
Social Rights Monitor 2025 - Country Report - Serbia



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About SOLIDAR

SOLIDAR is a European network of progressive Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to advance social justice through a just transition in Europe and worldwide. We represent over 50 member organisations based in 26 countries (19 of which are EU countries), among which national CSOs in Europe, as well as some non-EU and EU-wide organisations, working in one or more of our fields of activity.

The network is brought together by its shared values of solidarity, equality and participation.

SOLIDAR voices the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions by carrying out advocacy actions, project management and coordination, policy monitoring and awareness-raising across its different policy areas.

What is the Social Rights Monitor (SRM)?

The Social Rights Monitor assesses the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) at national level from a civil society perspective. The EPSR – also known as the Social Pillar – is a set of 20 principles that guide the action of the European Union in the realm of social affairs and policies. In other words, it is intended to be a compass guiding the EU towards a more social Europe. For too many people, however, the implementation of these principles at national and EU level is not yet a reality.

Thanks to the contribution of our members and their networks on the ground (the National Strategy Groups), SOLIDAR monitors the extent to which social rights are respected, upheld and promoted for all people living in the EU. The Social Rights Monitor also investigates the health of civic space and social and civil dialogue in the EU, as well as the extent to which a just transition is being pursued. Therefore, the thematic areas covered by the Monitor are the following: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; Fair working conditions; Social inclusion and protection; a Just transition; and Civic space. The first three correspond to the three chapters of the EPSR, while the last two have been added to give a fuller picture of social justice in Europe.

Thanks to first-hand data gathered by national civil society organisations, the Social Rights Monitor constitutes a direct channel of policy recommendations between the national level and EU policymakers. It thus amplifies the voices and needs of the most marginalised groups. The Monitor dedicates a section to “advocacy messages” which result from the national-level analyses in each thematic area and are addressed to EU policymakers.

Countries are assigned a score for each thematic area out of a maximum of 100 points. This makes immediately visible how each country is performing in each area and enables comparison with other countries. The numerical scores originate from the National Strategy Groups’ (NSGs) assessments of national developments related to social rights, civic space and just transition. Negative developments in an area result in lower scores. NSGs rate these developments for each country by replying to Linkert-scale questions. This means that the score of a country’s thematic area is given by adding up all the rates given to the questions concerning that thematic area and expressing the score out of 100. The overall score of a country is the average of the thematic areas scores. Further details on the questionnaire and data gathering are provided in the section “About: What is the process?”

Since the SRM score reflects the NSG’s assessment of changes—either improvements or deteriorations—in each of the five areas over the past 12 months, it does not represent the overall status of these dimensions in absolute terms. Instead, it highlights recent trends. For example, a country with a historically strong welfare state might receive a low score if recent reforms have significantly weakened social rights or pose a risk of doing so. This does not imply that the overall situation is poor, but rather that recent developments are cause for concern and may undermine social standards over time.

Therefore, the SRM should not be used to compare the overall situation of social rights across countries—official statistics are more appropriate for that purpose. Instead, it serves as a tool to track short-term national trends and to understand the perspectives of civil society organizations (CSOs) on these developments.

What is the process?

The Social Rights Monitor is a tool that amplifies the voice of progressive civil society at national level. Its content is based on the inputs provided by the National Strategy Groups (NSGs) set up by SOLIDAR’s members and partners, which are active in the countries analysed. They consist of NGOs, associations, movements, trade unions, academia and thinktanks, ensuring that the perspective of civil society is mirrored in the Social Rights Monitor’s analysis. The Monitor reflects the experiences of these organisations, which are active on the ground, and the experiences are complemented by scientific data gathered through desk research.

The data elaborated in the Social Rights Monitor are gathered by SOLIDAR’s secretariat through a questionnaire distributed to the National Strategy Group Leaders (our national members) and completed with information produced by each group. From 2023, this questionnaire has been carried out online.

Based on the picture that emerges from the Monitor, SOLIDAR and the NSGs together devise policy recommendations for EU policymakers. These aim to make social rights, a healthy planet and an enabling, free, protected civic space a reality for all in Europe. The key recommendations stemming from the analysis are used as a basis for SOLIDAR's social affairs advocacy work.

The SRM is published every year, around the end of November/beginning of December and its findings cover the period going from June of the previous year to May of the year of the publication. This timeline is due to the fact that the NSGs submit their questionnaire by the end of May of the publication year.

How do we use it?

SOLIDAR's main role as a European-level civil society network is as a bridge between EU institutions and their policies on the one hand and our progressive members working at the national level on the other. The Social Rights Monitor is a valuable tool to gather information from the ground and bring it to policymakers' attention. This ensures that the voices of the most neglected social groups are duly taken into account. For example, the SRM complements the European Semester, by providing a more-complete assessment of Member State policies. Regrettably, the Semester is still too focused on countries' economic and financial performances and does not provide sufficient guidance on upward social convergence in the European Union.

SOLIDAR disseminates the findings of the Social Rights Monitor in various ways, including through the Social Europe Conference, an annual event at which it is presented, and which also explores a topic of priority for social Europe. More generally, the Monitor is one of the main ways through which the SOLIDAR network presents its positions on social affairs, so its findings are mainstreamed throughout our advocacy work.

Social Rights Monitor Overview

SCORE: 45

Serbia has made modest progress in several areas yet is hampered by several persistent structural issues, the NSG reports. The provision of welfare services has been improved by increasing the number of licensed providers. Inclusion of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is also better thanks to initiatives from CSOs and other private actors. However, a lack of legislative initiatives and delays in the implementation of those that have been announced severely hindered progress in the social and solidarity economy and in housing. Some promising, much-needed legislative initiatives have been announced for youth employment and poverty eradication. Several transversal issues also persist, such as gender equality and poor enforcement in areas such as work-life balance and occupational health and safety. The level of social dialogue is low, and the state of civic space is highly worrying, as attacks against protesters, journalists and CSOs have become commonplace.

The NSG for Serbia was led by SOLIDAR's member [Association of Citizens Initiative for Development and Cooperation](#).



Equal Opportunities and Access to the Labour Market

SCORE: 50

Investment in the welfare system

Serbia's social welfare system has made incremental, continuous improvements, the NSG reports, but challenges remain. The implementation of the Social Card Act, which started in 2022, continues to face criticism.^[1] The act introduced a centralized electronic register, meant to improve equity in the distribution of welfare benefits and to combat fraud. By September 2023, nearly all Social Work Centres had adopted the system. However, there have been severe issues with its implementation. Around 44 000 individuals had lost their entitlement to financial assistance by March 2024.^[2] In September 2022, the A11 Initiative for Economic and Social Rights challenged the legality of the Act on grounds of violations of international and Council of Europe data-minimization and transparency principles through its use of a broad personal data registry and automated eligibility algorithm. In July 2023, 48 MPs asked the Constitutional Court to review the Act's compliance with the Serbian constitution, international conventions and the European Treaties. But the Court has yet to make a final judgement.^[3] The A11 Initiative for Economic and Social Rights also complained to the World Bank's Inspection Panel, pointing out the adverse impact of the system on vulnerable groups such as Roma, who face disproportionate rates of exclusion and are denied benefits.^[4] The Inspection Panel in August 2024 estimated that misclassification and miscalculation of income data in the Registry have resulted in loss or significant reduction of assistance for approximately 44,000 beneficiaries, many of whom belong to marginalized groups".^[5] The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs (MLEVSI) has not provided remedial measures or increased the registry's transparency, the NSG reports.

Another persistent issue is the Strategy on Deinstitutionalisation and Development of Community-Based Services for 2022–2026, which is meant to enable children placed in care or people with disabilities to live in the community. The Strategy envisaged the gradual closure of residential institutions, the development of family- and community-based alternatives and the provision of stable funding to local alternatives. But major delays have significantly hampered its potential impact. In its 2024 Serbia Report, the European Commission criticized a failure to adopt the 2023-2024 Action Plan before the end of 2024.^[6] Only a small number of pilot projects for community-based services were operational, and there were large regional disparities, CSOs have pointed out. In January 2025, the government adopted the new Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities for 2025 to 2030, which includes a 2025-2027 Action Plan referencing community-based alternatives and deinstitutionalisation. The NSG welcomes this renewed political will but remains sceptical over the realization of the 2022-2026 Deinstitutionalisation Strategy.

The geographic coverage and user access of social services has improved incrementally in 2024 and 2025.^[7] The number of licensed social service providers increased from 313 in 2022 to 342 at the end of 2024. The activity rate of these providers increased

by 2.9 percentage points to 86.3% in the same time period. Moreover, these providers covered 97.2% of the 145 municipalities in Serbia, a 3.4 percentage point increase compared to 2022. Similar increases took place concerning licensed Home Assistance providers who increased from 135 in 2022 to 147 by the end of 2024 and covered 89.7% of municipalities, a 5.8 percentage point increase from 2022. The activity rate, however, experienced a very slight decrease of 0.8 percentage points compared to 2022. Whilst the number of licensed Personal Assistance service providers increased substantially from 21 to 26, it remains very low, which is reflected in its geographical coverage of 22.1% of all Serbian municipalities. The number of licensed Daily Care Services providers for children and youth in conflict with the law, family, school, or community remains extremely low at 4, up from 3 in 2022, covering as many municipalities. The NSG highlights how the increase is the result of partnerships between local socio-work centres and regional NGOs.

Licensed shelter services, which provide temporary accommodation and referral for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, increased to 18, up from 16 in 2022, covering 12 municipalities, up from 10 in 2022. Women represent nearly two thirds of adults needing the services due to their higher risk of being exposed to domestic violence and homelessness. Respite Care Services for children and adults with disabilities provided 11 256 hours of service to 359 users, up from 9,873 hours of care for 318 users in 2022.

Gender equality

The 2024 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum ranked Serbia 26th out of 146, up from 38th in 2023.[8] Serbia ranks 25th in political empowerment, which measures women's participation in political life. Serbia's rank in the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index rose from 69th to 63rd in 2024, but the NSG points out that this does not match the reality of many Serbian women. Women face greater obstacles in accessing and re-entering the labour market than men, according to data in a report by the CSO Democracy for Development.[9] The main causes of female unemployment in Serbia include discrimination, education, gender-blind policies, the gap between education and job market demands and the difficulty of balancing private and professional life, according to the report.

The percentage of women-owned businesses and solo self-employed increased from 28.1% to 31.2%, and legislative amendments led to some improvements.[10] Since August 2023, female solo self-employed have been entitled to two years of maternity leave, though only for their third and subsequent children. Their employed husbands are also now entitled to paid parental leave as well as special parental leave (an extension of parental leave due to exceptional circumstances like child's health reasons). Nevertheless, female solo self-employed, women farmers and women with flexible contracts remain at a disadvantage compared to traditionally employed women. When on leave, they receive lower benefits, their length of service is not recognized, and they are not entitled to pregnancy leave.[11] Several legal amendments should be introduced to improve their social rights, including the Labour Act provisions on maternity and child-care leave.[12]

In general and despite explicit legal prohibition, women's wages are on average 20% lower than men's. The inequality is even graver for women from minority groups. Underage marriage is still common among Roma girls. Half of Roma girls under 18 are already married, sometimes even before the age of 14, undermining their chances of education and economic independence.[13][14] Rural women are often not formally employed, despite working all day and having to look after a household, and 90% do not own the land they work on.[15]

The inactivity of the Gender Equality Coordination Body and the suspension of the Gender Equality Act by the Constitutional Court are particularly worrying. The Gender Equality Coordination Body was established in November 2022 to coordinate the work of public administrations and other institutions to improve gender equality and status.[16] However, its last report was published in 2021, and no updates on its activities appeared on its website in 2024.[17] In June 2024, the Constitutional Court suspended the Gender Equality Act as a provisional measure until a final decision on its constitutionality. This has led Serbian experts to express serious concerns over the impartiality of the Constitutional Court, as well as over its understanding of gender equality and its respect for Serbia's international gender-equality obligations.[18]

The UN – in the framework of the fourth periodic Review – and the Council of Europe have exerted pressure on Serbia to improve gender equality.[19] Their reports referred to misogynist and discriminatory statements made by politicians and religious representatives and perpetuated in tabloids. They also expressed concern over the lack of timely and effective protection against femicide.

Femicide continues to be a substantial problem in Serbia. The NGOs Femplatz and the Autonomous Women's Centre indicate that nearly 30 femicides took place each year from 2019 to 2023.[20] In 2024, the number went down to 17. Many of the CSOs reporting on femicides rely on media publications, as they are the only publicly available source of information, the NSG points out. But they are inconsistent, as they mainly focus on domestic violence and neglect extra-familial violence against women and femicides.[21] The public monitoring body Femicide Watch has still not been established despite being announced in 2018. Women's NGOs have consistently demanded its establishment as well as the definition of femicide as a separate criminal offence.[22]

Education, training and life-long learning

Non-formal education (NFE) plays a vital role in Serbia's life-long learning system, encompassing adult education, private tutoring, community-based workshops and non-governmental training initiatives. Private tutoring is valued at approximately €110 million annually. But NFE regulation remains fragmented and underdeveloped. Private tutoring is largely unregulated, and many tutors operate in the informal economy.[23] The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has not been fully implemented. While it has been formally adopted, it lacks robust mechanisms to recognize partial qualifications acquired through non-formal pathways. Institutional quality assurance remains limited, as highlighted in the European Commission's 2024 Serbia Progress Report.[24] Some formalized procedures exist to recognize prior learning through NFE, but these are not yet embedded in national practice,[25] so non-formal learners are often left without official recognition of their competences.

