



Government
of Montenegro



SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Second Voluntary National Review: Montenegro and Sustainable Development Goals 2016–2021

June 2022



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Dear readers,

What you have in front of you is the *Second Voluntary National Review: Montenegro and the Sustainable Development Goals 2016-2021* (VNR), which is the first official review of the level of implementation of Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (2030 Agenda) and launched by the United Nations General Assembly (UN) in September 2015. This is also the first review of the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development by 2030, adopted by the Government in 2016 as Montenegro's national response to the commitments defined by the 2030 Agenda.

Although the Second VNR assesses the status of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the 2030 Agenda, special attention was paid to the implementation of the following SDGs, in line with the guidelines for drafting reviews formulated by the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF):

- SDG 1 – *End poverty in all its forms anywhere;*
- SDG 4 – *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;*
- SDG 5 – *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;*
- SDG 14 – *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;*
- SDG 15 – *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; and*
- SDG 17 – *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.*

The Review's findings confirmed that significant progress was made in the past five years in numerous SDG tasks that were in the focus of the assessment, but that Montenegro still faces many challenges (especially in the areas related to goals 1, 5, 15 and 17). These challenges are further exacerbated by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, human and social, natural and economic resources must be consolidated for Montenegro to make an unequivocal turn towards sustainable development of the society. We are obliged to do so by our Constitution, as well as by the commitments we have made at the international level as a UN member and as a future European Union (EU) member.

In this Review, we tried to include all stakeholders in the society and leave no one behind, and we paid special attention to young people, i.e. to their assessments and recommendations to be used as guidance for the definition of future development priorities to accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

To accomplish this, we made significant steps forward in improving the strategic and institutional framework for sustainable development in 2021. We placed this policy at the heart of the executive branch of power and we redesigned the National Council for Sustainable Development, an advisory body to the Government of Montenegro that brings together all relevant social stakeholders. Thus, we will ensure that future decision-making, policy-making and adoption of laws, as well as the implementation of development projects, are based on the principles of sustainable development.

We will also continue to strengthen the administrative capacities at all levels, to ensure effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development by 2030 and accelerate the EU integration process through more efficient implementation of the closing benchmarks.

To improve the processes of policy implementation, monitoring and reporting and to enable the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in these processes, we plan to invest additional efforts in improving the statistical system for SDGs, because sustainable development can be achieved only through a transparent and inclusive approach, verification of results and reporting on those results.

Finally, I hope that this Review will inspire you to actively contribute to the implementation of sustainable development goals and change daily habits, as well as encourage improved cooperation and inclusion at all levels, which are necessary to intensify the activities lying ahead of us so that Montenegro can develop on a sustainable basis and become a genuine ecological state.

THE PRIME MINISTER
OF MONTENEGRO
Dritan Abazović, PhD

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Key recommendations of *The Second Voluntary National Review (VNR): Montenegro and Sustainable Development Goals 2016–2021*

Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are fully integrated into the national framework through the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 (NSSD 2030). A report on the implementation of NSSD 2030 has shown that, in spite of significant successes, there are numerous challenges to achieving SDGs: progress has been achieved for four¹ out of the 17 goals, while an assessment of the trends for the remaining goals was not possible due to a lack of data. It is necessary to step up the commitment both to the implementation and to the monitoring of the effects and measuring of the NSSD 2030 results.

Agenda 2030 and the process of EU accession are highly complementary. Nearly two thirds of the SDG targets (109 out of 169) are closely linked to EU policies, especially those from the following chapters: 27 on the environment; 23 and 24 on the judiciary, fundamental rights, the rule of law, freedom and security; and 19 on social policy and employment. By meeting the requirements from the EU acquis, we are significantly progressing towards achievement of the SDG targets: by meeting the requirements from chapter 27, for example, Montenegro would achieve 40 SDG targets.

In the last couple of years, certain progress has been made in financing and coordinating sustainable development through the gradual introduction of programme budgeting and establishment of the Eco Fund, i.e. through the restructuring of the

National Council for Sustainable Development and organizational changes at the technical level (positioning the Office for Sustainable Development (OSD) in the Secretariat General of the Government). The need for continuous efforts to foster implementation mechanisms and accelerate attainment of SDGs remains.

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a 15.3% fall in GDP in 2020. Registered unemployment (annual average) rose by 13.4% in 2020 compared to 2019. A rapid socio-economic impact assessment showed that about 21% of employed persons experienced a decrease in salaries, and that vulnerable groups suffered disproportionate key health and socio-economic consequences. Children were affected in several ways, while the available data shows an increased number and intensity of domestic violence cases. COVID-19 had a profound impact on education, where, in addition to the negative impacts, there were also some positive ones.

The Second Voluntary National Review (VNR) focuses on goals 1, 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17.

¹ Goal 1 – No poverty; Goal 8 – Decent work and economic growth; Goal 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure; Goal 12 – Responsible consumption and production.

Goal 1: No poverty: The at-risk-of-poverty rate, i.e. share of population with an income below the national poverty threshold (€2,347 for a one-member household) dropped to 22.6% in 2020.² A positive trend has also been recorded for poverty, social exclusion and material deprivation of children, but the rate (38.6%) remains high and worrying. Poverty is increasing in the north with the at-risk-of-poverty rate (44.5%) being four times higher than in the southern region. Achievement of SDG 1 requires effective interventions in the field of social policy and regional development policy.

Goal 4: Quality education: Significant positive trends have been recorded: an increase in the number of children in early education, improved accessibility of buildings and a reduction of education costs through the provision of textbooks free of charge. Although it is obvious that education is becoming more inclusive and equitable, inequalities remain in terms of access to education for vulnerable groups of children, while the quality of education is emerging as the key issue, in terms of both the infrastructure of education institutions and the learning results and outcomes. The frequency and types of peer violence are increasing and concerning.

Goal 5: Gender equality: The development of gender policies has continued and they have significantly contributed to higher participation of women in political and social life. Some positive trends (albeit with certain fluctuations) have been recorded in the representation of women in the parliament and in processing of cases of violence. Nevertheless, the society is still dominantly patriarchal; traditional gender roles and stereotypes persist in all spheres of life, particularly at home, but also in politics and in the labour market. The gender equality index suggests that Montenegro is lagging behind not only compared to the EU average, but also within the region.

SDGs 14 and 15: Life below water and Life on land: Development of the legal and institutional framework for preservation of marine and terrestrial biodiversity is predominantly driven by the EU accession process. Significant progress has been achieved in the designation of protected areas: in 2020, 13.44% of the land area was designated for protection on the basis of national legislation. As of 2021, a protection regime was introduced for the first time for 0.98% of the coastal marine area. Challenges remain, in particular with the management of protected areas, sustainable management of forests, protected species, and certain land and freshwater ecosystems. The lack of indicators for monitoring and assessing is particularly visible for these goals.

² In line with SDG 1, the rate should be reduced by half by 2030 compared to the 2015 level, i.e. it should amount to approximately 12%.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals: An analysis of public finances supported by the UN system showed that, in the period 2015–2020, about €1.55 billion was allocated in order to finance the institutions, programmes and measures connected to achievement of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17, of which as much as 78% (€1.2 billion) was for education. Expenditure on gender equality in the entire period amounted to €4.2 million and this had a strong declining trend; expenditure on protection of marine and land biodiversity amounted to roughly €112.4 million and this was doubled in the observed period. Almost €222 million was allocated to various interventions connected with SDG 17.

According to the draft of the latest report on the implementation of the NSSD, certain data (periodical or continuous, equivalent and similar) exists for about 60 SDG indicators. The plan for a gradual introduction of indicators, according to which in 2018 a total of 77 indicators were to be followed, while by 2020 another 91 SDG indicators were to be introduced into the system of statistics, has not been implemented. This lack of indicators is greatly hindering assessment of the achievements and targeted adaptation, i.e. the development of adequate responses/public policies. The lack of clearly defined parameters, procedures and responsibilities for collecting data and generating indicators requires decisive interventions and the clear setting of responsibilities in the period ahead.

The VNR was prepared in consultations with stakeholders and the broader public – through institutional mechanisms, regional meetings in Bijelo Polje, Nikšić and Podgorica in April 2022 and through the platforms www.sdgmontenegro.me and UNICEF's U-Report. A particular contribution came from the institution of the Protector of Human Rights, i.e. the network of Golden Advisers to the Ombudsman for the protection of the rights of child. The process of development of the VNR was coordinated by the Office for Sustainable Development, with the support of the UN system in Montenegro.



1 Introduction

The Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030 (2030 Agenda) was adopted at the 70th United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2015. The Agenda applies to all countries, taking into account various national circumstances, capacities and levels of development, respecting national policies and priorities. This plan of action defines 17 universal sustainable development goals (SDG) and 169 concrete targets defined as aspirational and global. The states are to decide by themselves how to introduce these aspirational and global goals into their national planning processes, policies and strategies.

At its meeting of 7 July 2016, the Government of Montenegro adopted the National Strategy for Sustainable Development by 2030 with the pertaining Action Plan (NSSD 2030). NSSD 2030 is the country's umbrella, horizontal and long-term development strategy that responds to the challenges on the path towards sustainable development of Montenegrin society by 2030. The process of defining this strategic framework took into account the results of the implementation of the Action Plan of the previous NSSD 2007–2012, undertaken international commitments, those contained in the 2030 Agenda as priorities, as well as the national development priorities and priorities in the process of accession to the European Union (EU).

The NSSD is a document that translates into the national context the 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets defined in the 2030 Agenda. The Strategy defines the solution for sustainable

management for four groups of resources – human, social, natural and economic – by establishing principles, strategic goals and measures/sub-measures for achieving sustainable development of Montenegro by 2030, starting from the national needs, having in mind at the same time the need to meet the global commitments defined in the 17 SDGs.

As one of the first countries that transposed the 2030 Agenda into its national strategic framework, Montenegro presented its First Voluntary National Review (VNR³) at the meeting of the High-Level Political Forum – HLPF⁴ in July 2016. The First VNR was prepared immediately after the 2030 Agenda and NSSD 2030 were adopted, and therefore it was focused on nationalization of the SDGs, i.e. on the way in which the SDGs are integrated into the national planning framework. The First VNR and NSSD 2030 received positive assessments in the HLPF and from the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSDD).

The Second Voluntary National Review: Montenegro and Sustainable Development Goals 2016–2021 was prepared on the basis of analyses and inputs collected in the process of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030, with the assessments by measures/sub-measures and available indicators. The Second VNR for the first time offers an official overview of the status in achieving the 17 SDGs at the national level after five years of implementation of the NSSD and 2030 Agenda. Special attention was dedicated to those goals which were recommended to be the focus of



The NSSD is a document that translates into the national context

the 17 sustainable development goals



and 169 targets defined in the 2030 Agenda



³ The Voluntary National Reviews constitute a part of the process of monitoring and assessment of implementation of 2030 Agenda.

⁴ HLPF is the key UN platform for sustainable development which has a central role in monitoring and assessment of implementation of 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals at the global level.

the VNR cycle from 2022 and the goals of particular importance at the national level. In addition to the information collected in the process of assessing the implementation of the NSSD, the Second VNR strongly relied on consultations with stakeholders and the broader public.

Starting from the guidelines for preparation of the VNR, the purpose of the Second Montenegrin Report on Achieving the SDGs is to assess the progress in comparison with the previous report, to identify challenges, contribute to the strengthening of the system for monitoring and assessment of progress and to encourage further actions for acceleration of the national implementation of SDGs and to strengthen coordination. The process of preparation of the VNR is already perceived as an opportunity for the broader dissemination of sustainable development issues and raising awareness about SDGs.

2 The VNR process and development of the Report

2.1 Initial preparations and organization

In its paragraph 79, the 2030 Agenda encourages UN Member States to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which are country-led and country-driven”. The idea is that these national reports serve as the basis for regular assessments by the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) that meets under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).⁵ As paragraph 84 of the 2030 Agenda reads, the reviews are to be voluntary, state-led, prepared by developed and developing countries and to include various stakeholders.

At the UN General Assembly, Montenegro was elected to be a member of the ECOSOC for a period of three years, 2020–2022, and is dedicated to fulfilling the mandate of this body and to its proactive and effective role in the field of sustainable development. Given its membership of the ECOSOC for the period 2020–2022, Montenegro applied on 17 September 2021 to prepare its Second Voluntary National Review and to present it to the HLPF in July 2022.

The Office for Sustainable Development (OSD) within the Secretariat General of the Government has the key role in the process of preparation of the *Second Voluntary National Review: Montenegro and Sustainable Development Goals 2016–2021*

(hereinafter referred to as the “Second VNR” or “Review”). An important role is also given to the working group – an inter-sector working body established for the purposes of preparing the report on implementation of NSSD 2030 for the period 2016–2021 and preparation of the VNR.

The working group has 42 members representing various structures of the society: line ministries, institutions participating in the implementation of NSSD 2030, business, universities, the NGO sector and young people. In addition to its contribution given through the activities of all its members, the Working Group has contributed to the preparation of the Second VNR through its core team comprising representatives of the institutions in charge of measures and activities for implementation of the goals that are the focus of the Second VNR (SDGs 1, 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17). This core team also includes representatives of the UN system in Montenegro who have followed the VNR process. Information that the members of the Working Group submitted in the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030 served as the basis for preparation of the VNR, while the working group considered each of the important steps in the process, including the Initial Report, key recommendations and the draft of the Second VNR. The government discussed and adopted the proposed VNR before the document was sent to UN DGACM and UN DESA⁶ to be officially presented to the HLPF.

⁵ ECOSOC is one of the six key UN bodies in charge of economic and social policies. In the last decade the role of ECOSOC has been strengthened in identifying new challenges, promoting innovation and achieving balanced integration of the three sustainable development pillars – economic, social and ecological.

⁶ The Report is submitted to the UN Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (UN DGACM) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). According to the mandate entrusted by the UN member states, UN DESA helps countries to find a common basis, set the norms and undertake actions for sustainable development.



The working group has **42 members** representing various structures of the society:



line ministries



institutions participating in the implementation of NSSD 2030



businesses



universities



NGO
civil society



youth

2.2 Preparation of the Second VNR

Preparation of the Second VNR was coordinated by the Office for Sustainable Development, with the support of the Working Group for NSSD/VNR reports and the core team, i.e. representatives of the UN team established to provide support in the VNR process. The OSD had a leading role, but the Working Group, core team and UN VNR team contributed to the process and development of the Review at several levels, primarily through providing key inputs and information in the process of reporting on the NSSD and giving guidelines and comments regarding the concept and methodology for preparing the Review, the plan of work and the manner of consulting stakeholders and the public. They also contributed to the formulation of key recommendations of the Review that are in line with the procedure for preparing the VNR submitted to the UN in early May 2022. The draft of the Second VNR was submitted to all stakeholders involved in its preparation to obtain their opinions. The proposal of the Review was considered and adopted by the Government of Montenegro.

