Inputs of the Protector of Citizens of the Republic of Serbia to the questionnaire of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities aimed at developing a study on the disability-inclusive international cooperation

1. **Please describe to what extent international efforts in the form of international cooperation, including international development aid, are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities and how this funding is tracked and reported.**

The Ministry of European Integration of the Republic of Serbia, together with line ministries and other relevant sectoral institutions, coordinates in the process of developing the Multiannual Planning Document on the needs of the Republic of Serbia for international development aid. The Multi-annual Planning Document contributes to a more effective planning of public policies in nine sectors (justice, internal affairs, public administration reform, competitiveness, human resources development and social development, energy, transport, environment, agriculture and rural development), which are the mainstay of economic development and help Serbia meet all economic and political conditions for accession to the European Union. This document is based on state policy and its purpose is to manage the allocation of donor funds for the implementation of national strategic reforms. During the preparation of the document, the main focus is on the development of a Situational Analysis of the Sectors, which provides a comprehensive overview of the sectors as well as an assessment of the current situation in a sector, in order to substantiate the decisions related to the allocation of donor aid for the implementation of national reforms.

The Working Group on Human Resources and Social Development worked on the finalization of the Situational Analysis of the Human Resources and Social Development Sector and was chaired by the Ministry of European Integration and the competent authorities in the Sector (Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Health).

Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia operating within the Prime Minister’s Office ensures that actions planned within the Human Resources and Social Development Sector’s planning policies, the implementation of which will be supported through international development aid, are inclusive and sensibilized, in line with the needs of vulnerable groups.

The meetings of the Working Group on Human Resources and Social Development are regularly attended by the representatives of the following donor organizations: UNICEF, OSCE, Japanese Embassy, French Embassy, European Commission, Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia, KfW, GIZ, German Embassy, UN Women, UNOPS, and Swiss Government through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Through their participation in these meetings, the representatives of the donor organizations are informed about the needs in the Social Development Sector. The international efforts in the domain of international cooperation, including international development aid in the field of supporting persons with disabilities, can be assessed as moderate, given that each donor has its own plan of activities and specific areas, instead of having target groups[[1]](#footnote-1) for which the contribution is provided.

Through this mechanism, the Republic of Serbia coordinates international development cooperation, including international development aid for all sectors, including the Sector for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities, which falls within the competence of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy.

The Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy through the Department for International Cooperation, European Integration and Projects coordinates bilateral donor aid for all sectors within the Ministry, including the Sector for Protection of Persons with Disabilities, relying on the priority measures defined in the National Strategy on Improvement of the Status of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020 - 2024.

In 2009, pursuant to Government’s Conclusion 05 No: 110-1740 / 2008-2 dated 5 February 2009, the Department for Contracting and Financing European Union Funded Programs was established within the Ministry of Finance, and it is responsible for financing, contracting, execution of payments and supervision of the EU programs and projects implementation. This Department monitors, records financing and reports on EU pre-accession funds, while the Audit Office of European Union Funds was established as a service of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, acting as the audit authority for the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.

Links:

* The document National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD)[[2]](#footnote-2) for the period 2014-2017 with projections until 2020, pages 35, 38, 193, 196, 199, 204, 205 and 262, sheds light on the situation in the domain of inclusiveness of persons with disabilities as well as on the measures of priority interventions for international development aid with a view to creating conditions for inclusive living of persons with disabilities.

<https://www.mre.gov.rs/latinica/dokumenta-medjunarodna-saradnja-projekti.php>

* Department for Planning, Programming, Monitoring and Reporting on EU Funds and Development Aid within the Ministry of European Integration of the Republic of Serbia, updates data within the information system for coordination of development aid in the Republic of Serbia in all sectors - Intersectoral Development Assistance Coordination Network – ISDACON

[www.evropa.gov.rs](http://www.evropa.gov.rs)

1. **Please describe how South-South and triangular cooperation[[3]](#footnote-3) support your country’s efforts to implement the rights of persons with disabilities, including by facilitating the exchange of innovative knowledge, skills and successful initiatives.**

The Republic of Serbia is interested in developing overall cooperation with the countries participating in the South-South cooperation process, and as a country in the European integration process and one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, it is particularly interested in developing the triangular cooperation and joint action of partners from developed and developing countries. The Minister of Foreign Affairs attended and delivered a speech at the UN South-South Cooperation Conference held in Argentina in March 2019.

1. **Please describe how your country coordinates, prioritizes and manages aid received from international cooperation in order to ensure that national development programs are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.**

The Republic of Serbia coordinates the aid received from international organizations through the Ministry of European Integration, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, through the Department for International Cooperation, European Integration and Projects and the Sector for Protection of Persons with Disabilities, ensures that national development programs are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities, through the implementation of measures and activities from the National Strategy on Improvement of the Status of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic to Serbia for the period 2020 - 2024.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. **Please explain whether the Sustainable Development Goals resulted in increased international development aid benefitting persons with disabilities in your country and how.**

In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in its Concluding Observations, having considered the Initial Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia, after the State responded to additional questions and after completing the dialogue with the State delegation, under item 66, expressed concern about the lack of mainstreaming of disability rights, as enshrined in the Convention, in the national implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The Committee recommended to the State party that disability rights, as laid down in the Convention, be mainstreamed in the national implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, and that those processes are undertaken in close cooperation with and involvement of organizations of persons with disabilities, with a transparent decision-making process and budget.

On 30 December 2015, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Decision on establishing an Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The Working Group is in charge of monitoring and implementing the Agenda and all goals and subgoals.

In the coming period, the Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for Monitoring the Implementation of the Recommendations of the United Nations Mechanism for Human Rights is to work on developing relevant human rights indicators and linking them to the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, in cooperation with the Civil Society Organizations Platform for Co-operation with UN Human Rights Mechanisms and with the support of the UN Human Rights Team in Serbia and the OSCE Mission. These indicators should enable an objective assessment of the progress made in securing the enjoyment of human rights.

The Office of the Minister without portfolio responsible for demography and population policy is tasked with the preparation of the Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Serbia on the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and the latest report (for which the Protector of Citizens submitted his contribution) was prepared for 2019.

The German Development Agency (GIZ), in partnership with the National Association of Towns and Municipalities (Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities - SCTM), and in cooperation with the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, launched an initiative in mid-2019 that local self-governments in Serbia are to adapt local strategic documents to the Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of making them local.

The Swiss and German Co-operation and Development Agency (SDC and GIZ) launched, in early 2020, a dialogue platform on "Sustainable Development Goals for All" within the project “Public Finance Reform – 2030 Agenda”.

The above-mentioned leads to conclusion that international agencies have recently started to introduce more intensively in their aid programs the element of monitoring the goals and subgoals of 2030 Agenda in the general contexts of raising awareness on their importance and amending national and local policies with the aim of implementing them. Therefore, there is currently no information as to whether the Sustainable Development Goals result in an increase in international development aid benefitting the persons with disabilities, but it can be concluded that efforts need to be intensified to make organizations of persons with disabilities more involved in the implementation and monitoring of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Links:

* <http://www.ciljeviodrzivograzvoja.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Okvir-javnih-politika-za-realizaciju-UN-ciljeva-odr%C5%BEivog-razvoja-posle-2015.pdf>
* <http://www.ciljeviodrzivograzvoja.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Public-policy-framework.pdf>
* <https://www.mdpp.gov.rs/doc/DNI-2019.pdf>

1. **Please describe to what extent and how are persons with disabilities and their organizations involved and consulted in decisions related to international cooperation in your country, and how they can access international cooperation funds and grants (including legal requirements, procedures and challenges).**

As stated in the inputs to questions 1 and 3, the Republic of Serbia coordinates the aid received from international organizations through the Ministry of European Integration, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, through the Department for International Cooperation, European Integration and Projects and the Sector for Protection of Persons with Disabilities, ensures that national and international development programs are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities through civil society organizations advocating their rights.

In March 2011, through the European Integration Office, the current Ministry of European Integration, a mechanism for consultation with civil society organizations called the SEKO Mechanism was established, which facilitates the participation of organizations’ representatives in the programming of EU funds and other international development aid. Through the SEKO[[5]](#footnote-5) mechanism, organizations representing persons with disabilities are involved and consulted in the decision-making process regarding international cooperation and grants.

The Republic of Serbia has taken over the model from Slovakia and since 2006 the National Convention on the European Union has been monitoring the process of negotiations about the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), and later the most important topics in the Serbia's European Union accession process. National Convention on the European Union is a permanent body for conducting a thematically structured debate on Serbia’s accession to the European Union among the representatives of the state administration, political parties, civil society organizations, experts, economy, unions, and professional organizations. Through the Convention on the EU mechanism[[6]](#footnote-6), organizations representing persons with disabilities are involved and consulted in the decision-making process regarding international cooperation and grants.

All civil society organization can access international cooperation funds and grants through open calls announced by the Ministries and through other stakeholders.

The Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy coordinates the EU Employment and Social Innovation Program (EaSI) and the EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship program (REC).

The above-mentioned means that the Ministry pays annual membership to enable all interested entities from the territory of the Republic of Serbia to exercise the right to submit project proposals to the open calls of the European Commission, and provides advisory and technical assistance in the application process, as well as letters of support when needed. In addition, the Ministry regularly informs the public about newly opened calls and novelties regarding the programs. The applicants submit project proposals directly to the European Commission and have the opportunity to communicate directly with the European Commission. The holders of positively evaluated project proposals sign a Grant Agreement with the European Commission (grant contract). The EU funds 80% of individual project proposals, while 20% is provided by applicants.

The Employment and Social Innovation Program aims to support social and employment policies in the European Union. It supports the efforts of Member States to create and implement social and employment reforms at European, national, regional and local levels, through the identification, coordination, analysis and exchange of best practices. The Republic of Serbia joined the Program in 2015. The right to participation in this program can be exercised by: all public and private bodies; profit-oriented organizations (only in partnership with public or private non-profit bodies); international organizations. Applicant specific criteria, as well as the documentation to be submitted, are defined separately on a case-by-case basis.

The objective of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship program is to promote, protect and implement the rights that ensure equality for citizens as guaranteed by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Treaty on the European Union, the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is particularly relevant to issues in the Negotiating Chapters for EU Accession - 19, 23 and 24. The Republic of Serbia joined this Program in 2018 and thus became the first Western Balkan country to participate in the Program. Funding areas are: non-discrimination and integration of the Roma; racism, xenophobia and homophobia; **the rights of persons with disabilities**; gender equality; prevention of violence against children, youth, women and groups at-risk; the rights of the child; EU citizenship; data protection; consumer rights.

The right to participation in this program can be exercised by: all public and private bodies; profit-oriented organizations (only in partnership with public or private non-profit bodies); international organizations. Applicant specific criteria, as well as the documentation to be submitted, are defined separately on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, when it comes to cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities and their access to various funds, the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, as a point of contact for the EU “Europe for Citizens” Program, regularly informs all potential beneficiaries of this Program’s possibilities and provides professional support to organizations during the project preparation and application process. A significant number of organizations tackling the rights of persons with disabilities have so far participated in informative events on promoting the Program itself, and a number of these organizations have enforced projects both as a project holder and as a partner in a number of projects implemented throughout the European Union.

With reference to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance - IPA as a European Union mechanism for pre-accession assistance to both EU candidate and potential candidate countries, it is a sole instrument that integrates all assistance programs for countries seeking EU accession. Interested entities can be informed on and apply for funding through:

Ministry of Finance - Department for Contracting and Financing European Union funded Programs, following the announcement of the tender for applicants, available at:

<http://www.cfcu.gov.rs/tenderi.php>

Open calls and tenders announced by the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia, available at:

<https://europa.rs/otvoreni-tenderi/>

<https://europa.rs/otvoreni-pozivi/>

1. **Please provide any information and statistical data available on disability-inclusive international cooperation in your country, including information related to the challenges and limitations of the international aid system to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.**

International cooperation can be important for promoting the position of persons with disabilities, either by introducing a disability perspective into general programs and projects, thus making them accessible to and inclusive of persons with disabilities, or through specific projects. The practice has shown that the parallel mode of operation produces the best results.

UNDP in the Republic of Serbia has supported the preparation of the Draft Strategy on the Improvement of the Position of Persons with Disabilities, the process of harmonizing national regulations with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the ratification of the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto, preparation of the Draft Law on the Use of Serbian Sign Language, preparation of draft by-laws for the implementation of the Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, Draft Law on Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, as well as the work of the Social Innovation Fund and the Global Compact. Furthermore, the UNDP supported the restructuring of professional rehabilitation enterprises in cooperation with the Government of the Kingdom of Norway.

Through the DILS program, the World Bank has supported capacity building of persons with disabilities associations in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy. The International Labor Organization has supported the promotion of the Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, in cooperation with representative employers' associations and trade unions.

The European Union has supported a feasibility study on the reform of persons with disabilities employment in Serbia, projects of persons with disabilities associations aimed at promoting anti-discrimination regulations and developing the shadow reports (the alternative reports) on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

DFID has supported the preparation of draft standards for social welfare services, including personal assistants services, day care and supported housing.

The Development Agency of the Republic of Ireland has supported a pilot project of personal assistant services.

The Austrian Government has supported the exchange of experience in the field of employment and professional rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

USAID has supported local projects to remove architectural barriers in several towns in Serbia.

The Kingdom of Sweden has supported a number of projects aimed at improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

The British Council has supported an inclusion project in the field of culture.

Oxfam and Handicap International have systematically supported the development and capacity building of organizations of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia.

UNICEF systematically works to support projects aimed at inclusion of children and the youth with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia.

For instance, with respect to EU Pre-accession IPA Funds, the project "Improving the Position of Beneficiaries in Residential Institutions with Intellectual and Mental Disabilities, by Creating Conditions for their Inclusion in Society and the Local Community" was implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. The overall objective of the project was to advance, in the long run, the social inclusion of persons with mental disorders and mental disabilities. The purpose of the project is to facilitate the deinstitutionalization and social inclusion of persons with mental disorders by transforming the institutions in terms of service delivery improvement and supporting the development of social and health services at the local level. This project was implemented on the basis of a financing agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the European Commission under IPA 2011 Program. The project is worth € 5,170,000. The implementation of the project commenced on 15 September 2012 and lasted for 24 months. The final beneficiaries of the project are the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy and the Ministry of Health.

In addition, the first phase of the project of the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, entitled "Project of Improving the Access to Public Facilities for Persons with Disabilities and Reduced Mobility (under IPA 2016)" is underway, during which public facilities in local self-government units (third and fourth categories of development) for which improving accessibility is required will be mapped and technical documentation for selected projects (minimum three facilities in 30 local self-government units) will be developed, while construction works will be carried out in the second phase of the project. The main objective of the project (of all phases, including projects under IPA 2016) is to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities and reduced mobility through facilitating the access to public facilities. The project involves 30 educational institutions (3 pre-school institutions, 5 secondary schools, 1 music school and 21 primary schools).

The researches relevant to the position of persons with disabilities in Serbia have been funded intermittently and, as a rule, by foreign donors, such as the EU, UN agencies and organizations -UNDP, UNICEF and the International Labor Organization.

Some of the civil society organizations in the Republic of Serbia that have received support from international organizations are:

* National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS)[[7]](#footnote-7)

- OSCE Mission to Serbia and the Government of Sweden

* Youth with Disabilities Forum[[8]](#footnote-8)
* UNDP (September 2019 - May 2020)
* Delegation of the European Union to Serbia (January 2018-June 2020; June 2014-December 2015; December 2012-June 2014; June 2012-June 2014)
* Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway to the Republic of Serbia (April 2013-December 2013)
* Embassy of the United States of America to the Republic of Serbia (April 2013-December 2013)
* The Centre for the Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities in Serbia[[9]](#footnote-9)
* UNDP

The state bodies and civil society organizations involved in the implementation of the projects have included project data in their work reports, which are available to the public.

The implementation of international cooperation projects is followed within the framework of the monitoring that each project envisages in accordance with individual project rules, but there was no intertwined systematical monitoring, and there is no integrated database covering all projects. Some of the identified challenges and limitations of the international aid system regarding the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities are:

* + Submission of project proposals in English, and not in Serbian
  + Lack of knowledge of civil society organizations related to project proposals preparation in line with donor procedures[[10]](#footnote-10)
  + Co-financing condition for project proposals
  + Lack of human resources for project implementation
  + Insufficient use of outreach mechanisms to identify the real needs of persons with disabilities

1. The exceptions are: UNICEF (target group are children) and UN Women (target group are women) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The document National Priorities for International Development Assistance NAD 2019-2025 has been prepared and it is to be adopted in the coming period. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) is a knowledge hub providing advisory and consulting services to all stakeholders on South-South and triangular cooperation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. National Strategy on Improvement of the Status of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic to Serbia for the period 2020 - 2024

   <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/dokumenti/ostalo>

   <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/dokument/45678/programi-planovi-strategije-.php>

   The First National Strategy on the Improvement of the Status of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic to Serbia referred to the period 2007-2015

   <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnik/Portal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2007/1/3/reg> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://sekomehanizam.org/uploads/SEKO_komunikaciona_agenda_SR.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://eukonvent.org/o-nacionalnom-konventu/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://noois.rs/projekti> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://fmi.rs/?page_id=2506> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.cilsrbija.org/ser/static.php?id=onama> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Procedures for applying for projects through the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy are provided in a simplified form. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)