

**Fourth Report on the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on
Ageing 2017-2021**

Summary

Quantitative data were collected through a review of the latest publicly available documents and research, listed in the Annex, as well as directly from official representatives of various institutions and organisations. Qualitative data were collected via direct contact with the representatives of relevant public institutions, civil society organisations, as well as older people's organisations. A selection was made among all relevant collocutors who answered specifically designed questions within their areas of work and priorities, all in line with the Guidelines for National Reports on Ageing (using United Nations methodology). All the participants in this process that answered questions and provided information for the Report are listed in the Annex.

Over the last five years, Serbia has made considerable progress in many areas related to the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Regional Implementation Strategy (MIPAA/RIS). From the perspective of public institutions and legislators, it is important to stress that the perception of older people as a homogenous population has changed, and that new planning documents, but also concrete activities, on supporting the participation of older people in the labour market or overcoming digital gap and discrimination show that the image of older people has been changing and has been more in-depth, and that older people are no longer reduced to the part of the society that needs solely to be provided for and protected. The government has adopted several significant strategic documents that recognise older people, taking into account gender equality and the situation of older women. The number of services for older people has increased. Special focus has been made on promoting and developing intergenerational cooperation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, older people were identified as a population at risk, but there are also numerous examples of well-designed volunteering activities of older people, as well as special assistance provided by the government to them. During this entire period, it has been demonstrated that community services represent a very important segment of formal support to older people, especially in rural and remote areas, and that their further development should cover not only expanding the offer, but also increasing the availability.

The Ombudsman and Commissioner for the Protection of Equality have had considerable focus on the rights of older citizens, both acting on reports made to them and on own initiative, with considerable results from projects and studies implemented by these bodies. Simultaneously, the civil sector has continued to further build a strong advocacy network, which not only represents the interests of older persons, but also actively involves them in its work, both in local and national, and regional and global processes, such as the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) or the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals. There are also good synergies here with public institutions and government representatives. The civil sector has in this period contributed also with a considerable number of studies on social exclusion of older persons, the digital gap, violence against older people, and intergenerational exchange, and some of this research has been conducted with support from UNFPA and the Republic of Serbia Government.

The Republic of Serbia needs to invest strongly in further development of intergenerational cooperation and exchange, full respect for human rights for all generations, as well as access to

necessary services, but also the labour market. Simultaneously, a strategically planned integration of long-term care services is required, in a system that will be easier to coordinate, more efficient in providing services to a greater number of beneficiaries – especially in areas where these services are not harder to access – which will fully recognise the crucial role of informal caregivers in providing long-term care. Finally, much stronger investment in the strategic orientation towards the development of geriatric medicine in the Republic of Serbia – a higher number of geriatricians, a higher number of geriatric nurses, as well as professional caregivers is required, considering all the projections on demographic ageing of the population in the Republic of Serbia, and recognising that life and work age have become longer, and that this must be followed with stronger focus on health, social, psychological and overall welfare of persons in their later years.

Part I

General Information

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4. Name, reference, and date of adoption or status of preparation of national strategy, action plan or similar policy document on ageing (please attach relevant documents in the annex).

The National Strategy on Ageing was adopted on 7 September 2006¹, and its evaluation was completed in late 2015. This is when it was decided not to adopt a new strategy, but to continue with the implementation of the existing, using the defined strategic objectives, considering they are in line with the objectives set by the European Union by 2022.

All defined strategic directions, including recommendations for setting future priorities, were evaluated as suitable for the coming period:

- Poverty reduction
- Respect for the sustainability principle
- Adaptation of the pension and disability insurance system
- Defining and establishing legal framework for ageing and practically connecting and developing long-term care services

¹ Official Gazette RS, No. 76/06, https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/Nacionalna%20strategija%20o%20starenju_1.pdf

- Strengthening non-governmental organisations and private partners in the long-term care process
- Increased availability of lifelong learning for older persons
- Improved living environment and safety of older persons

Prevention and protection of older persons from any form of discrimination and violence

Anti-Discrimination Strategy: the Republic of Serbia, by adopting the Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the period 2013-2018, recognised older persons as one of the five vulnerable social groups at increased risk from discrimination. Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy provides eight measures explicitly focusing on older persons. The analysis of the Strategy during the reporting period revealed that one measure was implemented (12.5%) and four measures were not (50%), two measures were partially implemented (25%), while there are no data on the implementation for one measure (12.5%). Related to the measures on improving regulations, by end of 2018, it was recorded that there were no improvements in the strategic framework, laws or regulations with the aim of prevention and protection of older persons against discrimination. In relation to measures for the systemic prevention of discrimination and improved antidiscriminatory practices, a prevention measure was implemented – campaign to adopt positive/affirmative social attitudes towards older people, but no concrete measures in local communities were implemented.

1. National ageing situation

Demographic data: In the period 2002-2020, the share of persons under 15 years of age in the total population decreased from 16.1% to 14.3%, whereas at the same time, the share of persons over 65 years of age increased from 16.6% to 21.1%. The ageing index is 144.05.² In 2020, average age in the Republic of Serbia was 43.3 years and the ageing index 144.7. Until 2041, according to low projections, the share of young people will decrease from 14.4% to 11.7%, while the share of older persons will increase from 17.3% in 2011 to 25.2%. It is expected that the oldest population, over 80 years of age, will experience the fastest growth, from 3.5% in 2011 to 7.8% in 2041.³ The Republic of Serbia's birth-rates have over the last six decades been below replacement level, and the mortality of the population over 50 years of age has been minimally reduced compared to this trend in the majority of European countries.⁴ According to the 2019 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), 23.8% of older persons in the Republic of Serbia live in single-person households.⁵ In the future, growth in the share of older households is expected, as well as demand for social protection services.⁶

² Population estimates 2020, Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, 2021, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2021/Pdf/G202111181.pdf>

³ Population projections of the Republic of Serbia 2011–2041, Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, <https://www.mdpp.gov.rs/latinica/demografija-projekcije-stanovnistva.php>

⁴ https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/kljueni_demografski_izazovi_srbije_i_njihove_buduce_tendencije.pdf

⁵ https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show/.do?dataset=_Ivps30&lang=en

⁶ Welfare state in the Western Balkans, CSP, 2017 https://futureofthewelfarestate.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Drzava_blagostanja_u_zemljama_Zapadnog_Balkana_Programsko_stanoviste.pdf

Rough estimates based on various data sources indicate an average annual net negative migration rate of at least 15,000 persons in the most vital and key age for reproduction.⁷ Within the country, migration is ongoing from rural to urban areas and from less developed to more developed areas, with movements of younger, work-age population from areas with less opportunities for employment to more urban areas. During 2020, 109,747 persons moved permanently from one place to another within the Republic of Serbia, and their average age was 34.7 years (35.2 years for men and 34.4 years for women).⁸

In 2020, life expectancy at birth was 71.4 years for men, 77.2 years for women and 74.2 years for the general population. Life expectancy at 65 was 13.3 years for men, 16.2 years for women and 14.8 years for the general population in 2020. Finally, in 2020, healthy life years (HLY) were estimated at 67 for men, 69 for women and 68 for the general population.

Regarding functionality, approximately one-third of older people (31.5%) have severe difficulties in performing daily household activities (preparing food, light or heavy housework, shopping, and similar), and nearly one in ten (9.5%) have serious difficulties in performing personal care activities (dressing, undressing, using the toilet, bathing and showering and similar). Much more often, women, persons over 75, persons living outside urban areas, persons of the lowest education level, as well as the poorest individuals were limited in performing daily household and personal care activities. In the population of older persons that experiences difficulties in performing household activities, 29.7% have no need for assistance, 33.3% receive enough assistance, while unfulfilled need for assistance is reported by over one-third (37.0%).⁹

Almost one-third of the population over 65 (31.9%) assess their own health as very good and good (considerably more men – 38.4%, age groups of 65 to 74 years – 37.1%, from Belgrade – 40.6% and urban settlements – 37.3%), a little over one-third of the population (41.3%) as average, and one-quarter (26.8%) as poor or very poor. The population in South and East Serbia (30.7%), as well as the population in non-urban settlements (31.4%) assess their health as poor in a significantly higher percent. This is an improvement in general health indicators compared to 2013, when one-fifth of the older population (22.4%) assessed their health as good or very good, but the Republic of Serbia is still below EU countries average, where, according to EUROSTAT data, more than one-third of the population in 28 EU countries of 65 years and older (42.4%) assessed their health as good or very good in 2019, and 14.4% as poor. The most frequent condition in the older population, during the year prior to the study, was high blood pressure (63.8%), followed by lower back pain disorder (32.2%), coronary disease (24.7%), neck pain disorders (23.3%), high blood fats (21.0%), diabetes (18.6%), arthrosis (18.0%), and urinary incontinence (10.4%), while the shares of others were under 10%. Functionally limited walking is experienced by nearly one-half of the older population (44.8%), functionally limited eyesight 40.7% and hearing 45.9%, while one in four older persons (25.8%) has severe difficulties walking, 8.7% severe difficulties with eyesight and 13.9% severe difficulties with hearing. It should be noted that

⁷ Key demographic challenges of Serbia and their future tendencies, Demographic Review, 2017
https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/ključni_demografski_izazovi_srbije_i_njihove_buduce_tendencije.pdf

⁸ <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2021/pdf/G20201189.pdf>

⁹ Research on the health of the population of Serbia 2019., Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, 2021,
<https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2021/pdf/G20216003.pdf>

during the last ten years in the Republic of Serbia, there were only eight subspecialisations in geriatric medicine, which, considering the fast increase in the share of older people in the population should be taken as warning.

Economy and fiscal stability: According to the data provided by the Ministry of Finance, after a growth of 4.3% in 2019, COVID-19 pandemic caused a recession of 0.9% in 2020, which was better than the earlier projected drop of 1.8%. The Republic of Serbia Government mitigated the recession with high fiscal stimulants (approximately 13% of GDP) by delaying payment of taxes, increasing expenditures (~8% of GDP) and guarantees (~4.8% of GDP). The largest part of the incentives package (7.4% of GDP) went to business entities, thus avoiding large reductions in employment, and actually increasing the percentage of employees by 1.9% at annual level. Subsidies for salaries and financial support to citizens were provided in order to prevent rise in poverty, which is estimated to have practically stagnated at 17.4% in 2020, compared to 17.3% in 2019.¹⁰ For persons over 65 years, special financial assistance was paid several times during 2020 and 2021 (including the RSD equivalent of 100 EUR for all adult citizens who applied for it, 5,000 RSD specifically targeting older citizens in 2020, as well as close to 110 EUR in two payments during 2019). According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), it is expected that the Republic of Serbia GDP will rise to 6% in 2021.¹¹

Compared to May 2020, average gross nominal wage for May 2021 was higher by 10.1% and real wage by 6.6%. In May 2021, 1.17 average wages were required for an average consumer basket, while the minimum basket required 0.60 of the average wage.¹² Owing to primarily low inflation pressures and stable movements on the foreign exchange market, as well as good fiscal results, inflation remains low.¹³

Social context: Negative migration rate and migration contribute to demographic ageing and increase the impact on overall wellbeing, especially taking into account the fact that mainly younger and work-age people migrate. Emigration also accelerates the breaking down of the traditional multi-generational family model, influences the increased share of older persons in the household and creates higher demand for long-term care services, which are normally provided within the extended family.¹⁴ Uneven depopulation creates numerous problems for areas with higher emigration rates, especially in the south and the east of the country, which leads to reduced infrastructure and availability of basic services, such as health and social protection, but also groceries, transport, etc. These are additional challenges for the population staying in areas with negative migration rates, where it is more difficult for the ageing population to access major resources and key services, which are of increasing importance to them.¹⁵

¹⁰ https://www.nbs.rs/export/sites/NBS_site/documents-eng/finansijska-stabilnost/presentation_invest.pdf

¹¹ EBRD upgrades Serbia's 2021 GDP growth projection to 6%, SEE News, <https://seenews.com/news/ebrd-upgrades-serbias-2021-gdp-growth-projection-to-6-745897>

¹² Consumer basket, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Communications, <https://mtt.gov.rs/informacije/potrosacka-korpa/>

¹³ Revised fiscal strategy for 2020 with projections for 2021. and 2022. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/extfile/sr/423624/revidirana-fiskalna-strategija-za-2020-sa-projekcijama-za-2021-22-0187-cyr.zip>

¹⁴ Welfare state in the Western Balkans, CSP, 2017 https://futureofthewelfarestate.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Drzava_blagostanja_u_zemljama_Zapadnog_Balkana_Programsko_stanoviste.pdf

¹⁵ Older persons in rural areas, 2016, Crveni krst Srbije, <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/1919/polozaj-starijih-na-selu-web.pdf>

In 2019, at-risk-of-poverty rate was 23.2%, which was lower by 1.1% compared to 2018. The at-risk-of-poverty rate, but also social exclusion, was at 31.7%, which is lower by 2.6% compared to 2018. By age, persons younger than 18 were at the highest risk of poverty – 28.9%, as well as persons of 18-24 age group – 25.6%. The lowest at-risk-of-poverty rate was for persons over 65 – 21.1%.¹⁶ However, when it comes to at-risk-of-poverty rates, the older population in the Republic of Serbia is closer to the younger population (at-risk-of-poverty rate of 23.4% for the population over 75 years of age), probably as a result of more expressed needs for appropriate healthcare than is the case with the younger older population, which also entails higher financial costs.