An expert team was hired through the support of the UN system to Montenegro. Their task was to analyse the available materials and, using them as the basis along with the inputs from the consultation process, to develop this document. In addition to this, the task of the expert team was to design a communication strategy, prepare a plan for engaging stakeholders and to contribute to the process of collecting opinions from the stakeholders by participating in consultative meetings and presenting opinions and information collected through the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030.

Reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030 has been done continuously since 2016 on the basis of standardized forms that are used to record the implemented activities and evaluate progress in the implementation of the measures and sub-measures of the Strategy's Action Plan, collecting the data for available indicators for the set outcomes. The opinions submitted by the relevant institutions are then aggregated up to the level of strategic goals and thematic units. The first overview of the situation was prepared in 2019 as a working report. The second overview, conclusive with 2021, is in its final stage and it constitutes the basis for development of the Second Report on the Implementation of the NSSD, whose finalization is expected by mid-2020. This Second Report will be adopted by the Government of Montenegro.

The preliminary findings from this process show that, for all four groups of resources dealt with by this document, the level of implementation is low. The process of collecting data showed certain weaknesses that are primarily related to a lack of information, insufficient dedication to regular reporting due to the fact that civil servants have too heavy a workload and/or due to frequent changes of the personnel in charge of monitoring NSSD 2030 in various institutions, as well as due to a general lack (absence) of the envisaged indicators. In addition to this, the system is rather complex and it leaves some room for a certain level of arbitrariness – particularly where there are no indicators on the basis of which the assessment can be made objective. Since the Sustainable Development Goals are fully integrated into the NSSD, the identified deficiencies also impact the possibility and quality of evaluating the progress in achieving the SDGs at the national level.

The key sources of information for assessing the progress in achieving SDGs in the period 2016–2021 were the materials collected in the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030. Other available materials were used as well, particularly analyses of the UN system in Montenegro (on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, connections between the 2030 Agenda and process of accession to the EU, vulnerable groups, the availability of budget funds for financing sustainable development⁷ and other issues). Since the preparation of the Second Report on the Implementation of NSSD 2030 for the period 2019–2020 has shown that the number of indicators monitored at the national level is not sufficient to get a clear picture on implementation for all SDGs, other relevant indicators prepared by official statistics and other national institutions were used. To complement the information collected through the process of monitoring NSSD 2030 in those cases where such information was not sufficient to make an assessment of the key SDG targets – relevant plans, strategies, reports and other materials of the Government of Montenegro were used too.

In the analysis of SDG implementation, particular attention was dedicated to children's rights; information related to this field is presented within the relevant goals (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 16). Efforts were invested to do something similar with (other) vulnerable population groups to the extent possible, i.e. to the extent to which there was relevant data; Chapter 6 – Leaving no one behind – provides more information.

The analysis is prepared in such a way as to try to respond to the following questions: 1) What has been done in the last five years? 2) What has been achieved? 3) Where are we now? 4) What are the key needs and challenges for the period ahead? These questions were discussed for all targets (relevant for Montenegro) for goals 1, 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17, and for those that are the focus of the Second VNR, discussing the connected topics where relevant, and noting the cases where it was not possible to make any assessment due to a lack of data/information. A shorter analysis was prepared for the goals that are not the focus of the Second VNR – consideration of the information collected during the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030 and making assessments for the selected/key targets.

The progress made in achieving the goals that were subject to the detailed analysis was evaluated on the basis of one of (or combining) the following two elements:

- Available indicators (SDG or similar national indicators);
- Information about activities implemented in the last five years (where indicators were not available).

To present the assessments, this document uses the symbols and colours used in the global report on achieving SDGs, with an interpretation adapted to the national circumstances, as presented in the figure below. Where indicators were available, evaluation was done on the five-year trends for the period covered by the Review, and for the SDG targets evaluation was done on their status at the end of 2021.

⁷ Draft from April 2022.

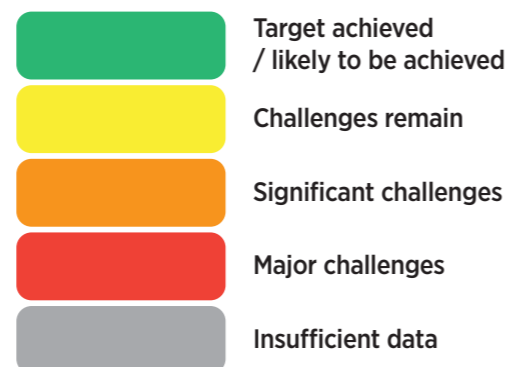
Evaluation of the trends for available indicators (2016-2021)



On the basis of target assessments, a summary assessment was derived for goals 1, 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17. As for the other goals, only a descriptive assessment of the progress and challenges is given.

In addition to official assessments, the Second VNR dedicated attention also to the opinions expressed in the consultative process – in meetings or through the platforms www.sdgmontenegro.me and UNICEF’s U-Report, which provided about 1,000 people (almost half of them being young people) with an opportunity to express their opinions about sustainability, individual goals and issues of importance for achieving SDGs. Although information from online consultations was not collected on the basis of representative samples and cannot be considered a statistically valid picture of public opinion in the country, it nevertheless provides a valuable insight into reflections by a significant number of citizens about the issues of sustainable development and, as such, they were used in the Review. Representatives of NGOs active in the field of environment protection contributed to the review by sending in their opinions about the goals/targets from their field of work; opinions from the civil sector are given in their original form in the document.

Target status / SDGs



The first two chapters discuss the context of preparation, process and the method of development of the Second VNR, as well as the involvement of stakeholders. Chapter 3 deals with integration of the SDGs into the national strategic framework and planning of the topics, while chapter 4 refers to relationships between the SDGs and accession to the EU. Information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are presented in chapter 5, while information about vulnerable groups in the context of the principle of “leaving no one behind” is presented in chapter 6. The central chapter of the Second VNR is chapter 7, which deals in detail with the progress for goals 1, 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17, with an overview of implementation of the other SDGs. Chapter 8 is dedicated to monitoring and assessing progress in the implementation of NSSD 2030 and SDGs, and discusses the availability of high-quality and reliable data, giving recommendations for strengthening the system for collecting and analysing data to establish the effects of implemented measures and policies and encourage acceleration of the process of achieving SDGs. Chapter 9 offers concluding remarks and considerations about the next steps.

2.3 Involvement of stakeholders

The process of preparation of the Second VNR included three consultative regional meetings (in Bijelo Polje, Nikšić and Podgorica.⁸ These were meetings with representatives of local self-government, educational institutions, civil sector and other stakeholders. The meetings were attended by about 80 people from 17 (out of the 24) Montenegrin municipalities, who showed a high level of interest and participated actively in the discussions about individual SDGs and sustainable development in general, emphasizing their needs and contributing significantly to consideration of the causes of unsustainable trends. The response of the private sector was weak. Consultative meetings were primarily dedicated to education, gender equality, environment and poverty, as the central topics of the Second VNR and issues of particular importance for development of the society on sustainable bases. Calls were extended to all interested citizens, the private and civil sectors, as well as to representatives of local self-governments.

In addition to these meetings, a meeting was also held with representatives of the institution of the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (Ombudsman), i.e. advisers to the Protector for the fields of public administration, protection from discrimination and children rights. Particular value was given to this meeting from members of the network of Golden Advisers to the Ombudsman – children and young people under 17, which includes children/young people from vulnerable groups.

The platform www.sdgmontenegro.me, with short questionnaires about the SDGs that are the focus of the Second VNR and sustainable development in general, was opened up to the public for a period of three weeks during April 2022. Information about the platform was disseminated through social networks but also verbally (during consultative meetings and otherwise). In that period, 547 unique visits were registered, while the number of people who responded to the questionnaires ranged from about 240 to 460. Almost two thirds of the participants were women. About 82% of the respondents were from the public sector (public administration, school institutions), 6% from the private sector, about 5% from the civil sector and about 7% were categorized as “others”. UNICEF’s U-Report platform collected young people’s opinions about violence. A total of 433 young people participated in this survey. The results of the online consultations are presented in this and other relevant chapters of the Second VNR (chapter 7 presents an analysis by goals, and chapter 9 contains recommendations for the future).

Through the working group and through consultative meetings, representatives of the civil sector took part in the process of preparation of the Second VNR. They were from various areas (environment, education of children with disabilities, etc.). Their opinions and comments are included in the Review through information from offline consultations, inputs of the working group and through a special opinion submitted by representatives of non-governmental organizations Green Home and the Society of Young Ecologists.

⁸ The regional consultative meeting in Bijelo Polje was attended by representatives of eight municipalities in the northern region: Mojkovac, Bijelo Polje, Kolašin, Pljevlja, Berane, Andrijevica, Gusinje and Petnjica. The meeting in Nikšić was attended by no representatives from other municipalities. The meeting in Podgorica was attended by representatives of 10 municipalities, mostly from the central region and from the coast.



The meetings were attended by about **80 people**

from **17** out of the **24** Montenegrin municipalities



The platform www.sdgmontenegro.me

547

unique visits were registered in that period.

U-Report

UNICEF’s U-Report platform collected young people’s opinions about violence.

A total of 433 young people participated in this survey



3 Sustainable development goals in the national strategic framework and planning

3.1 Ownership of the sustainable development goals

Efforts to follow global processes and to introduce into the national framework the elements of sustainability policy have been present in Montenegro since the adoption of the Declaration on an Ecological State in 1991 and integration of the designation of Montenegro as an ecological state in the Constitution from 1992. Ten years later, Montenegro established the National Sustainable Development Council (that has been functioning ever since in various forms). In 2007 the first National Strategy for Sustainable Development was adopted. In addition to this, the country made efforts to achieve nationalized Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In parallel with the global process, in 2013 and 2014, Montenegro organized consultations with the slogan “Say what kind of Montenegro you want”, through which it was made possible for stakeholders to give their contributions to formulating a new development agenda for the period after 2015. More than 8,000 people participated, while particular attention was paid to including marginalized groups, including the poor, the young and elderly, women, people living in remote and isolated communities, persons with disabilities and others. Consultations continued in 2015, so that about 2% of the population took part in considering what had been achieved and in reflecting about the new development challenges. The government used the priorities identified in the consultation process

to prepare the country’s official position about the future Sustainable Development Goals in the work of the Open Working Group where Montenegro had a common position with Slovenia.

In the preparation of NSSD 2030, a broad range of consultations was also organized with all the relevant stakeholders, including different levels and sectors of the government, but also non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and the business sector. A three-month consultation process preceded adoption of NSSD 2030 in July 2016. The entire process was elaborated in detail in the First VNR that Montenegro presented to the HLPF, also in July 2016.

The process of implementation of NSSD 2030 included a wide range of government⁹ but also other stakeholders that were recognized as leading stakeholders in the complex set of measures and sub-measures defined within the NSSD Action Plan. Reports on progress in the implementation of NSSD 2030 (working report from 2019 and draft second report) show, however, that ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals has not been strengthened in this period, which shows a modest level of implementation of a significant number of measures and sub-measures, i.e. an insufficient degree of involvement of various administration bodies and institutions in the process of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030. The impression is that NSSD 2030, and SDGs as well, have not been the focus of implementation of public policies in the last five years, but that other

⁹ Mostly at the national level, but also at the local level. Certain local self-governments implemented certain, mostly project-based, activities to localize the 2030 Agenda.

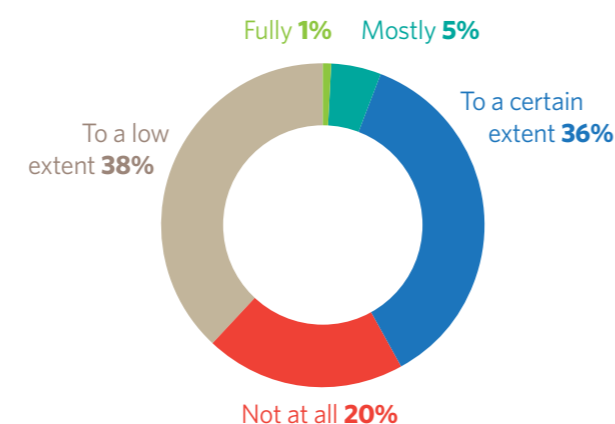
priorities have been higher. However, most of these have a positive influence on the achievement of the SDGs.

The process of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030 clearly shows that it is necessary to work on the strengthening of ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals – both those formulated through the NSSD 2030 process and those transferred over from the 2030 Agenda. It also shows that it is necessary to step up implementation, find more effective methods for monitoring and reporting (possible also through the review of the Action Plan, analysis of the procedures, but also strengthening of responsibility for undertakings) and significantly improve coordination and integration of policies. In that respect it is very important that the renewed National Council for Sustainable Development should start working in its full capacity and in line with its innovated mandate (presented in section 3.3).

As assessed in a larger number of international and national reports and analyses, a weak implementation of plans and strategies is characteristic for Montenegro and it is certainly one of deficiencies that should be seriously dealt with in the period ahead to ensure prospects for achieving several-decades-old aspirations and undertaken international commitments. However, in spite of the established weaknesses in the implementation of NSSD 2030, it is a fact that sustainable development is a significant topic in the public discourse. This can also be seen in the process of preparation of the Second VNR, during which the activities for including the public and strengthening ownership of SDGs continued through exchanges with the International Working Group, consideration of the proposed Report by the government, and through online and offline consultations with stakeholders and the public in general.

About 270 citizens between the age of 12 and 72 responded to the questions about sustainable development through online consultations in the preparation of the Second VNR. Answers to the question of whether Montenegro is developing sustainably (Figure 3-1) show that the respondents do not have a high opinion about the achievements. Fifty-eight percent of them thought that it was not the case at all (20%) or that development of the country is sustainable “to a low extent” (38%). On the other hand, only 6% of participants were of the opinion that the country is fully or to a large extent developing in line with sustainable development principles.

Figure 3-1: Opinions of the survey respondents: Is Montenegro developing sustainably?



Almost one in three participants (30.1%) said that the most significant progress in the last five years in terms of sustainability had been achieved in the fields of renewable energy and energy efficiency, environmental protection and development of environmental awareness, or in the fields related to these areas. A significant number of respondents (25.6%) were not able to list the fields where progress has been achieved, or they thought that there had been no progress. It is also interesting that

the responses were quite “dispersed”, i.e. that a large number of fields (e.g. health services, IT, science and innovation, education and poverty reduction, decent work and economic development, agriculture) were selected by a small number of people (at most 2.5% of the total number). Some of the typical answers to the question of “what is sustainable development for you” are given in Box 3-1.

The largest number of participants thought that a personal contribution to sustainable development can be given by work, competences, education, knowledge, socially responsible behaviour and civic activism; a significant number also thought that it can be done by respecting environmental principles, by activities related to energy efficiency and adequate waste management, promotion of healthy lifestyles, i.e. raising awareness about the importance of preservation of the environment.

The respondents stated that if they were politicians, most of them would work on improvement of the policies related to sustainable development and their consistent implementation; then they would work on education and raising awareness, as well as on concrete interventions in sectors such as energy, agriculture and others, particularly in the north of the country. There were those who said that they would “stop thinking about themselves and start working better for the benefit of the state”, which is a message that was present also in some of the other responses and shows a lack of trust among a significant number of citizens in political leaders and parties.



