

H.E. Ms. Slavica Djukic-Deanovic
Minister without Portfolio in charge of Demography
and Population Policies - Serbia

Dear Madam Chair,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my immense pleasure to be with you here today. Firstly, I wish to convey gratitude to the UNFPA for inviting me, mainly because meetings like this one provide an excellent platform for fostering dialogue and exchanging experiences related to demographics and population policies. I also look forward to sharing with you the activities the Serbian government has undertaken in this field.

In 2016 the Republic of Serbia faced the lowest birth rate in our recorded history. That fact encouraged the Government to put supporting prenatal and family care policies as one of its top priorities and the Cabinet for Demography and Population Policy was formed to lead this effort. We set ourselves a clear target to stop negative demographic trends, being aware that this task could not be accomplished with hasty political decisions. We gathered all relevant stakeholders, including the professional and academic community, local self-government representatives, non-governmental organizations and the media. As the result, the Government adopted the new Birth Promotion Strategy in March this year.

The new document has considered long-term health investment benefits on growth and development of future generations. It draws data from the 2011 census and acknowledges results of demographic research conducted over the period of nine years. The strategy is aligned with the latest Law on Financial Support for Families with Children and considers two important topics: caring for the elderly and migration management. It has eight specific targets and aims to increase the fertility rate from 1.46 to 1.85 in the next 10 to 15 years, leading to the favourable fertility rate of 2.1 in the future.

The Government has already started to work actively on meeting all targets of the strategy. For example, the new set of financial assistance has been designed to reduce economic costs of childbearing.

Starting from July, parents are entitled to receive single payments of 100.000 Serbian dinars for their first child, 10.000 a month over two years for the second, and 12 or 18.000 for a third or fourth child over ten years.

The Strategy has also recognized the importance of sexual and reproductive health and considered the key challenges in this field: unreliable contraceptive methods, the growing number of unplanned pregnancies and abortions, high-risk sexual activities of adolescents and youth.

All of its targets related to reproductive health have been aligned with previously adopted (2017) “National Programme for safeguarding and improving sexual and reproductive health of Serbian citizens,” which had been developed with UNFPA support and presented during the World Contraception Day 2018. The Republic of Serbia is one of the first countries in the world to fully align national sexual and reproductive health priorities with the international standards and documents such as Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health (2016-2030) and the WHO Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health: Towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Europe – leaving no one behind. The Strategy also proposed a set of effective prevention, education and counselling recommendations to raise awareness on healthy sexual behaviours and reproductive health.

With great support from the UNFPA, my Cabinet has conducted research to overview and understand issues parents and their employers face in an attempt to reconcile work and parenthood. The results of this research have already been translated into practice through newly established family-friendly awards for companies in Serbia that provide a supportive environment for parents and their children.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to highlight migrations as yet another challenge Serbia faces along with its neighbours. Despite global population growth trends, the Republic of Serbia is faced with depopulation of approximately 16.000 people a year. An average age of a Serbian migrant is estimated at 29 years with every fifth being either a college or University graduate. The causes of population decline do not only reflect the falling birth-rate and higher mortality, but also migrations as one of its leading causes.

At the beginning of this year, my Cabinet has conducted research on student migrations aiming to collect reliable data needed to inform policies and activities for enabling a supportive environment for young people to stay or return to Serbia after completing their studies abroad. The results suggested one-third of the students plan to emigrate from Serbia as soon as they have completed studies. As

the main reasons for emigration, students listed the lack of opportunities to work in their line of professional expertise, low-paid jobs, and low standard of living.

Along with the prevention of negative demographic trends, the Republic of Serbia recognizes migration management of young and highly-educated people as one of its top priorities.

We are aware that there are no simple solutions, yet the consequences are complex and far-reaching. However, as Confucius has taught us: “success depends upon previous preparation and without such preparation, there is sure to be a failure.”

As the chairwoman of the Inter-ministerial working group for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the Republic of Serbia, I am determined to align our population policy work to targets defined by Sustainable development goals. Agenda 2030 provides possibilities for sustainable development that reconcile the needs of the present with the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, ensuring no one is left behind. I hope this meeting will bring us a step closer to reaching that objective.

Thank you!