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## **EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER**

Ad hoc report on the cost-of-living crisis

submitted by

**THE GOVERNMENT OF SERBIA**

Report registered by the Secretariat

on 15 January 2024

**CYCLE 2024**

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**  
**AD-HOC REPORT ON THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS**

**Questions**

**1) Please provide information as to whether and how the statutory minimum wage is regularly adjusted/indexed to the cost of living. Please indicate when this last happened, specifically whether it has been adjusted /indexed since the end of 2021.**

In accordance with the Labour Law, an employee has the right to a minimum wage for standard performance and time spent at work. The minimum wage is determined on the basis of the minimum price of labour determined in accordance with this Law, time spent at work and taxes and contributions paid from the wage.

The minimum labour price is determined by the decision of the Social and Economic Council established for the territory of the Republic (hereinafter: SEC). The minimum labour price is determined per working hour, without taxes and contributions, for the calendar year, no later than 15 September of the current year, and is applied from 1 January of the following year.

When determining the minimum wage, the starting points are, in particular: the existential and social needs of the employees and their families, expressed through the value of the minimum consumer basket, trends of the employment rate in the labour market, the rate of gross domestic product, trends in consumer prices, trends in productivity, and trends in average wages in the Republic.

The Labour Law also stipulates that the minimum labour price cannot be set at a lower amount than the minimum labour price determined for the previous year.

In 2020, the minimum labour price for 2021 was determined in the amount of RSD 183.93 per working hour without taxes and contributions. The specified minimum labour price was valid from 1 January 2021 - 31 December 2021.

Social partners (representative trade unions, representative association of employers and the Government) negotiate each year the minimum wage that will be valid in the following year, and although the Law stipulates that its amount cannot be set at a lower amount than the amount determined for the previous year, it can also be stated that the practice is that every year the level of the minimum labour price is determined in a higher amount compared to the previous year, which happened in all the previous years, even when determining the level of the minimum labour price for 2021, which was increased by 6.6% compared to 2020.

In 2021, the percentage increase of the minimum labour price was the result of a careful and realistic assessment of the state of the economy obtained after a detailed analysis of all parameters prescribed by the Law. In the conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was necessary to

ensure macroeconomic stability and maintain economic activity, so that the material position of employees would improve year after year.

Compared to 2021, the minimum labour price in 2022 was increased by 9.4%.

For the year 2023, the minimum labour price was increased by 14%, in relation to the level of the minimum labour price determined for the previous year, that is, the minimum labour price in 2023 is RSD 230 per working hour, and for the year 2024, the minimum wage has been increased by 17.8% and amounts to RSD 241 per working hour.

Table overview for 2021-2023:  
- Minimum wage for each year

<b>Year</b>	<b>Minimum labour price</b>	<b>Minimum wage for the average 174 working hours</b>
<b>2023</b>	230	<b>40,020</b>
<b>2022</b>	201.22	<b>35,012</b>
<b>2021</b>	183.93	<b>32,003</b>

### **Social and Economic Council**

Pursuant to Article 112 of the Labour Law, it is established that the minimum price of work per working hour without taxes and contributions for each year is determined by the decision of the Social and Economic Council of the Republic of Serbia.

Every year in the second half of August, the Social and Economic Council conducts negotiations between social partners, which end with a meeting of the Social and Economic Council, where the decision on the level of the minimum labour price for the following year is made. The decision on the amount of the minimum labour price is published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia and applies from 1 January of the following year.

When determining the minimum wage, the starting points are, in particular: the existential and social needs of the employees and their families, expressed through the value of the minimum consumer basket, trends of the employment rate in the labour market, the rate of gross domestic

product, trends in consumer prices, trends in productivity, and trends in average wages in the Republic.

Therefore, every year the minimum wage is adjusted, i.e. indexed, in relation to the cost of living, and when it comes to the coverage of the minimum consumer basket by the minimum wage, for the last three years, it was at the following levels:

Year	Month	Minimum labour price (net per working hour)	Index	Average minimum wage	Minimum consumer basket	Coverage (%)
2021	January	183.93	106.60	32,004.00	38,141.32	83.91
	December				41,380.11	77.34
2022	January	201.22	109.40	35,012.00	41,757.70	83.85
	December				48,344.00	72.42
2023	January	230.00	114.30	40,020.00	49,420.40	80.98
	May				51,874.39	77.15

**2) Please provide information on any supplementary measures taken to preserve the purchasing power of the minimum wage since the end of 2021.**

As very important, we would highlight the measures of State to limit the price of basic foodstuffs in order to protect the market, that is, to prevent deformations in the formation of prices and in order to preserve purchasing power, and these measures include, among others, measures such as:

- the Regulation on limiting the price of basic foodstuffs was adopted, which will be valid until 30 September 2022, limiting the price of UHT milk with 2.8 percent milk fat in a one-litre package to RSD 128.99, was adopted,
- the Regulation on price limitation of oil derivatives related to Euro-diesel and Euro-premium BMB 95 was adopted, which is extended for the next 30 days, in order to preserve the standards of citizens and economic stability,

- the Regulation on mandatory production and sale of bread was adopted, which limited the price of bread made from T-500 flour and the margin on other types of this foodstuff, in order to prevent major disruptions and preserve the standard of living of the population,
- the maximum retail price of white caster sugar, in all packages, is limited, which must not exceed RSD 102.99 per kilogram,
- the Government adopted a package of measures related to the safe supply of wood assortments and price control of firewood and pellets.
- the Regulation on the extraordinary intervention measure of support for flour producers was adopted, and the Government allocated RSD 160,000,000 for these purposes,
- the Decision on the temporary restriction of the export of basic agricultural and food products essential for the population was amended.

In September 2023, the Government of the Republic of Serbia, through the Action "Better Price", determined the following 20 product categories that will be on a constant "sale" regime, which means that at least one product from each of these categories will have a "Better Price - Price for the People".

The product categories are: **milk, yogurt, cheese, apples, lemons, tangerines, potatoes, lettuce, tomatoes, pasta, chicken (carcass), beef, pork, salami in wraps, soft drinks, coffee, baby food, baby shampoo, baby body wash, baby diapers, adult shampoo, adult body wash, toilet paper, sanitary napkins, dishwashing detergent, laundry detergent, flour type 500, flour type 400, sunflower oil, sugar, buttermilk, butter, margarine, cheese spread, onions, beans, cabbage, pate, hot dogs, frozen peas, jam, biscuits, certain types of chocolate, toothpaste and soap.**

Products in stores are clearly marked with a "Better Price" sign to make it easier for consumers to find them on the shelf and buy them.

The main goal of the action is to make the prices of these products the lowest or among the two lowest in that category in Europe. The Ministry of Internal Trade will monitor the analytics of this action on a weekly basis.

**3) For States Parties with no statutory minimum wage, please describe any measures taken to preserve the purchasing power of the lowest wages since the end of 2021.**

The Republic of Serbia has minimum wage.

**4) Please provide information as whether the cost of living crisis has led to the extension of inwork benefits.**

The Republic of Serbia plans to amend the Law on Social Protection. Work on the formation of a working group has begun. A letter was sent to all state authorities to submit the proposals of the

members of the working group in accordance with the Law on the Planning System. A letter will be sent to representatives of professional organizations and representatives of the civil sector for the purpose of delegating their representatives as members of the working group. After creating the formal conditions, work will begin on drafting the Law amending the Law on Social Protection. In accordance with the Law on the Planning System, an *ex post* analysis of the previous Social Protection Strategy was carried out, as well as an *ex ante* analysis of the effects of the new Social Protection Strategy, which will determine further directions of development in the social protection system starting from the principles defined in the European Pillar of Social Rights, Revised European Social Charter, Agenda 2030 and other relevant documents to which the Republic of Serbia is a signatory. Preparations regarding the formation of a working group have begun. After the formation of the working group, and based on the effects of *ex post* and *ex ante* analyses, the preparation of the Social Protection Strategy Proposal will start, as a new planning document.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs within the Financial Plan for 2023, and based on the Law on the Budget of the RS for 2023 (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 138/22 and 75/23), allocates significant funds to support individuals and families within social protection, as well as family protection.

Within the Program intended for social protection, funds have been allocated for: compensation in case of illness and disability, or allowance for care and assistance of another person and increased allowance for assistance and care of another person; compensation from the budget for children and family, i.e. financial social assistance and a special allowance in the form of a lifetime monthly cash income in the amount of the lowest employee insurance pension for one parent who has been directly caring, for at least 15 years, for their child and the child has exercised the right to an increased allowance for the assistance and care of another person; and compensation from the budget for housing and living.

Within the program activity - support to associations and local communities, funds have been allocated for current transfers for the improvement of social protection in local self-government units and grants to non-governmental associations that provide assistance to households (soup kitchen, food and hygiene packages, recovery of children of soup kitchen users in resorts of the Red Cross, etc.).

One-time assistance is assistance provided to a person who suddenly or momentarily finds themselves in a state of social need. Payment of one-time financial assistance is made from the budget of the local self-government through centres for social work. Data from the Social Card Register show that 24,194 one-time grants were awarded and that RSD 270,554,318.57 were spent in the period of use of the Register, 01 January – 04 October 2023.

As part of the Program intended for family protection, a total of RSD 91,406,188,000 has been set aside for the rights of beneficiaries in the area of family and child protection, namely: compensation from the budget for maternity leave; compensation for maternity leave, leave from work for child care and leave from work for special care of a child and other benefits; compensation for staying in a preschool institution for: children without parental care, children with mental and physical disabilities; as well as for benefits from the budget for the payment of parental allowance, child allowance, for the realization rights to funds for construction,

participation in the purchase, or purchase of a family house or apartment based on the birth of a child. During 2023, EUR 3,221,400 were paid for apartments to 236 mothers.

It is important to mention that the funds are planned in the amount for one-time aid to the vulnerable population, aid for training for work, financial aid to migrants, etc.

In order to protect the standards of pension beneficiaries, in February 2022, all pension beneficiaries, as well as temporary benefit beneficiaries - people unable to work due to the second and third categories of disability, i.e. remaining working ability, and children with disabilities - beneficiaries of temporary benefits from the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance, were paid assistance in the amount of 20 thousand dinars per person. The total funds for one-time assistance paid to pension beneficiaries in February 2022 amounted to 33 billion 400 million dinars.

It is planned that aid will be paid to the same categories of beneficiaries at the end of November or the beginning of December 2023. The expenses for the payment of the amount as an increase with the pension in 2022 amounted to RSD 17 billion and 135 million. For this purpose, funds in the amount of 20 billion 512 million dinars are planned in 2023.

In addition, we would like to point out that since November 2018, in order to protect standards, beneficiaries of lower pension amounts have been paid a monetary amount regularly, on a monthly basis, as an increase with the pension, a special benefit that increases the income for about 75% of the total number of pension beneficiaries.

Since the emergence and declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Republic of Serbia has provided measures of support and assistance to employees, as well as other categories of the population, in accordance with budgetary possibilities.

Since 2021, one-time financial aid has been paid on several occasions to the employees most affected by the crisis, we would single out just a few:

- a one-time financial aid of RSD 10,000 was paid to employees in health institutions;
- a one-time financial aid of RSD 10,000 was paid to employees in primary and secondary schools, higher education institutions and boarding houses for students;
- a one-time financial aid of RSD 10,000 was paid to health workers employed in residential social protection institutions founded by the Republic;
- a one-time financial aid of RSD 10,000 was paid to employees in social protection institutions;
- a monthly reward of up to 30% of the monthly salary is provided to healthcare workers and other persons employed in publicly owned healthcare institutions, who are engaged in work related to the treatment of patients and prevention of the spread of the epidemic of the disease COVID-19;
- all citizens, who had loans from banks, during COVID-19 pandemic, had the possibility, if they wanted, to stop paying instalments (moratorium on repayment of loans), without additional interest;
- all adult citizens of Serbia have received one-time assistance several times (in 2020 in the amount of EUR 100, and twice in 2022, in the amount of EUR 30).

In the middle of 2020, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Regulation on the Youth Employment Incentive Program "My First Salary". The need arose from the fact that the position of young people in the labour market was less favourable than the general population in the Republic of Serbia. Young people face significantly more obstacles in the labour market compared to their peers in the EU-28, where the youth unemployment rate is twice as low, and the youth employment rate is significantly higher. Young people with secondary and higher education also face difficulties in finding their first job. The "My First Salary" program creates additional opportunities for training, gaining first work experience and increasing opportunities for a more competitive performance of young people in the labour market and employment. Also, bearing in mind that the unfavourable epidemiological situation in that period could also affect the state of the labour market, it was assumed that the program "My First Salary" would have a positive effect on the smooth functioning of the labour market and the elimination of the harmful consequences of COVID-19, with simultaneous complementarity with the already adopted measures of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which were aimed at preserving jobs and maintaining employment.

The program is implemented at the employers' belonging to the private or public sector, while priority is given to employers from the private sector, especially employers from devastated areas. The program lasts nine months.

Furthermore, in 2022, the Government amended the Regulation on the Youth Employment Incentive Program "My First Salary", which increased the amounts of compensation for unemployed youth who would be included in this program under a new public call (for youth with secondary education, the amounts were increased from RSD 22,000 to RSD 25,000 per month, and for young people with higher education from RSD 26,000 to RSD 30,000 dinars).

In order to mitigate the pandemic of the disease COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, at the proposal of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Government of the RS adopted a Conclusion (05 No.: 401-3115/2021-215 of 15 April 2021), based on which citizens of the Republic of Serbia, who were on the records of the National Employment Service on the day of the adoption of this conclusion, were paid a one-time financial aid in the amount of EUR 60 in RSD equivalent amount. For these purposes, the National Employment Service paid a total of RSD 4,075,433,243.67.

Systemic support of the State to the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs is also significant - the Regulation on establishing the Investment Program "Recovery and Development" was adopted, considering the strategic determination to provide systemic support to the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs. Funds for the implementation of the Program were provided from the credit line of the European Investment Bank and from the Development Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

Other measures aimed at reducing the negative economic effects on citizens, employees and the economy were also implemented, such as the Program of economic measures to reduce the



negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and support for the Serbian economy. The package of economic measures to reduce the negative effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and support the economy of Serbia was worth EUR 5.1 billion. Economic measures are divided into four groups - tax policy measures, direct aid to the private sector, measures to preserve liquidity and direct aid to all adult citizens. These were comprehensive measures, the main goal of which was to preserve the acquired level of employment and help the companies most affected by the crisis caused by the coronavirus epidemic. When formulating the measures, the requests and proposals of numerous business associations and social partners were considered.

We had four groups of economic measures:

1. Tax policy measures

Postponement of the payment of taxes on wages and contributions for the private sector, during the state of emergency, with later repayment of the obligation in instalments starting from 2021 at the earliest - Postponement of the payment of advance income tax in the second quarter of this year - Exemption of donors from the obligation to pay VAT.

2. Direct aid to the private sector

The Regulation on fiscal benefits and direct grants from the budget of the Republic of Serbia to business entities in the private sector and financial assistance to citizens in order to mitigate the economic consequences caused by the disease COVID-19 (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 54/2020 and 60/2020), provided the following:

For business entities - legal entities, including branches and representative offices of foreign legal entities (hereinafter: legal entities), the due date for payment could be postponed for:

- taxes and contributions on wages and wage compensation;

- advance payments of corporate income tax for March, April, and May 2020 until the submission of the final corporate income tax return for 2020.

A legal entity has the right to postpone the payment of owed tax and contributions, or the advance payment of corporate income tax, whose due date for payment had been postponed, for a maximum of 24 equal monthly installments without paying interest.

Entrepreneurs and agricultural entrepreneurs who pay taxes and contributions on income from self-employment through self-taxation, and have not opted for payment of personal wages, exercised the right to postpone the due date of advance payments of taxes and contributions on income from self-employment, as well as deferment of payment of these obligations, by applying the rules related to postponement of due date for payment and postponement of advance payment of income tax for legal entities.

The program to support small and medium-sized enterprises for the purchase of equipment is a program implemented by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Serbia in cooperation with the Development Agency of Serbia (DAS) and selected banks and leasing companies.

The Ministry of Economy awards grants to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurs and cooperatives for the purchase of production equipment/construction machinery/machines and equipment for the improvement of energy efficiency and ecological aspects of production with the aim of facilitating the financing of the purchase of equipment.

The funds determined by the Program are intended for co-financing the acquisition of new production equipment and equipment directly involved in the process of production of tradable goods and the execution of construction works, namely:

- production equipment and/or machines;
- transport and manipulative means included in the process of production and internal transport;
- parts, specialized machine tools or other capital goods;
- machines and equipment for improving energy efficiency and ecological aspects of production;
- construction machinery for carrying out construction works.

The Program is realized through two separate Public Calls:

- The first public call is intended for commercial banks and leasing companies interested in participating in the Program, since grants are approved together with a loan approved by the partner bank(s), or a financial leasing agreement approved by the partner leasing company(ies). Based on that public call, the banks and leasing companies that will participate in the Program are selected;
- The second public call refers to business entities that want to apply for grants for the purchase of equipment.

### 3. Measures to preserve liquidity

Financial support program for the economy of the Development Fund for entrepreneurs, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, agricultural farms and cooperatives - RSD 200 million.

### 4. Guarantee scheme to support the economy in COVID-19 crisis conditions.

For loans to maintain liquidity and working capital for entrepreneurs, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, farms, given by commercial banks. The value of the guarantee scheme was RSD 240 billion.

Public sector salaries, and pensions were secure and regular.

Additional support for the most affected sectors - support for large companies in the form of corporate bonds.

**5) Please provide information on changes to social security and social assistance systems since the end of 2021. This should include information on benefits and assistance levels and the allocation of benefits.**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
At-risk-of-poverty rate (%)	25.7	24.3	23.2	21.7	21.2
Absolute poverty rate (%)	7.3	7.1	7.0	6.9	
Gini coefficient <sup>1</sup>	37.8	35.6	33.3	33.3	33.3

*Source: (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022) and UNICEF (2022)*

The at-risk-of-poverty threshold for a household with two adults and one child under the age of 14 was RSD 43,315, while for a four-person household with two adults and two children under the age of 14, it was RSD 50,533.

Observed according to age, persons aged 18 to 24 were most exposed to the risk of poverty - 27.7%, as well as persons aged 65 and over - 22.7%. Persons aged 25 to 54 had the lowest at-risk-of-poverty rate - 19.1%.

According to the type of household, households with dependent children were more exposed to the risk of poverty - 21.4%, compared to households without dependent children - 20.9%. Households consisting of two adults with three or more dependent children had the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate - 38.8%, and households consisting of three or more adults - 14.3% had the lowest at-risk-of-poverty rate.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate according to the most common activity status, for persons aged 18 and over, shows that 48.6% of unemployed persons were exposed to the risk of poverty. Self-employed persons had a higher at-risk-of-poverty rate than persons employed by an employer, 14.5% compared to 5.4%. For pensioners, this rate was 19.9%.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated by using data on income for the SILC dataset.

In recent years, the share of children who are poor and socially excluded in Serbia has slightly decreased. Ensuring the minimum financial security of the family, as one of the conditions for improving the quality of childcare, supporting the well-being and overall development of children, especially younger ones, and especially children living under unfavourable socio-economic circumstances, is realized by the social protection system through cash social benefits, parental allowance, child allowance and a number of other measures and rights prescribed by the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Financial Support for Families with Children.