Preserving the country for future generations! PROPRIETY, decorum, responsibility, empathy!

- Balance between economic progress of society and preservation of the environment.
- Peace, justice and equality.
- Development where people live and act in a way that is in balance with nature. Development that does not aim only to achieve material benefits, but also aims at leaving natural resources intact for the future generations.
- Development where laws and human rights are respected, where modern education is acquired, jobs can be easily found, a society of equal opportunities for all is created and nature is cherished, where the need for growth is respected and alternative sources are used to protect the environment.
- The use and exploitation of all resources and potentials in an area in a rational way, whereby the maximum benefit is obtained with minimal damaging consequences and mandatory preservation of resources for future generations.
- Preserving the environment and using natural resources in a prudential manner, so that the future generations can meet their needs in the same way, if not better.
- Smart use of resources, preservation of the environment.
- Sustainable development is a ray of hope. A sustainable economy that strikes a balance between profit and environmental protection, implemented by human resources with quality education, adequately prepared for the labour market through the national education system. Development that instills life in social justice and equal opportunities.
- That is life in harmony with nature and people.

Box 3-1: How citizens explain what sustainable development is

3.2 Incorporation of SDGs into national frameworks and integration of three dimensions of sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda and sustainable development goals are fully integrated into the national strategic framework through NSSD 2030, which defines the solutions for sustainable management for four groups of national resources – human, social, natural and economic. In this way all three dimensions of sustainable development are included. For each group of resources, principles are established, strategic goals are set, and measures/sub-measures defined for achieving sustainable development of Montenegro by 2030. Through this process, all the SDG targets relevant for the country are integrated and the pertaining indicators are transferred over. They are matched with the appropriate measures/sub-measures and strategic goals of NSSD 2030.

Starting from the identified problems and sustainable development needs, NSSD 2030's strategic goals are set for the following priority topics: 1) improving the situation of human resources and strengthening of social inclusion; 2) support to values, norms and behaviour matrices important for the sustainability of society; 3) preservation of natural capital; 4) introduction of a green economy; 5) management for sustainable development; and 6) financing for sustainable development. For the six thematic areas, 30 strategic goals are defined, with 102 measures and 602 sub-measures that make up the NSSD's Action Plan. The Action Plan also defines the target outcomes for every strategic goal and identifies indicators for monitoring the level of achievement of the goals.

The NSSD dedicates particular attention to establishing a framework for financing sustainable development in Montenegro. The basic principles for financing for sustainable development are presented in detail and possible sources are considered for the requirements presented in the Action Plan from Addis Ababa. In the end, the NSSD defines the manner for establishing a national system to monitor the sustainability of national development through monitoring of implementation of the goals, measures and tasks contained in the Action Plan.

The responsibilities for implementation of the complex set of measures of NSSD 2030 and for monitoring its implementation have been defined for a large number of administration bodies, institutions and other stakeholders on the level of leading and other entities for each strategic goal.

In the process of implementation of NSSD 2030 and the SDGs, the National Council for Sustainable Development (more details in the section that follows) has had a guiding and coordinating role, with the support of the Office for Sustainable Development at the expert-administrative level. The sector for coordination, monitoring of compliance and monitoring of implementation of the strategies establishing public policies within the Secretariat General of the Government also has an important role in the process of implementation of NSSD 2030 and the SDGs, primarily as the body dealing with assessment of compliance of the proposals from new strategic documents with the strategic goals defined in NSSD 2030 and Montenegro's obligations according to the 2030 Agenda (more details in section 7.6).

3.3 Institutional mechanisms and structural issues

The National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSO) was established in 2002 on the eve of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, as an advisory body of the Government of Montenegro for implementation of sustainable development policy. In 2005, within the Secretariat General of the Government of Montenegro, the Office for Sustainable Development (OSD) was established as a Secretariat to the NCSO.

In the last 20 years, within its expert working groups and in its plenary sessions, the NCSO considered the important strategic, planning and implementation documents and results of relevant projects, while the OSD, as an NCSO secretariat, after the meetings, submitted information with conclusions to the government for consideration and adoption. After adoption by the government, the conclusions were sent to the relevant line ministries for implementation.

In the period between 2006 and 2021, both the NCSO and OSD underwent several reforms, the most important being the one from 2008, when, inter alia, it was made possible to establish working groups within the NCSO, while the OSD acted for some time within the ministry in charge of the environment.

Reform in 2021 returned the OSD to the Secretariat General of the Government, while the NCSO was redesigned so that it deals with the current challenges that Montenegro faces on the path of practical implementation of the idea of an ecological state.¹⁰

Members of the NCSO are representatives of all relevant structures in society (all ministers in the government, the Secretary of the Parliament, Chief Negotiator for the EU, expert institutions, financial institutions, business associations, universities, trade unions, NGOs, independent experts, youth representatives and the media). The president of the NCSO is the prime minister, while the secretary is the head of the OSD.

The tasks of the National Council are compatible with the 2030 Agenda – they support it and they are formulated in the following way:

1. Issuing recommendations and expert opinions to the government to ensure adoption and implementation of policies and development projects in line with the principles of sustainable development;
2. Harmonization of the sector-level strategy, planning and programme documents and regulations with principles, goals and measures of sustainable development policy and issuing recommendations and expert opinions to complement/amend them in such a way as to ensure integration of the principles of sustainable development;
3. Consideration and issuing of an opinion on national reports and communication that Montenegro, as a signatory to international conventions, is obliged to prepare, including the reports on the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development by 2030 (and the review of that document), as well as other strategic, planning and programme documents of importance for achieving the sustainable development goals defined in the UN 2030 Agenda, Green Deal, EU Climate Package, Green Agenda for the Western Balkans,



2021 Reform placed the Office for Sustainable Development in the General Secretariat of the Government



National Council for Sustainable Development strengthened under the leadership of the Prime Minister

¹⁰ The declaration from 1991 and Article 1 of the Constitution define Montenegro as an ecological state.

- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Protection of the Maritime Environment and Coastal Area of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and other national and international regulations;
4. Improving the system of financing for sustainable development in line with the Action Plan from Addis Ababa, including mobilization of resources for implementation of policies, regulations and strategic documents in the field of sustainable development;
 5. Improving the communication strategy for sustainable development, by additionally engaging and informing the public, as well as by encouraging broad discussion about the issues related to sustainable development, including the establishment of partnerships with the media, and organizing events and meetings with various groups of stakeholders about the key topics and concepts of sustainable development to ensure thorough and topical exchange about current and future (international, European, national) development, ensuring additional expert knowledge and broader coverage in the media and public communication about outcomes;
 6. Encouraging and promoting research and research studies, education, training, exchange of technologies and exchange of knowledge and skills relevant for sustainable development, as well as building capacities for sustainable development at the national level to ensure adoption of evidence-based decisions;
 7. Establishing and improving partnerships with development partners and organizations, the private sector, academic community and other relevant stakeholders to ensure support for the implementation of sustainable development policy;
 8. Promoting dialogue and building partnerships for sustainable development with major groups that are identified as key stakeholders outside of the government, the national and international communities, those that have an important role in the transition to sustainable development (vulnerable groups in the society, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, representatives of workers and trade unions, economy and industry, entrepreneurs, research community, youth and others);
 9. Support for initiatives related to sustainable and just transition, leaving no one behind (a green economy, innovation and technology, a circular economy, a blue economy, cleaner production and consumption, social responsibility, climate change, integrated coastal zone management, preservation of biodiversity and biological safety, healthy lifestyles, gender equality, etc.);
 10. Launching the National Council's own initiatives about important topics in the context of sustainable development through development of pilot projects focused on certain priority areas in the context of the national sustainable development policy framework;
 11. Other tasks from within the scope of work of the National Council.

The reformed NCSO will have five working groups (expert working bodies) for:

- Monitoring implementation of sustainable development policy;
- Mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
- Integrated coastal zone management in Montenegro;
- Sustainable development at the local level;
- Financing for sustainable development.

The key tasks of the working groups are to give opinions and recommendations, with a view to improving the materials sent to the NSDC for consideration.

The intention of this reform is to strengthen the role of the Council as an advisory body of the Government of Montenegro in order to ensure expert guidelines for: (i) the development and implementation of public policies and development projects based on sustainable development principles, (ii) improving the system of financing for sustainable development, (iii) encouraging and promoting research, education, exchange of technologies and exchange of knowledge and skills relevant for sustainable development, as well as building the capacities for sustainable development at the national level; and (iv) promoting a dialogue and building partnerships for sustainable development.

It is expected that, in this way, the NCSO will for the first time reach its full potential and become the most important “area for exchange and consideration of policies based on knowledge and facts” in Montenegro, as well as for solving the urgent developmental issues in Montenegrin society that are to be harmonized with sustainable development principles (a balance between the economic development needs and preservation of the environment, taking into account the needs and rights of all categories in society, leaving no one behind). The reformed Council for Sustainable Development will focus on seeking positive political solutions in the areas important for the country and in line with the requirements of EU integration and international commitments and practices.

This improvement constitutes a significant contribution to the implementation of obligations that Montenegro has in the international context that stem from the UN 2030 Agenda and obligations within the negotiation process with the European Union. The Reform also supports the strategic goal of NSSD 2030 that refers to the strengthening of the institutional framework for sustainable development.

Completing the system of governance for sustainable development in the way described above constitutes political support for the implementation of sustainable development policy in Montenegro.



4 Sustainable Development Goals and EU accession

EU accession is Montenegro's priority and a strategic commitment that has the continuous and strong support of the majority of citizens. At the same time it is also the key driver of reform processes in the country that has been a candidate for membership since 2010 and has been negotiating since 2012. So far, 33 negotiation chapters have been opened, of which three are temporarily closed. In the last couple of years the negotiations have stagnated (the last opening of a chapter took place in 2020), and there are some changes in the negotiation modalities, i.e. in the organization of pre-accession requirements.

The key conclusion of the analysis from 2018 – *Mutual links: EU Accession and 2030 Agenda*¹¹ – carried out by the UN team in Montenegro, is that there is a strong complementariness between the processes of EU accession and achieving the 2030 Agenda/Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), i.e. that these are interwoven processes. Nearly two thirds of the SDG targets (109 out of 169) are closely linked to the requirements of the EU *acquis*. By fulfilling all the EU requirements within Chapter 27 (the environment and climate change), for example, almost 40 SDG targets would be achieved (25% of the total number). The results of this analysis (presented in the paragraphs that follow) clearly show that, by meeting the obligations in the process of joining EU, Montenegro will get much closer to achieving SDGs.

This complementariness is particularly explicit in Chapter 27 on the environment, Chapters 23 and 24 on fundamental rights, the rule of law, security and freedoms, and Chapter 19 on social policy and employment. Strong mutual links have been established also with a significant number of other chapters (overview for selected chapters is given below).

Meeting the obligations defined in [Chapter 11: Agriculture and Rural Development](#) mostly contributes to achieving SDG 2 through direct payments, common market organization and other horizontal issues in agriculture. This is particularly relevant for SDG tasks related to agricultural productivity (2.3), production and incomes of farmers (2.3), maintenance of ecosystems (2.4) and agricultural markets and trade rules (2.1.c).

This chapter is also connected to SDG 15 in the part related to land and degradation of land. Rural development policy is related to SDG 6.1 through the support and strengthening of participation of local communities in managing waters and improving sanitary conditions, and also SDG 11 through support for positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas (strengthening national and regional development planning), and SDG 5 (related to gender equality). The EU policy of organic agricultural production is interwoven into all of the above sustainable development goals and targets.

¹¹ The document is prepared on the basis of discussions, analyses, validations and quantitative analyses of connections between the EU accession process and the 2030 Agenda. Preparation of the analysis was supported by the UNDP Regional Centre in Istanbul and UNICEF Montenegro within the process of *Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support* – MAPS).



of the SDG targets
(109 out of 169)

are closely linked
to the requirements
of the EU *acquis*.



By fulfilling all the
EU requirements
within Chapter 27
(the environment
and climate change)

almost
40 SDG targets
would be achieved
(25% of the total number)





Chapter 12: Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy also contributes to achieving a larger number of goals/tasks, including SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production), and particularly to the achievement of target 12.3 (Halve per capita global food waste). Through implementation of phytosanitary policy, a contribution is given to goal 15, i.e. sustainable forest management and the fight against land degradation.

Chapter 15: Energy includes, inter alia, rules and policies related to competitiveness and state aid, internal energy market, promotion of sustainable energy sources and energy efficiency, etc. These policies/rules directly correspond to SDG 7 and the five targets formulated within this goal (i.e. for the achievement of universal access to reliable, affordable and modern energy services; a sustainable share of renewable energy in the energy mix; improvement of energy efficiency; stronger international cooperation for clean energy; improved infrastructure and technology for modern and sustainable energy services in developing countries).

Chapter 19: Social Policy and Employment – Firm links are identified with the targets within SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), as well as links with several other goals: SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities).

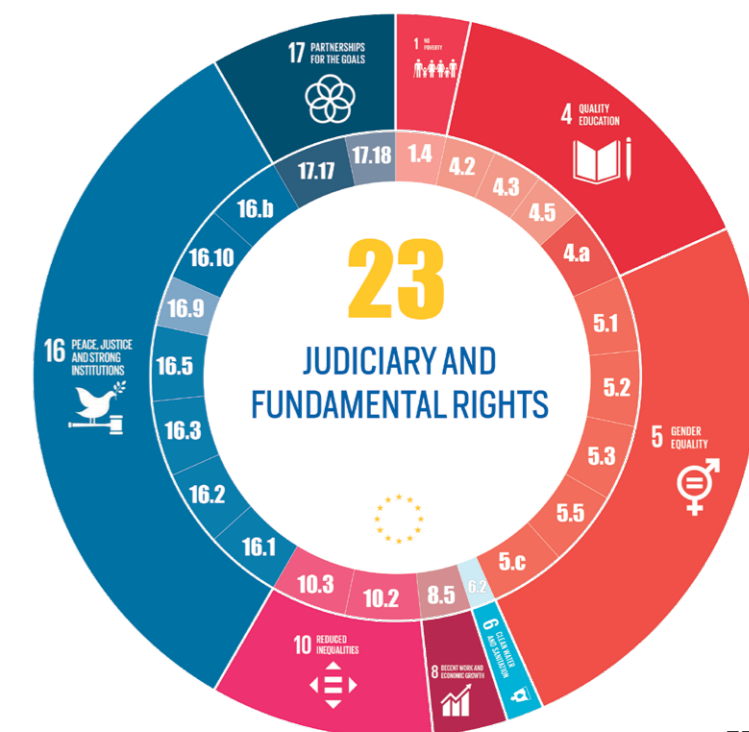
Reform of the system of social and child care¹² is financed mostly from budget sources, with the support of IPA II funds. After accession to the EU, Montenegro will have access to the European Social Fund and other similar funds. To be able to

¹² The reform has been in progress since 2001, but its intensity grew in 2010 when financing from EU funds started. However, budget allocations for the reform are still not sufficient to improve the position of vulnerable groups.

use these opportunities successfully, Montenegro needs to strengthen its institutional, professional and administrative capacities, as well as the capacities of all stakeholders.

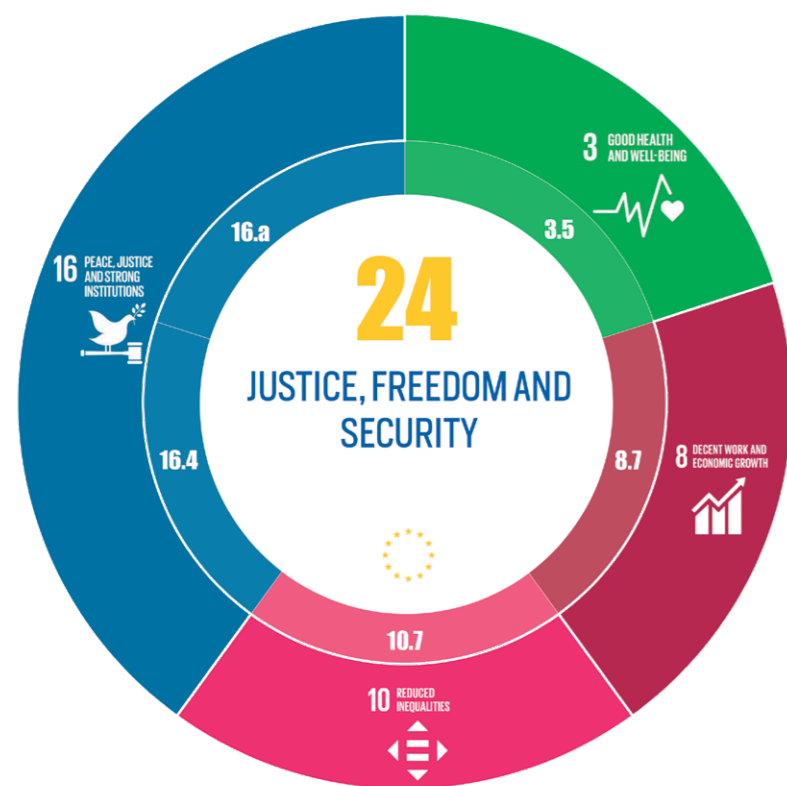
Chapter 20: Entrepreneurship and Industrial Policy refers *inter alia* to industrial policy, instruments of financial support to small and medium-size enterprises (SME), tourism, air and the maritime and wood industries. For Chapter 20 it is established that it has the most significant correlation with SDGs 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) and 12 (Responsible consumption and production).

Chapter 23: Justice and Fundamental Rights includes the fields of justice, the fight against corruption, fundamental rights and the rights of EU citizens. In the negotiation process it is necessary for candidate countries to show visible and measurable results and achievements in these fields. This chapter is linked with 23 SDG targets, or 17% of the total number, and to the largest extent to SDG 5 (Gender equality) and 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). Chapter 23 has been recognized as one of the key chapters for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Montenegro.



The same can be said also for Chapter 24: Justice, Freedom and Security – which aims at ensuring freedom of movement and security of people. Topics to be negotiated within this chapter include migration, cooperation in criminal and civil matters, police cooperation and fight against organized crime, protection from violence, abuse and exploitation, including child marriages and child begging, human trafficking, etc.

This chapter has a direct and strong influence on five SDG targets, mostly within SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). The fields that are particularly important for Montenegro and that will require additional efforts in the context of EU accession and achievement of SDG are: 1) trafficking in human beings; 2) money laundering; 3) financial investigations and confiscation of assets; 4) promotion and protection of the human rights of the most vulnerable groups, such as Roma, children and LGBTI members.



Chapter 27: The Environment and Climate Change is the most complex in terms of its relations with the 2030 Agenda. The requirements from this chapter are related to 40 SDG tasks.

The requirements of so-called horizontal legislation (on impact assessment, participation of the public, etc.) strongly contribute to targets 12.8 and 12.2. The requirements related to the quality of water are strongly connected to 10 targets within SDGs 3 (Good health and wellbeing), 6 (Clean water and sanitary conditions, and 14 (Life below water). Improvements in the monitoring of the status of surface, ground water and coastal (including transitional) waters in the territory of Montenegro are very important for all further activities in the field of water resources management and preserving their quality.

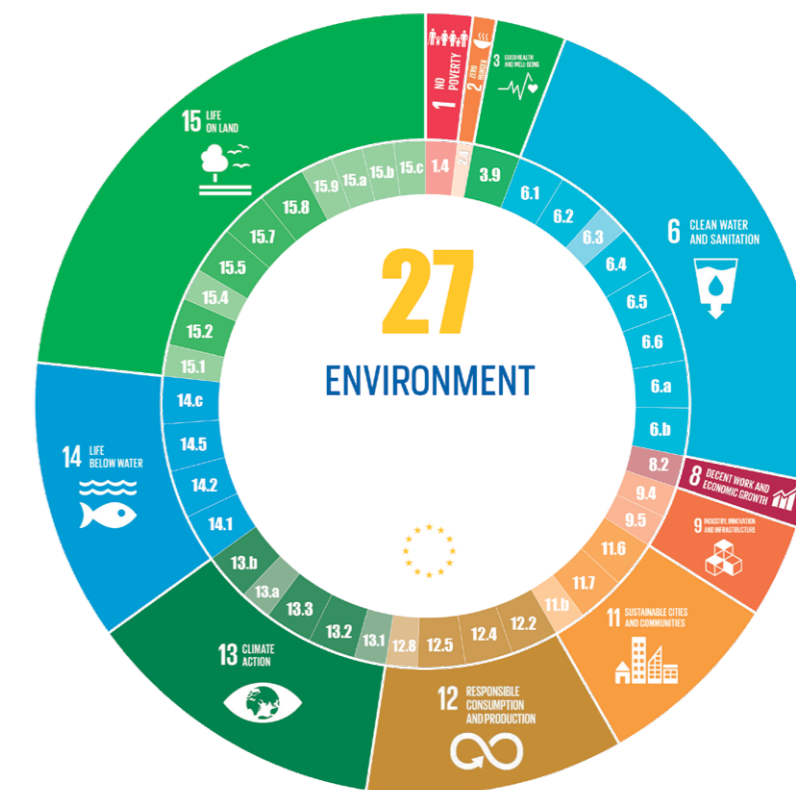
The requirements from Chapter 27 that are related to air quality are strongly linked with SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and are moderately linked with SDG targets 3.9, 6.6 and 15.1. One of the key challenges is achieving a satisfactory air quality in all areas, particularly for the municipalities of Podgorica, Pljevlja and Nikšić, where the concentration of polluting matter frequently goes above threshold values. Implementation of this part of Chapter 27 requires significant financial investment in infrastructure and remote heating systems, improvements to public transport in cities, implementation of energy efficiency measures, preservation and enhancement of green areas, etc. The part of Chapter 27 that refers to waste is strongly linked with SDGs 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), 12 (Responsible consumption and production) and 14 (Life below water). Planning documents for waste management envisage measures for recycling and separated collection of waste material, as well as application of the principle “the polluter pays”.

EU legislation, i.e. the part of Chapter 27 that refers to climate change, is closely linked with SDGs 13 (Climate action) and 11 (Sustainable cities and communities).

The requirements from Chapter 27 that refer to the protection of nature are firmly linked with SDGs 12 (Responsible consumption and production), 14 (Life below water) and 15 (Life on land). Establishment of the Natura 2000 network and implementation of legislation are of decisive importance both for further progress in the accession process and for achieving the SDGs. Administrative capacities and other specific knowledge, particularly related to implementation of appropriate assessments, compensation measures and proper application of the relevant EU directives and legislation (including the directives on habitat and on birds) will have to be strengthened significantly.

Significant support in the implementation of policies in the field of the environment will be secured through IPA TAIEX, Twinning and other instruments. Technical support will depend on the availability of donor funds and EU funds and adequate preparedness for the envisaged activities. Coordination of donors and high-quality and early programming of potential support of international financial institutions, IPA funds and of bilateral support from the member states are of key importance for ensuring the needed expert knowledge, and within that, also for timely implementation of the planned activities.

The total costs of activities for implementation of Chapter 27 have been assessed at €1.4 billion (which is about 35% of the GDP for 2017).¹³ To finance the obligations within Chapter 27, Montenegro needs to ensure implementation of the principle of cost recovery, while the lacking funds should be secured through a combination of financing sources, including IPA programmes, international financial institutions (IFI), commercial banks, specialized sources and donors, economic/commercial direct investment and private investors, etc. The remaining gap will be financed from the public sector through the central budget/local self-government budgets and mechanisms such as the Eco Fund.



¹³ The assessment was done within the National Environmental Approximation Strategy (NEAS).



5 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Montenegro has a surface area of 13,812 km² and a population of 621,036 (estimate for 2020). It is ranked 48th out of 189 countries and territories in terms of its human development index (0.829

in 2019). It belongs to the group of countries with a very high level of human development.¹⁴ An overview of the macro-economic indicators for the period 2016–2020 is given in Table 5.1.

Table 5-1: Montenegrin economy 2016–2020: Key indicators

Macroeconomic indicators	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GDP (current prices), € million	3,954	4,299	4,663	4,951	4,186
Real GDP growth rate, %	2.9	4.7	5.1	4.1	-15.3
GDP per capita, €	6,354	6,908	7,495	7,959	6,736
Consumer price index, %	1.0	1.9	1.6	1.0	-0.9
Number of employees	177,908	182,368	190,132	203,545	176,693
Unemployment rate, %	21.3	22.1	17.8	16.2	20.5
Public debt, € million	2,546	2,759	3,269	3,789	4,409
Public debt, % GDP	6.4	64.2	70.1	76.5	105.2
Net foreign direct investment (FDI), € million	372	484	328	345	468
Net FDI, % GDP	9.4	11.3	7.0	7.0	11.2

Sources: Monstat, Central Bank, Employment Agency

In the years that preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, an average GDP growth of about 4% per year was recorded. The key drivers of growth were major infrastructural projects, construction, energy and particularly significant growth in the sector of tourism, which is assessed as one fifth to one quarter of GDP. In the end of 2019, record employment of 203,545 was registered.

Under the impact of the pandemic, in 2020 GDP fell by 15.3%. The unemployment rate¹⁵ (end-year, 2019/2020) increased by 4.3 percentage points. Registered unemployment (annual average) in 2020 was 13.4% higher in comparison to 2019. The number of tourists in 2020 (444,065) was 83% lower than in 2019 (the number of domestic tourists fell by 31%, while the number of foreign tourists fell by 86%).¹⁶



¹⁴ UN system in Montenegro, *Common Country Analysis: Montenegro*, 2021.

¹⁵ Calculated by administrative data of the Employment Agency. The unemployment rate, according to Monstat's Labour Force Survey, amounted to 15.1% in 2019 and 17.9% in 2020.

¹⁶ Central Bank of Montenegro, *Annual Macroeconomic Report 2020*.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy and society are discussed in the paragraphs that follow on the basis of the available analyses of the UN system in Montenegro and information about the programmes that the Government of Montenegro implemented in response to the crisis. The impact of COVID-19 is also discussed in relation to some of the SDGs.

According to the *Common Country Analysis*,¹⁷ the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on the country and its people; it deepened the existing vulnerabilities, and revealed and worsened structural weaknesses in the economy. The World Bank's analyses about poverty discuss the possibility of the emergence of new vulnerable groups ("new poor") whose income depends to a large extent on the informal economy and who are not covered by social protection, or cannot exercise any right to unemployment benefit. It is estimated that, for this category, family income may fall by 5–10%, which means that, due to the pandemic, 9,000–20,000 people could fall below the poverty line established for the purposes of this assessment.¹⁸

In the first months of the pandemic the government responded with a set of diverse measures – from abolishing excise on certain products, through postponing taxes and contributions to salaries, to the introduction of new credit lines in the Investment Development Fund (IDF) aimed at improving the liquidity of entrepreneurs. Delayed payment of rent for property owned by the state was also approved and advance payments introduced to contractors for capital projects. Subsidies were introduced for affected economic entities, as well as exemption from paying bills, while certain forced

collections were suspended. In addition to this, one-time monetary support was paid to retired persons receiving the minimum pension, and families of the users of basic social benefits amounting to €50 per person. Eight thousand five hundred families and 11,900 retired persons benefited from this form of support. The Central Bank introduced a moratorium on the repayment of loans for a period of 90 days.

At the end of July 2020 the government adopted the Programme for Subsidizing Salaries with a view to mitigating the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the third tranche of the package of socio-economic measures and continuation of the Programme of Providing Support for the Businesses and Employees that, within the second and third packages of measures, was implemented in the period 1 May – 30 July and 1 July – 30 September. Through subsequent decisions, application of the third package of measures was extended until the end of the year. Within this programme, in the period 1 May – 31 December 2020, 57,890 requests for subsidies were paid at a total amount of €59.67 million. Payment was made to subsidize 257,282 salaries of employees in 15,800 economic entities. The right to subsidies for salaries of employees belonging to economic entities in industry and public road transport entities, for employees who had mandatory isolation imposed or were on paid leave since they had to care for children under ages of 7 or 11. The programme also included support to new employment.¹⁹

¹⁷ UN system in Montenegro, *Common Country Analysis: Montenegro*, 2021.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The source of information and data is the Central Bank of Montenegro, Annual Macroeconomic Report 2020.

For the first quarter of 2021, a new package of measures was approved. Its total direct and indirect financial impact was estimated at about €163 million. The package was prepared with a view to: 1) ensuring support for vulnerable categories of the population; 2) ensuring support to maintain the level of employment and new employment; 3) encouraging the liquidity of economic entities; 4) creating conditions to increase the number of tourists; and 5) supporting the stability of the market for agricultural products.

With the support of UNICEF and UNDP, rapid-impact assessments of COVID-19 on the society were carried out, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups. Three surveys were completed, in the period from 14 to 30 April 2020, 8 to 30 June 2020, and April to May 2021. The reports with results were published in June 2020 and September 2021.²⁰ The impact on the general population was estimated on the basis of a public opinion survey, while for an analysis of the impact on vulnerable groups, qualitative methods were used to collect data and information about these groups.

An analysis of the impact on the business sector and economy was done with the support of UNDP. For the purposes of the assessment a survey was carried out with micro, small and medium-size enterprises and entrepreneurs (MSME&E). It was done on a representative sample of 300 enterprises and an enhanced sample of an additional 141 enterprises, along with collection of qualitative data through 10 in-depth interviews to establish the most vulnerable sectors of the economy.²¹

On the basis of the quick assessments of social impacts and the assessment of the impact on the

²⁰ UN Montenegro, *Report on the Rapid Assessment of the Social Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic in Montenegro April–June 2020* and UN Montenegro, *Rapid Assessment of the Social Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Montenegro: Report*, 2021.

