

ADDENDUM

TO

THE VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA TO THE STATUS OF  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR  
MIGRATION SUBMITTED IN 2020

MAY 2022

## Abbreviations

AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DIMAK	German Information Centre for Migrations, Professional Education and Career
EMN	European Migration Network
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)
EU	European Union
ICMPD	International centre for Migration Policy Development.
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LSG	Local Self-Government
MESTD	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MLEVSA	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs
MOI	Ministry of Interior
NES	National Employment Service
PMD	Global Programme Migration & Diaspora
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SORS	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
SRCM	Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration

## **Introduction**

In November 2020, the Republic of Serbia submitted the Voluntary Contribution to the Status of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Report was drafted in line with the UN Network on Migration recommendations.

A consultative process was conducted for the preparation of the Report, which, in addition to the relevant government authorities, also involved relevant CSOs, with technical support of the IOM Office in Serbia. Progress against the achievement of 23 GCM objectives was presented in four clusters, in accordance with the Resolution 73/326 of July 2019. The Report presents the situation in the area of migration, key policies regulating this area, as well as the most significant projects and initiatives implemented by Serbia, contributing to the achievement of GCM objectives.

For the occasion of the First International Migration Review Forum, it was agreed that the Republic of Serbia would submit Addendum to the First National Voluntary Contribution to the Status of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which will track only latest developments after its submission in November 2020. This will ensure that repetition of information already provided is avoided.

### **1. Progress against the Achievement of GCM Objectives in the Republic of Serbia**

Report on the progress against the achievement of GCM objectives will follow the structure of the report prepared and submitted in autumn 2020, under three groups of objectives, as defined by the GCM-related documents.

#### **1.1 Ensuring voluntary, orderly and regular migration – Objectives 2, 5, 6, 12 and 18**

The most relevant policies defined in this period for the said objectives are the Economic Migration Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2027 and the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2026.

Aware that massive emigration coupled with brain drain remains a burning issue for the country, the Action Plan 2021–2023 on the Implementation of the Economic Migration Strategy elaborates activities to be implemented in this field under specific objective: Improving the living and work conditions in economic and social sectors. Outputs should contribute to migration not being an imposed solution, but rather free choice. The target group of this broad objective is the entire working population of the Republic of Serbia, and the measures envisaged for the achievement of this objective are the following:

- Continued implementation of structural reforms and increased efficiency of public sector
- Institutional capacity building for designing incentives to attract direct investments
- Developing a programme to retain human capacities in the category of deficient occupations
- Capacity building of market economy in line with the EU's strategic recommendations
- Developing a programme to attract and include foreigners of different educational profiles in the labour market of the Republic of Serbia
- Strengthening the fight for the rule of law, against corruption and nepotism

The Strategy with its Action Plan involve a broad range of stakeholders in the implementation of activities: the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Economy, the National Employment Service, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Ministry of Interior, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Chamber of Commerce, the Development Agency of Serbia, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, local self-government units and other stakeholders.

**Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2026** and its corresponding Action Plan 2021–2023 aims to create a stable employment growth underpinned by knowledge and decent work, with the following objectives:

- Growth of high-quality employment achieved through cross-sectoral measures aimed to enhance labour supply and demand
- Improved labour market position of the unemployed
- Improved institutional framework for employment policy

In order to better regulate, facilitate and ensure a fair and safe employment procedure, the needs to conclude bilateral agreements regulating the employment procedure for citizens abroad are regularly assessed. Accordingly, negotiations are under way to conclude bilateral agreements on temporary employment with Qatar and Malta.

Until today, Serbia has also signed treaties with 61 countries on the avoidance of double taxation, thus providing the legal prerequisite for more efficient employment and competitiveness of Serbian residents in the other signatory states.

In November 2020, Serbia introduced a one-stop-shop for submitting applications with the accompanying documents required for residence permit and work permit, thus simplifying, and accelerating, the administrative procedure for employing foreigners in the country.

Since April 2021, the issuance of temporary residence permits can also be done electronically. Including administrative procedures regarding employment, regulation of residence, return and in general, with different migration phases and different rights of migrants in the processes of public administration digitalisation, will lead to improved information sharing and safer migration by applying legally defined procedures.