NFE is also hampered by a lack of institutional cooperation and coordination. The Qualifications Agency and certain units of the Ministry of Education are responsible for adult education, but they rarely engage or integrate NFE-providers or CSOs into their operations.[26] A lack of detailed statistical data also hinders the development of adequate, targeted policies. The most recent data on NFE from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia is from 2022 and showed 17.4% of adults engaged in some form of NFE.[27]

Some improvements have taken place in dual education thanks to the entry into force in September 2023 of amendments to the Dual Education Act. These amendments increase from six to eight hours per day the time at the workplace, maintains the remuneration for work-based learning time at 70% of the minimum hourly wage, allow precontracts on dual education, make possible training alliances between at least two employers that enables the achievement of learning outcomes and centres and regulate the status of both the Dual Education Office and the National Qualifications Framework Office. Moreover, they include more work-based learning in three- and four-year secondary programmes and will provide financial support to schools and companies identified by the government.

Inclusion of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and minorities

In 2023, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Aliens Act[28] and the Act on the Employment of Aliens.[29] Their entry into force in February 2024 represented a significant improvement in the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. The amendments facilitate their access to rights, in particular that to permanent residence, which had been practically impossible under the previous framework. The amendments to the Aliens Act ease the conditions for permanent residence for someone who has resided in Serbia for three or more years without interruption. They also outline the conditions for aliens to acquire citizenship after obtaining permanent residence, and require that the practices of public authorities in this procedure is subject to monitoring.

The amendments to both acts contribute to Serbia's alignment with EU acquis, notably the Single Permit Directive, by introducing a single permit procedure for both temporary stays and work. They also allow refugees and persons granted humanitarian residence direct access to the Serbian labour market. Asylum seekers' waiting period to access the labour market has now been reduced from nine to six months after the lodging of an asylum application.

The positive effect of these changes might prove limited in practice, as the NSG points out, due to the persistent low number of cases in which Serbia granted international protection. From 2020 to mid-2025, 85 asylum claims were granted, as were 61 subsidiary protection claims. Temporary residence on humanitarian grounds was granted to 426 people. However, temporary protection was granted or extended to over 4 000 people, though many of these were Ukrainian nationals. As of 27 May 2025, 52 282 foreigners resided in Serbia with approved temporary residence based on employment.[30] However, only 9 744 of these were women, indicating a significant gender imbalance. Only 7 174 of 31 659 employed foreigners are women.[31] Women with young children lack adequate institutional support, limiting their ability to work, according to the NSG. Furthermore, there is no unified, interinstitutional database on migrants and their employment. This hinders labour market integration, as each government body only maintains statistical data related to its specific competences.

The NSG identified several more challenges to the inclusion of refugees and people granted subsidiary protection.[32] Their awareness of labour rights protection is insufficient, so many rely on free legal aid provided by CSOs. The language barrier is also a challenge, and Serbian language courses are limited in availability and accessibility. Migrants' identity documents are often refused, because they do not include an equivalent of the personal number on Serbian citizens' national identity documents. This represents a significant barrier in accessing essential services, such as bank accounts. Banks accounts also require an open-ended work contract, but this often proves incompatible with migrant workers' legal status as fixed-term employees. CSOs flagged the issue in a complaint to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. The Commissioner recognized it as a severe restriction of migrants' ability to participate in economic and social life and issued recommendations to banks at the end of 2024.[33] Banks then notified the Commissioner of the measures they took in compliance with the recommendations.[34]

Labour exploitation is increasing in Serbia. In 2024, 71 victims of human trafficking were identified, of whom 26% were victims of labour exploitation, according to a report by the Centre for Human Trafficking Victim Protection.[35] Two thirds of the 71 were foreigners. According to the NGO ASTRA Report, 35% of 1,200 foreign labour inspections in 2023 revealed serious infringements, including non-payment of wages exceeding three months, unlawful wage deductions and the absence of written contracts.[36] Moreover, 70% of 500 migrant workers surveyed in 2023 lived in employer-provided dormitories lacking basic sanitation, while 45% had their passports confiscated under the pretext of providing "security deposits". Most were men from India, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

Police brutality and institutionalised racism against Roma were displayed in an incident reported by the NSG. Masked police agents raided an informal Roma settlement in Vuk Vrčević Street in Belgrade on 10 February 2024, using batons on people and belongings, as well as intimidation and ethnic slurs.[37] Emergency services had been instructed not to respond to calls from the raid site, so ambulances only arrived after city councillors contacted them. The Military Intelligence Agency later issued a press release on the raid, claiming the police agents were searching for individuals suspected of harassing young people and assaulting a police officer. No comment was given on allegations of police abuse.[38] A criminal report was filed against at least five unidentified police officers with the Belgrade First Basic Public Prosecution Service and a complaint was submitted to the Ombudsman over the Belgrade police's conduct. The complaint was dismissed on a procedural ground.

Measures to help Serbian citizens living with disabilities are hindered by a lack of data on their numbers, the NSG reports.[39] In her 2023 Annual Report, the Serbian Equality Commissioner reported 78 complaints of discrimination on the grounds of disability, a majority of which related to procedures before public authorities, the provision of public services and the inaccessibility of public indoor and outdoor facilities.[40] The Commissioner also noted several improvements in her 2024 Report, such as a high rate of compliance with her recommendations and initiatives that addressed disability as a cause of discrimination. For example, the number of accessible public buildings increased. However, the Commissioner also noted that the accessibility of buildings and public spaces remains limited, the adoption of the Action Plan on the Deinstitutionalisation Strategy has been significantly delayed, community services are underdeveloped, and people with disabilities are not sufficiently included in The Report also points out that people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities risk being deprived of legal capacity. The Ombudsman noted the lack of consistent implementation and enforcement of key legislative initiatives, as well as discrepancies in the administration of disability benefits.

Good practice:

IKEA Serbia, in collaboration with the UN Human Rights Committee, set up a paid internship programme called "Skills for Employment" to improve migrants' employability.[41] The programme allows migrants to gain practical skills and work experience. Over 70% of the 36 participants found employment within three months.

Mapping efforts by IKEA and its partners culminated in the launch of the Network for Employment of Refugees in June 2023 by the UNHCR and IKEA Serbia.[42] The Network consists of corporations who regularly report their vacancies. It facilitates the matching process with qualified asylum seekers. The Network provides employers and refugees with individual support and information sessions on topics such as health insurance and migrants' rights, as well as translation services for interviews. Since its establishment in June 2023, 107 individuals have used the Network for employment support, and 45 have been employed through its services.

Mercator-S was inspired by IKEA Serbia's "Skills for Employment" Program and became part of the Network for Employment of Refugees, providing the UNHCR with vacancies to match with refugee workers. . [43]

Youth employment

Despite an increase in youth employment, unemployment remains one of young Serbians' main problems, the NSG reports.[44] The rate of young people (aged 15 to 30) not in employment, education or training (NEET) declined by 3.8 percentage points from 2021 to 15.2% in 2023, though this was still higher than the EU average of 10.3%.[45] The main initiative is the Employment Strategy for the Period 2021-2026,[46] which has implemented EU recommendations and communications. These include a Youth Guarantee for people under 25, with a focus on NEETs. It ensures quality employment opportunities, continued education and an apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. An implementation plan for the 2023-2026 period maps NEETs and provides a policy overview and consultative process.[47] Improving youth employment is also recognised in the Employment Strategy as an important tool for preventing informal youth employment. The Strategy highlights the prevalence of informal employment among young people due to loose and arbitrary interpretations of regulations on flexible forms of work such as service contracts, casual work contracts and work through student or youth cooperatives. Informal employment erodes labour and social rights and increases the risk of poverty.[48]



Fair Working Conditions

SCORE: 50

Adequate wages

Positive developments include the Social and Economic Council increasing the minimum net hourly wage for 2025 to 308 RSD (Serbian dinar – about €2.60). The minimum wage fluctuated throughout 2024. Though it was increased, it did not keep up with consumer prices. [49]

The gross average wage increased by 13.8% in nominal terms and 9.1% in real terms in 2024, according to official data. The net average rose 13.9% in nominal and 9.2% in real terms.[50] There was a 13.8% gap between men's and women's average net monthly wage, a gap that persists across education levels.[51]

Job Security

The employment rate rose 1.4 percentage points to 51.9% in the third quarter of 2024, while unemployment decreased to 8.1%, official data show.[52] The total informal employment rate was 12.3%. It was particularly high, at 52.7%, in the agricultural sector. In non-agricultural sectors, it averaged 6.1%. Key indicators of decent work are close to zero for workers on four platforms active in Serbia – Glovo, Wolt, Mr. D and Yandex – according to the 2023 Fairwork Report.[53] Using a loophole in the Agency Employment Act, all four platforms used temporary employment agencies and employed workers with an irregular migration status that left them without guaranteed labour rights. Some of the platforms, such as Glovo and Wolt, provided bare minimum workers' rights, such as the minimum hourly wage and appeal mechanisms against sanctioning decisions. But none could provide evidence that they met the principle of fair representation for platform workers. Glovo was the only platform that could show it provided free safety equipment and training for its workers.