²¹ UNDP, *Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on the Business Sector and Prospects of Growth for the Montenegrin Economy*, 2020.

business sector, we can underline the following findings about the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and society:

1. In spite of the support measures provided by the government, many citizens were left without any funds for subsistence, and many found themselves at risk of unemployment and poverty. Data shows that the pandemic influenced the regime of work of Montenegrin enterprises. As a response to the crisis, 28% shortened their working hours, while 22% stopped operating completely. Seventeen percent of SMEs sent their employees on unpaid leave, or reduced their salaries.
2. In March 2020, employment was five percentage points lower than in March 2019, while in April 2020 it was almost 8 percentage points lower than in April 2019. According to the data from the Employment Agency, the number of unemployed persons grew by almost 10,000 in September 2020 in comparison to the same month in 2019. Youth unemployment also increased – in the second quarter of 2020 it was 27.9%, while in the same period in 2019 it amounted to 19.5%.
3. About 21% of employed people experienced a reduction in their salaries. In the period of the Rapid Assessment of the Social Impact, about 20% respondents said that they either were not receiving salaries, or that they had lost their jobs. About 40% of women in Montenegro in that period had difficulties covering their expenses. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously affected the ability of families with children to procure food and appropriate hygiene.

About **21%** of employed people experienced a **reduction** in their salaries.

In the period of the Rapid Assessment of the Social Impact,

About **20%** respondents said that they either were **not receiving salaries**, or that they had **lost their jobs**.



Data from the Quick Assessment of the Social Impact shows that, although the pandemic affects everyone, vulnerable groups disproportionately suffer from key health and socio-economic consequences.

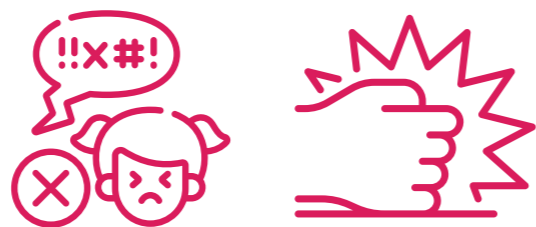
4. Data from the Quick Assessment of the Social Impact shows that, although the pandemic affects everyone, vulnerable groups disproportionately suffer from key health and socio-economic consequences. Most of the respondents from groups of Roma and Egyptians say that they either lost their income completely, or that their income was significantly reduced. More than three quarters (77%) of the refugees, asylum seekers and persons at risk of statelessness covered by the research said that they had lost their job/income.
5. About one third of employed women (35%) were on paid leave due to the pandemic, while one in 10 persons was on unpaid leave (6% of employed women). One third of women worked shortened working hours. Paid leave and a reduction in salaries were most represented in the sectors of transport, tourism and hospitality.
6. During the pandemic women did 92% more unpaid work and caring for others than men. The projected monetary value of that work and care amounts to €122 million for three months of the pandemic during the second and third quarters of 2020.
7. Children were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways. Many families suffered a serious or a complete loss of incomes; it seems that the most seriously affected were those that were receiving monetary social benefits, single-parent households, Roma families and families with a history of psychoactive substance abuse. The transfer to online education disproportionately affected children who live in poverty, due to the fact that they do not have computers and internet access, they are not technologically literate and their parents cannot help them.



Children were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways.

8. Lockdown measures contributed to a sharp increase in the number and intensity of cases of domestic violence and violence against children. The Women's Safe House received 46% more calls in the period from 16 March to 1 June 2020 than in the same period in 2019. During May 2020, the number of victims of gender-based violence that found refuge in the shelter was 60% larger than in the same period of the previous year.

The COVID-19 pandemic also influenced cultural institutions and industries for which there was a need to identify new opportunities for cultural and creative production, dissemination and consumption of cultural goods and services. Activities of recovery and response should focus on development of a common marketing strategy to increase investment in cultural heritage, establishing new institutional capacities and implementing innovative management templates that can reduce the administrative, social and economic obstacles between cultural heritage and potential investors. This is in line with the efforts of the Government of Montenegro, and particularly of the line ministry to promote cultural heritage as a tool to develop the country.



Lockdown measures contributed to a sharp increase in the number and intensity of cases of domestic violence and violence against children

6 Leaving no one behind

Vulnerable groups, i.e. those who lag behind the most in achieving development goals and sustainable development goals, should be the particular focus of public policies. It is necessary to identify their needs and to undertake measures to empower them and provide them with the same opportunities as the rest of the population, i.e. opportunities to overcome difficulties. In the past there were significant moves in that direction, primarily through the adoption of important strategic documents, whose goals are the social inclusion and protection of vulnerable groups (such as victims of gender-based violence, domicile and refugee Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities, elderly, child victims of violence or children at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation, children without parental care, children with disabilities, children exposed to poverty) in line with international standards. There are also obvious efforts, which is seen in the budget allocations, to improve social, children and health care (in general and for vulnerable groups) and to include children from vulnerable groups as much as possible in the education system.

In spite of this, a significant number of groups/populations remain at risk of being left out of development programmes and measures concerning the rights and wellbeing of people. Within the Common Country Analysis 2021 carried out by the UN system in Montenegro, an assessment was done of social exclusion, i.e. vulnerable population groups to whom particular attention should be dedicated in line with the principle of leaving no one

behind.²² The assessment established that the most vulnerable population groups belong to one of the following 10 categories, and that they face multiple deprivations. Certain data about vulnerable groups is presented also within the relevant goals (e.g. SDGs 4 and 5, SDG 3).

1. **Roma and Egyptian communities, including women, girls and boys from those communities:** Domicile and refugee Roma and Egyptians are among the most marginalized and poorest communities in Montenegro, exposed to a high level of discrimination, social exclusion and deprivation. The estimate shows that about 90% of Roma and Egyptian households live in a situation of material deprivation. Twenty-one percent of children under 5 from Roma and Egyptian communities/settlements lag behind, while 8% are undernourished (in the general population these figures are: 7% of under-5s lagging behind and 4% undernourished).²³ About 11.5% of Roma and Egyptians do not have appropriate housing conditions, while 11.7% do not have access to sanitary conditions.²⁴ The employment rate is many times lower than the national average, and access to health care can be difficult. For women and girls that come from Roma and Egyptian communities it is more likely that they are illiterate and it is less likely that they have access to decent work. The chances of girls from Roma and Egyptian communities being married before the age of 15 is 22% higher than in the general population;

The estimate shows that about

90%

of Roma and Egyptian households live in a situation of material deprivation.



22 Analysis was done on the basis of Guidelines for Sustainable Goals for UN Teams - Leaving No One Behind: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams.
 23 UNICEF MICS survey, 2018.
 24 *Ibid.*



Children are at a higher risk of poverty than adults.

the chances of them being married before the age of 18 is 60% higher.²⁵ The practice of arranged child marriages in Roma and Egyptian communities is a reason for concern. The prevalence is significant because child marriages are considered to be a traditional practice, and not a violation of children’s rights. On top of that, children from Roma and Egyptian community are engaged to a large extent in begging, although there is no exact data about that phenomenon.

- 2. Persons with disability, including those with intellectual disabilities and persons in institutional care:** There is no national definition of a person with a disability;²⁶ the criteria for establishing disability are mostly based on a medical and not a social model of disability, which is contrary to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There is a serious lack of data about children with disabilities. The estimate is that 60% of persons with disabilities live below the poverty threshold.²⁷ Almost one half of persons with disabilities that are registered at the Employment Agency do not have any formal education. Persons with disability, especially women, children and the young, are particularly vulnerable because they face widespread violence. Adults and children with psychosocial/intellectual disabilities in institutional care are also a particularly vulnerable category faced with many deprivations.

25 Monstat and UNICEF, Preventing Child Marriages in Montenegro: Challenges, lessons learnt and theories of change; State of Affairs 2018.

26 In the process of harmonization of Montenegrin legislation with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a certain number of the pieces of legislation harmonized the definition of a “person with disability” with the definition from the Convention, but harmonization of the entire legislation with this Convention, as the key international treaty, remains a challenge. In addition to harmonization of legislation, the Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights also established a special Directorate for the Protection and Equality of Persons with Disabilities. At the end of 2021, the government adopted a decision to establish the Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

27 Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities 2016–2020.

28 UNICEF MICS Survey 2018.

- 3. Children (including children with disabilities, victims of violence, children without parental care, children living/working on the street):** Children are at a higher risk of poverty than adults. The Common Country Analysis of the UN System for 2021 relies on the World Bank estimates that a child born in Montenegro will achieve only 62% of his/her potential productivity in adulthood, due to the lack of high-quality education and health care. Immunization rates are on a constant decline, while mental health (including that of adolescents and youth) is becoming a problem. According to what mothers say, 6% of children (aged 5–17) experience anxiety, while 3% experience depression.²⁸ Groups of children that are particularly exposed to multiple deprivations include: 1) children with disabilities; 2) child victims/witnesses of violence, exploitation and neglect, including domestic violence and violence on the internet, sexual abuse and special forms of abuse or neglect, such as child marriages and begging; 3) children without parental care; and 4) children living in poverty, including children working and/or living on the street.

- 4. Elderly persons, particularly those with deteriorated health, with a disability and/or those who need long-term care:** Montenegrin society is aging rapidly. According to the Common Country Analysis, only 52.3% of elderly people receive any kind of pension.

Insufficient incomes are forcing 73% of persons over 65 to engage in the informal economy. Women mostly have lower pensions than men. The capacities for elderly people who need long-term care due to a serious health condition are insufficient. People with needs in the field of mental health, intellectual and/or psycho-social disability are frequently placed in psychiatric clinics. Vulnerability is more prominent for people who live in distant/rural areas in the north of the country, due to more difficult access to services.

- 5. Refugees from the former Yugoslavia, asylum seekers and refugees whose status is recognized on the basis of the law regulating asylum and persons at risk of statelessness:** Most displaced/internally displaced persons have only limited access or have no access to fundamental rights. According to data published in the Common Country Analysis, the poverty rate among displaced/internally displaced persons is 8.6% higher than in the overall population. Asylum seekers cannot effectively exercise their right to work (they can qualify to exercise that right only nine months after the application) and they usually work in the informal economy. Research implemented by the United Nations Refugee Agency and the Ministry of the Interior in 2020 showed that more than 60% of refugees in Montenegro work in the grey economy and in unregulated conditions (in spite of the fact that refugees from the former Yugoslavia, for example, have their legal status regulated). The situation is particularly difficult for people with the status of displaced/internally displaced persons and for persons at risk of statelessness, whose legal status in the country is unstable.

29 More information about gender inequality is given in the part of this Review that focuses on SDG 5.

- 6. Informal workers, workers on temporary employment contracts and seasonal workers:** According to the data published in the Common Country Analysis, almost one third of those who work are informally employed and/or are paid their salaries “in cash”. Unlike workers in the formal economy, informal workers usually do not enjoy protection of workers’ and other rights, including standards of safety and health at work. One third of all workers (32.9%) are employed on temporary work contracts, while 8.7% do not have secure employment, which is more than four times more than the average in EU countries. The issue of informal employment has multiple negative influences on young people. The percentage of workers employed under a contract for part-time work in 2019 amounted to 4.14%. Seasonal workers who come from abroad are mostly engaged in tourism and construction.

- 7. Women who experience multiple deprivations and an unfavourable position:**²⁹ Women are not an inherently vulnerable group, but they do become vulnerable due to discriminatory laws, policies or practices that are used to maintain gender inequality and deprive women of their rights. In spite of the progress achieved in the previous period, women in Montenegro are yet to achieve economic equality with men and to ensure higher participation in public and political life. Research about violence against women implemented by the United Nations Development Programme showed that 42% of women in Montenegro experienced some kind of violence throughout their lives and that every fifth woman (18%) was a victim of violence in the year that preceded the research. There are still some deficiencies in the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, while



42% of women in Montenegro experienced some kind of violence throughout their lives and that every fifth woman (18%) was a victim of violence in the year that preceded the survey

the majority of domestic violence cases are processed as misdemeanours, instead of as criminal offences.

8. Victims of trafficking in human beings:

Efforts aimed at protecting victims have been strengthened, but there is still a certain lack of compliance of the national legislation with international standards whereas the national legislation does not offer adequate protection against human trafficking. For example, children are allowed to enter into marriage at the age of 16, which is two years below the minimum age (18) defined in international instruments. There are also deficiencies in the implementation of standard operational procedures envisaged for unaccompanied child migrants and refugees and those separated from their families, as well as for unaccompanied child asylum seekers who are victims of trafficking in human beings in Montenegro.³⁰ According to the opinions of the Special Rapporteur for Human Trafficking from 2019, application of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings is still at a low level. The causes of human trafficking lie in poverty, discrimination of women and children, patriarchal attitudes and social isolation. Communities that are exposed to exclusion and discrimination are often at particular risk. In Montenegro, the Roma and Egyptian population, particularly women and girls, is at particular risk.

9. LGBTI persons: Data about the size of the LGBTI community in Montenegro does not exist. Many members of this community face discrimination, threats, hate speech and violence, in spite of legal and strategic framework that guarantees equal rights and protection of LGBTI persons from discrimination (which has been

additionally strengthened through adoption of the Law on Registered Partnerships of Same-Sex Couples in 2020). Transgender persons face challenges in accessing key services. The research shows that anti-LGBTI attitudes in the society are dwindling, but reasons for concern still exist. A survey done in 2020 among more than 400 high school students showed, for example, that one third think that homosexuality and connected phenomena are a “social evil” that should be suppressed, while one in 10 high school students believe that LGBTI persons deserve to be abused.

10. Homeless persons: Data and other information about number and position of homeless persons in Montenegro are very limited. The availability and quality of social apartments are insufficient;³¹ services of shelters and support in terms of food for homeless persons are also very limited.

30 UNICEF, Standard operational procedures from 2017 for treating children separated from parents or unaccompanied, with a particular emphasis on proactive identification of potential victims of human trafficking.

31 Access to social housing primarily depends on the local level, where practices and capacities are rather unequal.

7 The focus of the Second VNR

According to global recommendations for this cycle of voluntary national reports, the Second VNR has dedicated particular attention to the goals that refer to education, gender equality, the marine and land environment and partnerships for development. Due to its importance at the national level, the goal related to poverty is also included.