In 2021, the at-risk-of-poverty risk was 21.2%, and, in comparison to 2020, it is lower by 0.5 percentage points. The at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate was 28.5%, and compared to 2020 it is lower by 1.3 percentage points.

In 2022, the at-risk-of-poverty rate was 20.0%, and compared to 2021, it was lower by 1.2 percentage points. The at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate was 28.1%, and compared to 2021, it was lower by 0.3 p. p.

The Law on Social Protection, Article 79, prescribes the types of material support. The beneficiary can obtain **material support** through financial social assistance, allowance for assistance and care of another person, increased allowance for assistance and care of another person, special financial compensation, assistance for training for work, one-time financial assistance, assistance in kind and other types of material support. The Law on Social Protection stipulates that the right to financial social assistance belongs to an individual, that is, a family, who, through their work, income from property or other sources, earn an income lower than the amount of the financial social assistance determined by the Law on Social Protection. The Law stipulates that the base for determining financial social assistance is harmonized with the consumer price index in the previous six months, based on statistical data, twice a year, on 1 April and 1 October.

In addition, **various local benefits** also contribute to ensuring the standard of living for vulnerable population groups (utility bill reduction, energy vulnerable customer status, free textbooks, student scholarships, free kindergarten, free meals in the soup kitchen, transportation costs for students, free snacks at school, free health care, one-time benefits in money and in kind and other types of assistance that may vary in local self-government units). To all this should be added a significant number of rights that are granted on the basis of the Law on Financial Support for Families with Children.

Specific **support for single-parent families** is achieved through the use of several rights and services at the national and local level, such as: the right to increased cash social assistance, the right to child allowance under more favourable conditions, one-time material benefits, free or

compensation for use of services in day care centres for children with developmental disabilities, subsidies for the payment of electricity, subsidies for the payment of communal utility services, public transport services, etc. The guardianship authority also has the option of providing support through counselling and psychosocial support. Support for a single parent is also possible through the imposition of measures of preventive and corrective supervision over the exercise of parental rights in relation to the other parent who does not fulfil their obligation to support the child, as well as by initiating court proceedings to exercise the child's right to support from the parent who does not fulfil this obligation.

The **number of beneficiaries of financial social assistance (FSA)** is around 200,000 people per year, and working-age FSA beneficiaries who are able to work make up half of all FSA beneficiaries.

The Law on Social Protection stipulates that the basis for determining the financial social assistance is adjusted to the consumer price index in the previous six months, based on statistical data, twice a year, on 1 April and 1 October.

An *ex-post* analysis of the application of the previous **Social Protection Development Strategy** was performed, as well as an *ex-ante* analysis of the effects of the new **Social Protection Strategy**). The draft of the new strategy will determine further directions of development in the social protection system starting from the principles defined in the European Pillar of Social Rights, Agenda 2030 and other relevant documents to which the Republic of Serbia is a signatory.

The most important cash benefits aimed at reducing poverty are the financial social assistance (FSA) and child allowance (CA), and they are given on the basis of a means test. According to the findings of the World Bank, the financial social assistance has the best performance in terms of economy of all social programs financed from the state budget.

Beneficiaries of financial social assistance have the right to health care and other material benefits and privileges, e.g. the status of an energy-vulnerable customer, which is actually a reduction in the monthly bill for electricity or gas, and also entitlement to the child allowance if the child regularly attends school. Other types of assistance may vary in local self-government units (in most towns and municipalities, beneficiaries of financial social assistance are entitled to one-time financial assistance or benefits in kind, free meals in soup kitchens, free textbooks, reimbursement of transportation costs for students, scholarships for students, compensation costs of staying in a preschool institution, reduction of utility bills, etc.). There are also rights guaranteed under the *Law on Financial Support for Families with Children*.

The financial situation in the social protection system is stable, all rights are paid regularly.

**The Social Card Register** has been operational since 4 April 2022. All the data provided by the Law on the Social Card were consolidated into the register database before the start of the application of the register in such a way that the register was integrated with the internal records of the Ministry in the field of social, child and veterans' and disabled veterans' protection, and also with the original records of other authorities (Central Population Register, records of the Ministry of Interior, Tax Administration, Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance, National Employment Service, Republic Geodetic Institute).

Data in the register is exchanged according to a certain dynamic so that there is always up-to-date data on the socio-economic status of the persons on whom the data is kept, and all changes in status that affect the right are also notified (errors of exclusion, errors of inclusion and other changes).

The basic functions of the register are to be used as a source of data for the needs of administrative procedures in the exercise of rights, to generate notifications for the actions of officials for appropriate cases where it is necessary to carry out a check and take measures *ex officio*, to act on the decisions of the Government when assistance is to be provided to certain groups of persons, for analytical work and the like.

In addition to the functionalities that exist in relation to reaching out to existing persons who are in the register, the registry has the possibility to process data on certain groups of persons (vulnerable groups) according to the Government's decisions, and to "filter" persons according to the criteria it defines for appropriate assistance according to those decisions. In this way, the register enables targeted outreach to persons who need help.

The data in the register are exchanged and updated according to certain dynamics so that there is always the necessary up-to-dateness of the data on the socio-economic status of the persons on whom the data is kept.

In addition, notifications are created about changes in the socio-economic status of persons that have an impact on the exercise of rights. These are notifications about: exclusion errors, inclusion errors, inconsistencies of data from internal records, inconsistencies of data from source records, changes from source records and inaccuracies reported by beneficiaries through the e-Government Portal.

Professionals in the social protection system use data from the Social Card Register for the purposes of conducting administrative procedures and resolve notifications received from the Social Card Register about changes related to existing beneficiaries.

During the implementation so far, professionals of centres for social work have, owing to the SC Register, acted proactively towards citizens in about **50,000 cases**, informing them that they can

exercise a right (for example, the right to child allowance, for compensation of expenses for stay in kindergarten, etc.).

Decisions on the recognition or cancellation of a right are always made by competent persons - professional workers who are authorized by law to deal with administrative proceedings.

Beneficiaries of all rights **have the option of filing a complaint, given that rights are decided in the procedure according to the law regulating the administrative procedure. It is one of the basic human rights that is guaranteed.** In each specific procedure, the beneficiary is provided with an administrative act in which there is an instruction on the legal remedy, i.e. that an appeal can be filed with the appropriate second-instance authority, within what time frame and in what way. After the second-instance authority, it is possible to conduct the appropriate court proceedings.

In the drafting of the Law on the Social Card and the realization of the register, the best examples of practice were used, as well as the provisions of all laws related to the protection of personal data, data confidentiality, information security, electronic identification, electronic administration, and of the laws in the field of social protection, child and family protection, and veterans' and disabled veterans' protection.

The **centre for social work (CSW)** is the institution where rights are exercised, measures are applied, services are provided and other tasks are performed in the field of social protection. In the exercise of public authority, the centre carries out activities that are mainly determined by the Law on Social Protection, Family Law as well as other laws and regulations. The founder of the centre for social work is the local self-government unit. The centre can be established for two or more municipalities, but under the condition that each municipality has a separate organizational unit - a department. The entire territory of the Republic of Serbia is covered by a network of centres for social work. In total - 141 centres for social work within which there are 173 municipal departments.

In the centre for social work, on-call is a special form of work outside working hours, where the employee must be **constantly available (on standby)** in order to perform an **immediate intervention** if necessary. Social protection services can be provided in the form of immediate interventions to ensure safety in situations that threaten the life, health and development of beneficiaries and are provided **24 hours a day**. These services are provided by CSW with mandatory cooperation with other competent services and authorities. Urgent intervention services are provided by the Republic of Serbia or the autonomous province.

The Law on Social Protection stipulates that social protection is implemented in a way that ensures the timely identification of the needs of beneficiaries and the provision of services in order to prevent the emergence and development of conditions that threaten the safety and satisfaction of life's needs and hinder inclusion in society.

Social protection services are provided in accordance with the function they have, in a connected and coordinated manner, so that they provide complete social protection to the beneficiary at every

age of life. Services are provided in accordance with the principles and standards of modern professional social work practice. The quality of services is improved by the application of modern scientific and professional achievements and professional support in order to improve the professional competences of professional workers and the quality of beneficiaries' protection.

The provision of social protection services is organized in a way that ensures their **physical, geographic and economic accessibility**, while respecting cultural and other differences. Social protection services are provided in such a way that the beneficiary is provided with an individualized approach and a professional worker in charge of working on the specific case, i.e. case manager.

With regard to the beneficiaries' rights, they have, among other things, the right to be informed, in accordance with their needs and abilities, about all data that are significant for determining their social needs, as well as how these needs can be met. The beneficiary has the right to participate in the assessment of their condition and needs and in deciding whether to accept the service, as well as to receive all the information they need in a timely manner. Without the consent of the beneficiary or their legal representative, no service may be provided, except in cases established by law.

The beneficiary has the right to **free choice of services and providers of social protection services**. They also have the right to privacy when providing social protection services. The beneficiary who is not satisfied with the service provided, the procedure or the behaviour of the service provider can file a **complaint with the competent authority**.

## **LAW ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN**

The Law on Financial Support for Families with Children (*Official Gazette of the RS*, No. 113/17, 50/18, 46/21-CC, 51/21-CC, 53/21-CC, 66/21, 130/21, 43/23-CC and 62/23) prescribes the following rights:

### **1. Right to wage compensation during maternity leave, leave from work for child care and leave from work for special child care**

This right is exercised by employees of legal entities and natural persons (employers) in accordance with the Labour Law.

The Labour Law determines the length of leave from work, and the Law on Financial Support for Families with Children determines the method of obtaining wage compensation during leave from work.

Maternity leave lasts from the day it starts, mandatorily 28 days before childbirth or according to the doctor's opinion, for 45 days and up to three months of the child's life.