According to the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance data from January 2021, average pension amounts to 29,378 RSD (approximately 250 EUR), while average amount of agricultural pension was 11,896 RSD (approximately 101 EUR). This means that for a high number of pensioners (approximately 75%), their monthly income is lower than the amount of the minimum consumer basket (in September 2020 – 37,741.06 or 321 EUR). This represents a direct threat to economic security in old age and makes older persons dependent on family members and the community.¹⁷

Policy: In this period, four important strategic documents were adopted, including the Mental Health Protection Programme in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2019-2026¹⁸, Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disability in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2024, adopted in 2020, Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2021-2025 adopted in 2021¹⁹, as well as the Social Card Law.²⁰

Human rights: According to the annual report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality²¹, the highest number of complaints refers to discrimination on the grounds of disability, age and sex. Years as grounds for discrimination came second by frequency of complaints in 2016, 2017, and 2018. In 2019, this grounds for discrimination was in the fourth place by frequency, but it was stated in approximately 10% of the total number of complaints, the highest number of which referred to discrimination of persons over 65 years old. In 2020, discrimination on the grounds of on age was the second most common cause with 14.8% of the total number of complaints. It should be borne in mind that the number of complaints does not represent a realistic situation of discrimination of older persons, considering that the majority of discrimination cases remains unreported. Older persons often do not recognise discrimination and do not report it, due to lack of information, lack of understanding of the meaning of discrimination and protection

¹⁶ Poverty and social inequality, 2019, Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-US/vesti/20201015-siromastvo-i-socijalna-nejednakost-2019/?s=0102>

¹⁷ Special Report on Discrimination against Older Citizens, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, 2021, http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PZR_Poseban-izvestaj-%D0%BE-diskriminaciji-starijih-gradjana_6.5.2021_FINAL.docx

¹⁸ http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2019_12/t12_0013.htm

¹⁹ <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/dokumenti/ostalo/sektor-za-socijalnu-zastitu/strategija-za-spreccavanje-i-borbu-protiv-rodno-zasnovanog-nasilja-prema-zenama-i-nasilja-u-porodici-za-period-2021-2025-godine>

²⁰ <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/zakoni/2021/95-21%20-%20lat..pdf>

²¹ <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Poverenik-za-zastitu-ravnopravnosti-Godisnji-izvestaj-za-2020.pdf>

mechanisms, but also due to the fact that because of their situation they are often forced to endure certain behaviours because they depend on others or because they are ashamed to report them. Age-based discrimination often occurs combined with some other personal characteristics – disability, health status, sex, etc. and this is particularly the case with discrimination of older persons with disabilities in the area of service provision and/or use of public spaces. Discrimination of older persons is an intersectional phenomenon, conditioned also by the situation of certain categories of the population, regardless of age. For example, discrimination against women is particularly pronounced in the labour market, in the sphere of economy and education, in participation in decision making, with the presence of gender-based violence against women. This situation that women are in during their lives inevitably leads to a less favourable situation and discrimination when they are older, where it is an amplifier of pre-existing discrimination for some of the groups within the population of older women. In addition to gender-related differences between men and women, which are reflected at an earlier age, there are also some other differences among older persons. Older persons are not a homogenous group with equal needs and opportunities – there are differences between persons living in urban and in rural areas, between older, those above 80, and younger older persons, those in institutional care and those living alone, etc.²²

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality also conducts research on the situation of certain social groups. This research establishes the position and indicates areas in which support needs to be provided to certain social groups, creating measures and enabling the fulfilment of all the rights in full scope. In cooperation between the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and the Red Cross of Serbia, studies *Ageing in Cities – Challenges of the Modern Society* (2018) and *Position of Older Women in Serbia* (2017) were conducted.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality also conducted research on the *Position of Older people in Serbia – Social Context, Data Review and Research Results* (end of 2020). This study is an integral part of the *Special Report on Discrimination against Older Citizens*, which was submitted by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality to the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in May 2021, and points to the different manifestations of discrimination against older citizens, the heterogeneity of this population and factors contributing to the specific and increased vulnerability of some of its members, like the “older older” people, persons with disabilities, etc. The report provides recommendations for improving the situation in the area of social protection and healthcare, combating poverty, protection from violence and discrimination, acting in crises, as well as further activities on creating measures to fulfil the rights and meet the needs of older citizens in full scope, especially at the level of local communities.

UN Agenda 2030: In 2015, the Republic of Serbia Government established an Interministerial Working Group for the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda by 2030, composed of high-level representatives of 27 line ministries and other institutions. The tasks of this entity include the coordination of activities related to the

²² Special report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality on discrimination against senior citizens http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PZR_Poseban-izvestaj-%D0%BE-diskriminaciji-starijih-gradjana_6.5.2021_FINAL.docx

Agenda 2030 of all relevant ministries, monitoring its implementation, proposing the adoption of the National Sustainable Development Strategy with a financial plan for the integration of individual strategies and harmonising efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), statistical monitoring of objectives, submitting reports on their implementation and continued information sharing with UN representatives in Serbia and the UN system. Additionally, in 2017, the National Assembly of Serbia established a focus group for the development of mechanisms for monitoring SDG implementation. This mechanism monitors and supports the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Furthermore, the “localisation” of SDGs has been introduced by including SDGs in local policies. This work has largely depended on the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM), which coordinates the activities of local self-governments. The implementation of the Agenda 2030 was joined in by other civil society organisations and different initiatives at the national and local levels.

United Nations human rights recommendations: in 2014, the Republic of Serbia Government formed a Council for monitoring the implementation of UN Human Rights Mechanisms, which is in charge of reviewing and monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of United Nations human rights treaty bodies and recommendations received by Serbia under the Universal Periodic Review.

For more efficient monitoring of the recommendations, the Council has developed the UN Recommendations Monitoring Plan, which contains unified records of all recommendations by UN human rights mechanisms, activities undertaken towards fulfilling them, participating institutions, indicators measuring the degree to which the recommendations have been fulfilled, links with UN Agenda 2030 SDGs, deadlines for fulfilling the recommendations, as well as a column for remarks by civil society organisations (CSOs) which have submitted shadow reports to UN human rights mechanisms and other relevant actors.

The Plan currently contains 392 received and accepted recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms, which are being implemented. Out of the total number of recommendations, 4 relate to improving the situation of older persons provided by the CEDAW committee (in 2019), and 42 recommendations to Serbia within the Third Universal Periodic Review indirectly refer to improving the situation of older persons within the recommendations related to domestic preventing violence and gender-based violence, promoting gender equality, and enforcing antidiscrimination policies regarding vulnerable groups at high risk of discrimination.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) plays an important role in monitoring achievements regarding SDGs. It has established a web-based platform currently enabling the monitoring of 83 of 244 indicators monitoring the implementation of SDGs. In July 2018, Republic of Serbia Government submitted its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), presenting all achievements in the implementation of sustainable development goals, with special focus on local communities and youth.

2. Method

Quantitative information was collected through a review of the latest publicly available documents and research, the list of which is provided in the Annex, as well as directly from official representatives of various institutions and organisations.

Qualitative information was collected through direct contact with representatives of relevant public institutions, CSOs as well as older people's organisations. A selection of all relevant collocutors was made, who replied to specially designed questions from their area of work and priorities, in line with UNECE reporting guidelines. All the participants in the process who answered the questions and provided information for the report are listed in the Annex.

Part II: 20 years of MIPAA/RIS

Reports by the Republic of Serbia

2007 Country report Serbia:

https://unece.org/DAM/pau/docs/age/2007/AGE_2007_MiCA07_CntrRprtSRB_e.pdf

2012 Country report Serbia:

https://unece.org/DAM/pau/age/country_rpts/SRB_report_last.pdf

2017 Country report Serbia:

https://unece.org/DAM/pau/age/country_rpts/2017/SRB_National_Report_for_the_3rd_Review_MIPAA.pdf

1. Recognizing the potential of older persons

Developing and implementing socially responsible and future-oriented economic and financial strategies

The latest, 2021 amendments to the Law on Personal Income Tax²³, in the part related to incentives for older entrepreneurs, stipulate the age of taxpayers and their ability to work as some of the corrective elements when determining the amount of flat-rate income for payers of tax on income from self-employment, who pay taxes on a flat-rate basis. In this way, for entrepreneurs paying flat-rate taxes over 55 years of age, as well as those over 60 years of age, registered for certain activities, the application of stipulated coefficients reduced the baseline for the calculation of the amount of flat-rate income, which also serves as tax base for income from self-employment for these entrepreneurs.

Regular and adequate income is one of the foundations of security in older age. In the Republic of Serbia, the coverage with pensions has been continuously increasing in the recent past:²⁴

²³ Official Gazette RS, No. 24/01...44/21, <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon-o-porezu-na-dohodak-gradjana.html>

²⁴ Source: Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance

Year	Old-age pension		Disability pension		Family pension		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Children
2017	455,078	377,934	106,797	66,227	4,891	223,564	8,932
2018	471,358	397,119	105,202	66,491	5,110	223,795	8,403
2019	488,418	417,566	103,819	66,656	5,345	225,610	8,053
2020	500,206	434,555	101,356	66,381	5,566	224,162	7,535

The number of pension beneficiaries by insurance, according to data for June 2021:

Employed	Self-employed	Farmers	Total
1,414,617	102,486	156,034	1,673,119

The number of beneficiaries by type of entitlement for June 2021:

Old-age	Disability	Family	Total
1,080,732	257,032	335,355	1,673,119

Average pension by type of entitlement and category of insurance for June 2021:

	Employed	Self-employed	Farmers	Total
Old-age pension	34,309	30,391	13,043	31,617
Disability pension	28,297	27,036	13,418	27,491
Family pension	24,689	21,466	9,298	23,635

The ratio of the number of insurance payers to the number of pensioners in June 2021:

	Number of insurance payers	Number of insurance beneficiaries	Ratio
30 June 2021	1,673,119	2,747,172	1:1.6

Pension and disability insurance in the Republic of Serbia is based on intergenerational solidarity and the system of covering pension costs with current income from pension and disability insurance contributions, according to which the employed finance pensions of existing beneficiaries and in this way acquire the same entitlement. However, in light of demographic

changes, the sustainability of this model of pension insurance in its current form is uncertain, so the pension amounts have been reduced compared to the period when the system was established, when three or four insurance payers would pay the insurance amount needed for one pensioner.

This also affects the financial security of older persons and leads them to risk of poverty, but also impacts the sustainability of the pension, or public finance system, having in mind that the missing funds for the payment of pensions are subsidised from the Republic of Serbia Budget. The Republic of Serbia Budget System Law stipulates a special fiscal rule on the sustainable level of pension costs, which amount up to 11% of GDP. Starting with 2017 onward, and as a result of fiscal consolidation, total expenditures on pensions have not exceeded the level of 11% of GDP, and any fiscal opportunities created throughout the duration of the fiscal consolidation programme were used to pay one-off assistance to pensioners, and sustainably increase pensions. After the expiry of the fiscal consolidation programme, with the aim to improve predictability and sustainable pension increase, the “Swiss formula” has been used for pension calculation.

The Law on Amendments to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance²⁵ stipulates that pensions, starting with the pension for the month of January of the current year, are aligned in the percentage representing the sum of the half of percentages of consumer price changes and the half of percentages of average wage without taxes and contributions in the period of 12 months counting backwards starting with the month of June of previous calendar year, in relation to the period of 12 months prior to the stated period.

With the aim to increase the sustainability of the pension system, the age limit to access the right to old-age pension for women is gradually rising in the period until 2032, when it will reach 65 years and become equal to the age limit for men. In addition, in the period until 2023 for men and 2024 for women, conditions for accessing the right to early retirement will become stricter, and entail reaching 60 years of age and 40 years of insurance. At this moment further tightening of the conditions for retirement have not been planned.

With the aim to protect the social situations of the beneficiaries of lower-level pensions, starting with November 2018, an amount has been paid as a top-up to the pensions. According to data from June, around 75% of pension beneficiaries receive this top-up. The amount of top-up depends on the pension, wherefore the beneficiaries of lower pensions receive higher amounts of money on top of the pension. The above-mentioned top-up is aligned in the same period and in the same percentage as the amounts of pensions.

The number of persons of 65 years and above who do not receive pension by the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance was estimated in December 2020 at 128 thousand, calculated by cross-referencing data on population size assessment published by SORS and data on age structure of pension beneficiaries, from the records of the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance.

According to data by the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance from June 2021, the average amount of pension is 29,384 RSD (approximately 250 EUR), while according

²⁵ Official Gazette RS, No. 86/19, https://www.paragraf.rs/izmene_i_dopune/170621-zakon-o-izmenama-i-dopunama-zakona-o-penzijskom-i-invalidskom-osiguranju.html

to data from January of the same year, the average amount of agricultural pension is 11,896 RSD (approximately 101 EUR). This means that for a great number of pensioners (approximately 75%), their monthly income is lower than the amount of the minimum net wage (32,371 RSD or 275 EUR) and minimum consumer basket (39,334.76 RSD or 334 EUR). This represents a direct threat to the economic safety in older age and makes older persons dependable on other family members and the community.²⁶ On the other hand, it should be noted that pensions received based on the rights to compulsory pension and disability insurance are exempt from personal income taxation.

Older women make up over 97% of the total number of beneficiaries of family pensions, aged 65 and above. This shows the importance of the institute of family pension, as well as pension and disability insurance overall, for maintaining the social status of this category of persons. In 2012, 47.1% of women aged 65 and over received old-age or disability pension, and this share increased to 54.1% in 2016 and 59.9% in 2020. Data presented show the importance of the pension system for the protection and promotion of the social situation of older women.

The newly formed Ministry of Rural Welfare supports the notion that following the model of neighbouring countries, the concept of social, guaranteed pension should be followed, which would be reserved for persons over 65 years of age, who did not acquire the right to pension and have no other income, starting from the fact that it is evident in rural areas that there is a number of people, mainly women, about whom there is no precise data, over 65 years of age, who have not acquired the right to pension and have no other income. After the necessary data is acquired, analyses performed and the Social Card Law comes into effect (adopted in February 2021 to be implemented from March 2022), providing for a single centralised registry with accurate up-to-date data on the socio-economic status of individuals and their personal connections, the Ministry of Rural Welfare is planning to, in cooperation with the Republic Secretariat for Legislation, submit a formal proposal to the Republic of Serbia Government with the aim to find suitable legal solutions, so that this population category can acquire the right to guaranteed social pension and thus improve their socio-economic situation.

The Red Cross of Serbia, through its soup kitchens programme, which is partially funded from municipal budgets (in 68 out of 78 municipalities in 2021), provides support to 30,000 beneficiaries annually, out of whom approximately one-fifth over 65 years of age. For these persons, the meal that they receive at the soup kitchen is often the only warm meal during the day and represents an essential contribution to their health and wellbeing.

Fostering effective consultations with, and involvement of, older persons and their representatives at the national, regional, and local levels in designing policies

The Law on Planning System of the Republic of Serbia²⁷ regulates the system of public policy management and mid-term planning, type and content of planning documents proposed, adopted and implemented in line with their competencies by all the participants in the planning system. This Law guarantees the principle of equality and non-discrimination, which entails that

²⁶ Special Report on Discrimination against Older Citizens, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, 2021 http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PZR_Poseban-izvestaj-%D0%BE-diskriminaciji-starijih-gradjana_6.5.2021_FINAL.docx

²⁷ Official Gazette RS, No. 30/2018, <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon-o-planskom-sistemu-republike-srbije.html>

during the development and implementation of planning documents human and minority rights and freedoms, guaranteed in the Constitution and the Law are respected. These documents include: development planning documents, public policy documents and other planning documents, with public policy documents further classified into strategies, programmes, policy concepts and action plans. The principle of publicity and partnership entails that public policies are developed through a transparent and consultative process²⁸, supported by the Ordinance on the methodology of public policy management, policy and regulatory impact assessment, and content of individual public policy documents, followed by the Government of Serbia Conclusion on guidelines for including civil society organisations in working groups for the development of public policy documents or regulation proposals and drafts²⁹, as well as the Rulebook on good practice guidelines for public participation in the drafting of laws and other regulations and acts.³⁰ This has provided the civil society and older persons themselves with the opportunity to collect evidence and best practices, participate in consultations, panels, focus groups, interviews, round tables, research, etc. and influence the design of public policies. This means that the representatives of the older population, through their organisations and civil society organisations advocating for the rights and interests of older persons, have the opportunity to participate in public policy making processes in the domain relevant to this population. Also, on 16 June 2021, the Government adopted a Decision, establishing the e-Consultation web page, part of the e-Government website, with the aim to enable the public to participate in an equal and equitable way, electronically (online), in the process of preparation and adoption of public policy documents. The e-Consultation page is under construction, and it is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2021.

Organisations of pensioners, as well as civil society organisations representing older people and working with them also have their representatives in two relevant councils of the Republic of Serbia Government: Council for Old Age and Ageing Affairs and Council for Improving Intergenerational Cooperation and Solidarity, which has also provided them with an advisory role in shaping and implementing public policies. Also, the Management Board of the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance has one place reserved for a member from among the rights beneficiaries, at the proposal of the Pensioners' Union founded at the national level with the largest membership.³¹

The Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography supports joint action of local and national authorities, independent bodies, scientific institutions, civil and private sectors in providing response to the existing situation and the needs of older people, accepting the recommendations from the Special Report on Discrimination against Older Citizens published by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality.

In 2018, the organisation Amity, in cooperation with six more civil society organisations from the Republic of Serbia, including Red Cross of Serbia, drafted a Shadow Report to the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, about discrimination of older women in the Republic of Serbia. The report was written based on interviews with 68 older women

²⁸ Handbook for public participation in planning, drafting and monitoring the implementation of public policies and regulations, <https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Final-Public-Consultation-Manual-16-07-2020-for-publication-v3.pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/zakljucak/2020/8/1/reg>

³⁰ <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2019/51/5/reg>

³¹ <https://www.pio.rs/sr/organi-upravlana>

in seven focus groups, 10 in-depth interviews, and a desk analysis of existing research and legal document in the Republic of Serbia.

Promoting a positive image of older persons, acknowledging their contributions to society

The Republic of Serbia Government Office for Human and Minority Rights (since 2020 Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue) has funded several important projects dealing with the promotion of rights and the situation of older persons: in 2017 two projects; in 2018 four projects; in 2019 five programmes; in 2020 four programmes; and in 2021, one programme was supported, titled Promotion of Non-Discrimination and Protection from Violence against Older Women during the Pandemic. Total value of these projects was over 100,000 EUR.

During the last five years, the civil sector has had continuous activities on promoting a positive image of ageing and older persons, with full participation of older persons. The most massive form of promotion of the positive image and concept of healthy ageing is the Third Age Sports, Health and Culture Olympics organised since 2008, and it has become even more massive since 2015. In late 2019, the representatives of Hungary, Republic of Slovenia, Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia founded the European Third Age Movement, with headquarters in Belgrade, which decided in 2020 to hold the first European Third Age Sports Olympics in Belgrade. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, this event did not take place in 2020 and 2021. This event also fosters the concept of lifelong learning through organisation of art colonies for painting and iconography, literary encounters, cultural and artistic events, handicraft workshops and similar.

Activities on the promotion of positive image of ageing and old age are very well linked to the International Day of Older Persons, 1 October. To mark this day, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality organised awards for best literary work, artwork, and photograph, under the title the Bridge of Understanding – Intergenerational Solidarity. The participants in the contest were students in years 6-8 of primary schools in the Republic of Serbia, while older persons were on the awards committee. The event and the awards ceremony were organised in cooperation with different institutions, including the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality implements also various projects promoting a positive image of older citizens, such as the project with Help Net, Advancing Intergenerational Dialogue, with the aim to encourage mutual cooperation, understanding among different generations, developing new forms of intergenerational knowledge, skills and experience exchange, through debates and socialising with younger and older people in several local contexts throughout the Republic of Serbia.

Through various campaigns, the Red Cross of Serbia has promoted a positive image on ageing and old age, including the 2019 campaign, using posters in public transport vehicles in seven towns in Serbia. It is estimated that these messages and posters were seen by approximately 1,700,000 people during the three weeks of the campaign. Red Cross of Serbia has also organised street photo exhibitions two times, with the topics of social inclusion of older people and

prevention of violence against older persons, in 2018 and 2021 in the pedestrian zone of Belgrade, and estimates are that the exhibitions were seen by 210,000 and 150,000 persons, respectively. In 2018, an older volunteer of Red Cross of Serbia participated in the ceremony to mark the International Day of Older Persons in the United Nations in New York, representing their generation and country.

The organisation Amity has for eight years in a row continuously promoted active ageing, through implementation of annual awards for best travel journals of persons over 60 years of age. The contest is international as it includes older people from the region and other countries. In the period 2018-2021, 439 different authors participated, among whom 119 travel journals were selected for awards or special commendations.

The Festival of Older Persons' Creativity "Golden Age", organised by the Gerontological Centre Belgrade should also be mentioned, the aim of which is to affirm and promote amateur creativity of older persons, foster and transfer non-material cultural heritage, and the Intergenerational Cooperation Festival "Okay", with the aim to connect people of different generations through culture, sports and amateur creativity, with the aim to improve intergenerational tolerance, cooperation, understanding, empathy and create a society fit for all generations. The Mixer Festival, in 2020 and 2021, also promoted the positive image of older persons and strengthening of intergenerational cooperation.

Fostering work and volunteering of younger and older persons in intergenerational settings

In late 2020, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia published an ex-post analysis of the effects of the Law on Volunteering³², which was adopted in 2010. This analysis indicates the need for further alignment of the Law on Volunteering with other national regulations. It also indicates the need to increase the number of volunteering organisers and volunteers engaged, improve the system of record-keeping on volunteering organisers and volunteers engaged and improve data systematisation on movements and participation of volunteers in public and private sectors. The analysis highlighted that conditions for engaging vulnerable groups, including older persons, in volunteering are insufficiently clearly defined.

This and other analyses by civil society organisations³³ indicate also that performing ad hoc activities of general interest, for general benefit or the benefit of a third party, which do not last longer than 10 hours per week, over a maximum period of 30 days with or without interruptions, during a calendar year, according to legally proscribed criteria, are excluded from the definition of volunteering. As these are the most common forms of volunteering in the Republic of Serbia, it can be said that the scope of volunteering activities in the Republic of Serbia is considerably greater

³² <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2021-02/%D0%95%D0%BA%D1%81%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%20%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%20%D0%B5%D1%84%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%20%D0%97%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%BE%20%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%9A%D1%83.pdf>

³³ <https://www.gradjanske.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/U-SUSRET-NOVOM-ZAKONU-O-VOLONTIRANJU.pdf>

than what the system recognises according to legally defined criteria. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, based on existing analyses, recognises the need to improve the Law on Volunteering. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Republic of Serbia Government paid special attention to promoting volunteerism and established a national online platform for volunteering applications (www.budivolonter.gov.rs).

The practice of Red Cross of Serbia, but also other organisations, which rely on volunteering work, especially in the domain of ageing and older persons, shows a large gap regarding volunteering of middle generations, because, statistically observed, the largest number of volunteers come from the population of younger persons (high-school and primary-school students) and the population of persons over 65 years of age. Red Cross of Serbia has continuously had a considerable number of volunteers over 65 years of age, especially in programmes and activities related to ageing and older people, such as home assistance or self-help groups for older persons. Between 2017 and 2020, Red Cross of Serbia had over 1,700 volunteers over 65 years of age participating in different activities, while during the first six months of 2021, this number has exceeded 1,400.

Also, the national Humanas network, gathers seventeen organisations representing older persons or working on ageing and old-age issues and the majority of these organisations engage older persons as volunteers. These organisations often involve both younger and older volunteers in their work, both on providing services of assistance to older persons, and in creative workshops, education and similar activities. Zvezdara Volunteering Centre is a particularly important example of organised volunteering at the local level.

On the proposal of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Republic of Serbia Government announced the year 2020 as the Year of Solidarity and Cooperation, organising also an online conference within this initiative, titled Intergenerational Solidarity and Cooperation – We Have Each Other. At the conference, the results of the one-year qualitative and quantitative research were presented, achieved within the project implemented by the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance, with support from the line ministry. This research focused on exploring the characteristics and contents of intergenerational solidarity and its improvement, and participants were representatives of youth between 19 and 25 years of age, and of older persons, between 68 and 89 years of age.

Encouraging businesses, non-profit organisations and public enterprises to involve older persons as consumers in the planning and design of goods and services

The Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications has for years been supporting the construction of infrastructure and superstructure in tourist destinations, by awarding credit funds to boost the quality of the tourism offer. In addition to companies and entrepreneurs, the beneficiaries of credit funds for boosting the quality of the tourism offer are also agricultural holdings, headed, among others, by older persons. Also, the Ministry has for years been encouraging increased turnover from domestic tourists and from organised foreign tourists by awarding vouchers for subsidised accommodation. The majority of voucher users belong to the category of older persons (55.6% in 2021, which is an increase compared to 42% in 2020).

Ensuring that older persons can attain and maintain their highest possible level of health and functional capacity by supporting the development of age-friendly environments and housing

The Law on Planning and Construction³⁴, and its amendments, also proscribes accessibility standards as mandatory technical measures, standards and conditions of design, planning and construction, which ensure unimpeded movement and access for persons with disabilities, children and older persons. This includes buildings intended for public and commercial use, and other spaces to be used publicly (streets, squares, parks, etc.), and also buildings used for housing and a combination of housing and commercial use with ten and more units must be designed and built so that these users, and particularly persons with disabilities, children and older persons, are enabled unimpeded access, movement, stay and work. The National Social Housing Strategy³⁵ emphasises that a high number of collective housing units were built before the Rulebook for planning and designing buildings for unimpeded movement of children, older persons and persons with disabilities³⁶, so it is necessary to improve the physical characteristics of these buildings, as well as to increase monitoring of the implementation of planning and construction regulations when making new housing facilities, whether these are new or repurposed buildings with special priority given to residential accommodation for older persons and persons with disabilities.

The City of Belgrade Secretariat for Transport singles out two important plans, in line with the concept of age-friendly cities: the General Regulation Plan for the Construction Area of the Local Self-Government Unit – City of Belgrade (units I-XIX)³⁷ and the City of Belgrade Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan.³⁸

Various data on the quality of life of older persons in Belgrade were collected in the study Age-Friendly City – Roadmap for Active Ageing in the City of Belgrade. So, for example, almost one-half of older people (43.3%) reported moving with difficulty or great difficulty in the area they lived in, taking into consideration the condition and size of pavement, safety of street crossings and frequency of rest areas, while only 11% reported moving very easily, and 45.6% easily. It was shown that the lack of benches and adapted walking areas can influence the isolation of older persons and reduce their participation in community activities. Access to the largest number of public institutions was assessed as good, with increased number of buildings with ramps that facilitate entering and placing the majority of important services on the ground floor, where they are more accessible. The highest number of older persons feel that public transport is fully or mainly accessible (73%), while 18.4% of them report that it is mostly inaccessible, and 8.5% that it is not at all accessible.

Regarding the feeling of safety, it decreases with age, wherefore 16.2% of older persons in the 65-69 age group feel unsafe or very unsafe, but even 40.4% of those at 85 years or more.

³⁴ Official Gazette RS, No. 72/2009, 81/... 52/2021, https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_planiranju_i_izgradnji.html

³⁵ <https://www.mgsi.gov.rs/lat/dokumenti/nacionalna-strategija-socijalnog-stanovanja>

³⁶ Official Gazette RS, No. 18/97

³⁷ Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade, No. 20/16, 97/16, 69/17, 97/17, <https://www.beoland.com/planovi/pgr-beograda/>

³⁸ http://bgsaobracaj.rs/uploads/files/%D0%9F%D0%9E%D0%A3%D0%9C/POUM-BG_usvojen%20Skupstina%2018-12-2020-za%20sajt_compressed.pdf

Three-quarters of older persons (81.6%) report that the architecture of the building they live in is mostly or fully adapted to their needs, although this decreases with age. Similarly, financial burden of housing is the lowest among older persons in the 65-69 age group, 64% of whom report that housing costs are acceptable and this decreases with higher age groups, so in older persons of 85 years of age, nearly one-half (49.4%) speak of financial difficulties related to housing. Older persons living on higher floors in buildings where lifts break down more often are faced with higher risks of social isolation, because they rarely leave their flats under these circumstances.