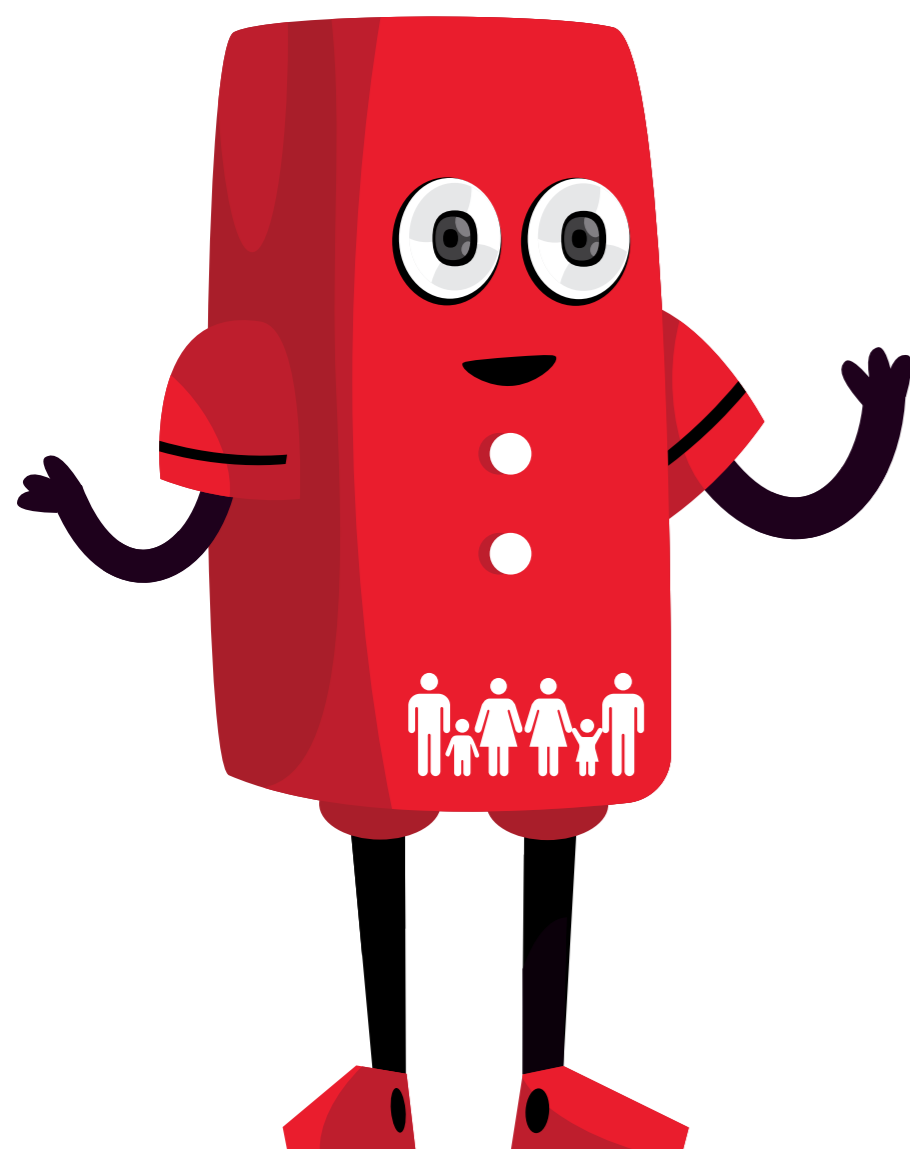
7.1 SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms

In the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030, goal 1 has been recognized as one of the SDGs where progress has been achieved. The overview carried out in the preparation of the Second VNR confirms this.

SDG 1 contains targets related to the eradication of extreme poverty (1.1), reducing the number of poor people (in line with national definitions) by at least half by 2030 (1.2), implementation of adequate social protection systems and measures (1.3), ensuring equal rights to economic resources and access to basic services (1.4), and building the resilience of the poor to climate change, natural disasters and other economic, social and environmental shocks (1.5). In addition to these targets, the SDG targets also include ensuring adequate support to developing countries (particularly the least developed ones) to implement programmes and policies to end poverty (1.a), as well as to development of gender-sensitive development strategies aimed at the poor and vulnerable groups (1.b). These targets are integrated into NSSD 2030 through several goals that refer to employment and inclusion (2.5), equal regional development (2.8), enhancing environment and human health (3.3), and mitigating risks of natural and other hazards (3.6).

There are 13 indicators to be used to assess whether the targets within SDG 1 are being met. None of these indicators are monitored in Montenegro, as it is defined in the methodology of the United Nations Statistics Division – UNSD. Since 2013, Monstat has been calculating a number of indicators (on the basis of the EU-SILC survey – Survey of Income and Living Conditions³²) that ensure a detailed overview of changes and assessment of situation for SDG 1.2.

³² EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) – survey about income and living conditions on the basis of which a number of indicators are derived in line with Eurostat methodology, i.e. as stipulated in Regulation (EC) 1177/2003.



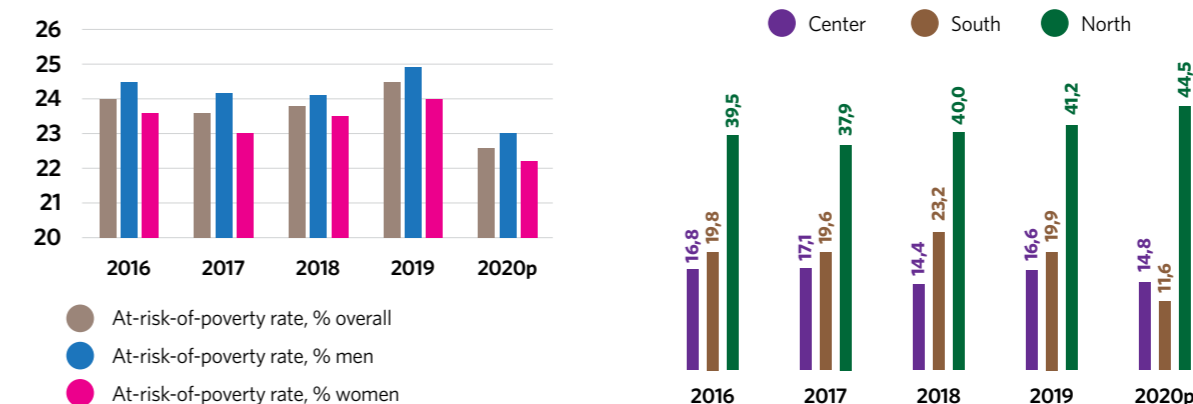
Data about extreme poverty (target 1.1) in line with international definition³³ is not being followed. The main nationally available indicators for poverty reduction (SDG target 1.2) are the at-risk-of-poverty rate and the social exclusion rate. Data for both of these indicators is calculated with a high level of disaggregation (for example: by gender, type of household, geographical designations (such as type of settlement or region), age, education level, activity, etc.).³⁴ This ensures a detailed analysis and is a good basis for developing adequate public policies.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate shows the proportion of the population whose available equalized income is below the relative poverty threshold³⁵ that in 2020 amounted to €2,347 per one-member household and €4,928 for a four-member household. The at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rates take into account not only income but also dimensions of material deprivation,³⁶ as well as the intensity of work. These two indicators are similar to SDG indicators 1.2.1 and 1.2.2.

The indicators presented in the Figure 7-1 show that, with certain oscillations, in the last five years a positive trend was recorded and that the at-risk-of-poverty rate (for the total population) was reduced from 24% in 2016 to 22.6% in 2020.³⁷ In the observed period, the at-risk-of-poverty rate is a bit lower for women (usually for less than one percentage point) than for men, which is progress, in comparison to the period before 2016 when women were at a higher risk of poverty than men. If this trend had continued, SDG target 1.2 (reduction of the rate to 12% in 2030) would not have been achieved, which means that in the coming period the efforts towards poverty reduction have to be intensified, particularly in the light of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global disturbances whose influence on the factors that the income and living conditions of population depend on will be additionally felt in the current and coming years.

at-risk-of-poverty rate
22.6%
in 2020

Figure 7-1: At-risk-of-poverty rates (total, by gender and region)



Source: Monstat

³³ People living on less than \$1.25 per day.

³⁴ But not for certain communities that may be at a disproportionate risk of poverty.

³⁵ That is, 60% of the calculated median value of the equivalent available income.

³⁶ The assessment is based on whether the person or household can afford/cover each of the following nine items: heating; washing machine; car; seven days of vacation outside of the home per year; unexpected financial expenditures; telephone; colour TV; meal with fish/meat every second day; paying bills regularly. A person/household is considered materially deprived if unable to afford three out of these nine items; prominent material deprivation is if they cannot afford four out of the nine, while extreme deprivation is if they cannot afford five out of the nine.

³⁷ The data for 2020 is preliminary data.



In 2020 the population of the north of Montenegro was at risk of poverty as many as

4x times higher than the population of the southern region



The at-risk-of-poverty rate in 2020 for children under 17 is significantly higher than that rate for the overall population

32.6% under 17 overall **22.6%** **ONE THIRD** of the total number of children

Unlike the at-risk-of-poverty rate for the total population, there was an expressly negative trend of this rate by region. While the rate fell in the central and southern regions in the last five years, in the north it grew by 5 percentage points (pp), which further deepened the gap between the more developed part of the country and the less developed north. In 2020 the population of the north of Montenegro was at risk of poverty as many as four times higher than the population of the southern region (the rate was 44.5% in the north, while it was 11.6% in the south). In the period 2016–2021 there were some changes also in the relations between the central and southern regions, so at the end of the observed period the at-risk-of-poverty rate was lower in the south (11.6%) than in the central part (14.8%), while at the beginning of this period the situation was reversed (19.8 in the south and 16.8 in the central part).

The trend of the at-risk-of-poverty rate by region shows that the regional development policy (including the measures envisaged within the strategic NSSD 2030 goal 2.8) did not produce the expected results, in spite of significant efforts through programmes for improving competitiveness and development of clusters, as well as through implementation of the Regional Development Strategy 2014–2020 and other initiatives. According to the reports on implementation of the Regional Development Strategy,³⁸ investment in the northern region amounted in 2019 to €353 million (50% of the total invested amount) and in 2020 to €198 million (30% of the total).³⁹ The poverty rates however clearly show that a fundamental change of approach to regional development is necessary.

38 Preparation of the new strategy for the period 2022–2027 is in progress.

39 Data obtained in the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate for children under 17 is significantly higher than that rate for the overall population (32.6% in 2020, while for the overall population it was 22.6%) and it was at a level of about one third of the total number of children, with a mild increase in the observed period.

The trend in the at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rates is presented in Table 7.1. Although the trend is generally positive, the indicators are concerning, since they show that almost one third of the population lives at risk of poverty, experiences material deprivation or lives in households with a low level of work engagement. It is particularly concerning that in 2020 38.6% of children belonged to this category and that 13% of children lived in households that could not afford more than half of the items (five out of 10) used to measure material deprivation, including, for example, heating, quality diet, basic household appliances, etc. It is also concerning that the rate of extreme material deprivation of children is on the increase (from 9.6% in 2016 to 13% in 2020).



Table 7-1: Trend in the at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rates (overall and among children)

At risk of poverty or social exclusion rate	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020p
Total population	34.6	33.7	31.4	30.5	30.9
Children (age 0–17)	40.1	40.3	39.4	38.4	38.6
Material deprivation – children					
Material deprivation rate	40.6	38.2	37.4	35.0	39.3
Rate of pronounced material deprivation	18.4	18.2	17.7	16.7	17.0
Rate of extreme material deprivation	9.6	8.4	12.0	11.2	13.0

Source: Monstat

According to the UNICEF MICS survey, as many as 91% of children in Roma settlements experience material deprivation (in three or more dimensions) in comparison to 37% of children in the general population.⁴⁰ Montenegro does not have any umbrella strategy for poverty reduction. The visibility of the problem has been reduced due to the lack of available analyses and published data about the nature and scope of child poverty. It is expected also that children will be additionally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that has intensified the economic and social challenges and inequalities in the society.

When it comes to the implementation of programmes and social policy measures (SDG target 1.3) there are no sufficiently detailed (classified) data about the part of the population that is covered by systems/levels of social care. Data from Monstat's SILC survey shows that the at-risk-of-poverty rate (2020) without social transfers amounts to 27.8%, which means that the rate of the overall social benefits (without pensions) is reducing by about 5 pp (to 22.6%).⁴¹ It would require further analysis to

decide whether this is sufficient and proportionate to budget expenditures, and how to use targeted measures to improve the effects of social policy on poverty reduction. Reform of social policy is a topic that has been discussed for a long time, but no tangible change happened in practice in the period covered by the Second VNR.

There is no data on the basis of which we can assess the success in meeting SDG target 1.4 – ensuring equal rights, particularly for the poor and vulnerable, to economic resources and access to basic services. Through the UNICEF and MICS surveys data is collected about the population that uses improved sources of drinking water (which is one element of SDG indicator 1.4.1⁴²) but data is available only for 2018 and the progress cannot be assessed.

As for SDG target 1.5, especially indicators 1.5.1 and 1.5.2 that refer to the number of persons affected by disasters and direct economic losses generated due to disasters, certain data is being collected and processed, but the values of these indicators (as defined in the UNSD methodology) are not

40 Monstat and UNICEF: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2018 and MICS 2018 for Roma settlement, Report on the findings of Survey. Podgorica, Crna Gora: Monstat and UNICEF

41 At risk of poverty rate without pensions and social transfers was 41.4%.

42 Share of population living in households with access to basic services.



as many as **91%** of children in Roma settlements experience **material deprivation** (in three or more dimensions)

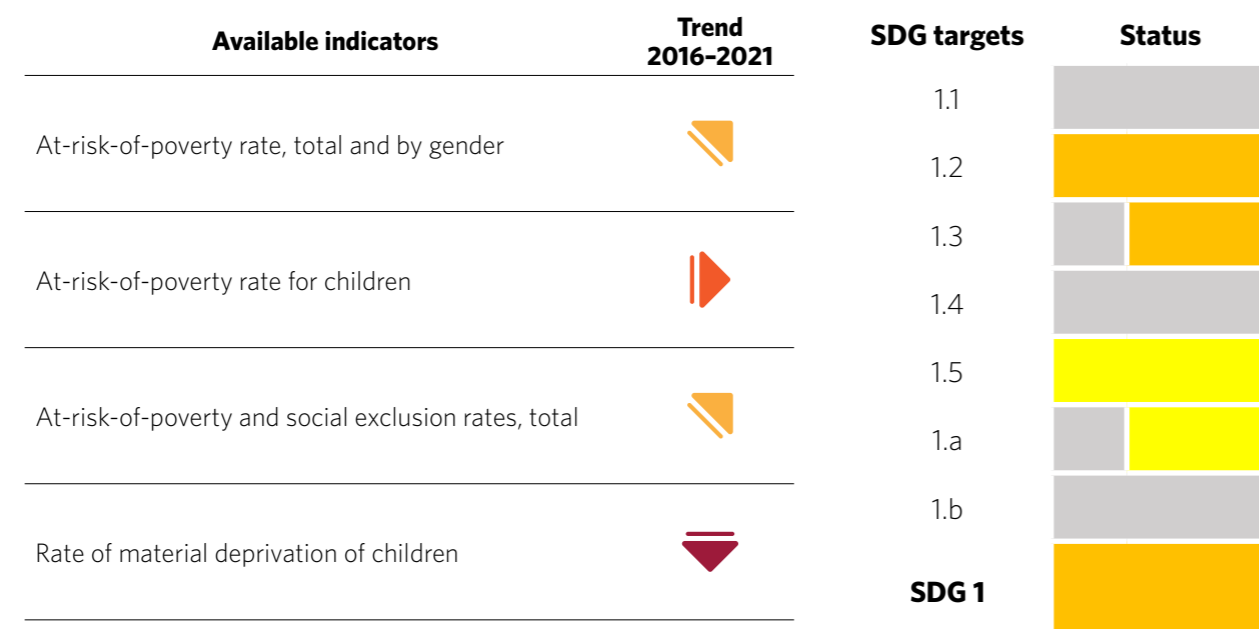


being reported in the process of assessment of the implementation of NSSD 2030. Progress has been recorded in the relevant policies, including preparation of the Assessment of the Risk of Disasters in Montenegro (in line with EU guidelines) and national plans for protection and rescue in the event of all kinds of natural and anthropogenic hazards; progress at the local level is significantly slower. Preparation of the National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change is in progress. There are numerous initiatives for development of capacities in this area.

Allocations (by the government) for poverty reduction programmes (within SDG target 1.a) are not being monitored; data about budget expenditures for education, health, social and child care is available, but they are not being analysed in the context of poverty reduction. Montenegro does not have any (gender-sensitive or general) development strategy focused on the poor or

vulnerable groups (SDG target 1.b), and it does not follow how much of the current or capital consumption of the country is in sectors that are particularly beneficial for women, the poor and vulnerable groups. Within NSSD 2030 strategic goal 2.5 – Stimulate employability and social inclusion – particular attention is being paid to the employment of beneficiaries of social benefits/material support; in the last NSSD 2030 reporting period (2019–2021), 268 beneficiaries of material support capable of working were employed, 157 of whom were women.

On the basis of the data and information presented above, the assessment of progress is derived, as well as the status in the achievement of SDG 1, as presented below:



Among the key achievements for SDG 1 there has been a stable trend of reduction in the overall at-risk-of-poverty rate in the last five years. In addition to this, this rate for women is not higher than the overall rate (as was the case until 2016), which can be linked to the policies and measures for encouraging economic empowerment of women. Although the data for SDG indicators (by UNCSD methodology) is not available, nationally available data from the SILC survey now constitutes a good basis for developing adequate policies for SDG target 1.2 (reducing poverty by half by 2030).

In spite of the progress, a significant number of challenges for achieving SDG 1 remain, including further and more dynamic poverty reduction, particularly among children, with improvement of the system of social and child care, particularly for vulnerable groups. Assessment of the progress in achieving SDG 1 has also clearly shown that significant changes are needed in the regional development policy, as well as better coordination and improvement of employment policy. In spite of the fact that one in three children and one in four adults are at risk of poverty, Montenegro does not have any poverty reduction framework.

In the process of consultation within preparation of the Second VNR, a lot of attention was dedicated to poverty, primarily at the regional meeting that took place in Bijelo Polje, as well as through online consultations. The opinions expressed in the consultative process are presented in the paragraphs that follow and in Box 7-1.

Although poverty was not profiled as a priority topic of public policies and development debates in Montenegro, the survey that was implemented through the online platform www.sdgmontenegro.me showed that a large number of people think that poverty is widespread and that it affects several population categories, and that the system of social care is not adequate. About 460 people responded to the questions about poverty,⁴³ and about two thirds of them were women. The respondents were from 12 to 68 (and the average age was about 40), they were of various vocations and levels of education (some of them were still pupils). Most of them (77%) were from public administration.

The perception of the people who responded to the questions related to SDG 1 is that in Montenegro there are more poor people than the statistics show: as many as 60% of the respondents think that the number of poor people is large or exceptionally large, i.e. that it is from about one third to about one half of the total population. As five categories that are most affected by poverty, the respondents identify retired people⁴⁴ (144 responses), unemployed people (86 responses), the population in the north of the country (83), Roma (73) and children (55 responses). Fewer than 5% of the participants in the survey say that the system of social and child care is absolutely or mostly adequate, while more than 65% think that it is not adequate at all or that it is responding to the needs only to a low extent. As possible solutions for poverty reduction, the largest number of respondents in the survey propose employment, then health care and education, and

43 From one answer to another, the number of those who responded varied by several persons.

44 In this part, the opinion of citizens is not in line with official data which shows that in 2020 the at-risk-of-poverty rates for retired people (12.2%) and people over 60 (15.2%) were significantly below the overall rate (22.6%). The explanation probably lies in the fact that the poverty threshold was established at the level of about €196 per month for one person, and that only those people with pensions below this level and without other sources of income are considered to be at risk of poverty (according to a statistical survey). The fact is, however, that in the real world a significant number of people with low pensions (but above the poverty threshold) have material difficulties, which means the assessments of the public on poverty among the elderly are not without grounds.

finally social care. Through the comments, we can see a strongly represented message that the problems of poverty are linked to issues of (a lack of)

justice and negative phenomena that are identified in the society.

Box 7-1: Who is most affected by poverty? Typical messages from online consultations



- **A large part of population. There is a division into classes in the society - those who are extremely rich and those who are poor, there is no "middle class". Education and work do not guarantee wellbeing. Flourishing of the grey economy, illegal jobs, mistrust in the institutions, selectiveness in actions, survival...**
- **The honourable ones!**
- **The part of population with a low level of education and small sources of income... retired people, unemployed youth, unemployed looking for jobs for many years.**
- **Children and people who cannot work due to illness, because our social policy is very bad.**
- **Roma children, single parents.**
- **The north of Montenegro is strongly affected, because it is impoverished.**
- **The northern region is strongly affected by poverty. But people are used to struggling to make ends meet and to be silent about it.**
- **Who is poor? People like me, for example. I can say I am poor because I finished high school, I have a permanent job and a regular income, but I have four kids at home, a wife who does not work and I do not have my own place to live in, I am a tenant.**
- **People who are not in politics, farmers.**
- **Marginalized population groups, Roma and Egyptians, the population in the north of Montenegro, single-parent families, the population over 65...**
- **Victims of transition - people who lost their jobs because the economy was destroyed.**
- **Those with the lowest education, people who are not in the labour market and people with the lowest incomes.**
- **Those who did not belong to the ruling political option over the last 30 years, the unemployed, the ill, those who do not have influential relatives or friends. Ordinary, common honest people.**
- **Roma, unemployed people, retired people, families with children with disabilities or other ill persons.**



7.2 SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

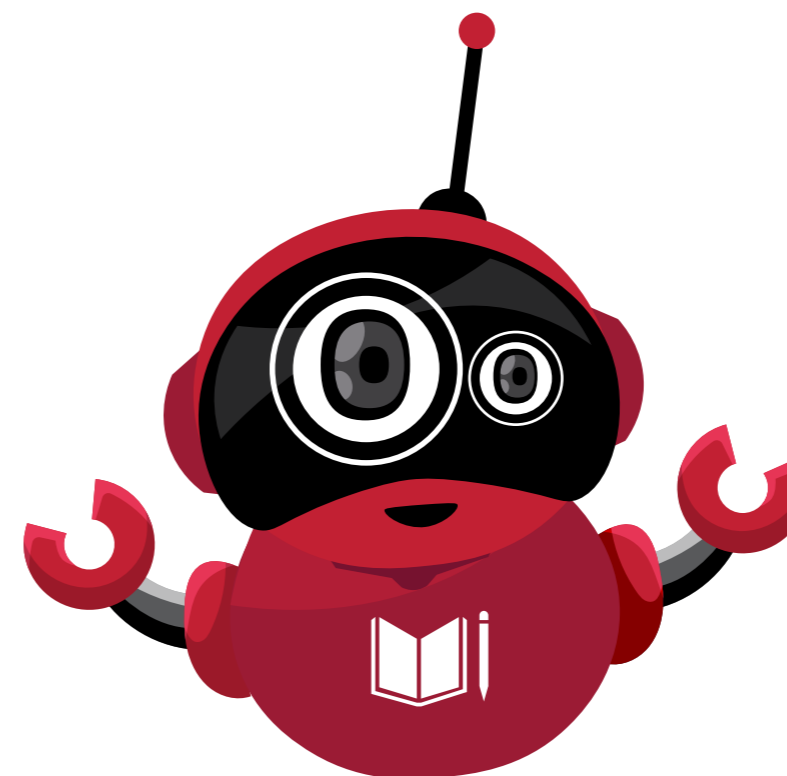
SDG 4 is integrated into the national framework through NSSD 2030 strategic goal 1.3 (Ensure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong learning for all); for target 4.7 related to education for sustainable development, certain measures for the elimination of discrimination, social solidarity and public participation defined within NSSD 2030 goals 2.1, 2.2 and 5.1 are also relevant. Target 4.b is not relevant for Montenegro (it refers to developing countries).

Out of the 12 indicators envisaged for SDG 4, Montenegro is following three (the proportion of children that are on a good development path, participation in formal and informal education, and the proportion of persons with ICT skills), while for three there are nationally adapted, i.e. similar, indicators; one indicator is not relevant, while the remaining five are not followed at all. In addition to this, for some of the indicators that are followed, as well as for some of the adapted indicators/ substitutes, it is not possible to establish a trend because there is only one point (one measure) or the value is constant (100%).

In relation to SDG target 4.1 – ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education – significant efforts have been invested into making education fully accessible. Primary and secondary education are free-of-charge and since school year 2021/2022 textbooks have also been provided free-of-charge for all pupils of primary schools. Education still remains expensive for families with low incomes due to the costs of school materials, clothes, footwear



Primary and secondary education are free-of-charge and since school year 2021/2022 textbooks have been provided free-of-charge for all pupils of primary schools.





Enrollment of children with disabilities in regular schools increased from

16% in 2016 to 19% in 2019.

Schools that organize vocational education do not have conditions for practical classes.⁵⁰ Amendments to the Law on Higher Education from 2017 introduced a new model of studying (3+2+3) and practical classes as a mandatory part of study programmes in the scope of minimum 25%. The new law also made bachelor's and master's studies free-of-charge in public institutions that enrol more than 3,500 students in public institutions every year, to ensure higher accessibility to higher education by the best pupils, regardless of their social status. In addition to this, Montenegro established the Agency for Control and Quality Assurance for Higher Education. The Law on Incentive Measures for the Development of Research and Innovations was adopted in 2021.

Precisely defined learning outcomes and evaluation of their achievement remain the key problems of higher education. In addition to the fact that there are no practical classes, there is no analysis or information about its quality and efficiency. The final report on the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education 2016–2020 shows that the percentage of unemployed persons with higher education out of the total number of unemployed is on the decline,⁵¹ but the issue of an adequate match of the system of higher education with the labour market in Montenegro remains. In 70% of Montenegrin universities, physical access is not solved, and teaching tools are not adapted for persons with visual impairments.⁵²

50 According to Article 4 of the Law on Vocational Education, schools can carry out vocational education fully or theoretical part in school and the practical part or part of the practical part with the employer. The scope of practical education with the employer is determined in the curriculum.

51 www.gov.me/dokumenta/52c892dc-f0f5-4705-8dc0-6f4529004233.

52 Informal Coalition of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and Parents' Organizations of Children and Youth with Disabilities Podgorica, August 2018, Montenegrin Alternative Report on the Implementation of The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Podgorica, August 2018.

53 Education Monitoring Information System, data from 2016–2020.

Positive trends are recorded for SDG indicator 4.4.1: the proportion of young people and adults with information and communication technology (ICT) skills is on the increase.

Information collected in the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030 shows that in the previous period Montenegro did not do enough to integrate programmes on the elimination of all types of discrimination and programmes of education for sustainable development (which is related to SDG target 4.7) in an adequate manner within the education system.

As for SDG target 4.a, Montenegro adopted the Strategy of Inclusive Education (2019–2025), relying on binding international principles, standards and recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The goal is to remove obstacles related to participation and achievements in the education process for all children. **According to the data from the line ministry, enrolment in regular schools for children with disabilities has been improved to a certain extent (from 16% in 2016 to 19% in 2019), but access to preschool education is still low.** Enrolment of children with disabilities in vocational schools is also low. Although the number of children with disabilities who are enrolled in schools grows, reports from NGOs that work in this field show that the system of education is not sufficiently inclusive.⁵³ First of all, children in the education system do not have sufficient individual support. Efforts to make the school infrastructure accessible are obvious, but

they are mostly aimed at solving physical access. Children with serious development difficulties are referred to day care that lacks educational content.⁵⁴

Indicators show that for SDG target 4.c there were both positive and negative developments. The number of teachers in primary and secondary schools, for example, grew from 7,962 to 8,737 in the observed period, but the percentage of teachers in preschool and primary school education that attended at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) before employment is on the decline.⁵⁵

Quality of education is an issue that is increasingly in focus, mostly at the level of identifying problems, and less in seeking for and implementing effective solutions. In the national assessment of the quality of education the focus is on so-called indicators of activities (number of training sessions, number of teachers, etc.), and not on so-called indicators of outcome that could indicate the quality of the education system in a better way. Quality of education is given a lot of attention in the consultative process of preparation of the Second VNR, which shows that participants in the education system and the public in general recognize weaknesses and consider education a key part of the chain of achieving sustainable development.

PISA testing shows that, in spite of certain progress, our pupils lag significantly behind the OECD average measured in terms of the results they achieve, i.e. by the knowledge and skills they acquire through education (Figure 7-4). Only 1% of pupils in Montenegro achieve the best results in the field of reading (the OECD average is 9%), 2% in mathematics (the OECD average is 11%) and almost no pupils in the field of science (the OECD average is 7%). PISA testing confirms that children in socio-economically deprived families, on average, achieve poorer education results.⁵⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic strongly affected the education system. The line ministry responded quickly and established several support systems for children, adolescents and the young, mostly in the field of education, including a system for distance learning at all levels. In spite of that, data points to negative consequences from the pandemic. A rapid assessment of the social impact of COVID-19 implemented by the UN system in Montenegro showed that the majority of young people think that they learnt less through distance learning than through the classical teaching-learning process. Parents also agree with this opinion. According to parents, Roma children during the pandemic had problems with distance learning because they lacked adequate equipment and they needed significant support in doing homework. One piece of data states that as many as 13.3% of households with school-age children did not have computers or laptops with internet access.⁵⁷ Young people also missed the social component of education.⁵⁸

54 Informal Coalition of all Montenegrin Disabled People's Organizations, Alternative Replies to the List of Issues of the UNCRPD Committee, INT_CRPD_CSS_MNE_28453_E, July 2017.