Maternity leave is granted to the child's mother, and the child's father in exceptional cases (in the case when the mother abandons the child, dies or is prevented from exercising that right for other justified reasons (serving a



prison sentence, serious illness, etc.). In the aforementioned cases, the child's father has the right even when the mother is not employed.

Leave from work for child care lasts the remaining period from the completion of the first three months of the child's life to 365 days for the first and second child, or two years for the third and each subsequent child.

The father and mother of the child who are employed can agree who will use this right after the child is three months old.

Leave from work to care for a child by an adoptive parent, guardian or foster parent of the child under the age of five lasts - 11 months if the child placed in the family is under three months old, or 8 months if the child is older than three months. The leave can only last up to 5 years of the child's life.

Leave from work for the special care of a child, based on the opinion of the competent commission of the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance, can last up to the fifth year of the child's life (without interruption or with interruptions).

The father and mother of the child who are employed can agree on who will exercise this right.

The wage compensation is determined in the amount of the average monthly base for the wage, for which contributions for compulsory social insurance were paid, which were recorded in the Central Register of Compulsory Social Insurance, in the last 18 months preceding the first month of leave due to complications related to maintenance of pregnancy, or preceding the maternity leave if the leave due to complications related to the maintenance of the pregnancy was not used, and the maximum is five average monthly wages in the Republic of Serbia, according to the data valid on the day of the start of exercising the right.

The wage compensation during maternity leave (from the day it starts until three months of the child's life) cannot be lower than the minimum wage.

The wage compensation during leave from work for child care and leave from work for special child care is equal to the average base in the observed period of 18 months.

The wage compensation is calculated by the municipal - city child protection service on the basis of data on the amount of the base for which contributions for compulsory social insurance were paid, which were recorded in the organization that keeps records of paid contributions for compulsory social insurance, on the day of submission of the application for exercising rights.

The payment of the net wage compensation is made by the ministry responsible for social affairs to the personal current account of the applicant, and the amounts of the corresponding taxes and contributions are paid to the prescribed payment accounts, from the funds provided in the budget of the Republic.

A request for the exercise of the right to wage compensation can be submitted until the expiration of the duration of the right established by law.

**1a. The right to leave from work for child care and leave from work for special child care and to wage compensation, or to wage compensation for the child's father, if the child's mother is a self-employed person or, as the owner of a family farm, has the status of a self-employed person according to the law governing personal income tax**

The father of the child who is employed by an employer has the right to leave from work to take care of the child and to wage/salary compensation, if the mother of the child is a self-employed person or, as the owner of a family farm, has the status of a self-employed person according to the law governing personal income tax.

The father of the child, who is employed by an employer, has the right to leave from work for the special care of the child and to wage/salary compensation, if the child's mother is a self-employed person or, as the owner of a family farm, has the status of a self-employed person according to the law governing personal income tax.

The right to leave from work to take care of the child and to wage/salary compensation can be realized based on a mutual agreement with the child's mother, after the completion of the first three months of the child's life.

The child's father can exercise the right to leave from work for child care and to wage/salary compensation, for the remaining period up to one year of the child's life for the first and second child, or up to two years of the child's life for the third and each subsequent child, from the day when the mother received entitlement to other benefits based on the birth and care of the child.

The right to leave from work for the special care of the child and corresponding wage/salary compensation, based on a mutual agreement with the child's mother, can be exercised by the child's father based on the opinion of the competent commission of the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance on the degree of impairment in the child's psychophysical development or the child's disability.

The father of the child can exercise the right to leave from work for child care and to wage/salary compensation if the mother has the right to other benefits based on the birth and care of the child starting on 1 August 2023 and later.

The child's father can exercise the right to leave from work for the purpose of special care of the child and to wage/salary compensation, based on the opinion of the competent commission of the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance on the degree of impairment in the child's psychophysical development or the child's disability starting on 1 August 2023 and later.

The right to leave from work is decided by the employee's employer, in accordance with the regulations governing labour.

On the day the father's rights are effected, the mother's right to other benefits based on the birth and care of the child ceases.

## **2. Right to other benefits bases on the birth and care of a child**

(the right is applicable since 1 July 2018, and since 1 August 2023 with amendments)

Other benefits based on the birth and care of a child and special care of a child, for a child born on 1 August 2023 and later, can be exercised by the mother who earned income in the period of 18 months before the birth of the child:

- 1) based on self-employment;
- 2) as the owner of a farm, with the status of a self-employed person in accordance with the law governing personal income tax.

Other benefits based on the birth and care of a child and special care of a child, for a child born on 1 August 2023 and later, can be exercised by the mother who earned income in the period of 18 months before the birth of the child:

- 1) and at the moment of the child's birth is unemployed and has no right to financial unemployment benefit;
- 2) based on a contract for temporary and occasional jobs;
- 3) based on a service contract;
- 4) based on an authorship contact;
- 5) based on the contract on the rights and obligations of a director outside of an employment relationship.

Other benefits based on the birth and care of a child and special care of a child, for a child born on 1 August 2023 and later, can also be obtained by a mother who was insured as a farmer in the period of 18 months before the child's birth.

The right can be exercised by the adoptive parent, foster parent or guardian of the child.

The right to other benefits based on the birth and care of a child is realized for one year for the first and second child, or two years for the third and each subsequent child.

Exceptionally, for a person who also realizes the right to wage/salary compensation, the right to other benefits based on the birth and care of a child is realized for a period of one year from the day the right to maternity leave begins.

The right to other benefits based on the birth and care of the child is exercised by the mother for a period of three months from the day of the child's birth, if the child is stillborn or dies before the completion of three months of life, or until the child's death if the child dies later.

The right to other allowances based on the birth and care of the child can be exercised by the child's father, if the mother is not alive, if she has abandoned the child, or if she is prevented from directly caring for the child for objective reasons.

Exceptionally, the mother and father of a child who earn their incomes

1) based on self-employment

2) as owners of a family farm, with a status of a person who is self-employment according to the law governing personal income tax

can agree that after the completion of three months of the child's life, the right to other benefits based on child care for the remaining period up to one year of the child's life for the first and second child, i.e. two years for the third and each subsequent child, will be realized by the child's father.

The right to other benefits based on the care of a child who is under five can be exercised by the adopter, foster parent or guardian of the child from the day the child is referred for adjustment and before the adoption is established, or from the day of adoption or placement of the child in a foster or guardian family: for 11 months if the child is younger than three months, and for eight months if the child is older than three months.

The right to other benefits based on special care of a child is realized in accordance with this law and the regulations that regulate the exercise of the right to compensation of wages during leave from work for the purpose of special care of a child by persons employed by an employer.

The request for exercising the right to other benefits based on the birth and care of a child and special care of a child can be submitted until the expiration of the duration of the right established by law.

The base for other benefits based on the birth and care of a child for entrepreneurs and persons engaged on a contract other than an employment contract is determined in proportion to the sum of the monthly bases for which contributions have been paid, except for the contribution base for incomes that have the character of a wage, for the last 18 months preceding the first month of leave due to complications related to maintaining the pregnancy, or preceding maternity leave if no leave was used due to complications related to maintaining the pregnancy, or preceding the day of the child's birth.

The base for other benefits based on the birth and care of a child, for women insured as farmers, is determined in proportion to the sum of the monthly bases for which contributions for compulsory pension and disability insurance were paid for the last 18 months preceding the day of the child's birth.

The basis for other benefits based on special child care for entrepreneurs and persons engaged on the basis of a contract other than an employment contract is determined in proportion to the sum of the monthly bases for which the contributions were paid, except for the contribution base for income that has the character of a wage, for the last 18 months preceding the first month of exercising the right.

The base for other benefits based on special child care, for women insured as farmers, is determined in proportion to the sum of the monthly bases for which contributions for compulsory pension and disability insurance were paid for the last 18 months preceding the first month of exercising the right.

The monthly base for other benefits based on the birth and care of a child and special care of a child is obtained by dividing the sum of the bases by 18.

The monthly base for other benefits based on the birth and care of a child and special care of a child cannot be higher than five average monthly wages in the Republic of Serbia, according to the latest published data of the national body responsible for statistics on the day the right began to be exercised.

The monthly base is divided by a coefficient of 1.5, and thus the full monthly amount of other benefits based on the birth and care of a child and special care of a child is determined.

The payment of monthly amounts of other benefits based on the birth and care and special care of the child, without taxes and contributions, is made by the ministry responsible for financial support for families with children to the applicant's current account, from funds provided in the budget of the Republic of Serbia.

### **3. Parental allowance**

The right to parental allowance can be exercised by the mother for the first, second, third and fourth child, provided that she is a citizen of the Republic of Serbia and resides in the Republic of Serbia.

The right to parental allowance can also be exercised by a mother who is a foreign citizen and has the status of a permanently resident foreigner, provided that the child was born in the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

The right is exercised by the mother who directly takes care of the child for whom she submitted the application, whose children of the previous order of birth have not been placed in a social protection institution, foster or guardian family or given up for adoption, and who has not been deprived of parental rights in relation to the children of the previous order of birth.

Among the conditions for exercising the right are prescribed regular attendance of a preparatory preschool program within the system of preschool upbringing and education in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, regular attendance of primary school within the system of primary education of the Republic of Serbia, regular

vaccination of children in accordance with the regulations in the field of health care of the Republic of Serbia, as well as that the applicant and the child for whom the right is exercised do not live abroad.

Exceptionally, the mother can exercise the right to parental allowance for each child higher in order of birth than the fourth who was born together with the second, third... child from a multiple pregnancy (twins, triplets...), and for the fifth child in order of birth if one of the children from the previous order of birth died immediately after birth and for whom the right to parental allowance was not realized, based on a special decision of the ministry responsible for financial support for families with children.