Regarding social inclusion, the majority of participants feel that the members of the community they live in respect them greatly or mostly (74.1%), but the participation in community activities is at a low level: only 17.8% of older persons have been included in social activities during the month leading to the survey.

Regarding healthcare, 65.7% of older persons state that they are very well or well informed about issues of importance for health preservation and prevention of health-related issues (65.7%), and 88.4% of respondents reporting that healthcare services are fully available to them, have visited a doctor in case of illness. On the other hand, this has been done by only 28.7% of those that report that healthcare services are not at all available to them, as well as 51.6% of those that report that the services are mostly unavailable to them, which indicates that the perceived availability of healthcare services has significant impacts on maintaining the health of older citizens. Introducing the electronic prescription was mentioned as positive, because it greatly facilitates and simplifies the procedure, without waiting in line. More or less continuous support in performing the activities of daily living is needed by 65.5% of respondents, but the majority of respondents do not know if the City or the Republic is responsible for specific social protection services. The participants also stressed the lack of information exchange among services dealing with the protection of older persons – social protection system, Pension and Disability Insurance Fund, health system and municipality. The perceived quality of life decreases with age, with a little more than one-half of older persons of 85 years or more assessing their quality of life as good or very good, unlike 79.7% of older persons in the 65-69 age group and 73.2% in the 70-74 age group.

1.2. Please also reflect on your country's participation in the relevant global/UN- wide campaigns:

1.2.1. Does your country take part in the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism led by the World Health Organization (WHO)? Do the activities in your country contribute to the endeavours of this WHO-led campaign? Which ones? Did your participation in the campaign contribute to the implementation of the MIPAA/RIS in your country? Which measures have been set in this context?

The participation in the WHO Global Campaign to Combat Ageism was mainly led by civil society organisations, through international conferences, but also educational activities. In 2021, the Gerontological Society of Serbia organised an educational webinar for professionals working with older persons on the Decade of Healthy Ageing, which is also the core of the projects implemented by the Red Cross of Serbia with EU support and in partnership with UNFPA, with

the plan to establish healthy ageing centres in several municipalities in the Republic of Serbia. Also, in September 2021, a conference was held for the regional presentation of the first UN Global Report on Ageism and National Dialogue on Ageing and Ageism was organised. The organisers of the conference were the United Nations Population Fund, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality.

One of the recommendations of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, in its Special Report on Discrimination against Older Citizens sent to all authorities on the national, provincial and local levels refers to the need to encourage activities and projects promoting equal and planned inclusion of older persons in various spheres of social life, cultural, sports and other activities, as well as to ensure active cooperation with civil society organisations and active participation of older citizens in the prevention of risks of social exclusion, encouraging different forms of self-organisation and self-help for older citizens, simultaneously raising the awareness of personal responsibility for dignified, active and healthy ageing.

1.2.2. Does your country take part in the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG-A) for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons? Do the activities in your country contribute to the endeavours of the OEWG-A? Which ones? Do national policies ensure protection of the human rights of older people in your country? Do you see any legal gaps?

The Republic of Serbia has had representatives on the sessions of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) who have contributed to the working group with interventions and contributions. Since 2017, the Red Cross of Serbia has participated in the sessions on neglect, violence and abuse against older persons³⁹, the autonomy and independence of older persons⁴⁰, long-term and palliative care⁴¹, social protection and social security⁴², access to justice⁴³, and right to work⁴⁴; while the Ombudsman participated with contributions regarding the right to work of older persons⁴⁵, and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality on the topics of autonomy and independence⁴⁶ and long-term and palliative care⁴⁷, as well as in a joint intervention with the Red Cross of Serbia, on the topic of equality and non-discrimination.⁴⁸

National public policies in the Republic of Serbia have continuously improved in order to become more sensitive and better recognise the needs of older persons and different categories in the older population, in line with OEWGA objectives. An example is that the latest versions of

³⁹ https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/eighth/Inputs%20NGOs/RedCross_Serbia-Neglect.pdf

⁴⁰ https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/ninth/Inputs%20NGOs/VAE_Autonomy.pdf

⁴¹ https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/ninth/Inputs%20NGOs/RCSerbia_LTC.pdf

⁴² https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/tenth/Inputs%20NGOs/Red_Cross_Serbia_Social%20protection%20and%20social%20security.docx

⁴³ <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/eleventh/Inputs%20NGOs/RedCrossSerbia-AccessJustice.pdf>

⁴⁴ <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/eleventh/Inputs%20NGOs/RedCrossSerbia-RightWork.pdf>

⁴⁵ [https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/eleventh/Inputs%20NHRIs/Inputs%20from%20the%20Protector%20of%20Citizens%20\(Serbian%20NHRI\)%20-%20Right%20to%20Work.pdf](https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/eleventh/Inputs%20NHRIs/Inputs%20from%20the%20Protector%20of%20Citizens%20(Serbian%20NHRI)%20-%20Right%20to%20Work.pdf)

⁴⁶ https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/ninth/Inputs%20NHRIs/Serbia_Autonomy.pdf

⁴⁷ https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/ninth/Inputs%20NHRIs/Serbia_LTC.pdf

⁴⁸ https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/eighth/Inputs%20NGOs/JOINT%20RedCross_Commissioner_Serbia-Equality.pdf

planning documents on gender equality single out older women as a separate group at risk of intersectional discrimination, but also continuous work on balancing between ensuring financial security of persons in older age and maintaining the stability of the national pension fund.

1.3 Highlight in a nutshell the most important policy achievement during the last 20 years to contribute to empowering individuals to realize their potential for physical, mental and social well-being throughout their lives and to participate in and contribute to society.

Give some examples how thinking, feeling and dealing with ageing has changed during the last 20 years and give some recommendations for future action (what is planned/needs to be done) to avoid ageism.

Establishing independent bodies dealing with the protection of rights and protection from discrimination against citizens

The Ombudsman has been functional since 2007, when this independent body was established with the adoption of the Law on Ombudsman and appointment of the Ombudsperson. The Ombudsman works in response to citizens' complaints, but also on own initiative, and part of the duties of this regulatory body relate to the protection of rights of older citizens of the Republic of Serbia, including recommendations related to the respect of the rights of older persons during the COVID-19 emergency.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality was established as an independent body with the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Law in 2009. In its work, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality responds to complaints, and gathering information published in the Special Report on Discrimination against Older Citizens⁴⁹, largely recognises the forms of discrimination affecting older persons and their prevalence.

The National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2016-2020, is a document recognising older women as a group in particular risk of intersectional discrimination, which is an important step forward in understanding the heterogeneity of the population of older persons, but also the intersectional nature of discrimination risks for older women, for whom discrimination in older age is often a continuation and extension of discrimination they have been facing their entire lives.

Finally, the 2011 Law on Social Protection regulates this area of great importance for older persons in need of long-term care, and its implementation has made community services much more available to older persons, both the offer and service providers.

Balanced development of all required social protection services at the local level, in line with needs, is one of the priorities of social protection policy, implemented since 2016 through earmarked transfers of budget funds to local self-governments in line with pre-defined criteria.

A recommendation for the future development of public policies in this area is primarily related to the integration of long-term care services that are currently offered through three separate systems (social protection, healthcare and pension insurance). This makes not only access to these

⁴⁹ <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/poseban-izvestaj-o-diskriminaciji-starijih.pdf>

services considerably more complex, especially for the persons that need them the most and who face obstacles that others do not, but also more difficult to coordinate, and also more expensive for the systems within which they are provided. Integrating long-term care services in a single system will improve coordination, efficiency and availability of services and thus considerably help increase the quality of life in old age. Special focus in the development of future public policies related long-term care and ageing in general should be dedicated to informal caregivers providing the majority of long-term care services, whose work needs to be adequately recognised and supported.

2. Encouraging longer working life and ability to work

2.1. Which measures have been implemented to recognizing the potential embedded in the employment of older workers and developing labour market strategies to promote maximum participation opportunities for workers of all ages along the RIS commitments 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10 and the goals of the Lisbon Declaration?

Promoting lifelong learning opportunities

According to the Adult Education Survey, conducted by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia in 2018, the rate of participation of adults in some form of formal or informal education and training was 18.8%, which is somewhat more than in 2011 (16.5%), but below average for European Union countries (45.1%).

Important new public policies related to lifelong learning, developed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development are: the Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia⁵⁰ and the Annual Adult Education Plan.⁵¹

On the initiative of Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, the “Digital Expedition”, Caravan off Digital Skills, Literacy, and Security was launched in 2021. The Caravan is implemented with support from the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Office for ICT and e-Government, in partnership with the New Literacy programme, implemented together by USAID and Propulsion and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Caravan is available to all citizens, including young people who are exposed to digital contents since birth, through digitally more adept generations and their parents, and citizens for whom digital resources are insufficiently known or available. Through this initiative, citizens will be introduced to electronic public services available at the e-Government website, principles of electronic trade and foundations of secure use of social media and other advantages of the digital space.

Fight against unemployment at all ages, reducing financial inequalities and poverty, taking up measures to reduce the gender pay gap

In 2020, the Ombudsman reviewed 200 cases in the area of rights of persons with disabilities and rights of older persons and indicated 224 rights violations, the largest portion of

⁵⁰ http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/1-SROVRS-2030_MASTER_0402_V1.pdf

⁵¹ <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/odluka/2021/20/1/reg>

which related to the right to employment and professional rehabilitation, right to equal access to services and rights of persons deprived of legal capacity, violations of the rights of older persons and/or rights of persons in social protection and healthcare institutions, rights to social protection services for older persons and right to special healthcare for older people.

In March 2021, the Employment Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2026 was adopted, indicating significant recovery of the labour market in the period 2015-2019 – with reduced unemployment rates and increased employment rates, the number of employed persons increased, which affected also an increase in the number of persons included in the labour market (active persons), and there was a reduction in the number of unemployed and inactive persons. The total number of work-age population (15-64) was reduced by 249 thousand in 2019, compared to 2015, the number of persons active on the labour market increased by 46 thousand, while the number of inactive persons was reduced by around 295 thousand. The number of the employed increased by 262 thousand and the number of the unemployed decreased by 216 thousand. Employment rate for the work-age population was 60.7% in 2019, which is an increase of 8.7 p.p. compared to 2015. The number of unemployed persons at work age was estimated at 335 thousand in 2019, which is a decrease by 216 thousand (39%) compared to 2015. Owing to the reduced number of the unemployed and increased number of the employed, the unemployment rate in 2019 was at 10.9%, which is lower by 7.3% than in 2015.

Main labour market indicators, population 15-64

Age category	I Quarter 2021		II Quarter 2021	
	Rate in %	Number	Rate in %	Number
15-64				
Activity	68.5	3,020,600	69.8	3,064,700
Employment	59.5	2,621,700	61.8	2,714,400
Unemployment	13.2	398,900	11.4	350,300
Population not in labour force	31.5	1,387,000	30.2	1,328,900

Source: SORS, LFS

Main labour market indicators, population 55-64

Age category	Average year 2020	
	Rate in %	Number
55-64		
Activity	55.1%	533,400
Employment	52.2%	505,400
Unemployment	5.2%	28,000
Inactivity	45.0%	435,500

Source: SORS, LFS

The Republic of Serbia is the first non-EU country to introduce the Gender Equality Index. The Gender Equality Index score for the Republic of Serbia is 55.8 points, which represents progress in improving gender equality, that is, index growth by 3.4 points in the period between 2014 and 2016. On the joint list with EU member states, the Republic of Serbia rates 22nd. One of the main domains of inequality recorded by the Gender Equality Index refers to gender segregation established during education and continued on the labour market. Inequalities are also visible in the domain of money (women have lower income than men), and some groups of women are exposed also to higher risks of poverty. Especially women over 50 years of age, having lost employment, remain discouraged in the attempt to find it again. In recent years, there has been a registered improvement in the position of women on the labour market, which contributes to their increased independence and autonomy. Special potentials have been perceived in the area of ICT.

Encouraging employers to value the experience of, and to retain and hire, older workers

With the aim to improve the situation of hard-to-employ persons, active labour market measures are implemented, set out in employment action plans. Active labour market measures directed at older workers include the subsidy for employment of unemployed persons from the category of hard-to-employ persons that entails one-time financial incentives to private-sector employers, in the amounts which depend on the level of development of local self-government units and are paid in the range of 200,000-250,000 RSD per beneficiary, increased by 20% for persons with disabilities, work-age financial social assistance beneficiaries, and victims of domestic violence. According to the National Employment Service's (NES) 2020 Report, these subsidies covered a total of 2,395 persons in 2019, including 1,078 (45.01%) persons over 50 years of age, with 1,216 (50.77%) women.

Pursuant to the Law on Contributions for Compulsory Social Insurance, there are currently two types of reliefs, with the requirement for the person to be registered with NES at least 6 months before entering into employment. This type of relief can be accessed by employing at least one person, provided that this employment simultaneously increases the number of employees compared to the number of employees in the employer's service on 31 March 2014. The employer can access reliefs for wages paid to the newly employed person by end of 2021, in the form of reimbursement of the part of paid taxes and contributions, in the following amounts: 65% if they employ 1-9 new persons, 70% if they employ 10-99 new persons, or 75% if they employ 100 and more new persons.

Another type of relief is conditioned on employing at least two new persons, which increases the number of employees compared to the number of employees on 31 October 2015. This relief can be accessed by employers for wages to newly employed persons paid by the end of 2021, in the form of reimbursement of 75% of paid taxes and contributions.

