these initiatives was to advance women's rights, encompassing the right to seek asylum, preventive measures against GBV, health-oriented awareness programs, and a spectrum of other subjects.

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## CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGES (CEFM)

- On 26 September, UNHCR & UNICEF hosted in the UN House in Belgrade the 12th Meeting of the National Coalition to End Child, Early and Forced Marriages, devoted to linkages between statelessness and child marriages, but also the efforts and the results of the national authorities on ensuring birth registration and activities of the civil society organizations on combatting CEFM and statelessness.
- With regard to activities addressing CEFM, UNHCR partner Praxis conducted four CEFM workshops for schoolchildren in primary schools in Tovariševo (Municipality of Bačka Palanka), Kostolac, Veliki Crljeni (Municipality of Lazarevac), and Leskovac. A total of 198 pupils (125 girls and 73 boys) attended these workshops and learnt of the links between CEFM and risk of statelessness. These workshops aimed at raising awareness of children regarding the potential hazards associated with CEFM, through engaging discussions on children's rights, the significance of education, early school drop-out concerns, the needs and obligations during their formative years, and discussions on parental roles and responsibilities in marriage. Praxis further organized four meetings in schools, engaging with directors,

pedagogical assistants, andragogic assistants, pedagogues, and psychologists to address the issue of CEFM. The school in Tovariševo embraced the proposal from the previous year and incorporated this crucial topic into its annual school program. For the other schools, Praxis initiated the integration of the child marriage topic into their annual work plans and Praxis provided relevant materials and reports to facilitate work on this important subject.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

- Belgrade Pride Week: UNHCR and its partners BCHR and CRPC organized on 8 September a Pride Week event at the Human Rights House in Belgrade entitled Safe Places for LGBTIQ+ Refugees and Asylum Seekers. A refugee member of this community shared his life's story with guests, including other fellow refugees. CRPC also supported participation of refugees and asylum-seekers in the Pride March on 9 September in Belgrade.
- In November, CRPC took part in the LGBTIQ+ conference held in Hamburg, organized by GIZ, which centered around queer activism and development cooperation. Additionally, CRPC attended a conference hosted by the World Bank

that specifically addressed the costs associated with the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals, followed by a meeting with the World Bank and various NGOs.

- CRPC continued its efforts in enhancing the capacity of relevant stakeholders and engaged in a "Trade union workshop/training on the rights of LGBTIQ+ workers in the Western Balkans," organized by ERA and Solidarity Centre, where they also took on the role of moderating one of the panels.

## VARIOUS

- Round Table on Expert Opinion in Asylum Procedure: On October 13, 2023, UNHCR and its partner Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) organised a round table on use of expert opinions as a proof in the asylum procedure, to improve evidence assessment and the quality of the procedure, with special focus on gender related claims. International and national experts discussed standards of the European Court for Human Rights (ECtHR), relevant body of EU law and experience of EU member states.
- On October 31, 2023, the BCHR organized a meeting with representatives from state and independent institutions, including the Protector of Citizens, Commissioner for the Protection of

Equality, and Social Welfare Centre in Belgrade (Savski Venac department). The primary agenda was to discuss the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers in Serbia, focusing specifically on the most vulnerable groups, such as refugees and asylum-seekers facing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and those from the LGBTIQ+ community.

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## INTERNATIONAL DAYS

### International Youth Day

On International Youth Day, UNFPA and UN Women kicked off the social media campaign #MladiGovore (#YouthHaveTheirSay), which is implemented under the JP “Peer Mentoring Program for promotion of human rights, gender equality and increased youth participation in Serbia”, supported by the Italian Embassy. A series of peer workshops and activities with youth in four local municipalities - Novi Pazar, Kragujevac, Sremski Karlovci and Sombor, took place on the occasion of International Youth Day. Local activities were promoted on social media, as well as traditional media through press release with the RCO and the Italian Embassy.

Additionally, UNFPA and Ministry of Tourism and Youth shared a press release on 12 August with a quote from the Assistant Minister and UNFPA Head of Office that featured key statistics and priorities in this area. 13 media hits were reported via press clipping.

### World Contraception Day

In the run-up to a regional ICPD30 conference in Geneva reviewing the 30-year progress towards implementation of the landmark Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, UNFPA held regional consultations on 26-27 September in Tbilisi, Georgia. The event brought together some 100 representatives of governments from across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including Serbia, as well as civil society, academia and international organizations. One of the key conclusions was that sexual and reproductive health and rights

are a key enabler of development and individual well-being and must remain a top priority, in light of a range of challenges that have threatened to undermine or even reverse progress in the region.

### International Day of Older Persons

To mark the International Day of Older Persons, UNFPA, in collaboration with its partners, supported two events with a heightened gender component: firstly, the photo exhibition “Beauty of Aging #3,” a collaborative effort with the citizens' association “Strength of Friendship - Amity,” and secondly, the exhibition “Bridge of Understanding - Intergenerational Solidarity,” in partnership with the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. These initiatives, attended by over 100 people, were designed to not only celebrate the beauty of aging but also to actively promote gender-inclusive perspectives on active and healthy aging, fostering intergenerational exchange.

In addition, UNFPA played a pivotal role in supporting the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Gerontological Society of Serbia, with the ceremony attracting over 70 guests, including experts and members of society. At this significant event, the head of the UNFPA Country Office in Serbia was honored with a certificate of appreciation. This recognition underscored UNFPA's exceptional and enduring contributions to the advancement of gerontology and geriatrics in the Republic of Serbia, particularly in the context of gender-inclusive and age-sensitive approaches.

### International Day of Rural Women

Together with women civil society organisations, UN Women in Serbia marked this year's International Day of Rural Women (October 15) with an event in Cacak, Western Serbia focusing on rural women's rights- challenges and perspectives. Organised under the Norwegian project, this also included campaign in traditional and social media with an overall reach of several hundreds of women and men. As part of the festival and the celebration of the International Day of Rural Women, an exhibition of women's creativity and products of members of the Association of Rural Women, beneficiary of the project “Improving the position of women and girls in rural areas”, was also organized to accompany the event. This year's International Day of Rural Women was also marked by the visit to the Municipality of Coka, Northern Serbia, organized together with the Coordination Body for Gender Equality of the Government of Serbia, in the framework of the GEF II programme, funded by the European Union. The aim of the event was to emphasize the importance of the improvement of the position of women living in rural areas, their economic empowerment and raising awareness of their rights and protection from gender-based violence.

### 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

UN Serbia GTG and Communications Group organized two joint events and a social media campaign to mark 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls. A joint event „Imagine Life without Violence“ focused on youth and GBV was organized 24 November in Belgrade, spearheaded by UNDP as Deputy GTG Chair. The event included a presentation of findings from the joint regional research on social cohesion, gender equality and peacebuilding, followed by a moderated discussion. An event “Bridges of Hope: United in the fight against gender-based violence” focused on refugee women and girls, was organized on 27 November, in Novi Sad by UNHCR and RCO, featuring joint cooking, musical performance and mural painting. Both joint events were attended by high government officials, donors and international community. UN agencies also organized other events targeting different communities, showcased in a detailed calendar of all UN agencies' events for 16 DoA against GBV which was shared on social media. For instance, UN Women organised a national conference “The right to inheritance – a Path to Gender Equality and Ending Violence” was in the Palace of Serbia. On this occasion, a guide “The rights to inheritance - equal to all”, jointly created by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, UN Women and Center for Research and Social Development IDEAS. Lastly, UN staff took a group photo in front of UN House, traditionally supporting the Orange the World Campaign and sharing this year's message “UNITE! Invest to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls.

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