In late 2021, Serbia started implementing the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, which is a step further in the implementation of the Council of Europe's Lisbon Convention. The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees is a special international tool which serves to assess refugees' qualifications for which there is insufficient or missing documentation, enabling refugees to have their qualifications assessed even in the absence of full documentation, thus helping refugees to continue studies or seek employment.

## **1.2 Protecting migrants through rights-based border governance measures – Objectives: 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 21**

Although new policies have not been adopted in this area, the implementation of the existing strategic and legislative framework has continued.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Plan for the Admission of Citizens of Ukraine and vulnerable populations who had to leave the country, or could not return to it, because of the armed conflict. The Plan also provides measures related to enabling Ukrainian residents without a travel document to enter the country, as well as to issue appropriate documents. On 17 March 2022, the Government of Serbia adopted a Decision to grant temporary protection to all persons fleeing from Ukraine. Identity cards are issued to persons who register for temporary protection with the Asylum Office for a period of one year.

Competent government authorities, in cooperation with UNHCR, regularly provide emergency assistance, as well as adequate information on the risks of illegal border crossing and possibilities for legal migration, including the right to asylum and assisted voluntary return to the country of origin in the gathering points of irregular migrants.

Competent authorities cooperate with Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre on several levels. Serbia participated in several international operations combating irregular migration and trafficking in human beings. The Permanent Task Force, established by the order of the Prosecutor for Organised Crime, including representatives of the Prosecution Office for Organised Crime, the MOI, the Security Information Agency, the Customs Administration and the Anti-Money Laundering Directorate, actively coordinates activities on uncovering human smuggling cases.

Between 1 January and 31 December 2021, the MOI, on reasonable suspicion that perpetrators committed the crime of illegal crossing of the state border and human trafficking, filed a total of 129 criminal charges (128 criminal charges in 2020) against 190 persons (177 in 2020). Of this number, the Service for the Fight against Organised Crime, the Department for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings and Smuggling filed 7 criminal charges in 2021 against 46 members of organised criminal groups, who smuggled irregular migrants to BiH, Hungary and Croatia.

The ongoing SDC-funded project, Strengthening Capacities and Partnerships for Migration Management in Serbia, implemented by IOM, together with the SRCM, MLEVSA and the MOI, also seeks to build the capacities of the teams for preventing and combating human trafficking.

In early 2021, two laws were adopted, which will improve international cooperation in the area of border management and anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking:

The Law on Ratification of the Agreement between the Governments of Serbia and North Macedonia on cooperation in the field of combating migrant smuggling, regulating the exchange of information and data, establishment of joint investigation teams, implementation of joint projects, organisation of joint trainings and seminars, in order to prevent and strengthen capacities to combat migrant smuggling.

Law on the Ratification of the Status Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the EU on actions carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG), establishing the legal framework to regulate all aspects of coordination necessary for the implementation of actions of the EBCG that might be taking place in the territory of Serbia.

Serbia has a voluntary return support programme for foreigners for 2021-2025 including funding for information and identification of potential returnees in place. Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme is implemented with EU and Member States' support, in cooperation with IOM. The Republic of Serbia has been continuously working on improving the voluntary return system, primarily by providing information and counselling to potential returnees. In each centre housing migrants run by the SRCM, adequate information is provided in languages that potential returnees can understand.

Although the number of persons returning to the Republic of Serbia pursuant to readmission agreements has decreased considerably, the Republic of Serbia is investing significant efforts to implement the reintegration programme, and monitor and evaluate the process of reintegration. Within the annual programme of incentives for migration policy objectives, funds have been set aside for the programme of reintegration of returnees pursuant to readmission agreements in 2021 and 2022.

### **1.3 Supporting the integration of migrants and their contribution to development – Objectives 14, 15, 16, 19, 20 and 22**

The most important integration-related activities have been those on improving healthcare rights and inclusion of various migrant categories in local community migration policy action plans.

Serbia enabled fully free vaccination of foreigners against COVID-19 and was the first country in Europe to start vaccinating asylum seekers and irregular migrants. This is certainly the result of migrants being identified and mainstreamed in key national policies, such as the national healthcare policy. During the

pandemic, in addition to enjoying access to healthcare without discrimination, the National Commission for Infectious Diseases has been paying special attention to migrants as a vulnerable group, taking into account their specific needs. In line with the above, a special document has been prepared, Protocol for Responding to Suspected SARS-cov-2 Cases in Asylum and Reception Centres.