Providing incentives for longer working life opportunities and more flexible retirement choices

The relative situation of work-age older persons (50-65) at the labour market has been improved in recent years. Activity and employment rates have increased without exception year

after year, peaking in 2019 at 61.1% (increase by 8.7% compared to 2015) and 56.9% (increase by 10.7% compared to 2015), respectively. On the other hand, unemployment rates decreased by 5 % at 6.9% in 2019.

The improvement of the relative situation of older persons was primarily affected by institutional changes. The first change is in relation to severance pay, which, according to the 2014 amendments of the Labour Law, is paid only for the years of service spent with the last employer. Before these amendments, the calculation of severance pay for the entire working life was demotivating for employers to employ older persons, as they saw the severance pay as a potential threat (as high costs in case of lay-offs) for employing persons with long working life. Another institutional change relates to the increased age limit for retiring, which directly affected increased activity and employment of older work-age persons. Finally, penalties for early retirement also influenced increased activity.

Overview of the number of retired persons who have worked in the previous 5 years (i.e. paid contributions in the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance), by type of contract – labour contract or service agreement and by sex

Year	Labour contract	Service agreement	Total
2016	20,109	24,169	44,278
2017	23,051	25,856	48,907
2018	29,197	28,069	57,266
2019	34,237	32,835	67,072
2020	35,833	32,887	68,720

Planning and implementing pension reforms, that take into account the increasing longevity and the extension of working lives

Age limit for old-age pension for women will gradually increase until 2032, when it will be equal with the age limit for men (65 years).

The 2018 Law on Amendments to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance⁵² has helped overcome some of the issues affecting older persons for years before. These amendments repealed the authorisation to the Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance to forcefully collect contributions by cancelling one-third of pension. The control of payment of contributions for social insurance is under the auspices of the Tax Administration, and beneficiaries will receive the pension proportionally to the insurance periods for which the contributions have been paid. This change is based on the Constitutional Court Decision from 2017⁵³, made on proposal by the Ombudsman, establishing that the provision in Article 4 of the Decision on type of insurance payer

⁵² <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/zakon/2003/34/1/reg>

⁵³ <https://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/article/5629/Resenje%20.pdf>

and obligation to pay contributions for compulsory pension and disability insurance, is not in accordance with the Constitution and the Law.

Another important change was the limitation to the temporary nature of the decision on pension, which is an issue that had for many years affected persons accessing the right to old-age pension and reducing their financial security. Now, in case if the missing facts are not established within three years of entry into force of the temporary decision, the amount of pensions becomes final, *ex officio*. The amendments to the law also facilitated the calculation of the final pension amounts for persons who spent part of their working life in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, for members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and military personnel, but also those that worked in enterprises that no longer exist, and the documentation about their employees does not exist in the archives. The valid Law on Pension and Disability Insurance still has considerable shortcomings, including that the term of agricultural insurance payer has not been adequately defined, nor have the criteria for becoming and ceasing to be an agricultural insurance payer been proscribed, the procedures for registering for insurance, establishing the type of insurance payer, cancelling insurance and establishing the termination of insurance payer status been clearly regulated, or the dormancy of insurance payer status regulated in more detail, or a number of other issues of importance for establishing the rights of agricultural producers to pension and disability insurance.

The Ombudsman has established that many difficulties regarding the access to rights to financial benefits for assistance and care provided to another person are the result of the possibility to access this right being proscribed by two different laws, before two different authorities and according to two different legal grounds, even though it is essentially the same right, which is according to both laws accessed by fulfilling the same requirements. According to valid regulations, this right can be accessed pursuant to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance before the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance, as the right to compensation for assistance and care provided to another person, and pursuant to the Law on Social Protection, before the Centre for Social Work, as the right to allowance for assistance and care provided to another person, but the same requirement regarding the health status is stipulated for access.

Therefore, it can happen that this right is “lost” if the circumstances change, or if formal requirements have been met (e.g. by acquiring the right to pension) and cannot be accessed before the other authority, even if the need was established as permanent beforehand, and health status of the beneficiary has not changed. Losing the right in practice causes a gap in receipt of the necessary funds for a certain period of time, or a complete loss of opportunity to access this right. In 2018, the Ombudsman submitted a legislation initiative to the Government, indicating the need to regulate the right to receive another person’s care and assistance in a simple and precise way, under equal conditions and criteria and before one authority. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs has declared that this initiative is considered justified, and that they have also been trying to find ways to address this issue, as well as that a comprehensive analysis is required to show which authority would be the most purposeful for

Facilitating the reconciliation of employment and care work

2.2. Which special measures did your country set to close the gender pay gap and pension gap as well as to take into account the special situation of older women?

According to information provided by the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability insurance, over 97% of the total number of family pension beneficiaries aged 65 and over, are older women. A continuous growing trend in the participation of older women who are beneficiaries of their old-age or disability pensions, which is the result of historical growth of the participation of women in the labour market. Therefore, in 2021, 47.1% of women aged 65 and over received old-age or disability pension. This participation reached 59.9% in 2020.

2.3. Highlight in a nutshell the most important achievement during the last 20 years in recognizing the potential embedded in the employment of older workers and developing labour market strategies to promote maximum participation opportunities for workers of all ages? Give some recommendations for future action (what is planned/needs to be done).

With the aim to improve the situation of hard-to-employ persons, active labour market measures are implemented, set out in employment action plans. It has been perceived that the changes in the technology and production processes have made it relatively harder for older persons than others to independently adapt to the new needs of the labour market. The biggest problem of these persons is obsolete knowledge and skills. With the aim to improve the human capital and social inclusion, which should contribute to knowledge-based economic growth by matching skills on the labour market, activities are also implemented to increase competences by acquiring additional knowledge and skills through training, as well as recognising knowledge and skills acquired through informal education and informal learning. Implementing active labour market measures, in 2021, the National Employment Service published 13 public calls for employers and unemployed persons. Based on direct financial support, the plan is to include over 18,000 of unemployed persons in these measures. The priority for being included in the measures lies with the persons from the hard-to-employ category, also including persons over 50 years of age.

Also, the Strategy for Digital Skills Development in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2024⁵⁴, regulates the development of digital skills of the population with the aim to use the potential of modern ICTs in the direction of raising the quality of life of all citizens, higher employment, efficiency of work and economic growth of the society. Specific objectives also provide, inter alia, for the promotion of basic and advanced digital skills for all citizens. Different training for learning basic digital skills should cover as many men and women citizens as possible, expanding their interests, especially among older persons, as well as in areas perceived as having fewer ICT users, such as rural areas and smaller urban environments, enabling the trainees to adopt digital skills and follow technological progress. A specific objective also refers to the development of digital skills based on labour market needs.

⁵⁴ Official Gazette RS, No. 21/20.

3. Ensuring ageing with dignity

Part III: Healthy and Active Ageing in a Sustainable World

1. Contribution of ageing-related policies to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals

3.1. Which measures have been contributing to protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and dignity, promoting their autonomy, self-determination and participation in society, and making sure that no law, policy or programme leaves room for discrimination of any kind along RIS commitments 7, 8, 9 and 10 and the goals of the Lisbon Declaration?

- **Protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and dignity, promoting their autonomy, self-determination and participation in society**
- **Supporting the necessary infrastructure and assistance to prevent all types of abuse and violence against older persons**

Violence against older persons in the Republic of Serbia is recognised and treated primarily as domestic violence, and in recent years, significant efforts have been made in this area to prevent this type of violence, as well as to provide adequate support to the persons exposed to it. At the level of municipalities, there is coordinated response to reports of domestic violence by intersectoral bodies, lead by the prosecution office with police, centre for social work and other services and institutions as needed.

According to the records of the centres for social work, older persons made up approximately one-sixth of all domestic violence cases reported to these institutions:

Share of older persons (65+) in the total number of violence cases reported to CSW					
Year	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Psychological violence	Economic violence	Share of older persons
2016	17%	8%	19%	29%	18%
2017	16%	15%	18%	17%	17%
2018	15%	12%	17%	29%	16%
2019	14%	15%	15%	25%	15%
2020	15%	27%	16%	25%	16%

The most commonly used procedure by the Centres for Social Work, implemented in four-fifths of the cases during this period, was providing financial, legal or counselling support, followed by referral to services of other relevant stakeholders (between one-fifth and one-sixth of all cases), whereas, for example, the removal of the victim of violence from the family was applied in only 1 to 3% of the cases, and initiating court proceedings in 2 to 3%.

When it comes to violence against older persons in residential institutions, according to the records of the Republic Social Protection Institute, the number of cases varied between 24 and 106 annually:

Beneficiaries of residential institutions by type of violence they were exposed to 2015-2020						
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Physical violence	21	43	26	65	38	25
Sexual violence		1	2	2	0	0
Psychological violence	2	51	41	39	42	14
Neglect	1	1	1		0	1
Economic violence		7	3		0	2
Total	24	103	73	106	80	42

During the last five years, several important documents have been adopted, strategic and operational, that directly deal with this topic: Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2021-2025⁵⁵, National Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2016-2020 with Action Plan for the period 2016-2018⁵⁶, Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence⁵⁷, Rulebook on conduct of police officers in cases of domestic and intimate partner violence against women⁵⁸, Special Protocol for the judiciary on cases of domestic violence and intimate partner violence⁵⁹, Special Protocol on action of centres for social work – guardianship authority in cases of domestic and intimate partner violence against women⁶⁰, Special Protocol of the Ministry of Health for the protection and treatment of women exposed to violence.⁶¹ On the other hand, the Rulebook on the protocol for institutional procedure in response to violence, abuse and neglect⁶² deals specifically with the incidents of violence against institutional beneficiaries – including those in residential institutions – as soon as identified that the violence has occurred outside the family, in an institution.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs data, in the period between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2021, the total number of criminal charges for crimes against older persons was 9,426 (in 2017, the total number of charges was 2,430, and in 2020 1,768). Almost one-half (46% or over 4,300) of these charges were for domestic violence. These were followed by theft committed in a bold manner, which made up over 20% (nearly 2,000) of all crimes, followed by endangering safety (810) and robbery (560). It should also be mentioned that aggravated theft,

⁵⁵ https://www.srbija.gov.rs/extfile/sr/541264/strategija_protiv_nasilja_nad_zenama_i_u_porodici050_cyr3.zip

⁵⁶ https://www.srbija.gov.rs/extfile/sr/256478/strategija-rodna_ravnopravnost190_cyr.zip

⁵⁷ https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_sprecavanju_nasilja_u_porodici.html

⁵⁸ <https://hrcvr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Posebna-protokol-o-postupanju-policijskih-slu%C5%BEbenika-u-slu%C4%8Dajevima-nasilja-nad-%C5%BEenama-u-porodici-i-u-partnerskim-odnosima..pdf>

⁵⁹ https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj58-K19dryAhXtx4UKHXI-DSkQFnoECAQQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mpravde.gov.rs%2Ffiles%2FProtokol%2520p14.%25201.%25202014..doc&usg=AOvVawlyLvgKPhTinyp931_Wpd7y

⁶⁰ <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/Posebni%20protokol%20MRZSP%20nasilje%20u%20porodici.pdf>

⁶¹ <http://projekti.zdravstvo.vojvodina.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Isto-Posebna-Protokol-Tirkizni-tekst.pdf>

⁶² https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/pravilnik_o_protokolu_postupanja_u_ustanovi.html

committed in a bold and particularly dangerous manner, even with the increased number of crimes did not lead to severe consequences, so in only 7 cases there was injury brought to older persons (one grave and 6 minor injuries). However, during the same period, 94 murders and aggravated murders of older persons occurred, with another 36 attempted murders, as well as 788 crimes with the outcome of grave or minor bodily injuries. In the period between 2017 and end August 2021, in 112 cases, death of persons over 65 years of age occurred as the result of crimes committed with the elements of violence (most often as a result of murder or aggravated murder). There were 1,900 minor and 489 grave injuries registered. Older women made up 58% of all the injured parties in these charges.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs data, the majority of perpetrators were family members or persons that have some form of control or influence over the victim of violence. Most commonly this is a man over 60 years of age or between 41 and 50, while female perpetrators are most often between 41 and 50 years of age. As cases of violence against older family members are more difficult to discover and less reported than the violence against young family members, especially in case of bed-ridden persons, it is important that in 2016, the Republic of Serbia Government adopted the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence⁶³, which has been implemented since June 2017, and the aim of which is to protect all the generations threatened by domestic violence, which also provides for the establishment of a Government Council for eliminating domestic violence.

Since 2019, in the Ministry of Internal Affairs Operational Centre, a telephone line has opened, free of charge and available 24/7, for anonymous reporting of domestic violence at the national level. Additionally, police officers have participated in projects with civil society organisations (Recognising and Preventing Violence against Older Women, joining forces of Amity and Women's Association Femina), with the support of the Office for Human and Minority Rights, within the project Implementation of Antidiscrimination Policy in the Republic of Serbia in 2019, as well as round tables and workshops organised by the victims' association HAJR.

Through its research, Red Cross of Serbia has also collected data on violence against older persons. The study On no man's land – gender-based violence against older women (65+) in the Republic of Serbia⁶⁴, which was part of the project titled Strengthening Older Women: Prevention of Violence Through Changing Social Norms in Serbia and Austria (EmPreV), funded by the European Union and the Austrian Development Agency, showed that 16% of older women aged 65 to 74 in Serbia experienced some form of violence after turning 65. This form of violence is covert, victims rarely decide to report it, and older women mostly endure violence for various reasons, out of fear, shame, economic dependence, and there are also strong patriarchal patterns at play. Since they turned 15, 40% of women have experienced some form of violence by current or former partner, while during the last 12 months (after turning 65), this experience has been shared by 7.7% of women. Psychological violence is the most common, experienced by 38% of women from the age of 15 and 7% of women during the last 12 months (after the age of 65).

⁶³ <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/zakon/2016/94/1/reg>

⁶⁴ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/7139/na-nicijoj-zemlji-web-low-res.pdf>

National Strategy for Preventing and Eliminating Violence against Women in the Family and in Intimate Partner Relations (2020-2025) was adopted by the Republic of Serbia Government in 2021⁶⁵, and due to Red Cross of Serbia efforts, it recognises older women as a special category.