In this case, when the right is realized for a child higher in order of birth than the fourth, the amount of parental allowance is the amount established for the fourth child in the order of birth.

The right to parental allowance can also be exercised by the child's father, if the child's mother is a foreign citizen, is not alive, has abandoned the child, is deprived of parental rights or is prevented from directly caring for the child for objective reasons.

The order of birth is determined according to the number of children born alive to the mother at the time of submitting the application for exercising the right to parental allowance.

The conditions for exercising the right to parental allowance are determined in relation to the date of submission of the request.

The request for exercising the right to parental allowance with the necessary documentation needs to be submitted no later than when the child is one year old.

The request can also be submitted at the maternity hospital on the e-Baby portal.

The amount of the parental allowance is determined in relation to the day of the child's birth.

Parental allowance (as 1 July 2023) for:

- the first child is RSD 366,122.62 and paid in one instalment;
  - the second child is RSD 324,772.08 and paid in 24 equal monthly instalments of RSD 13,532.17;
  - the third child is RSD 1,948,632.48 and paid in 120 equal monthly instalments of RSD 16.238,61.
  - the fourth child is RSD 2,922,948.72 and paid in 120 equal monthly instalments of RSD 24.357,91.

In addition to the one-time amount of the parental allowance for the first child and the first instalment of the parental allowance for the second, third and fourth child, a lump sum of RSD 6,766.09 is paid for the purchase of equipment for the child.

The amounts of rights are adjusted on 1 January and 1 July, based on data from the national body responsible for statistics, according to the movement of the consumer price index in the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the previous six months, and their nominal amounts are determined by decision of the minister responsible for financial support for families with children.

#### **4. ONE-TIME AID FOR BIRTH OF SECOND AND THIRD CHILD**

The right to one-time assistance in the amount of RSD 100,000.00 can be exercised by a mother who has exercised the right to parental allowance for the second or third child born on 1 January 2022 or later.

This right from 1 July 2023 - RSD 122,040.87.

The child's father can exercise the right if he meets the conditions for exercising the right to parental allowance for the second or third child.

The request for exercising the right is submitted simultaneously with the request for parental allowance for the second or third child.

The payment of the right is made simultaneously with the payment of the first instalment of the parental allowance for the second or third child.

The amount of the right is adjusted on 1 January and 1 July, based on data from the national body responsible for statistics, according to the movement of the consumer price index in the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the previous six months, and their nominal amounts are determined by decision of the minister responsible for financial support for families with children.

#### **5. FUNDS FOR CONSTRUCTION, PARTICIPATION IN PURCHASE OR PURCHASE OF A FAMILY HOUSE OR APARTMENT BASED ON THE BIRTH OF A CHILD**

The right can be exercised by the mother for a child born on 1 January 2022 and later, provided that she is a citizen of the Republic of Serbia and resides in the Republic of Serbia.

A mother who is a foreign citizen and has the status of a permanently resident foreigner can achieve this under the conditions established by the law regulating the basics of property relations, if the child was born in the territory of the Republic of Serbia and/or is a citizen of the Republic of Serbia.

Exceptionally, in the event of the death of the child's mother, the right may be exercised by the child's father.

The right is exercised by the mother who directly takes care of the child for whom she submitted the application, whose children of the previous birth order have not been placed in a social protection institution, foster or guardian family or given up for adoption, and who has not been completely deprived of parental rights in relation to the children of the previous birth order.

Exceptionally, the right is also recognized if the child of the previous birth order is placed in an institution due to the need for continuous health care and care, and with the previously obtained consent of the ministry responsible for financial support for families with children.

The request for exercising the right is submitted through the competent body of the local self-government unit, within one year from the day of the child's birth.

The right can be exercised by the mother of a new-born child, provided that she is becoming an owner of a family house or apartment in the territory of the Republic of Serbia for the first time.

The right to funds for construction, participation in the purchase, or purchase of a family house or apartment based on the birth of a child can be exercised by the mother of a new-born child, up to the amount determined by the Government, which issued the **Decision** on the amount of funds for exercising the right to funds for construction, participation in the purchase or purchase of a family house or apartment based on the birth of a child in 2023 (*Official Gazette of the RS*, No. 8/23).

The right to funds for construction, participation in the purchase or purchase of a house or apartment based on the birth of a child in 2023, can be exercised by the applicant, namely:

1) for the construction of a house in local self-government units that have been determined as devastated areas in accordance with the regulation that determines the development of regions and local self-government units, in the amount of 50% of the value of the works on the construction of the house based on a technical description with a list of works and a bill of quantities and estimate of works that has been certified by the responsible designer;

*(Babušnica, Bela Palanka, Bojnik, Bosilegrad, Varvarin, Vladičin Han, Golubac, Žagubica, Krupanj, Kuršumlja, Kučevo, Lebane, Mali Zvornik, Medveđa, Mionica, Prijepolje, Rekovac, Svrlijig, Sjenica, Surdulica, Trgovište, Tutin and Crna Trava)*

2) for the construction of a house in the other local self-government units - in the amount of 20% of the value of the works on the construction of the house based on the technical description with the list of works and the bill of quantities and estimate of the works certified by the responsible designer;



3) for the purchase of a house or apartment - in the amount of 20% of the real estate value assessed by the competent tax authority, and at most in the amount of 20% of the purchase price determined by the preliminary agreement on the purchase and sale of real estate;

4) for participation in the purchase of a house or apartment through a housing loan - in the amount of 20% of the estimated value of the real estate on the basis of which the loan is approved, and at most in the amount of 20% of the purchase price determined by the preliminary agreement on the purchase and sale of real estate.

The maximum amount of funds that can be approved is EUR 20,000.

The dinar equivalent of the amount is determined according to the official middle exchange rate of the National Bank of Serbia on the day of payment.

The right is determined on the basis of evidence of the necessary funds for construction, participation in the purchase or purchase of a family house or apartment and the assessment of the value of the house or apartment by the competent tax authority and the competent authority for geodetic affairs.

The right is decided by the Commission for the allocation of funds for construction, participation in the purchase or purchase of a family house or apartment based on the birth of a child.

The decision of the Commission is final in the administrative procedure.

The members of the Commission are appointed by the Government, and it consists of representatives of the state administration authorities responsible for social affairs, family care and demography, finance, economy, construction, rural care and the Republic Geodetic Institute.

The President of the Commission is the minister responsible for social affairs.

Professional and administrative-technical support to the Commission is provided by the ministry responsible for social affairs.

The Government determines the detailed conditions and method of exercising the right, the criteria for determining the amount of funds, the necessary documentation, the method of payment and the control of the intended use of funds and other issues of relevance for the exercise of the right, and it adopted the Regulation on the detailed conditions and method of exercising the right to funds for construction, participation in the purchase or purchase of a family house or apartment based on the birth of a child (*Official Gazette of the RS*, No. 18/23).

Immovable property or a proportional part of immovable property built or purchased with allocated funds is the mother's separate property.

Real estate built or purchased with allocated funds cannot be alienated within a period of five years from the purchase or construction, without the consent of the guardianship body competent to protect the rights and interests of children.

## **6. Child allowance**

It is exercised by one of the parents who directly takes care of the child, who is a citizen of the Republic of Serbia or a foreign citizen and has a residence or the status of a permanently resident foreigner in the Republic of Serbia, for the first, second, third and fourth child in the order of birth in the family, from the date of the submitted request, under the conditions stipulated by this law.

An exceptional right to child allowance can be exercised by the applicant for a child born higher than fourth in the order of birth, if due to the death of a child or due to the age limit for one of the first four children in order of birth, they can no longer exercise the right.

Child allowance belongs to children who live, study and regularly attend classes in the territory of the Republic of Serbia until the end of secondary school education, and at the latest until they reach the age of 20, if they are attending school as a regular student.

Child allowance also belongs to a child who, for justified reasons, does not start school, that is, who starts school later or stops schooling as a regular student, for the entire duration of the prevention, until the end of secondary education, and up to the age of 21 at the latest.

Child allowance also belongs to children who attend religious schools of churches and religious communities registered in the Register of Churches and Religious Communities in accordance with the law regulating churches and religious communities.

The competent authority is obliged, in cooperation with the appropriate school, during the school year, at the end of each trimester, to check the regularity of attendance of the child for whom the right is exercised.

The right to child allowance is realized based on the material conditions of the family.

The income and property that the members of the joint household earn or own in the country and abroad are of influence.

The right to child allowance is realized if the total monthly income, minus taxes and contributions, per family member gained in the three months preceding the month in which the request is submitted does not exceed the prescribed threshold.

The right to child allowance without resubmitting proof of the family's financial situation is exercised by the beneficiary of financial social assistance whose children regularly attend school, and regardless of the financial conditions of the family, and by the beneficiary whose child receives the allowance for the help and care of another person.

The right to child allowance is granted if the total monthly income, minus taxes and contributions, per family member gained in the three months preceding the month in which the request is submitted does not exceed the prescribed threshold.

The regular threshold as of 1 July 2023 is RSD 12,178.95 per family member.

The census is increased by 20% for single-parent families, guardians and parents of a child with developmental disabilities and child with a disability for whom the opinion of the inter-ministerial commission was issued and who was not placed in a residential social protection institution /RSD 14,832.65/.

The census is increased by 30% for single-parent families where there is no other parent (he/she died and the survivor's pension was not received, or the parent is unknown) or the other parent is unable to earn money /RSD 15,832.65/.

The census for exercising the right to child allowance is adjusted on 1 January and 1 July of the current year, based on statistical data, according to the movement of the consumer price index in the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the previous six months.

The regular amount of child allowance as of 1 July 2023 is RSD 4,059.65.

