



REFERENCE: 2025-5/CESCR/FU

7 March 2025

Excellency,

In our capacity as Chair and Co-Rapporteur for follow-up to concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, we have the honour to refer to the examination of the third periodic report submitted by Serbia at the Committee's seventy-first session held in 2022 (E/C.12/SRB/3). In the concluding observations (E/C.12/SRB/CO/3), the Committee requested Serbia to provide, within 24 months, written information on the steps undertaken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 17(b), 19(a), and 31(b) and (c) of the concluding observations.

The Committee welcomes the follow-up report (E/C.12/SRB/FCO/3) received on 1 March 2024 under its follow-up procedure. The Committee examined the report at its seventy-seventh session, held from 10 to 28 February 2025, and wishes to communicate the following assessment:

Paragraph 17(b): Human Rights Defenders – Assessment: Partial Progress

The Committee notes with appreciation the measures taken by the State party to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders, including the adoption of the *Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society in the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2022-2030* and the establishment of the Council for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society in September 2023. The Committee also welcomes the inclusion of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the drafting of public policy documents and the organization of roundtables and consultative meetings to address threats and attacks against human rights defenders.

However, the Committee remains concerned about the lack of specific measures for the effective protection of human rights defenders, particularly in cases of harassment, intimidation, and violence, and the need to provide a safe and favourable environment for their work. The Committee regrets the absence of detailed information on the effectiveness of measures taken to ensure the safety of human rights defenders.

The Committee concludes that while the State party has made some progress in creating a supportive environment for civil society, further efforts are needed to strengthen protections for human rights defenders and ensure that all reported cases of harassment and violence are promptly and thoroughly investigated. The Committee assesses the implementation of the recommendations in paragraph 17(b) as partial progress.

H.E. Mr. Milan Milanović
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Paragraph 19(a): A National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights - Assessment: Insufficient Progress

The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to foster multisectoral discussions on business and human rights issues. The ratification of the *Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* in September 2023 is a notable step towards providing additional protection of human rights, including in the field of business and human rights. The Committee also notes the organization of the *Business and Human Rights Conference* in December 2023, which aimed to promote dialogue between state institutions, businesses, and civil society on the implementation of the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*. The Committee further acknowledges the establishment of *The Council for Socially Responsible Business of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia* in 2021 as a potentially positive step for implementing recommendations on business and human rights, including a National Action Plan.

However, while advancements have been made in fostering discussions, the Committee notes the lack of concrete progress in drafting and/or adopting a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, as this effort is not explicitly mentioned in the State party's report. The Committee concludes that while the State party has taken initial steps to address business-related human rights issues, further efforts are needed to draft and adopt a National Action Plan and ensure that businesses respect human rights in their operations. The Committee assesses the implementation of the recommendations in paragraph 19(a) as insufficient progress.

Paragraph 31(b) and (c): Identity Documents - Assessment: Partial Progress

The Committee notes with appreciation the measures taken by the State party to address statelessness and ensure access to identity documents, including the signing of the *Third Memorandum of Understanding* between the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Protector of Citizens, and UNHCR in February 2022. The Committee also welcomes the informational campaigns conducted in 2022 and 2023 to raise awareness among the Roma community about the importance of birth registration and access to personal documents.

However, the Committee remains concerned about the persistent challenges faced by marginalized groups, particularly Roma (considering the high numbers reported on page 29 of the report) and internally displaced persons, in accessing identity documents. The Committee notes the lack of evidence or information indicating that the numbers provided meet the required demand for identity documents, or the long-term impact of these initiatives in sustainably reducing statelessness and improving access to social services, including the review of legislation relating to birth registration, as recommended in paragraph 31(c).

The Committee concludes that while the State party has made progress in addressing the issue of identity documents, further efforts are needed to ensure universal access to identity documents and eliminate barriers faced by marginalized groups. The Committee assesses the implementation of the recommendations in paragraphs 31(b) and (c) as partial progress.

The State party is requested to provide detailed information in its next periodic report on the measures taken to address all concerns and the progress achieved.

The Committee looks forward to continuing its constructive dialogue with the State party, with a view to providing guidance in its efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the Covenant.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.



Santiago Fiorio Vaesken

Co-Rapporteur for follow-up

Committee on Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights



Laura-Maria Crăciunean-Tatu

Chair

Committee on Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights