



## DEVELOPMENT EMERGENCY MODALITY

### Joint Programme 2022 Annual Progress Report

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**UNCT/MCO:** Serbia

**Reporting Period:** 1 January - 31 December 2022

**JP title:** Extending Social Protection to families in Serbia with enhanced shock- responsiveness

**Thematic SDG Areas:** Decent jobs & universal social protection;

**PUNOS:** UNICEF, UNFPA

**Stakeholder partner:** National Government; Sub-national Governments; Civil Society Organizations; Humanitarian actors;

**Gender Marker:** Gender-responsive (for example, the JP aimed to respond to specific gendered needs, such as linking social assistance with GBV response services or maternal health support)

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#### Annual Progress

**Overall JP self-assessment of 2022 progress:**

On-track (expected annual results-achieved)

##### Overall Progress

Output 1.1: More timely and reliable data on the impact of the global crisis on the most vulnerable population groups will be available.

All three PUNOs conducted mixed methods research to collect timely and relevant information on the impact of the newest global crisis on the most vulnerable families with children, older persons, refugees, asylum seekers. UNICEF conducted a quantitative survey using a combination of computer-assisted telephone interviews and online interviews that focused on the socio-economic situation of households with children. Moreover, the survey aimed to show how the ongoing Covid-19 and Ukraine crisis are impacting households in terms of consumption, income, employment, and poverty status. The survey was done on a sample of some 1,800 households with children from across Serbia. Inter alia, it highlighted the nature of coping mechanism employed by households with children, changes in wellbeing and subjective vulnerability, as well as the effectiveness of existing social protection schemes in protecting the most vulnerable parts of the population from these shocks. Preliminary findings were presented to stakeholders in December 2022, while the final study will be completed and published in January 2023.

UNFPA produced qualitative data to collect insights on vulnerable groups' lived experiences and their existing financial, social, and human resources, as well as the data on how the ongoing crises impacts their living conditions as individuals within the households and the community. Focus group discussions were organized in six municipalities with the most vulnerable groups in Serbia: families with children, single parents with children, beneficiaries of cash social assistance, and older persons. The total number of participants was 105, out of which 60 were female (57,14%), and 45 were male (42,86%). Moreover, through organizing focus group discussions with some of the most vulnerable groups in Serbian society which were affected by the crisis – refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons, UNHCR provided ample, qualitative, and timely data in the data collection part.

Output 1.2: Poverty trajectories are available.

UNICEF and UNFPA worked with partners from the UNU MERIT and the Center for Democracy Foundation on preparing poverty

projections assuming different potential implications of the COVID-19 and Ukrainian crisis. The effects on child and older persons' poverty were particularly stressed. The estimations relied on official statistical data and three scenarios are being developed based on different assumptions about the changes in leading factors. The preliminary scenarios were presented to stakeholders in December 2022 and following their inputs, the final study will be presented to the public in January 2023.

Output 1.3. Increased consultation with stakeholders on new poverty findings.

UNICEF and UNFPA, with the active support from UNHCR, organized a policy workshop in December 2022 in Belgrade where key stakeholders from Government, the UN, the Academia, and civil society were presented with preliminary findings from the project's outputs. Policy workshop concluded that: (i) the adequacy and coverage of social protection benefits need to improve; (ii) the social protection system needs further strengthening; (iii) coordination between social protection and emergency preparedness systems need to be facilitated; and (iv) appropriate finances must be available to facilitate the adaptation of programmes and systems.

Output 2.1. Together with the Red Cross of Serbia, UNICEF and UNFPA provided one-off humanitarian cash transfers to 175 vulnerable households. UNFPA assisted a total of 114 individual beneficiaries, living in 75 households-59 were female (51.75%) and 55 male (48.25%) in rural and remote areas in five municipalities. UNICEF assisted a total of 378 individual beneficiaries, living in 100 households, out of which 230 were children.

### **SDG Acceleration progress towards the SDGs, focusing on the main SDG targets**

All three PUNOs collected quantitative data, prepared poverty projections, increased consultation with stakeholders, and delivered humanitarian cash transfers, and thus contributed to the following SDG targets cited in the JP's ProDoc:

- SDG 1 – No poverty (1.3, linked to indicator 1.3.1)
- SDG 2 - Zero hunger (2.1, linked to indicators 2.1.2, 2.1.2a, 2.1.2b, 2.1.2c and 2.1.2d)
- SDG 5 - Gender equality (5.c)
- SDG 10 - Reduced inequalities (10.4 linked to indicator 10.4.1)
- SDG 16 – Peace, justice and accountable institutions (16.6 linked to indicator 16.6.1)

### **Constraints that were encountered and any adjustments that were made to strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of the JP and the coherence and coordination of UN system support.**

When providing one-off humanitarian cash transfer for households with older persons over the age of 75, UNFPA selected the targeted five municipalities due to several key indicators showing the economic vulnerability of specifically older population: 1) all five are officially classified as devastated communities, 2) all five municipalities have high ageing index, and 3) all five have a high depopulation rate which especially affects rural communities where in many cases there are only older households left in villages. Mapping of these municipalities helped reach those farthest away. However, during the mapping process it was determined that in e.g., rural areas of Zaječar, the assigned number of two and three-person households within the requested criteria, cannot be reached due to the simple lack of households fitting all the criteria. The challenge faced here was related to the short timeframe for an even more detailed mapping of individuals farthest away. This meant that the number of single person households was increased.

Another challenge faced was related to the short timeframe to organize focus group discussions, however this was resolved with the support of UNHCR's implementing partners. UNHCR's previous work and regular focus groups helped in mapping the ongoing needs and issues related to accessing rights and services, which helped UNHCR to quickly prepare and conduct fruitful discussions in focus groups organized within the JP.

### **Next steps, scaling and sustainability [up to half a page]**

PUNOs are regularly cooperating with partners in Government to liaise key project findings and recommendations and streamline outputs into ongoing and newly developed measures. Of note, is the December 2022 policy workshop and its conclusions aimed at supporting the Government of Serbia improve the shock-responsiveness of the country's social protection system. Moreover, PUNOs are working with members of the Steering Committee on developing a draft call-to-action to ensure sustainable follow-up on the recommendations made by this programme.

In order to contribute to sustainable follow-up, it is essential to continue mapping individuals who were functional until the crisis, and did not belong to a vulnerable group, but then became endangered due to changed circumstances. It is this change of setting that UNFPA together with its partners and relevant stakeholders will continue tackling in future, primarily when it comes to older persons in rural and remote areas. Moreover, the outreach and advocacy would be focused on both national level (through amending the Law on social protection and the Law on the financial support for families with children) and local self-governments with the goal to improve the position of older persons in Serbia.

UNHCR together with UNICEF and UNFPA, is ready to contribute to further steps and a sustainable follow-up through joint work on assessing the financial needs for realizing the recommendations, as well as outreach and advocacy focused on both relevant Government ministries and local self-governments, in order to provide for the application of recommendations given.

## Strategic Partnerships and Communications

### Explain how diverse stakeholders were engaged with the JP

The Government was involved since the onset of the programme. The Steering Committee was co-Chaired by the Advisor to the Prime Minister on SDGs and the UN RC, with participation of various line ministries, Statistical Office, Standing conference of towns and municipalities, etc. They were kept informed throughout to the project implementation. Methodology for the development of poverty projection projections, surveys and distribution of cash-assistance methodology was consulted with all SC members. Red Cross was a close partner in the distribution of cash assistance, in collaboration with local institutions. Furthermore, all partners were engaged in the Policy Workshop that served to prepare a list of recommendations for the Government to be addressed for strengthening the social protection system in Serbia.

#### Key meetings and events organized

JP steering committee/ programme board meeting	Strategic partners/ donors	Kick-off meeting event
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## Priority Cross-cutting Issues

### Cross-cutting results/issues

When conducting the quantitative survey, all data processing and analysis feature cross-tabulations of all questions with relevant socio-demographic variables, including gender disaggregated data comparisons between subsamples defined by categories of socio-demographic variables and graphical presentation of results.

When conducting the focus group discussions, UNFPA addressed the gender sensitive approach at the very first step when listening to the difficulties of all four target groups. Conclusions and recommendations further contribute to the improvement (and where needed – development) of the economic situation of the most vulnerable groups, their financial inclusion, empowerment of women (mainly single parents with children) as well as achieving greater equality in terms of accessing the equal rights and services, including those related to social protection, healthcare, and access to the labour market.

Moreover, a gender sensitive approach was addressed when providing one-off humanitarian cash transfer for over 100 households with children and 75 households with older persons. The criteria for the selection of beneficiaries has further addressed the principle of leaving no one behind by selecting older persons over the age of 75; older persons living in single-person households or in older couple-only households, particularly in rural and remote areas; materially vulnerable older persons (beneficiaries of cash social assistance, beneficiaries of agricultural pensions, and older persons without income – particularly older women engaged in domestic work who neither have a pension nor receive cash social assistance), as well as vulnerable households with children. In the final gender distribution of UNFPA provided cash assistance, there were 59 female (51.75%) and 55 were male (48.25%) beneficiaries, thus achieving the gender balance.

UNHCR collected timely data during focus group discussions with vulnerable groups, relevant in regards of realizing the following SDGs – No poverty (1), Gender equality (5), Reduced inequalities (10), Peace, justice and accountable institutions (16). It includes conclusions and recommendations that may contribute to the advancement the economic situation of vulnerable groups, their financial inclusion, empowerment of women, as well as achieving greater equality in terms of accessing rights and services, including those related to social protection and assistance, healthcare, and access to the labor market.

### How did the JP apply the Gender Marker

The JP is Gender-responsive (for example, the JP aimed to respond to specific gendered needs, such as linking social assistance with GBV response services or maternal health support). Evidence, data collection and analysis (e.g. gender assessments of programmes; policy briefs, costing for scale-up of social services);Policy dialogues, advocacy (e.g. direct inputs to national policies, strategies, laws, including women's and girls' rights groups in coordination mechanisms);Design of new gender-transformative programmes (e.g. new cash transfers to women-led households);

**JP address the below cross-cutting issues and principles of leaving no one behind**

Human Rights	Persons with disabilities	Youth	Environmental and social standards
Yes	No	No	Yes

**Contribution to enhancing SDG Financing**

Drafted a bill, strategy, and/or approved a law increasing the fiscal space for the policy in focus	Produced financing, costing, diagnostic and feasibility analyses as a basis to invest or increase spending on the SDGs	Improved efficiency (cost savings) in the management of programmes/schemes	Improved effectiveness (value for money; i.e. social impact of \$1 spent) of spending	Drafted policies/regulatory frameworks or developed tools to incentivize private sector investment on the SDGs	Structured new financial instruments (public, private or blended) to leverage additional funding
No	Yes	No	No	No	No

**How and in which area your JP contributed to enhancing SDG financing**

The prepared poverty projections do not include any costing. Nonetheless, they clearly present the needs that would be for increased financing in the social protection schemes based on different scenario results.