The amount of child allowance, for single-parent families and guardians, is increased by 30%, as well as for parents of a child with developmental disabilities and child with a disability, for whom the opinion of the interdepartmental commission was adopted, and from 1 July 2023, it amounts to RSD 5,277.54, and for a child who receives an allowance for the help and care of another person, and who is not placed in a residential social protection institution, it is increased by 50% and from 1 July 2023, it amounts to RSD 6,089.49.

If the conditions for increasing the amount of the child allowance on several grounds are met, the total amount of the increase cannot exceed 80% and from 1 July 2023, it amounts to RSD 7,307.38.

Beneficiaries of the child allowance whose children of secondary school age regularly attended secondary school and successfully completed the school year, in September of the current year, become entitled to another child allowance.

The amount of child allowance is adjusted on 1 January and 1 July of the current year, based on statistical data, according to the movement of the consumer price index in the territory of the Republic in the previous six months.

#### **7. Compensation of expenses of staying in a preschool institution for children without parental care**

**Children of preschool age without parental care** have the right to reimbursement of the costs of staying in a preschool institution accredited by the Ministry of Education, in the amount of the beneficiary's participation in the price of the service prescribed by the decision of the local self-government unit. This right is exercised by children without parental care in social protection institutions without additional conditions, and by children without parental care who are in foster families, provided that they are entitled to child allowance. Children without parental care who are in foster families exercise this right if they meet the conditions prescribed for exercising the right to child allowance.

#### **8. Compensation of expenses of staying in a preschool institution for children with developmental disabilities and children with disabilities**

**Children of preschool age with developmental disabilities and children with disabilities** have the right to compensation for the costs of staying in a preschool institution accredited by the Ministry of Education, in the amount of the beneficiary's participation in the price of the service, which is prescribed by the decision of the local self-government unit. The right to reimbursement of expenses cannot be exercised if the right to wage compensation during leave from work due to special care of the child has been exercised for that child.

#### **9. Compensation of expenses of staying in a preschool institution for children of financial social assistance beneficiaries**

**Children of preschool age of the beneficiaries of financial social assistance** have the right to reimbursement of part of the costs of staying in a preschool institution accredited by the Ministry of Education, in the amount of the beneficiary's participation in the price of the service, which is prescribed by the decision of the local self-government unit.

**6) Please provide information as to whether social security benefits and assistance are indexed to the cost of living, as well as information in particular on how income-replacing benefits such as pensions are indexed. Please indicate when benefits and assistance were last adjusted/indexed.**

Since 2013, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has been conducting the Income and Living Conditions Survey (SILC), which is fully compliant with Regulation (EC) No. 1177/2003 of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 June 2003 concerning Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC). The SORS regularly works on the improvement of all research segments, in accordance with the recommended methodological changes and modernization procedures by Eurostat.

The databases for the year 2021 were sent to Eurostat in November 2022. In addition, the Quality Reports for the years 2013 to 2020 were sent to Eurostat. Eurostat has published all indicators calculated on the basis of the sent databases, for the period from 2013 to 2021.

Field work on the SILC 2023 will be carried out in the regular period, from May to July 2023.

#### Indexation of pensions

A regular indexation of pensions has been established every for 1 January, starting from 2020.

A new formula for the indexation of pensions has been established, and from January 2023, pensions are indexed depending on the share of the amount of pensions paid and the monetary amount as an increase with the pension in the GDP in the period of 12 months ending in June of the previous year in relation to the year in which the indexation is made. If the stated ratio is less than 10%, the pension will be indexed according to the movement of the average wage in the Republic in the period determined by the Law. If the ratio is greater than 10% and amounts to a maximum of 10.5%, pensions will be indexed according to the so-called the "Swiss formula" according to which wages and consumer prices equally affect the calculation of the pension adjustment rate. In the event that the stated ratio is greater than 10.5%, pensions will be indexed according to the movement of consumer prices.

Amendments to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance introduced two extraordinary adjustments to pensions: on 1 November 2022 and 1 October 2023 (amounts shown in the table).

#### **Percentages of pension indexation in the period 2021-2023**

<b>Date of pension indexation</b>	<b>% of indexation</b>
<b>1 January 2021</b>	<b>5.90%</b>
<b>1 January 2022</b>	<b>5.50%</b>

<b>1 November 2022</b>	<b>9.00%</b>
<b>1 January 2023</b>	<b>12.10%</b>
<b>1 October 2023</b>	<b>5.50%</b>

The next pension indexation will take place on 1 January 2024, when the pensions will be increased by 14.8%.

#### Monetary amount received as an increase with pension

Starting from November 2018, a monetary amount was introduced by law and is regularly paid out as an increase with pension. Funds for these purposes cannot be higher than 0.3% of GDP on an annual basis. The legal provisions specify that the conditions, amount, coverage of pension beneficiaries and the dynamics of the payment of the specified amount of money are determined by a Government act, which was done by adopting the corresponding regulation in October 2018. By passing the corresponding regulations, the payment of the amount is extended every year. The monetary amount is indexed in the same percentage as pensions.

#### One-time assistance

The law also defines the possibility of paying one-time financial assistance from the funds of the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance, in order to protect the standard of pension beneficiaries, in the amount determined by the Government.

The dynamics of payment of this assistance to all pension beneficiaries from 2021 to 2023 is as follows:

- in September 2021 – RSD 5,900; and
- in February 2022 – RSD 20,000.

The next payment of one-time assistance will be paid on 30 November of this year, when beneficiaries will be paid RSD 20,000 each.

#### Pensioner's card

Based on the amendments to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance from 2018, the Fund issues a pensioner's card to the beneficiary of rights from pension and disability insurance.

Furthermore, in March of this year, the Government passed a Conclusion recommending to the state bodies, AP bodies, local self-governments and business entities to adopt measures or to propose to the Government regulations from their jurisdiction, which would enable the realization of certain benefits for users of pensioner's cards.

According to the latest information, over 920,000 pensioners have applied for this card, which brings a number of benefits. The card is available in over 650 different establishments and provides discounts on various services and products. This initiative works according to Western models, where the more you buy, the more points you collect and you get additional benefits.

What pensioners are most interested in are the discounts and benefits they can get through this card. Discounts range from 5% all the way up to 50%, but most often they will be in the range of 5% to 10%. Benefits cover a wide range of essentials, including consumer goods, services, cultural events, swimming pools, discounts on transport, for use of highways and for fuel.

According to interest, **lowering the prices of medicines and products from pharmacies**, as well as supporting spas and rehabilitation centres, is of particular importance for the elderly. This is especially important because it helps the elderly to achieve a better quality of life.

**7) Please provide information as to whether any special measures have been adopted since late 2021 to ensure persons can meet their energy and food costs, such as price subsidies for energy, fuel, and basic food items.**

Since the end of 2021, the following acts have been adopted:

**The Regulation on the temporary measure of limiting the price of gas and compensation for the difference in the price of natural gas procured from imports or produced in the Republic of Serbia in the event of a disruption in the natural gas market** to enable the economy and households to have a lower price of natural gas, was adopted in April 2023 (*Official Gazette of the RS*, No. 34/23). Funds for compensating the difference in the price of gas are provided in the budget of the Republic of Serbia. The Regulation was adopted on the basis of Article 39 of the Law on Trade, which stipulates that in order to prevent disturbances in the market or eliminate the harmful consequences of disturbances in the market in terms of the supply of goods and services of vital importance for the life and health of people and for the work of business entities, institutions and other organizations of general interest, the Government can determine temporary measures related to a certain type of goods and services, a certain category of traders, service providers or consumers, working hours, to the need to implement obligations assumed by an international agreement, to prices, as well as to other conditions for conducting trade, except for measures related to the import and export of goods;

The new **Regulation on vulnerable energy customers** was adopted in December 2022 (*Official Gazette of the RS*, No. 137/22), which enabled a greater number of households with minimum means of living to exercise the right to reduce their electricity bills or natural gas bill, or to reduce the bill for thermal energy, because the new Regulation defines differently the type of household that meets the criteria for the status of a vulnerable customer in the context of the energy crisis. The criteria are based on the financial position, the right to financial social assistance or child

allowance or an increased allowance for the assistance and care of another person or the health condition of a household member;

**The roadmap for energy support**, which was adopted in December 2022, contains two measures relevant to reducing energy poverty and helping small and medium-sized enterprises within the first objective "Mitigating the immediate socio-economic impact of the energy crisis on vulnerable customers and SMEs", namely:

- Subsidies for households for overcoming the increase in energy bills - During 2022, maintain the same number of protected vulnerable customers (66,000) and gradually increase the number of protected households - vulnerable customers up to 190,000 by 31 December 2023. The measure will be promoted through appropriate communication channels;
- Support to small and medium-sized enterprises in order to ensure business continuity - About 70,000 small and medium-sized enterprises used financial support measures. The goal is to maintain the same number of small and medium-sized enterprises in the conditions of the energy crisis - 70,000 or an increase in that number by November 2023.

On 26 October 2023, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted, at the proposal of the Ministry of Mining and Energy, amendments to the Regulation on vulnerable energy customers that will enable more citizens to receive a discount for electricity, gas or heating.

Pensioners who have an electricity supply contract in their name, and whose pension does not exceed RSD 21,766.26, will have the right to an additional bill reduction in the amount of RSD 1,000 during the heating season. Our oldest fellow citizens can apply for this discount at the counters in their municipalities from next week.

This made it possible for pensioners, who have meters in their name and pensions of up to 21,766.26 dinars, to receive a thousand dinars lower monthly electricity bills during the winter season. The discount is obtained by paying at the counters in their municipalities, and those who are unable to apply in person will have their bill reduced *ex officio*. The entire process is simplified for both pensioners and all other categories of the most vulnerable who, based on the Regulation, are entitled to significant reductions in energy bills.

In addition to the above, all citizens who reduce their electricity consumption compared to the previous two years can reduce their bills during the heating season by up to 40 percent.