Work-life balance

Whilst Serbia has ratified many ILO Conventions on weekly rest and paid leave, it has never ratified Convention No. 30 on hours of work (commerce and office) nor Convention No. 47 on the 40-hour work week. It withdrew from Convention No. 52 on holidays with pay and its sister Convention No. 101 for the agriculture sector. The Labour Act guarantees a 40-hour work week, which can be extended to a maximum of 48 hours through overtime. It also mandates breaks during working hours and daily and weekly rests and holidays.[54] However, employers often disregard the Labour Act's limits and obligations, particularly those on daily and weekly working time.[55] Some employers try to circumvent their labour obligations by falsely accusing employees of faking sickness or illness. These problems are compounded by authorities' lack of enforcement, the NSG reports.

Social and solidarity economy

Regulatory advances were made in Serbia's social and solidarity economy (SSE) throughout 2024 and early 2025, but systemic issues persist. The law on social entrepreneurship was adopted in early 2022, but it had not been implemented in 2024. The law provides the legal foundation to recognize social enterprises as distinct actors and defines the related statutory benefits. Nevertheless, only 26 entities had been registered as social enterprises by May 2025, probably due to factors including the lack of dedicated budget and bylaws. Many others opted instead to continue under their previous legal form.[56]

To map out local SSE ecosystems, the Social Enterprise Barometer was developed under the Erasmus+-funded project Social Enterprise Barometer: Serbia. It was implemented by the Coalition for Solidarity Economy Development in partnership with regional counterparts. The barometer provides empirical data-driven insights that can lead to policy action.

The municipality of Nis is a good example of the state of the SSE in Serbia, the NSG reports. First, there was a lack of dedicated funding and capital. No earmarked public funds were available, and tailored private investment instruments were virtually non-existent. Instead, many SSE actors relied on grant financing from CSOs and foundations, which were insufficient. Secondly, support systems such as legislative frameworks and incubator structures were underdeveloped, which impeded scaling and cross-sector collaboration.

The findings of the Barometer led to policy action at the municipal level in Nis. Local stakeholders discussed the creation of a Social Entrepreneurship Development Programme based on the law on social entrepreneurship. This included suggestions on how to allocate dedicated state and municipal funds and on the creation of incubator and innovation hubs to foster cross-sector collaboration. CSOs also pointed out the need to integrate entrepreneurial education at all levels of education to cultivate social entrepreneurship. Despite this positive development, the Barometer pointed out that local governments are constrained in their support of the SSE by centralized governance structures.

Concrete measures should be introduced to strengthen the social and solidarity economy, including greater funding, financial instruments adapted to social economy actors and public procurement rules that prioritise contacts with social and solidarity economy providers.

Occupational health and safety

The Law on Occupational Health and Safety came into force in July 2023, and employers were given until May 2025 to fully implement its provisions.^[57] It seeks to guarantee the respect of occupational health and safety principles and imposes several obligations on employers. Coordinators have to follow mandatory occupational health and safety training and pass a professional exam, all during paid working hours. Employers have to refer employees in high-risk jobs to preliminary or periodic medical examinations and reassign those workers to suitable jobs if they no longer fulfil the special health requirements. The OSHA empowers labour inspectors to prohibit work on construction sites if there are (immediate) risks to workers' health and safety.