Regarding the provision of social security to migrant workers, Serbia has bilateral agreements in place with 30 countries, out of which 18 EU Member States: Austria, Cyprus, Slovakia, Luxembourg, France, Hungary, Denmark, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Poland, Belgium, Romania, Croatia. It also has bilateral agreements with Norway, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Panama, Libya, BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Canada, Turkey, Russian Federation and China. Recently there have been no developments in negotiations on the electronic exchange of social security data with Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Poland, while several meetings have been held with Austria and Bulgaria. Electronic exchange of social security data is operational with Slovenia, Croatia, North Macedonia and Montenegro.

Local communities, which are the most important for migrant integration, have been supported in preparing local public policy documents with the aim to establish dialogue, understanding and cohesion between migrants and the local community. As local communities have been identified as key for all migrant categories, and as such included in almost all strategies dealing with the issues relevant for migrants, in 2021 SCRM initiated the revision of existing local documents. Supported through GIZ, SDC and National Budget-funded projects, LSGUs are provided with training for officers in LSGs and consultancy support with the aim to enhance the quality of these documents. In addition, it is of extreme importance that the funds for the activities provided in these documents are regularly allocated in the National Budget.

In parallel with the activities focusing on the integration of foreigners, significant activities have been undertaken on including the diaspora as agent of development.

Recently the Government of Serbia has embarked on implementing public policies that will provide the diaspora with concrete incentives to return. These include the Regulation on Customs Benefits that has allowed customs free import of personal property and household items for returnees who lived over ten years abroad. Amendments to the Law on Personal Income Tax and the Law on Contributions for Compulsory Social Insurance have introduced a tax break for highly skilled returnees.

Scientific diaspora was recognised as an agent of development. The project led by the Serbian Science Fund in 2021, enabled the implementation of 92 joint scientific projects between higher education institutions from Serbia and their diaspora counterparts in 22 countries in the areas of science, technology and engineering. Another important initiative is the Returning Point programme the objectives of which are to provide support for the repatriation of highly skilled workers, promote circular migration, provide direct assistance to diaspora, and propose public policy measures to facilitate both reintegration of highly skilled workers and strengthen cooperation with the diaspora.

The ongoing “LINK UP! SERBIA II”, implemented by the ICMPD and funded by the ADC is targeting the Development Agency of Serbia, Chamber of Commerce and six regional development agencies, involving them in development initiatives with the diaspora. Some of the notable elements of the project include the following:

- As part of the grants scheme, 6 regional development agencies implemented Technical Assistance (TA) packages in 10 LSGs to support them in business diaspora engagement.
- 80 investment opportunities were developed with regional development agencies and LSGs (including ones targeting vulnerable group members in the diaspora).
- Strategic and Methodological Framework developed to assess local potentials for fostering diaspora engagement by LSGs. 5 measures adopted to improve diaspora-related environment.

- 35 diaspora mentors selected; 20 diaspora brokers identified, over 40 diaspora investors mapped; 20 early-stage entrepreneurs receiving mentorship support for starting a business in Serbia identified. All of these categories include vulnerable group members.
- Diaspora Business Hub was created in 2020 as a unit in both Belgrade and Vienna and transferred to Chamber of Commerce for sustainability to help Serbian small and medium enterprises and LSGs find diaspora partners and investors.

#### **1.4 Improving value-driven and evidence-based policy making and public debate and enhancing cooperation on migration – Objectives 1, 3, 7, 17 and 23**

**The Programme of Official Statistics 2021–2025** by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) is an important step towards harmonizing national activities with EU standards and practices. The following is relevant for GCM objectives:

- Within the demography and social statistics area, statistics on migration, as well as statistics on asylum seekers, residence permits, and illegal migration are cited as priority development areas.
- The programme includes internal migration (number and territorial distribution of migrants according to demographic, ethnic and economic characteristics).
- Activities are planned to establish statistics on external migration (immigration, emigration, acquisition and loss of citizenship).
- Memorandum of Cooperation with competent authorities and institutions for migration monitoring to facilitate implementation of all activities related to the introduction of statistical surveys on external migration, as well as to improve national legislation and harmonisation with international regulations.

**Action Plan 2021–2023 on the Implementation of the Economic Migration Strategy** was adopted in September 2021, which elaborates in more detail activities for the implementation of the objective: *Build and strengthen institutional capacity to monitor and improve the quality of economic migration data* and the measures envisaged to achieve this objective:

- Strengthen the capacity of institutions responsible for monitoring migration movements.
- Upgrade or reform the existing institutional framework in accordance with the needs for more efficient management of economic migration.
- Establish a greater degree of coordination to support the inclusion of the concept of economic migration in development policies
- Establish a regular, updated, synchronised statistical database for monitoring migration flows in the Republic of Serbia.

In mid-2021, SCRM prepared and published the Migration Profile of the Republic of Serbia for 2020. The key statistics still refer to emigration, immigration, asylum, issued work permits, foreigners residing, but also the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Through the **NES established network of seven Migration Service Centres** (in Belgrade, Niš, Novi Pazar, Novi Sad, Kraljevo, Kruševac and Bor), migrants and potential migrants are provided information on risks of irregular migration, migrant rights, procedures for obtaining visas and residence permits, employment and study opportunities abroad, and access to healthcare. These seven centres are currently operating under the Global Programme Migration & Diaspora (PMD) funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by GIZ in partnership with the MLEVSA and NES. The centres are called German Information Centres on Migration, Training and Employment (DIMAK) and in the last three years, 1,820 clients used DIMAK advisory services on regular migration – individual consultations and informative events.

The Office of the Prime Minister in cooperation with UNDP have jointly launched the programme *Tačka povratka* (Returning Point) to provide support to diaspora by acting as a reception service for Serbians interested in returning. The programme entails series of measures, from communicating with the diaspora on their practical concerns, to “hand-holding” of highly skilled returnees in repatriation process and skills matching. Being a primary contact point for potential returnees, the programme provides answers on matters such as how to get a residence permit, register a car, find housing, enrol children in kindergarten/school, where to invest, etc. Some of the notable results include:

- Direct assistance provided to 7,000 potential returnees on a series of questions about various business-related, administrative, and social aspects of life in Serbia. Viber group set up for over 6,300 diaspora members providing information on all diaspora-related matters and events.
- Cooperation established with Infostud – the most visited employment portal in Serbia on vacancies in Serbia for candidates from diaspora and returnees with international experience.
- Digital Personal Guide for Repatriates developed. Based on inquiries that the team had with 7,000 potential returnees, an interactive guide was developed in 2021, covering all practical aspects of living and working in Serbia and has been seen by 20,000 people.

The Working Group on Mixed Migration Flows adopted the Plan of Response to Increased Migrant Influx for 2022, defining the strategy of response and measures of support to irregular migrants transiting through Serbia. As in the previous years, the main actions include providing asylum to applicants meeting the criteria, providing material assistance, providing healthcare and education to all persons in need regardless of their status, especially vulnerable categories, support to assisted voluntary return, identification and referral of vulnerable categories, including information, counselling and protection and prevention of human trafficking.

Competent authorities, civil society organisations and international organisations throughout Serbia organised a series of awareness-raising campaigns, workshops, round tables and conferences to promote tolerance towards migrants.

Coordination among many competent authorities is ensured through the work of inter-sectoral working groups. In March 2022, a **Joint Document on Needs Assessment and Planning in the Area of Mixed Migratory Flows and Asylum in the Republic of Serbia 2022–2024** was also prepared.

The Republic of Serbia has an active role in numerous international organisations and processes, regionally and globally, including the Global Forum on Migration and Development. The MOI and the SRCM cooperate with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and Serbia was granted observer status in the reception network organised by EUAA.

In September 2021, a workshop entitled Cooperation of the European Migration Network (EMN) with Serbia was held, gathering relevant state authorities in Serbia, EMN Chair and colleagues from Sweden, Slovenia, Luxembourg, Germany, and Estonia to establish opportunities for cooperation and joint activities. As a result, the Republic of Serbia was called to apply for observer status in EMN, which was done in April 2022. Cooperation and active participation in EMN will contribute to enhanced collection and disposal of data relevant to migration. In addition, the MOI and SRCM are participating in the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN) Management Board meetings, as observers.