In addition to the recognition of new particularly vulnerable groups of households, the amendments to the Regulation will enable the procedure of exercising the right to the status of a vulnerable energy customer to be carried out *ex officio*, through the exchange of data between competent institutions and suppliers. In this way, the number of households covered by benefits will be significantly increased.



In December 2022, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted a new Regulation on vulnerable energy customers, which improved the criteria for obtaining the status of a vulnerable energy customer in order to enable a greater number of households to exercise the right to reduce their bills for electricity, gas or district heating. With this regulation, citizens who cannot afford a sufficient amount of energy for their daily needs with their incomes are enabled to reduce their bills by up to 50 percent, and so far, around 72,000 households have exercised this right.

In October 2023, the government passed a regulation that provides that citizens who reduce electricity consumption by more than five percent, compared to last year or the year before, will receive discounts on their electricity bills from 20 to 40 percent.

Last year (2022), during the heating season, approximately one million households per month had savings and discounts. Also, citizens can get a discount of five percent if they consume more electricity in a lower tariff, when it is also cheaper.

Citizens have an additional discount for paying bills on time.

The Government continues with relief for socially vulnerable citizens, by reducing bills for electricity, gas and heating up to 50 percent for the category of vulnerable energy households.

All recipients of increased social assistance, as well as pensioners with pensions below 21,766.26 dinars, will receive a reduction of RSD 1,000 dinars on their electricity bills until the end of the heating season.

For help in buying food, see the answer to question number 2.

**8) Please provide up-to-date information on at-risk-of-poverty rates for the population as a whole, as well as for children, families identified as being at risk of poverty, persons with disabilities and older persons. Please show the trend over the last 5 years, as well as forecasts for upcoming years.**

The reference source of data for the compilation of indicators on poverty, social exclusion and living conditions is the annual survey Statistics of Income and Living Conditions (SILC). The survey is fully compliant with EU regulations and Eurostat methodological guidelines and description of EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions).

The calculation of poverty and social exclusion indicators published in this statistical release is based on data obtained from the survey conducted in 2021<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> **Methodological notes**

A **household** means any family or other community of persons who live together and jointly spend funds for meeting their basic life needs (food, housing, etc.), regardless of whether all members are permanently at the place where the

The at-risk-of-poverty rate was 21.2% in 2021, and compared to 2020, it was lower by 0.5 percentage points. The at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate amounted to 28.5%, and it was lower by 1.3 percentage points relative to 2020<sup>3</sup>.

### 1. Key indicators of poverty and social exclusion

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
At-risk-of-poverty rate, %	25.7	24.3	23.2	21.7	21.2
At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, %	36.7	34.3	31.7	29.8	28.5
At-risk-of-poverty threshold (on a monthly level), RSD	15,600	16,615	19,381	22,000	24,064

The at-risk-of-poverty rate represents the share of persons whose equivalised disposable income is below relative poverty line, which amounted to 24 064 RSD a month on an average for a single person household in 2021. It does not show the actual number of poor people, but rather how many of them have an income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

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household resides or some of them temporarily reside in some other place in the country or abroad on account of work, education or for some other reason.

“**Dependent children**” relate to all persons under the age of 18, as well as persons aged from 18 to 24, living with at least one parent, and being economically inactive.

**Equivalised disposable income** is the total household disposable income evenly distributed among the members of the household according to the modified OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) equivalence scale. In accordance with this scale, first adult member of the household receives the value of 1, other adults aged 14 and over 0.5, and children under the age of 14, 0.3. Household income does not include income in kind. The **at-risk-of-poverty threshold** (relative poverty line) represents 60% of the median equivalised disposable income and it is presented in dinars.

The **at-risk-of-poverty rate** represents the share of persons whose equivalised disposable income is below relative poverty line. It does not show the actual number of poor people, but rather how many of them have an income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

The **at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate (AROPE)** shows the share of individuals who are at risk of poverty or are severely materially deprived or live in households with very low work intensity.

The **relative at-risk-of-poverty gap** represents the difference between the at-risk-of-poverty threshold and the median equivalised disposable income of the persons who are below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

The **Gini coefficient** represents the measure of inequality in the distribution of income. The value of this coefficient goes within the interval from 0 to 100, where 0 represents perfect equality, i.e. each person has equal income. As the value of the coefficient grows, so grows the income inequality.

**Persistent at-risk-of-poverty rate** presents the percentage of persons who are at-risk-of-poverty in the current year and who have been in the same position for at least two of the three previous years.

Starting from 1999 the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has not at disposal and may not provide available certain data relative to AP Kosovo and Metohija and therefore these data are not included in the coverage for the Republic of Serbia (total).

<sup>3</sup> In 2021. out of total number of households envisaged for the survey - 5 903, a total of 5 158 households were surveyed, i.e. 13 855 persons aged 16 and over.

The at-risk-of-poverty threshold amounted to 43 315 RSD a month on an average for a household with two adults and one child aged below 14, while for a four-member household with two adults and two children aged below 14, it amounted to 50 533 RSD.

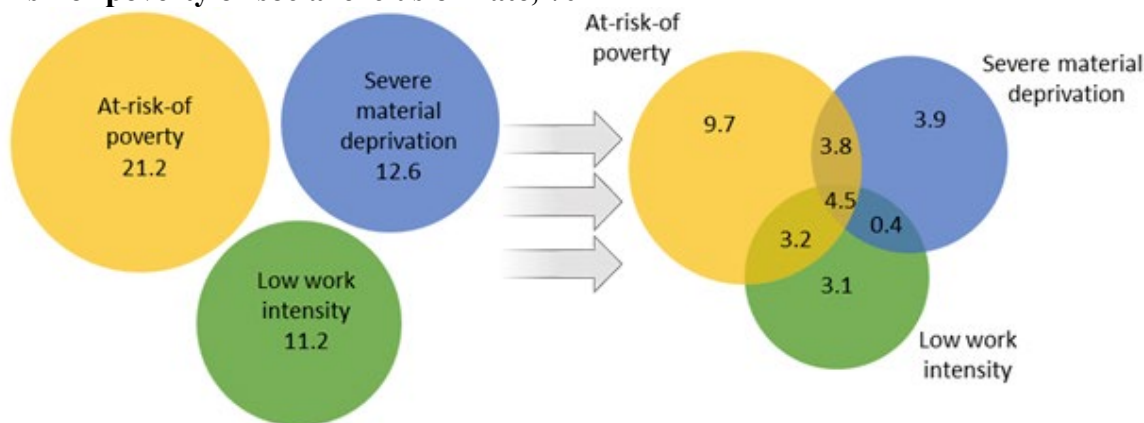
The at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate shows the share of individuals who are at risk of poverty or are severely materially deprived or live in households with very low work intensity.

Observed by age, the at-risk-of-poverty rate shows that individuals aged from 18 to 24 were the most exposed to the poverty risk – 27.7%, as well as individuals aged 65 and over – 22.7%. The lowest at-risk-of-poverty rate was recorded for the group of persons aged from 25 to 54 – 19.1%.

By the type of household, households with dependent children were at the higher risk-of-poverty – 21.4%, compared to households without dependent children – 20.9%. The highest at-risk-of-poverty rate was recorded for households composed of two adults with three or more dependent children – 38.8%, while the lowest at-risk-of-poverty rate was recorded for the households composed of three or more adults – 14.3%.

According to the activity status for persons aged 18 and over, the most exposed to the at-risk-of-poverty were unemployed persons – 48.6%. Self-employed persons were at the higher risk-of-poverty rate – 14.5%, compared to employees working for employers – 5.4%. The at-risk-of-poverty rate for pensioners was 19.9%.

### At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, %



## 2. Poverty and social exclusion indicators

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>At-risk-of-poverty rate, %</b>	25.7	24.3	23.2	21.7	21.2

At-risk-of-poverty threshold (on a monthly level), RSD

Single person	15,600	16,615	19,381	22,000	24,064
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	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Household with two adults and one child younger than 14 years	28,080	29,907	34,886	39,600	43,315
Two adults with two children younger than 14 years	32,760	34,892	40,700	46,200	50,533
<b>At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, %</b>	36.7	34.3	31.7	29.8	28.5
At-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers, %					
Social transfers not included in the income	31.6	29.6	28.3	26.7	29.5
Pensions and social transfers not included in the income	51.3	48.7	46.6	44.8	46.4
Relative at risk of poverty gap	38.8	37.4	32.1	27.1	28.3
Income quintile share ratio S80/S20	9.4	8.6	6.5	6.1	5.9
Gini coefficient	37.8	35.6	33.3	33.3	33.3
Persistent at-risk-of-poverty rate	18.4	19.6	15.9	14.5	16.5

### 3. At-risk-of-poverty rate by sex and age, 2021

	%		
	Total	Male	Female
<b>Total</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>21.9</b>
0-17	20.8	20.1	21.5
18-64	20.7	20.6	20.8
18-24	27.7	26.4	29.0
25-54	19.1	19.1	19.2
55-64	21.8	22.3	21.4
65+	22.7	20.2	24.7

### 4. At-risk-of-poverty rate by the type of household

	%				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Households without dependent children</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>20.9</b>
Single person	33.0	34.3	31.8	34.0	36.5
Single male	31.1	33.7	28.9	30.9	32.0
Single female	34.4	34.8	33.8	36.1	39.4
One adult younger than 65 years	39.6	37.2	32.7	37.1	36.3
One adult 65 years old or over	29.1	32.6	31.2	32.2	36.6
Two adults	22.7	19.8	19.4	22.5	21.4
Two adults younger than 65 years	29.2	24.3	21.4	25.3	22.6
Two adults, at least one aged 65 years or over	18.0	16.9	18.4	21.0	20.7
Three or more adults	19.0	17.4	15.7	15.1	14.3
<b>Households with dependent children</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>21.4</b>
Single person with dependent children	30.6	36.5	41.6	31.9	34.7
Two adults with one dependent child	26.4	24.1	23.9	18.4	16.7
Two adults with two dependent children	24.8	21.3	19.1	18.2	18.6
Two adults with three or more dependent children	55.8	53.6	51.9	37.2	38.8
Three or more adults with dependent children	26.1	25.5	25.4	22.5	20.6