Fostering the development of innovative methods and services as well as user- and age-friendly technology and products

In 2017, the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications awarded 10,000,000 RSD to organisations that had applied for funds for training programmes for retired persons with the aim to increase digital literacy and digital competences (17 organisations participated). By implementing the Strategy and Action Plan for the Development of Digital Skills in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2024, in 2021-2022, the ministry planned activities to contribute to further improvement of basic and advanced digital skills of all citizens, with one of the special goals to increase the availability of education and bridge and reduce the gap in communication of older people with their environment. The Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography, through a public call for subsidies to non-governmental organisations, support various projects of family support, population policy and improvement of the demographic situation, as well as projects of support and strengthening of women and domestic violence prevention.

In this area, the Red Cross of Serbia, with UNFPA support, conducted the study Ageing and Digital Inclusion – Baseline Study with Recommendations⁶⁶ in 29 municipalities in the Republic of Serbia, with the aim to establish the degree of digital inclusion of older persons in the Republic of Serbia, more specifically, their awareness of the existence of various online services and their frequency use. Within the same project, in cooperation with the Institute of Social Sciences, a Guide for using e-services was created targeting older persons, and over 300 older persons were educated.⁶⁷

Strategy for Digital Skills Development in the Republic of Serbia adopted in 2020⁶⁸ recognises that the current education levels, especially among the older population, do not enable easy and simple mastering of the digital economy, as well as that the obsolescence of certain educational programmes is one of the greatest weaknesses in the transition towards an information society. Older persons can identify themselves in the specific objectives of this strategy as a specific group with which work needs to be done on improving basic and advanced digital skills.

In the previous period, there have been good practice examples, such as the project Intergenerational Cooperation – Older People and Computers, an educational collaboration initiative between the university and gerontology centres, initiated by the Office of the Prime Minister in 2017. Also, the Department for Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, has since school year 2016/2017 had a mandatory course on adult education for third-year andragogy students, within which creative workshops are organised with service beneficiaries of the Retirement Club Stari Grad. Another example is the implementation of the Smart Care project in the Health Centre in Kraljevo, in partnership with the centre for social

⁶⁵ https://www.srbija.gov.rs/extfile/sr/541264/strategija_protiv_nasilja_nad_zenama_i_u_porodicima050_cyr3.zip

⁶⁶ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/6183/starenje-i-digitalna-ukljucenost-web.pdf>

⁶⁷ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/6181/vodic-za-koriscenje-e-usluga.pdf>

⁶⁸ <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2020/21/2/reg/>

work, which connects social protection and healthcare services, by using a software that covers the needs of social and medical health service users and connects service providers.

Raising quality standards for integrated social and long-term care and health services and continuously adapting the status, training and working conditions of professional care workers

Long-term care services in the Republic of Serbia are not sufficiently developed, nor are they equally available. The number of service beneficiaries is small relative to the population of older persons that need some type of assistance, and the funds allocated for these purposes are disproportionately small. Nearly one-fifth of local self-government units provide only one service – mostly the home assistance for older and adult persons, and not all services are available throughout the year in each of the local self-governments.

Daily community services were during 2018 provided in a total of 135 municipalities and towns in the Republic of Serbia, out of which in 126 for adult and older persons.⁶⁹ In 2018, the services of geriatric home assistants were funded by 85% of all municipalities in the Republic of Serbia, and day centres for older persons were funded by only 4% of municipalities (drop from 8% in 2012), while none of the municipalities funded respite services. Only 4% of municipalities funded the service of supported housing for adult persons with disabilities, as well as respite accommodation. In 2018, average number of beneficiaries of daily community services was 21,840, out of whom 16,678 used home assistance for adult and older persons, 449 day care for persons with disabilities and 345 day-care for older persons. In all cases, women used these services more than men, predominantly in urban areas. In the period between 2012 and 2018, only the number of home assistance beneficiaries increased (by 4.2%), while for other services the number of beneficiaries dropped. Regarding service providers, the share of beneficiaries of services provided by the public, government sector, dropped considerably to 58% in 2018, and the share of beneficiaries of services provided by non-profit organisations from the non-governmental sector increased to 35%. For the first time, for-profit providers of home assistance and personal escort for children services appeared.

Home assistance for adults and older persons is provided in 123 municipalities, with 15,052 beneficiaries, and in the total population aged 65 and over, this share is 1.34%. Women are the majority beneficiaries of this service with 70.54%, and urban beneficiaries make up 52.57% of this population. The service was provided continuously over 12 months in 51% of municipalities (63). In 39% of the total number of municipalities and towns (48), the service was provided between six and 11 months. This service was provided in 12 municipalities for under six months. According to data for the past five years, the share of people over 65 years of age was between 89 and 91% among all the beneficiaries of the home assistance service, whereas, for example, their share was only 2 to 3% among the beneficiaries of the day-care services, 2 to 6% among the supported housing service beneficiaries, 8 to 12% among the personal assistance service beneficiaries, 4-10% among the counselling and therapy service beneficiaries and 22 to 32% among the shelter

⁶⁹ Mapping of social protection and material support services under the jurisdiction of local self-government units in the Republic of Serbia, http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Mapiranje_usluga_socijalne_zastite_i_materijalne_podrske_u_nadleznosti_JLS_u_RS.pdf

service beneficiaries. Additionally, the share of older persons using the service of residential institutions increased compared to the previous period, when it was around 50% and ranged between 62 and 66% during the last four years. This can also be explained by the increase in the number of residential institutions for adults and older persons (208 in 2017 and 280 in 2020), although during this period waiting lists for these services became longer, with the number of 818 persons on the waiting list for residential accommodation in 2017 rising to 1,477 in 2020.

Total expenditures for social protection services within the competencies of local self-government units amounted to 3.65 billion RSD in 2018, or 0.07% GDP. For comparison, expenditures on centres for social work in 2017 amounted to 0.06% of GDP, and total expenditures on the most widespread social protection services – residential and family accommodation, amounted to 0.14% GDP. Belgrade's share in the total expenditures on local social protection services was more than the total population of the Republic of Serbia (nearly 24%). By service type, home assistance for adults and older persons is at the forefront (1,255,910,687 RSD), and 56,135,321 RSD were spent on day care for older persons. Expenditures on local social protection services per resident amounted to approximately 454 RSD annually, and in 70% of municipalities and towns even less than that amount.

Regarding earmarked transfers on social protection, they are regulated by the Ordinance on earmarked transfers on social protection from March 2016, which defines the amounts of non-earmarked transfers for funding social protection services, criteria for their distribution to local self-government units and for participation, dynamic of transfers, as well as the social protection services of particular importance for the Republic of Serbia. In 2018, home assistance for adults and older persons is funded with 25% through earmarked transfers, and day care for older persons with 9%. 2.8% of these expenditures were covered by donor projects and only 2.2% by beneficiaries' participation. It is notable that the number of towns and municipalities providing these services increased slightly in the period between 2012 and 2018, but considerably more funds were set aside for services (1,962,401,706 RSD in 2012, compared to 2,966,718,799 RSD in 2018), which can be attributed to the high share of earmarked transfers, although local self-government units set aside more from their own funds.

Primary health care centres and health care centres as institutions at the primary level of health care in the Republic of Serbia perform periodic preventive examinations of this vulnerable category of the population, but they also perform home visits for the purpose of palliative care.

From the capacities available for geriatric treatment, there are nine institutions whose range of services varies from hospital treatment and home treatment to geriatric psychiatry and support with mental health problems:

1. Institute for Gerontology and Palliative Care, Belgrade
2. Clinical Hospital Centre "Zemun" - Department of Geriatrics
3. Clinical Hospital Centre "Dr Dragisa Misovic" Dedinje - Department of Geriatrics
4. Clinical Hospital Centre Zvezdara - Clinical Department of Geriatrics

5. General Hospital Paracin - Department of Geriatrics
6. Special Hospital for Psychiatric Diseases Gornja Toponica - Department of Psychogeriatric
7. Health Centre Pirot - Department of Geriatrics
8. Institute for Mental Health Belgrade - Cabinet for the Third Age
9. Clinic for mental health protection and neuropsychiatry of developmental age KC Nis - Department of Psychogeriatric

The process of regular reporting on services, with established minimum data for regular and continuous monitoring at annual level, and period mapping, would enable local self-governments to identify issues and inefficiencies through self-evaluation and comparison. This particularly refers to the use of earmarked transfers with in-depth insight and exchange of experiences among local self-government units that have received the transfers, in order to improve this mechanism.

It is also necessary to establish the optimum level of distribution and availability of certain social protection services within the mandate of local self-governments, but also to define methodologically precise indicators, with a broader professional consensus, especially good-quality indicators, with the collection of data about eligibility criteria for beneficiaries, individualisation of services, and self-evaluation.

Supporting research on individual and population ageing processes to better address emerging needs in ageing societies

The Cabinet of the Minister without Portfolio in charge of demography and population policy supported the Red Cross of Serbia research, titled Intergenerational Exchange in the Republic of Serbia⁷⁰ and Intergenerational Solidarity between the Family and the State⁷¹, while in the same period with different partners and support of international stakeholders (European Union, Austrian Development Agency, United Nations Population Fund), Red Cross of Serbia conducted studies on the following topics: Social Inclusion of Older Persons (65+)⁷², Ageing in Cities – Challenges of the Modern Society⁷³, Ageing and Digital Inclusion – Baseline Study with Recommendations⁷⁴, Mental Health of Informal Caregivers⁷⁵ and On No Man’s Land – Gender-Based Violence against Older Women (65+) in the Republic of Serbia.⁷⁶ Also, several studies were conducted regarding various aspects of demographic ageing, and their number increased with the COVID-19 pandemic: the Knowledge of biological, psychological and sociological aspects of old age in the population of older persons⁷⁷, Experiences and quality of life of older persons during

⁷⁰ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/5286/medjugeneracijska-razmena-u-republici-srbiji.pdf>

⁷¹ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/6212/me%C4%91ugeneracijska-solidarnost-izmedju-porodice-i-drzave.pdf>

⁷² <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/4437/socijalna-ukljucenost-starijih-u-srbiji-e-knjiga.pdf>

⁷³ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/5214/starenje-u-gradovima-izazovi-savremenog-drustva-ebook.pdf>

⁷⁴ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/6183/starenje-i-digitalna-ukljucenost-web.pdf>

⁷⁵ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/6994/ment-zdravlje-neformalnih-negovatelja-web.pdf>

⁷⁶ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/7139/na-nicijoj-zemlji-web-low-res.pdf>

⁷⁷ <https://scindeks.ceon.rs/article.aspx?artid=0354-54151701125M>

the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictive measures introduced in the Republic of Serbia⁷⁸, Improving the position of informal caregivers in the Republic of Serbia – examining comprehensive needs with the aim to develop public policy recommendations⁷⁹, and How to improve intergenerational dialogue in the Republic of Serbia.⁸⁰

On 18 and 19 May 2018, the 10th International Gerontological Congress was held in Belgrade, on the topic of Ageing and Human Rights. Over 200 experts from the Republic of Serbia and abroad presented their papers in the area of geriatrics and gerontology, contributing to knowledge building in this area.

Promoting the participation of both persons with dementia and/or mental and behavioural disorders and their informal carers in social and community life

The Ombudsman indicates that when it comes to the rights of persons deprived of legal capacity, there is still notable tendency to apply this institute frequently. Although the Law provides for the option of partial deprivation of legal capacity, most often the procedure ends in total deprivation of legal capacity, which devoid persons of any and all decision-making rights. Namely, this institute is also very often misused in practice, to place individuals in social protection institutions, considering that for this to be done no consent is required from the person deprived of legal capacity. Also, the person deprived of legal capacity is not asked to consent or agree to proposed treatment measures, although international tendencies and standards stipulate this as mandatory. Although court decisions can by law be revised, the number of people whose legal capacity is reinstated, fully or partially, is very low.

Belgrade Centre for Human Rights reports that in 2019, 974 proceedings for deprivation of legal capacity were finalised, out of which 14.1% with total deprivation of legal capacity. During this year, centres for social work submitted a total of 665 proposals for deprivation of legal capacity, and 35 proposals to reinstate legal capacity. In 27 cases, the court made a final decision to reinstate legal capacity.⁸¹ Pursuant to current legislation, the decision on the deprivation of legal capacity is made by the court in extrajudicial proceedings, and the decision to assign a guardian is made by the centre for social work in administrative proceedings. The procedure for the deprivation of legal capacity is based on medical forensic examination, which can be done even without a judge being present. As provided in the Family Law, a person completely deprived of legal capacity has legal capacity of a child under 14 years of age, and this excludes any possibility of decision-making or exercise of rights, which affects many older persons with different forms of disability. The draft version of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Family Law provides for abolition of complete deprivation of legal capacity and extension of parental rights as the most drastic measure.