However, the oversight capacity of the labour inspectors is severely limited by their number. The Labour Inspectorate's 2024 Annual Report shows that only 218 labour inspectors are active in Serbia, each covering an average of 2 000 entities each year.^[58] The NSG and social partners point out that the number of inspectors needs to be increased for Serbia to comply with EU occupational health and safety standards and to ensure an effective implementation of the law's provisions.^[59]

Another important piece of legislation on occupational health and safety, specifically for the protection of certain categories of workers, is the Labour Act. It contains several provisions on protection for minors, women (for maternity and parenthood) and people with disabilities or health problems. In principle, the Labour Act strictly prohibits the employment of children under 15 and only allows light work for 15–17-year-olds. However, reports such as the ILO's July 2024 Policy Brief on Child Labour in Serbia show clear evidence of systemic non-compliance with these prohibitions.^[60]

Employers have persistently failed to implement workplace adjustments that favour the inclusion of people with disabilities, according to the Council of Europe's April 2024 Report on the European Social Charter. The European Commission's 2024 Report on Serbia also highlights issues in passing legislation on people with disabilities and deficiencies in monitoring mechanisms.^[61]

Social Dialogue

Social dialogue has barely improved in Serbia. There is little to no involvement from social partners in policy drafting. No new sectoral collective bargaining agreements have been signed, and some of the complaints brought to the ILO regarding violations of trade unions' and workers' rights remain unresolved. These findings were confirmed by the European Commission in its 2024 Serbia Report.^[62] This report also highlights the need to adopt the new Law on the Right to Strike, as does the report by the Centre for Democracy Foundation, which calls for reforms to strengthen bipartite and tripartite social dialogue mechanisms.^[63] However, both reports highlight a modest improvement, in that the Social and Economic Council could determine the minimum wage again. (See section above on "Fair working conditions – Adequate wages".)



Social Inclusion and Protection

Housing

Homelessness continues to be a problem in Serbia. It is rarely on the public agenda, only getting coverage in the media in late autumn and winter, the NSG reports. Homelessness is nevertheless a serious issue, with 20 people who sleep rough dying from cold in Belgrade over the winter months between 2024 and 2025.^[64] Few resources and facilities are made available for homeless people. No national registry exists of services for the homeless, nor is there any mention of preventive measures or systemic assistance. Most public measures consist of shelters for adult and elderly homeless people. A limited number of national CSOs focus on homelessness, which fulfil important roles such as running shelters and day centres. They also provide related services, which include providing meals, hygiene and clothing, as well as psychological aid and relevant information. However, some shelters are only open in winter, leaving homeless people vulnerable to summer heatwaves.^[65]

Poverty eradication

Serbia's risk-of-poverty-rate remains high, despite decreasing for several years in a row, official statistics show.^[66] Nearly 20% of the population was at risk of poverty in 2023, a 0.3 percentage point decrease from 2022. The rate of people at risk of poverty or social

exclusion was 27.2% in 2023, a 1.8percentage points decrease from 2022. Certain groups are significantly more at risk, such as elderly people and unemployed people.[67] The over-65s are the age group with the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate, at 23.5%. Households consisting of two adults and three or more dependent children also had a particularly high rate, at 34.7%. The highest rate of all groups was for the unemployed, of whom 50.9% were at risk of poverty.

The NSG says structural inadequacies partly explain the inability to adequately address poverty. The European Anti-Poverty Network highlights the lack of a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.[68] The A11 Initiative points to exclusionary criteria for eligibility to social assistance programmes, which stop around half a million below the absolute poverty line from receiving support.[69] In response, Serbia has initiated targeted reforms to strengthen social policies with international assistance from organizations including the World Bank, alongside domestic initiatives such as rural welfare programs.[70]



Civic Space

SCORE: 50

The CIVICUS Monitor classifies civic space in Serbia as “Obstructed”, a classification that has not changed since 2020.[71] This classification means that civic space is heavily contested by power holders. CSOs exist yet are undermined by state authorities through various means. Citizens can protest peacefully, but excessive police force is frequently used. Non-state media face restrictions and attacks, even of a physical kind.

Enabling space for civil society

Civic space in Serbia has regressed, according to the NSG, which cites developments in the European Commission's Serbia 2024 Report. CSOs have to operate in a difficult environment. They suffer verbal attacks. And they are hit with a large number of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs).[72]

Politicians, public authorities and the media launched verbal attacks against CSOs, activists, minority groups and trade groups throughout 2024.[73] CSOs engaged in election monitoring and advocating for democratic standards were often criticised by state officials and pro-government media.[74] The Pride Info Centre was attacked physically five times in 2024.[75] The Centre closed in September 2024 due to a lack of financial and institutional support, and it stated that none of the 24 attacks it had reported to the police had been adequately prosecuted.[76] Members of national and local authorities launched at least six SLAPPs against media outlets and journalists in 2024.[77]

Journalists and activists were also subjected to unlawful surveillance. In some cases, the police or the Serbian Intelligence Agency unlocked their phones while they were in detention using NoviSpy spyware, enabling access to their location, camera and microphone.[78] The use of this spyware was condemned by Amnesty International and Serbian NGOs.[79] The 2024 Draft Act on a Special Register of Foreign Influence Agents[80] would oblige organizations and non-profits who receive more than 50% of their funding from abroad to register as “foreign influence agents”. These are subject to constant oversight and can face criminal and financial sanctions. They can even be banned if they “influence the public interest of Serbia” or engage in “political activities”. The draft uses broad formulations of “political activities”, “foreign funding” and “unjustified interference in the political process”, effectively allowing the government to impose arbitrary penalties.

Experts have pointed out several irregularities related to transparency and delays in public calls for funds.[81] Some funds have been awarded to organizations that do not meet the criteria stated in the public calls, such as transparency requirements, or that are unable to provide evidence of their prior activities. Other funds have been allocated by the offices of ministers to organizations with ties to parties or people in power.[82] Prosecutors rarely act on reports of these abuses, investigations by media and CSOs have shown.[83]

Reaction to protests in the wake of the Novi Sad Railway Station tragedy highlighted several problems with the freedom of assembly. The collapse of the canopy of the Novi Sad Railway Station on 1 November 2024 killed 15 people up until 31st May 2025. It led to protests against the government, in which protestors blockaded streets for 15 minutes (for the 15 lives). The protests were mainly led by students' movements that besides organising blockades in universities and other public spaces across the country keeping the

public attention and pressure on the government high, successfully organised massive protests that involved civil society and citizens in a transversal way.

One of the largest protests in Serbia in the 21st century took place on 22 December 2024, when thousands of people responded to the students' call and blocked Slavija Square in Belgrade. The Archive of Public Assemblies estimated that around 100,000 people attended, whereas the MIA put their number at 28,000–29,000, whilst failing to disclose a clear methodology for their calculation. It was followed by an even bigger event, the largest protest ever on 15th March 2025, which gathered 325,000 people.[84] As a response the government unlawfully used the sonic weapon for crowd control. On April 30, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has issued an interim measure ordering the Republic of Serbia to refrain from using sonic devices for the purpose of controlling assembled citizens.[85]

Among the students' main demands are full disclosure of all documents related to the Novi Sad train station reconstruction project and the prosecution of those responsible for the assault on Faculty of Dramatic Arts students during the 22 November protest.[86] In fact, on 22 November, students, professors and other individuals participating in a static protest "15 Minutes for 15 Lives" and blocking the boulevard in front of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts (FDU) in New Belgrade were attacked and one student and one journalist were injured. A series of strikes organised by students followed. In general, protests, vigils and blockades took place almost daily across 400 cities and towns between November 2024 and May 2025. [87]

Though the protests were peaceful, the police often used excessive force, and they failed to prevent physical attacks on the protesters, as shown by the 22 November attacks. Tear gas was used since the first peaceful protest on 5 November, [88] and arrests were carried out in untransparent circumstances, including the fact that police performed the arrests without showing their badge nor explaining the reasons and legal grounds on which such arrests were being carried out.[89] Excessive use of batons and pepper spray was also recorded in similar protests.[90]

State officials, including the president and Prime Minister, denounced the protests as illegitimate. Some even described them as "attempts to overthrow the government by Croatian and Ukrainian spies". The informal movement Kopaćemo ("We will dig") published an online register of 16 student protestors, whom it called "paid student activists" and alleged were part of a scheme by foreign intelligence services. This – plus the lack of prosecution by the public prosecutor – put protesters in grave danger



Just Transition

SCORE: 50

Quality of jobs in the green transition

As a part of the EU Energy Community, Serbia has been directly impacted by EU climate policy. Both the Emissions Trading System (ETS) and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) affect Serbia's economy and labour market.[91] These two mechanisms incentivise non-EU trade partners to invest in decarbonization and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in production, so that their products will not be taxed.

The Serbian Climate Change Act transposes the ETS regulations on the monitoring, reporting and verifying (MRV) of GHG emissions. It does not include alternative carbon pricing instruments. Moreover, the GHG emissions MRV system has not been fully operational, as not all of the required bylaws had been adopted by the end of 2023. Those include the Rulebook on GHG emissions MRV that regulates the content of monitoring plans submitted by companies.[92] In its 2024 Serbia Report, the European Commission noted several positive developments, such as the adoption of the Rulebook, as well as the development of an IT system to facilitate the issuance of GHG permits.[93] The Report highlights that Serbia is taking steps to introduce its own carbon tax by 2027 aligned with the EU ETS.

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