**5. At-risk-of-poverty rate, by the most frequent activity and sex (for persons aged 18 and over), 2021**

	%		
	Total	Male	Female
<b>Employed persons</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5.7</b>
Employees	5.4	5.5	5.1

	%		
	Total	Male	Female
Employed persons except employees	14.5	15.1	12.9
<b>Not employed persons</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>30.6</b>
Unemployed persons	48.6	55.1	42.0
Retired persons	19.9	18.6	21.0
Other inactive persons	34.9	28.9	37.1

## 6. Dispersion around the at-risk-of-poverty threshold

	%				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
At-risk-of-poverty rate (40% of the median equivalised disposable income)	14.4	13.7	11.2	9.3	9.2
At-risk-of-poverty rate (50% of the median equivalised disposable income)	19.8	18.0	16.8	14.1	14.7
At-risk-of-poverty rate (70% of the median equivalised disposable income)	31.2	30.1	30.0	27.6	28.0

## 7. Material deprivation indicators

	%				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Persons who live in a household that cannot afford paying for one week annual holiday away from home	56.9	52.0	50.5	48.5	43.6
Persons who live in a household that cannot afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day	21.2	18.8	15.1	14.9	14.9
Persons who live in a household that cannot afford to face unexpected financial expenses	44.1	39.8	35.5	35.1	33.9

	%				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Persons who live in a household that cannot afford to keep home adequately warm	13.1	10.0	9.9	9.5	9.4
<b>Material deprivation rate</b>	<b>30.7</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>23.0</b>

**9) Please provide information on what measures are being taken to ensure a coordinated approach to combat poverty as required by Article 30 of the Charter, and to diminish reliance on last-resort relief, such as food banks and soup kitchens.**

In cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the United Nations agencies in Serbia - UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, during 2022, implemented a joint program entitled *"Extending Social Protection to Families in Serbia with Enhanced Shock-Responsiveness"* which was financed from the UN Joint Fund for Sustainable Development Goals. As part of this program, poverty projections were made for the most vulnerable categories of the population in Serbia - families with children and the elderly. These projections showed that poverty does not affect all households in the same way and that the greatest burden of the crisis is borne by families with small children, especially those with more than four members, elderly people living alone or in elderly households, refugees, asylum seekers, persons at risk to become stateless and internally displaced persons, people living in rural or remote areas or with minimal income. Among children, the most vulnerable are children living in large families, children in rural households and Roma settlements. A separate survey that included poverty projections for the elderly showed that those living in rural and remote areas have the hardest time meeting their needs for food, hygiene products or medicine.

This program represented the strengthening of social protection services and systems, especially at a time when we are facing increasing costs of living, in order to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the crises affecting the country. The aim of the program was to 1) strengthen the data response on the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable groups to feed into the introduction of legislative changes for adaptive social protection system, and 2) apply the shock-responsive social protection principles to provide support for the 170 most vulnerable families. In addition to the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the UN agencies in the Republic of Serbia, other relevant ministries, the special advisor to the Prime Minister in charge of Agenda 2030, the Red Cross of Serbia, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the World Bank, local self-governments were also included in the program.

Through this joint program, the Government of the Republic of Serbia received support to strengthen the national framework of social protection and crisis response policies and increase adequate budget resources for the protection of the most vulnerable population groups.

The project also focused on:

- Availability of timely and reliable data on the impact of the Ukrainian crisis on the most vulnerable population groups;
- Increased consultation with relevant actors to discuss data collected, crisis implications and policy implications;
- Provision of multipurpose basic cash transfers for vulnerable families and elderly people;
- Families with children and single households living in extreme poverty were key target groups of the joint program, including the elderly, asylum seekers with international protection, vulnerable internally displaced persons, and persons at risk of statelessness.

It is essential that social protection systems are properly targeted, so that those who are more vulnerable can receive the necessary support. In this sense, the **Law on the Social Card** has been in force in Serbia since 2022, on the basis of which the "Social Card" Registry was established. The register is a source of data that is necessary for conducting procedures for the exercise of various rights and services from the social protection system. The Social Card significantly contributes to a more efficient and faster exercise of rights, a fairer distribution of social assistance, but also to the improvement of the quality of the data itself, which is necessary for the adoption of decisions for the exercise of rights. The register has contributed to citizens exercising their rights more easily and quickly because they are not obliged to collect data themselves when submitting requests nor to spend their resources (time and money). Centres for social work, on the basis of the register, proactively acted towards a large number of citizens to realize some additional rights that belongs to them by law and for which they did not apply, which is a unique example of the care and attitude of the state towards citizens (e.g. citizens who are beneficiaries of the right to financial social assistance are also entitled to child allowance or free enrolment in kindergarten, but they did not apply for these rights, etc.). Therefore, owing to timely and accurate data, the register made it possible to detect both errors of inclusion in a right and errors of exclusion from the right. Data is provided by electronic exchange with various institutions of the Republic of Serbia in real time.

All adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia have received universal financial assistance several times to mitigate the consequences of the crisis (in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023). Pensioners and recipients of financial social assistance are granted this assistance automatically. Children and young people were also included in these universal measures based on their application for assistance. Applications were very simple and electronic.

### **Scholarships for students**

The Ministry of Education, in order to encourage pupils and students to continue their education, awards scholarships and loans from the budget of the Republic of Serbia.

The Ministry announces competitions for each school year:

- For granting pupil loans;
- For awarding pupil scholarships;
- For granting student loans;
- For awarding student scholarships;



- For awarding scholarships to extremely gifted pupils and students;
- For the awarding of student scholarships to students who are studying for the missing professions in the field of education;
- To award scholarships for students of doctoral academic studies;
- To award scholarships for postdoctoral students;
- To award scholarships for young researchers - pupils;
- For the awarding of scholarships for Roma pupils and students.
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### Student cards

In October 2023, the Government of the Republic of Serbia announced new benefits for higher education students through student cards.

The student card, which will be a payment card, means for students that they will have benefits in various spheres and that they will be able to receive student scholarships and loans through these cards.

All students studying in the Republic of Serbia (undergraduate, master's and doctoral studies), at state and private universities, can apply for the cards.

Postanska štedionica - the bank will provide **students** who take the cards with the status of VIP clients for obtaining a housing loan when they graduate from their **higher education institution**.

Students with these cards can get 20% discount on Srbijavoz train tickets, 10% discount on **Air Serbia** airline tickets, 2% on tolls, 15% discount in Cineplex cinemas, as well as in hypermarkets, supermarkets, cultural institutions and other service and hospitality establishments.

Among the 19 companies, with which contracts have been signed so far, are the Ethno village "Sunčana reka" from Banja Koviljača, the tourist agency "Hedonik Travel" from Belgrade, "Dunav Osiguranje" Insurance Company, "Lasta" transport company, "Putevi Srbije" road maintenance company, Air Serbia, "Telekom Srbija", Official Gazette, "Aman" markets, "Athletic" gym, "Monument" restaurants, "Dr Max" and "Benu" pharmacies, "Sani optik", "Livija" driving school, "Mercator S" trade market, "Delphi" bookshops, "Kej" Yachting Club, and "Srbijavoz" – train company.

**10) Please provide information on steps taken to consult with, and ensure the participation of, the persons most affected by the cost of living crisis and/or organisations representing their interests in the process of designing of measures in response to the crisis.**

Consultations are regularly held with representative trade unions, both at the national level, primarily through the work of the Social and Economic Council, but also at other institutional levels, as well as with trade unions established in sectors, groups and various activities, and all proposals concerning the improvement of the position of employees in the Republic of Serbia are considered, equally respecting the interests of employers' associations and trade unions representing the interests of employees.

Associations for consumer protection and their alliances were established in accordance with the Law on Associations, and their area is the achievement of consumer protection objectives.

Associations and alliances are independent in achieving the objectives of consumer protection and are obliged to be guided exclusively by the interests of consumers.

**The activities of associations and alliances include:**

- informing;
- education;
- advising and providing legal assistance to consumers in solving consumer problems;
- receiving, recording and acting on consumer complaints;
- conducting independent tests and comparative analyses of the quality of goods and services, and public publication of the obtained results;
- conducting research and studies in the field of consumer protection, and public publication of the obtained results;
- achieving cooperation with appropriate authorities and organizations in the country and abroad.

Associations and alliances are obliged to publish an annual report on activities that includes an overview of all their income, sources of income and expenses, as well as to submit it to the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade no later than March 31 of the current year for the previous year.

The Law on Consumer Protection prescribes the establishment of the Consumer Council, which is made up of representatives of all associations or alliances registered in the Ministry.

As it was designed as a body that will consider topics of common interest and define the common positions of consumer associations, its activities are: harmonizing the positions of the associations, **proposing association representatives to the National Council for Consumer Protection** and other bodies, **adopting the Associations' Code of Ethics** and monitoring its implementation, **giving an opinion to the Ministry in the procedure of registration and deletion from the Registry** and making recommendations on the deletion of associations and alliances from the Registry of the Ministry.

During the adoption of all public policy documents, representatives of relevant citizens' associations who represent the interests of certain vulnerable population groups always appear as members of working groups, so that their interests are considered and taken into account. In addition, every document, whether it is a draft law or a draft strategy, program, action plan, etc. also goes through the stage of public debate in accordance with the Law on the Planning System, which makes it available to both experts and wider interested public and is subject to later amendments based on the results of the public debate.