⁷⁸ <https://scindeks.ceon.rs/article.aspx?artid=0352-73792002201D>

⁷⁹ <https://helpnet.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Unapredjenje-polozaja-neformalnih-negovatelja-istrazivanje.pdf>

⁸⁰ <https://helpnet.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Medjugeneracijski-dijalog-u-Srbiji-165x235-F.pdf>

⁸¹ <http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Ljudska-prava-u-Srbiji-2020-za-web.pdf>

Mental Health Protection Programme in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2019-2026⁸², relying on the 2007 Strategy for the Promotion of Mental Health⁸³, as well as the Law on the Protection of Persons with Mental Health Difficulties⁸⁴ and the Rulebook on detailed conditions for the application of physical restraint and isolation of persons with mental health difficulties on treatment in psychiatric institutions⁸⁵, indicate a wide-spread stigma regarding mental health disorders, which is also significantly reinforced by the sensationalist media approach and inadequate public information, and recall that the process of deinstitutionalisation does not only entail reduced number of psychiatric beds – dehospitalisation, but also developing a network of planned and coordinated alternative community care, which includes cooperation between healthcare and social protection institutions, local community, associations of families and patients, as well as the education sector, judiciary and police, and functional changes in treatment methods and objectives. “Changing the paradigm rests on changing the attitudes towards the mentally ill, changing treatment methods and changing the status of the patient. Mental illness must be observed as any other illness, and treatment must be based on a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach”. Values and principles of the programme also include accessibility (“Mental health services should be open to all individuals that need assistance, regarding their sex, ethnicity, race, religion, age, level of education and social status”), as well as the necessity to protect human rights. It is explicitly required that human and patient rights be protected at all levels within the mental health protection system, that the mental health services have a built-in system for the protection of rights of persons with mental disorders, as well as that the work with persons with mental disorders be in line with the principles of ethics. All institutions should apply codes of ethics in treatment and research. Additionally, community participation also entails that persons with mental disorders, patient associations and family groups should be involved in mental healthcare planning and organisation processes. Destigmatisation entails that all participants in the treatment and prevention of mental disorders, and mental health promotion, including service beneficiaries and their families and the public overall, must be systematically informed about the issues of importance related to mental health. Existing prejudice and stigma (labelling, exclusion, discrimination) should be mitigated through anti-stigmatisation campaigns, to be organised and led not only by mental health experts, but also by beneficiaries of psychiatric services and all relevant organisations (schools, media and the civil sector). This is in line with the principles and values presented in the Institute for Mental Health’s Strategic Plan for 2020-2024.⁸⁶

The Program on Mental Health Protection also indicates the necessary activities in this area, which are:

1. Protection of the mental health of older people, which should take place in the community and be based on the identified needs of users and their environment, by professionals and society (including preventive interventions as an alternative or supplement to traditional clinical services);

⁸² http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2019_12/t12_0013.htm

⁸³ https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/Startegija%20razvoja%20mentalnog%20zdravlja_2.pdf

⁸⁴ <https://imh.org.rs/data/d/00025.pdf>

⁸⁵ <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2013/94/4/reg>

⁸⁶ <https://imh.org.rs/data/d/00017.pdf>

2. Organization of networks of institutions in which older persons with mental disorders are cared for and treated;

3. Providing continuous education of experts and society as a whole regarding mental disorders of older persons;

4. Promoting autonomy, as well as the possibility of independent living of older persons and enabling their participation in all important segments of society;

5. Prevention of age discrimination and implementation of anti-stigma campaigns for this population (older persons with mental disorders are twice as stigmatized, due to their age and mental disorders themselves).

- Action plan for the implementation of the Program on Mental Health Protection in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2019-2026 in measure 1.2.3 (Improvement of mental health of older persons) emphasizes the importance of establishing a network of institutions in which older persons with mental disorders are cared for and treated, which includes:

1. Establishing a network of institutions in which older persons with mental disorders are cared for and treated; and

2. Education, anti-stigma campaigns and promotion of autonomy and opportunities for independent living of older persons and enabling their participation in all important segments of life.

Psychosocial assistance services are provided to this category of the population through the Centre for Mental Health Belgrade, but also through the free service of the National Line for the Protection of Mental Health of the Clinic for Psychiatric Diseases "Dr Laza Lazarevic". Also, by the end of 2021, two more mental health centres will be opened (in Pancevo and Novi Sad), and the plan is to open another mental health centre in Belgrade, in the municipality of Palilula.

It is worth mentioning here also the innovative practice within the project implemented since 2020 by Red Cross of Serbia and international partners, with EU support. Addressing and preventing care needs through innovative community care centres (I-CCC) project activities also include volunteer work with older persons diagnosed with dementia, using tablets to do cognitive exercises several times a week according to a programme developed in cooperation with Austrian partners, with the purpose to preserve mental capacities and slow down cognitive deterioration.

Respecting the self-determination, independence and dignity of older persons, especially, but not limited to, towards the end of life

The Law on Free Legal Aid⁸⁷, adopted in 2018, can be mentioned as one of the most important changes in recent past, which, inter alia, guarantees the right to free legal aid for adults and persons placed in social protection institutions without their consent. The implementation of this law in practice shows that this institute needs more promotion, considering that those that need

⁸⁷ <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon-o-besplatnoj-pravnoj-pomoci.html>

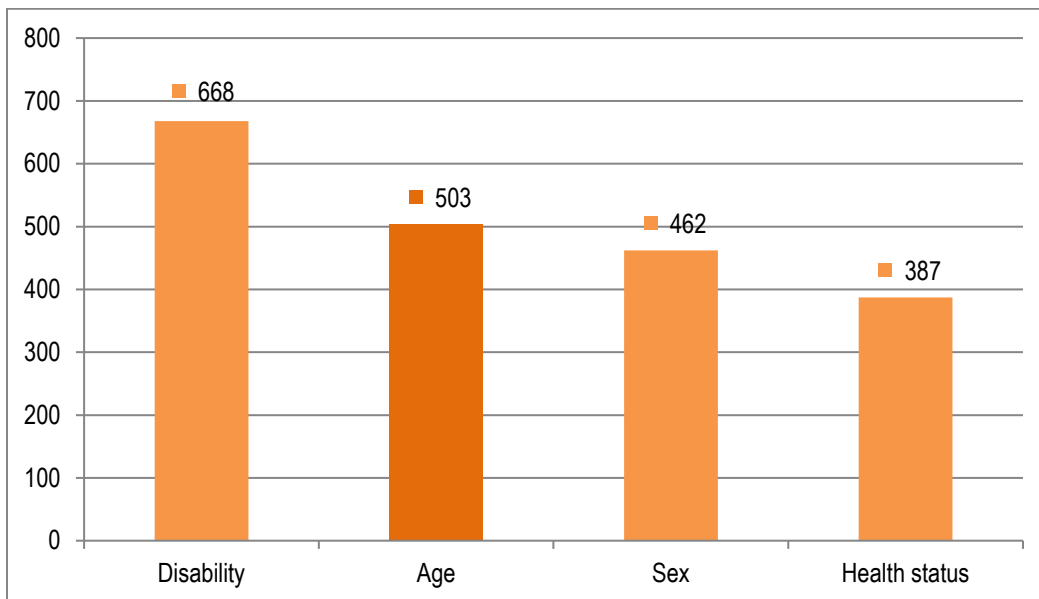
it the most know the least about how to access it, as well as that the procedure of application for free legal aid should be simplified, making it more accessible for those that need it the most.

The Ombudsman reports that older persons still face poverty and discrimination, with a particular issue being insufficient availability of special support services, especially the home assistance service, dissatisfaction with accessing rights to financial support due to difficult financial and living situation, difficulties in accessing rights to assistance and care provided by another person. These issues are particularly pronounced in rural areas, in which older women are in a particularly difficult position, living alone or most often dependent on other family members to meet their needs, considering that most often they do not have property rights on immovable and movable property, income, nor adequate access to community services in places without roads or public transport infrastructure.

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue recalls that older persons are recognised as a vulnerable social group in the process of development of the new strategic document in the area of prevention and protection against discrimination.

The practice of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality shows that age as grounds for discrimination is among the most numerous personal traits regarding the number of complaints submitted for the protection of discrimination over a period of ten years (2010-2020). Old age as grounds for discrimination was the second most frequent grounds according to the number of complaints in 2016, 2017 and 2018; in 2019, these grounds were the fourth by frequency, but they were listed in approximately 10% of the total number of complaints, while in 2020, discrimination on the grounds of on old age came second by frequency, with 14.8% of the total number of complaints submitted.

Chart: Number of complaints submitted to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, in the period 2016-2020



Out of the total number of complaints submitted to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality on the grounds of age, around one-third refers to the discrimination of persons over 65 years of age, having in mind that discrimination on the grounds of age includes all age categories. These grounds for discrimination often come in combination with another personal trait – disability, health status, sex, etc. When it comes to social relationships, discrimination against older persons is encountered in nearly all areas: in proceedings before public authorities, in the provision of public services, in the area of social protection and healthcare, pension and disability insurance, labour and employment, property rights, housing, education, culture and sports, as well as in the area of public information and media.

The number of complaints submitted to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality does not represent a realistic overview of the discrimination against older persons, and the majority of discrimination cases remain unreported. Older citizens often do not recognise discrimination and do not report it due to lack of information, lack of knowledge about the meaning of discrimination and protection mechanisms, but also due to the fact that because of their vulnerable situation they are not seldom forced to endure certain behaviours or they consider them shameful. With respect to this situation, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality continuously implements training on discrimination and protection mechanisms, which is a very important activity, not only in the field of education, but also prevention of discrimination and achieving equality. Trainings include, in addition to older citizens, also different stakeholders – representatives of the government and local self-government administrations, social protection and healthcare, law enforcement agencies, civil society, judiciary, employees in inspection services, media, etc.

3.2. Highlight in a nutshell the most important achievement during the last 20 years to protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and to raising quality standards for integrated social and long-term care and health services as well as adapting the status, training and working conditions of professional care workers. Give some recommendations for future action (what is planned/needs to be done).

It is necessary to: establish a special committee/subcommittee in the National Assembly on the issues of improving the situation of older citizens or delegate these issues to existing committees; local self-government units should develop support systems for older citizens in local communities; Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs should propose measures to provide support for financial security in old age, through a reform of the pension and social protection systems; Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and Ministry of Finance should propose measures to stimulate flexible forms of work enabling higher participation of older persons in the labour market and encourage them to work; Ministry of Health should undertake activities to improve the healthcare system and intensify the work on increasing the availability and the development of mobile and innovative services for older citizens, such as home treatment and care, field services for visit and assistance to older persons, telephone counselling and similar, especially in rural and inaccessible areas; develop long-term care services; healthcare institutions should intensify activities related to prevention, screening examinations and raising awareness and the level of information on health-related risks among older citizens; Ministry of Health should undertake measures to ensure higher availability of psychological and psychosocial support and mental health protection of the entire population, and older citizens in particular, taking into account crises, and work on ensuring equal access to palliative care within the right to healthcare, without discrimination, simplifying procedures to access palliative care and improve the use of information technologies for the purpose of assistance; local self-government units, in cooperation with the ministry in charge of social protection, should actively work on a balanced increase of the scope and continuity in the provision of adequate services of support to older citizens, with special focus on rural and remote areas and vulnerable groups (e.g.: dementia patients, poor persons, persons at risk of violence, etc.); encourage further development and creation of services by using innovative technologies (teleassistance) and other innovative services, such as occasional and temporary accommodation and similar; relax the conditions for licensing social protection service providers, provide adequate reliefs and incentives for service providers with the aim to stimulate capacity development and advancement of the formal support system; undertake concrete activities to improve the position and strengthen the capacities of informal caregivers, by understanding their needs, introducing support services, training for activities, networking, etc.; work on the promotion and development of intergenerational cooperation and volunteerism, both among young and older people.

2. Lessons learnt from managing the consequences and impacts for older people in emergency situations: the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 was one of the leading causes of death in 2020 for the population over the age of 65.

The ten most common causes of death among older persons in the Republic of Serbia in 2020

Causes of death (ICD-10)	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85 and over
Total	14.143	15.551	16.084	21.599	27.693
Cardiomyopathy	726	1.083	1.648	3.024	5.403
COVID-19	1.664	1.921	1.548	1.590	1.271
Primary hypertension	566	751	1.014	1.613	2.593
Myocardial infarction	526	767	969	1.416	1.521
Malignant tumor of the bronchi and lungs	1.312	973	516	311	137
Heart failure	390	519	36	1.076	1.566
Cardiac arrest	477	509	543	757	1.015
Acute myocardial infarction	630	558	546	547	689
Chronic ischemic heart disease	326	429	466	819	1.137
Atherosclerosis	85	147	223	536	1.334

Ensure that difficult healthcare decisions affecting older people are guided by a commitment to dignity and the right to health.

Soon after the pandemic and the state of emergency were announced in Serbia, the Ministry of Health adopted Recommendations for preventing the spread of infections caused by COVID in homes for adults and older persons⁸⁸, and later in the course of the pandemic, regular monitoring of the epidemiological situation in homes for adults and older persons as well as gerontology centres continued.

According to the operational plan of vaccination against COVID-19, developed by the Public Health Institute, the population over 65 years of age was vaccinated during the first phase

⁸⁸ <https://www.batut.org.rs/index.php?content=2066>

of vaccination, as priority group, together with employees in health institutions with the highest risk of contraction or transmission of the infection, as well as employees in homes for older persons and other social protection institutions. Specifically, these persons were over 65, permanently residing in homes for older persons and other social protection institutions, persons over 75 in the general population, persons in the age group 65-74 in the general population with multiple risk factors and beneficiaries of social protection institutions (other than homes for older persons) in which it is difficult or impossible to implement non-pharmacological prevention and elimination measures. The second phase of vaccination covered older age groups that were not covered by the first phase, persons with comorbidities, who did not fall under the older age group category, as well as employees in certain institutions of importance for the functioning of the society.

Older persons are the population with highest vaccination rates in the Republic of Serbia. According to Institute for Public Health data from July 2021, in the population 60-69 years of age, 65.3% of the population received at least one dose, in the population 70-79 years 78.6% and in the population aged 80 and over 57.7%. From early August 2021, persons that received two doses of the vaccine also have the third dose available by choice, and older persons who were among the first vaccinated people in the Republic of Serbia, are currently the most numerous among those that have received the third dose.

- Strengthen social inclusion and solidarity during physical distancing
- Fully integrate the focus on older persons into the socio-economic and humanitarian response to COVID-19
- Expand participation by older persons, share good practices and harness knowledge and data

Older Red Cross volunteers, as well as other older persons during the state of emergency due to COVID-19, were under strictly limited movement regime, which made it impossible for them to participate in regular volunteering activities. A high number of these volunteers was moved to remote activities, where they used the telephone, SMS and other services to provide information and psychosocial support to their peers until the end of the state of emergency.

Please describe briefly the main measures that have been set in your country to protect older persons and to address the four focus areas as outlined above. Please also indicate if and how policy approaches have changed, in light of the lessons learned since the start of the pandemic.

2.1. How were older people affected by Covid-19 in your country? Was there a higher share of hospitalisation and rate of deaths among older people in 2020 than for population in general and in relation to previous long-term observations?

According to a statement given by the Minister of Health on 20 July 2020, the share of deaths in the age group 20 to 29 years was 0.72% of total deaths, 30 to 39 years – 1.08%, 40 to 49 years – 8.6%, 50 to 59 years – 14.34%, while the majority of deaths was in the age group of 60 to 69 years – 28.67%, 70 to 79 years – 27.96% and above 80 years of age – 18.64%.

The service of home assistance was during the emergency situation provided in a limited scope, so geriatric home assistants visited beneficiaries only to purchase groceries and medicines for them, without doing any work on maintaining the hygiene, with the aim to reduce the risk of infection. Having in mind that this is contrary to the official position of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs about the obligation of local self-government units to ensure the continuity of service provision during the state of emergency, with adequate protection measures, the Ombudsman requested additional information from the service provider, Gerontology Centre Belgrade, which confirmed that the service was provided in a reduced scope to protect the health of the beneficiaries. After the address of the Ombudsman, and the end of the state of emergency, regular scope of services was re-established.

Similarly, informal caregivers providing the majority of informal care services to older persons were at the beginning of the pandemic also affected by strict movement restrictions, which made it very difficult for them to provide services to older beneficiaries. This was resolved at a later stage after interventions by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and the Ombudsman, by enabling informal caregivers to apply for special permits for movement during curfew. After the state of emergency due to COVID-19 was instated, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality particularly intensified monitoring the situation in the area of the protection of equality and proposed measures and initiatives to suggest to the Government and line ministries about various problems faced by the most vulnerable groups of citizens, primarily older ones, and proposed concrete solutions to overcome them in practice. During this period, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality proposed 312 measures and 12 initiatives including those related to re-examining the measures of full ban on movement for persons over 65 years of age, improving the work and functioning of the lines of assistance to older persons, ensuring access to regular health services and treatments, examinations and psychological support, continuous shopping options for older persons and payments of cash out of bank accounts, necessity for continuous provision of appropriate services, especially in the context of the pandemic (such as the home assistance service, support to older persons in remote villages, personal assistance), the need to pay special attention to people suffering from dementia and other. UNFPA supported the drafting of the report titled Older Persons in the Republic of Serbia and COVID-19 Pandemic.⁸⁹

Mortality rates of older persons were slightly higher in 2020 compared to the previous year⁹⁰:

Mortality rates 1000nqx [number]								
Age category	2017 Men	2017 Women	2018 Men	2018 Women	2019 Men	2019 Women	2020 Men	2020 Women
65-69	31,442	15,988	30,757	16,106	31,250	16,020	38,721	18,604
70-74	43,814	27,654	43,750	26,776	43,631	26,226	52,523	30,294
75-80	70,925	53,162	69,754	51,354	68,923	51,263	82,927	58,332
80-84	120,621	103,319	117,281	99,878	113,462	97,231	128,961	107,506
85+	199,853	198,954	191,045	188,866	183,256	182,907	208,501	198,768

⁸⁹ <https://serbia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/older-persons-and-covid-19-01-12.pdf>

⁹⁰ <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/18050103?languageCode=sr-Cyrl>

This increase follows the same rates as for the majority younger age groups and we cannot speak to great deviations.

2.2 What has been done to ensure that difficult health-care decisions affecting older people are guided by a commitment to dignity and the right to health? Please reflect on the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Policy Brief, when applicable, and briefly describe the main challenges and 3 - 5 good practices.

2.3. What has been done to strengthen social inclusion and solidarity during physical distancing? Please reflect on the recommendations of the Secretary- General's Policy Brief, when applicable, and briefly describe the main challenges and 3 - 5 good practices.

The priority of the Serbian Government in developing measures for preventing the pandemic was to preserve the health and life primarily of the oldest citizens, who represented the most-at-risk social group. In order to ensure everything that older persons needed at the time when they would not leave their homes, the Government of Serbia, in cooperation with local self-governments, initiated volunteer actions to provide assistance to older citizens. The recommendations for the protection from the virus were broadcasted daily in easily accessible and easily understandable ways. The Office for Human and Minority Rights, in cooperation with civil society organisations, published important information on their website regarding the pandemic, as well as recommendations given by the UN General Secretary, other UN mechanisms to protect human rights of vulnerable groups during the pandemic. In cooperation with national minority councils, messages about the prevention of COVID were broadcasted in national minority languages.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, undertook measures with the aim to reduce risk of infection in all social protection residential institutions, whether these were state institutions or institutions founded by other legal entities or natural persons. In addition to Ordinances adopted by the Government, this ministry issued 38 mandatory instructions, guidelines, orders and recommendations related to organisational issues regarding the functioning of social protection institutions in the situation of pandemic, undertaking epidemiological protection measures, creating the conditions to fully protect the health of residents, as well as creating the conditions for social distancing. Social protection inspection intensified control and monitoring of undertaken measure from the very onset of the pandemic, with the aim to prevent the development of conditions for entry and spread of virus among beneficiaries and employees in social protection institutions.

2.4. What has been done to fully integrate a focus on older persons into the socio-economic and humanitarian response to COVID-19? Please reflect on the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Policy Brief, when applicable, and briefly describe the main challenges and 3 - 5 good practices.

2.5. What has been done to expand participation by older persons, share good practices and harness knowledge and data? Please reflect on the recommendations of the

Secretary-General’s Policy Brief, when applicable, and briefly describe the main challenges and 3 - 5 good practices.

Regarding financial support to older persons during the COVID-19 pandemic, the package of support measures to the economy and the population was created by the Republic of Serbia Government in 2020, providing one-off assistance to pensioners two times (in the total amount of 9,000 RSD). Also, all citizens of the Republic of Serbia that applied (for pensioners the payment was automatic), received the sum in the value of 100 EUR. In 2021, all pensioners will receive assistance in the total value of 110 EUR. Vitamin packages were also provided to pensioners.

3. Activities in preparation and implementation of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020 – 2030

3.1. Is your country preparing (or already has) a National Action Plan (or similar) for the implementation of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020 – 2030? If yes, please briefly describe main actions foreseen.

3.2. Would your country agree to report on the implementation of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020 – 2030 in the framework of the next national reviews and appraisals of MIPAA/RIS?

At this moment, there is no document in the Republic of Serbia specifically regarding an implementation plan for the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-2030, but reports on activities within this WHO activity will be submitted within the following MIPAA/RIS reports.

Conclusions and priorities for the future:

- Overall summary of the findings, future challenges and opportunities related to ageing;
- Recommendations for future actions to be taken; and policy adjustments needed
- Progress towards the Lisbon Ministerial Declaration goals
- Major achievements over the twenty years of MIPAA/RIS
- Priorities for further policy research
- Requests, needs and wishes with regard to the work of international organizations in the field of ageing

Demographic ageing in the Republic of Serbia is a very pronounced process and its effects are clearly visible, even today – including through lower ratios of the number of persons paying contributions to the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund to persons that receive pensions, which is at this moment only 1:1.6, and projections for the next two decades indicate further steep increase of the share of older persons in the society, with the fastest increase in the share of the population over eighty years of age.

Regarding public policies, this requires a swift response, both in terms of short-term planning – for example to ensure the right balance between the sustainability of the pension fund and the financial security of pensioners – and in strategic terms. Key areas within which new public policies based on available information need to be adopted, as well as objectives defined within MIPAA/RIS and Decade of Healthy Ageing include:

- Full participation of older persons in the society, particularly in the areas of direct concern to them, including participation in the creation of strategies and public policies related to social protection, healthcare, pension insurance, disaster response planning, urban planning and labour market
- Develop intergenerational solidarity and policy that supports intergenerational exchange, which is present and intensively active in the Republic of Serbia and represents one of the foundations of social security in older age
- Increase the number of geriatric medical specialist doctors and geriatric medical nurses, as well as professional long-term care providers, stressing preventative health services, healthy ageing and lifelong approach to the phenomenon of ageing

Create an integrated long-term system that will:

- Include existing services provided through the healthcare and social protection, as well as pension insurance systems
- Improve coordination among services and planning of service development and implementation
- Increase the scope and availability of services – in line with established needs, but also awareness of the fact that the fastest increase of the share of oldest persons in the population also means a significant increase of needs in the future with less and less formal, but also informal care providers
- Recognise the key role that informal caregivers have in the provision of long-term care and provide systemic support for them (training, respite services, better availability of formal care services)

The 2021 Social Register Law, as well as the Strategy for Social Protection in the Republic of Serbia under development, should be good basis for further development of listed public policies.

Greatest achievements over the last twenty years certainly relate to better understanding of older persons as a heterogeneous population with specificities related to different subgroups within the older persons corpus – such as recognising older women as persons at risk of intersectional discrimination – in strategic documents, as well as the establishment of independent regulatory institutions, which have been dealing more and more with the older population through their work, recognising their increasing share in the society, but also threats to their human rights, which are partly the result of social norms, partly of inertia within the government system. Responding to complaints but also initiating actions, these bodies have created a significant body of information that are invaluable for understanding the human rights of older persons in the Republic of Serbia and improving their accessibility.

Simultaneously, the civil sector has made extremely significant and big steps forward during this period, with a transition from activities mainly directed at service provision toward public support and advocacy. In the domain of services, the civil sector has proven to be very efficient and valuable for older persons in some regions, while advocacy activity, especially with the participation of older persons themselves, spread to the national level (where one can speak of

good practices in the HumanaS network, gathering very heterogeneous civil society organisations around jointly advocating for older persons) and, in combination with research, it has also had significant results at the global level with continuous presence of Republic of Serbia representatives at important international events (including ministerial conferences and Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing sessions). It is necessary to involve the academia as much as possible, conduct various research, and better understand and design future evidence-based public policies.

International organisations recognise the civil sector in the Republic of Serbia and independent regulatory bodies in the domain of older persons and ageing and the practices of sharing experiences, expertise and good practices, global networking and cooperating should continue and intensify, under the auspices of international organisations and the UN, particularly in the context of accelerated demographic ageing worldwide.

Annex

Important research over the last five years

- Social Inclusion of Older Persons (65+)⁹¹
- Ageing in Cities – Challenges of the Modern Society⁹²
- Intergenerational Exchange in the Republic of Serbia⁹³
- Ageing and Digital Inclusion – Baseline Study with Recommendations⁹⁴
- Intergenerational Solidarity between the Family and the State⁹⁵
- Mental Health of Informal Caregivers⁹⁶
- On No Man's Land – Gender-Based Violence against Older Women (65+) in the Republic of Serbia⁹⁷
- How to improve intergenerational dialogue in the Republic of Serbia⁹⁸
- Improving the position of informal caregivers in the Republic of Serbia⁹⁹
- Analysis of usefulness and assessment of sustainability of counselling centre services for informal caregivers of dependent older persons¹⁰⁰
- Position and participation of older women in the political and public life in the Republic of Serbia¹⁰¹
- Accessibility of healthcare and social protection services to older citizens during COVID-19¹⁰²
- Dimmed City Lights – A Study of Position and Needs of Elderly Households of New Belgrade¹⁰³
- Special Report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality on Discrimination against Older Citizens¹⁰⁴

List of interviewed institutions and organisations

- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
- Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue
- Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography

⁹¹ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/4437/socijalna-ukljucenost-starijih-u-srbiji-e-knjiga.pdf>

⁹² <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/5214/starenje-u-gradovima-izazovi-savremenog-drustva-ebook.pdf>

⁹³ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/5286/medjugeneracijska-razmena-u-republici-srbiji.pdf>

⁹⁴ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/6183/starenje-i-digitalna-ukljucenost-web.pdf>

⁹⁵ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/6212/me%C4%91ugeneracijska-solidarnost-izmedju-porodice-i-drzave.pdf>

⁹⁶ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/6994/ment-zdravlje-neformalnih-negovatelja-web.pdf>

⁹⁷ <https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/7139/na-nicijoj-zemlji-web-low-res.pdf>

⁹⁸ <https://helpnet.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Medjugeneracijski-dijalog-u-Srbiji-165x235-F.pdf>

⁹⁹ <https://helpnet.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Unapredjenje-polozaja-neformalnih-negovatelja-istrazivanje.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.amity-yu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-Analiza-korisnosti-i-odrzivosti-usluge-Savetovalista.pdf>

¹⁰¹ https://www.amity-yu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Zene_u_politickom_i_javnom_zivotu_Srbije_Amity_2020.pdf

¹⁰² <https://www.amity-yu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/03-Istra%C5%BEivanje-o-pristupa%C4%8Dnosti-usluga-zdravstvene-i-socijalne-za%C5%A1tite-starijima-tokom-pandemije.pdf>

¹⁰³ <https://www.amity-yu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Prigusena-svetla-grada.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/poseban-izvestaj-o-diskriminaciji-starijih.pdf>

- Office for Information Technologies and E-Government
- Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
- Faculty of Medicine
- Faculty of Philosophy – Department for pedagogy and andragogy
- Faculty of Political Science
- Faculty of Geography
- Public Health Institute
- Republic Social Protection Institute
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Ministry of Rural Welfare
- Republic Public Policy Secretariat
- Special Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia for Sustainable Development Goals, prof. Slavica Đukić Dejanović PhD
- Gerontology Centre Belgrade
- Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance
- Ombudsman
- Commissioner for the Protection of Equality
- Team for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction
- City of Belgrade Secretariat for Transport

Civil Society Organisations

- Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
- Humanas Network
- Red Cross of Serbia
- Union of Pensioners of Serbia
- Amity
- Christian humanitarian association Bread of Life
- Charitable Foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church Philanthropy
- Gerontological Society of Serbia
- Help Net
- National Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
- Third Age Movement of Serbia