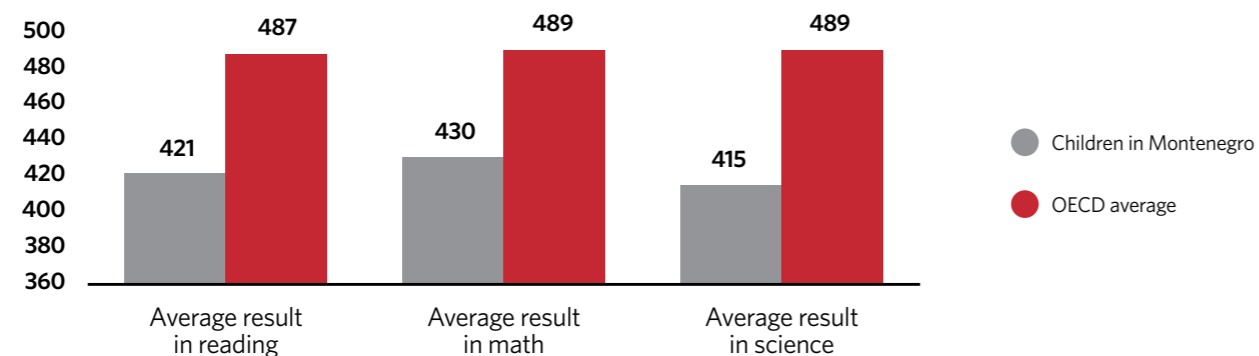
55 This can be seen in the substitute for indicator 4.c.1 (that is not monitored according to UNSD methodology) where both improvements and deteriorations are recorded (depending on the category of teachers, i.e. whether it is preschool, primary, lower or higher secondary education).

56 OECD, *Results from PISA - Country note - Montenegro*, 2018.

57 https://montenegro.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Report%20on%20the%20Rapid%20Social%20Impact%20Assessment%20of%20the%20COVID-19%20outbreak%20in%20Montenegro%2C%20April-June%202020_0.pdf.

58 https://montenegro.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/RSIA2_Sazetak_MNE_0.pdf.

Figure 7-4: PISA testing results – 2018



SDG 4 targets include the aspiration of the education system providing everyone with a safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environment. Twenty-five percent of 15-year-olds who participated in the PISA testing reported, however, that they experienced violence from their peers at least several times per month. National data about the frequency of peer violence does not exist; however, it can be concluded that this problem is increasingly present in Montenegrin schools, which is confirmed by the opinions collected in the process of consultations in the preparation of the Second VNR.

Within the Programme for Combating Peer Violence and Vandalism in education institutions and its Action Plan for 2019–2021, all primary and secondary schools in Montenegro established security teams (211 teams with 1,299 members). Instructions to schools relating to proceeding in cases of violence have also been improved to stipulate more responsibility, cooperation, implementation of prevention measures and support, and the recording of cases of peer violence has started through the information system of the line ministry. Exposure of children to contents on the internet opened up the question of security and protection in the virtual space.

The assessment for SDG 4 is presented in the figure below:

Available indicators	Trend 2016–2021	SDG targets	Status
Coverage of children with early education (target 4.2)	▲	4.1 4.2 4.3	Yellow
4.3.1 Rate of participation of young persons and adults in formal and non-formal education and training	▼	4.4 4.5	Green
4.4.1 Proportion of young people and adults with information and communication skills	▲	4.6 4.7	Yellow
4.c.1 Proportion of teachers that attended at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training)	▲ ▼	4.a 4.c	Yellow
SDG 4			Yellow

Information collected through reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030 and from other sources shows that significant progress was achieved within goal 4 in the field of early and inclusive education, as well as with the development of IT skills. Key challenges include a lack of precise data for assessing trends and improvement of the quality of education.

Coverage of vulnerable categories should be increased, and targeted support should be provided to those children who need it (including transport of children from distant settlements, equipment for distance learning and the internet, individual support to children with disabilities, etc.). Significant investments are needed to improve conditions in schools and to ensure possibilities for continuous training of teachers. Montenegro should establish an efficient and regular national system for monitoring

education performance, to plan interventions adequately with a view to improving the education system.

In addition to this, a further analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is needed (in terms of education performance, but also the psychosocial consequences for children and young people), with consideration of the possibility to adequately integrate the innovations that distance learning brought into the education system. An adequate response to peer violence is also very important for achieving SDG 4. In the end, additional reflections and adequate actions are needed to strengthen programmes of lifelong learning and ensure the acquisition of knowledge and skills important for sustainable development/sustainable lifestyles, including programmes for eliminating all forms of discrimination (integration of these issues into the

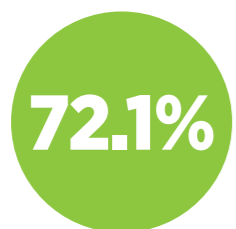
education system is one of the weakest points in the implementation of NSSD 2030).

The question of violence was also a topic of the [youth consultations](#) through UNICEF’s U-Report platform. Four hundred and thirty-three young people from Montenegro responded to the U-Report survey.⁵⁹ Eight-two percent of them gave a positive answer to the question of whether they had ever faced violence in their surroundings. Most frequently young people encounter violence in the vicinity of the school (84.7% said that they had had that experience), in the school (81.9%), on the internet (71.9%) and in someone else’s family (62.7%). Slightly less than three quarters of young people say that they feel safe at school (72.1%), while 27.9% claim that they do not feel safe.

Young people say that the key reasons due to which they feel safe at school are trust in their teachers and in the school, but also belief in themselves. Those who do not feel safe say that the reasons

include their personal experience and the experience of others in their surroundings with violence, recent frequent bomb threats in schools, but also a lack of trust in the school and the teachers, that they would react adequately. As solutions, young people propose work on suppressing domestic violence, which they see as a source of violent behaviour. They also propose higher sanctions for violence and zero tolerance towards violence. Some think that it is necessary to hire security protection or police in school yards or install a video surveillance system, while others see solutions in intensified pedagogical work and workshops on violence and its consequences, with more efficient response by institutions. As a source of violence, young people single out inequality, particularly material inequality, and they think that a reduction of inequalities will lead to a reduction of violence. Some of the typical messages from this type of consultations are presented in Box 7-2.

less than three quarters of young people say that they feel safe at school

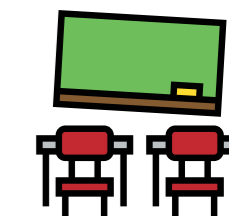


CLAIM THAT THEY DO NOT FEEL SAFE

⁵⁹ Although the data was not collected on the basis of a representative sample, the number of young people who responded makes it possible to draw indicative conclusions about the prevalence of violence in their surroundings.

Box 7-2: Young people on peer violence

Why don't they feel safe...	Possible solutions...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think that teachers do not deal adequately with either violence or the perpetrators of violence and that they perceive that as harmless and do not act properly to prevent violence. - Because some pupils are prone to violence, some even carry weapons. - Because a certain group of people are violent towards their peers and there are always divisions on the basis of material status. - Because there are children who take the liberty to make fun of and humiliate others, and in a way also to perpetrate violence against other children. Many are silent about that and nothing is being done about that issue. One day I could become a victim of such violence. - Nobody cares. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More conversations, less domestic violence. - Adequate sanctions for those who are violent. Zero tolerance for violence. - Better supervision by teachers, more classes about violence. - To sanction perpetrators of violence more, particularly for online violence. Corrective measures should be imposed immediately and they should be asked to apologize in public in front the whole class and the homeroom teacher, but they should also be deprived of the opportunity to go on school trips or to the prom or similar. - To talk more about peer violence and to have schools react in time. - To introduce school uniforms so that we can all be equal. - Stronger engagement of psychologists in school and sanctions also for events around the school.



The school infrastructure and infrastructure for preschool education are not at the required level and that conditions are particularly bad in rural schools

The rights of children⁶⁰ in the education process was a topic in the VNR consultative meeting with representatives of the Office of the Protector of Human Rights and the network of Golden Advisers to the Ombudsman.⁶¹ As an achievement, they emphasised the higher involvement of children in programmes of preschool education, with one reservation – that not all groups of children are equally involved. It was also stated that the school infrastructure and infrastructure for preschool education are not at the required level and that conditions are particularly bad in rural schools. There are particular challenges in the education of children with disabilities. There is a lack of special education teachers, psychologists, pedagogues,

speech therapists and other experts. Children from the Roma and Egyptian community frequently reach the end of primary education without learning how to write, for example, which shows that in certain cases education system is not engaging with them thoroughly, but only “getting them through”. It is also stated that, to solve the problem of peer violence, support is needed not only for the children who are suffering violence, but also for the children perpetrating the violence.

Golden advisers expressed very interesting observations (typical messages are presented in Box 7-3) regarding the quality of education, overloading of children, challenges that vulnerable groups face

⁶⁰ This question is dealt with in more detail within SDG COR 16.

⁶¹ Golden Advisers to the Ombudsman are children aged 12–17, including children from vulnerable groups.

and peer violence. Based on their opinions, that overlap with the data and surveys to a large extent, we can conclude that Montenegro still has a lot to do to achieve SDG 4.

Box 7-3: Opinions of Golden Advisers to the Ombudsman



- I am getting education to be a pharmaceutical technician, but I have never seen or used a pair of scales or any other laboratory equipment in school.
- The curriculum for primary school is too comprehensive; we cannot all achieve the same. My books have in total 2,567 pages. I calculated that it means I should study 27 pages every two school days.
- I know about examples of children that have had to give up sports or other activities to attend private classes (because they need it to cope with the curriculum).
- A special kindergarten for Roma children is not a good solution; it does not help them to learn Montenegrin. Why should these children be separated?
- It is often the case that Roma children cannot get the support that they need from their parents regarding school because their parents are not well educated, and during Covid it was difficult to secure technical equipment.
- I know of an example of a talented Roma child who enrolled in the secondary school he wanted, but he had to give up due to high costs and discrimination.
- Grades are never better and knowledge never poorer!
- I know examples of pupils who have ended up in hospital due to the stress in the examination periods.
- Some children from rural areas have many problems reaching school, particularly in the winter period, and using the internet...
- Children with disabilities cannot develop their talents.
- I know a girl who attempted suicide due to the pressure she suffered because of untruthful posts on social networks.
- I do not feel safe and comfortable in school; violence is present and committed both by pupils and by teachers.
- Children who suffer violence hesitate to report it to the psychologist.

Opinions about challenges and deficiencies faced by the education system were confirmed also at regional [consultative meetings](#) in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje. These meetings were mostly dedicated to education and focused on problems.

According to the opinions of participants, school infrastructure and equipment in schools for physical education classes, IT and practical classes is inadequate. In many schools there is a problem securing basic conditions for the teaching process – for example, heating in the winter period or hygienic

conditions in toilets. The school buildings were originally designed for a significantly lower number of pupils than they currently have. Overcrowding in classes is significantly reducing the quality of education. The quality of the education of children in rural areas is questionable. Teachers do not have access to tools for interactive learning (the internet, computers, video projectors, etc.). Thus they are forced to organize teaching in the traditional way.



27%
of Members of Parliament
are women

The assessment is that huge progress has been made in terms of inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular education processes, but that these children still face numerous difficulties and that they mostly end their education after primary school.

Participants also talked about how children are being overloaded and how they most need support from their parents or private lessons to cope with the curriculum. On the other hand, there is strong pressure to achieve the best possible results at school, which leads to (good) grades that do not always reflect the acquired knowledge. That is reflected later also in the labour market. The education system has been exposed to a large number of reforms, but it still is not developing critical thinking in children. It is not good that politics is interfering with education. Teachers are frequently overburdened with administrative tasks and children are not in the focus. Curricula are generally too comprehensive, particularly in relation to the number of classes, and their elements are poorly connected to each other. Opinions about the quality of teachers and about whether new approaches are making younger teachers better-qualified for the classroom and teaching are divided, but it was stated that the continuous education of teachers is a must and that Montenegro has to invest in teachers if it wants quality education. The mismatch between the education system and the labour market was also emphasized, as well as the fact that education is a path for the development of the society and for ending poverty for those communities in which it is present.

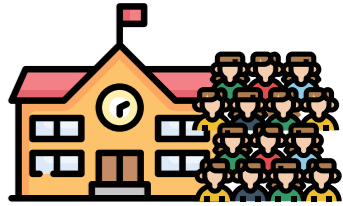
Similar opinions were expressed also in [online consultations](#) participated in by 356 citizens who expressed different and opposite opinions about how they perceive the education system in Montenegro. Some think it is bad, outdated and inadequate, while others consider it to be modern and developing.

Some citizens emphasized differences between what is planned and the manner in which the plans are implemented. They are particularly concerned because, in their opinion, reform is focused too much on changing the form and not on the essence of education. Some citizens discussed the capacities and appropriateness of teachers for modern teaching, while the trend in education since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was generally assessed as negative. Citizens are happy that the education system is mostly free-of-charge, but there are some who say that children do not learn enough at school and that parents have to pay for additional private lessons. A large number of citizens underlined the issue of how applicable what children learn in school is. They say also that the system is not sufficiently inclusive, particularly when it comes to children with disabilities.

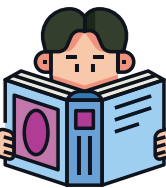
There is almost complete consensus among citizens that it is important that children attend preschool education programmes. Although they give different answers to the question about whether young people through the education system in Montenegro acquire the skills and knowledge needed for living in the twenty-first century, negative answers dominate. The worst aspect is (in the opinion of the survey respondents) that the focus is on memorizing facts, and that children do not get sufficient IT literacy in schools. They also emphasized several times the issue of the mismatch with the labour market, and that the infrastructure situation in schools and in faculties is inadequate for the modern teaching process. Citizens note that the quality of the teaching process depends too much on the personal attitude of teachers, which they consider unsustainable.

Opinions are divided also about security in schools and education institutions as places where children and young people spend time. While some think that schools are equally safe as other places where

The school buildings were originally designed for a significantly lower number of pupils than they currently have



Overcrowding in classes is significantly reducing the quality of education



Reportedly, children are being overloaded and need support from their parents or attend private lessons to cope with the curriculum

children and adults spend time, others emphasize problems such as peer violence, drug addiction and alcoholism. There is also dissatisfaction with the system of protection of children from violence and the problem of (ineffective) inter-institutional

cooperation in such cases, the lack of agility of the responsible institutions and the lack of adequate psychological support. Excerpts from typical messages are presented in Box 7-4.

Box 7-4: Opinions of citizens about education in Montenegro expressed through the platform www.sdgmontenegro.me



- **Inadequate programmes, hyper-production of diplomas...**
- **The education system in Montenegro at the level of pre-university education offers very broad and decent general education. At the university level, the system is slightly outdated and is not adapted to the labour market needs.**
- **Pupils are overloaded with materials that are there just to make them learn things by heart for a good grade and to forget it later... Not enough practical work and interesting content.**
- **It seems to me that the education in state schools is lagging behind the needs of the modern world. I think that the Montenegrin education system should be more modern, more flexible and more productive...**
- **Pupils acquire knowledge that is not applicable in practice.**
- **I think that certain secondary schools for practical crafts have good practical classes, just like certain technical faculties. On the other hand, in the faculties for humanities there is no practical work at all.**
- **Most schools do not have an appropriate IT infrastructure while, for some, projectors and CD players are still the greatest achievement (if they have them at all).**
- **Schools frequently do not have a response to peer violence and do not have adequate protection for children who are victims of violence. The vicious circle of responsibility is transferred from one institution to another while the child is waiting.**
- **Regardless of the fact that there is peer violence, I think that children are safe in education institutions.**



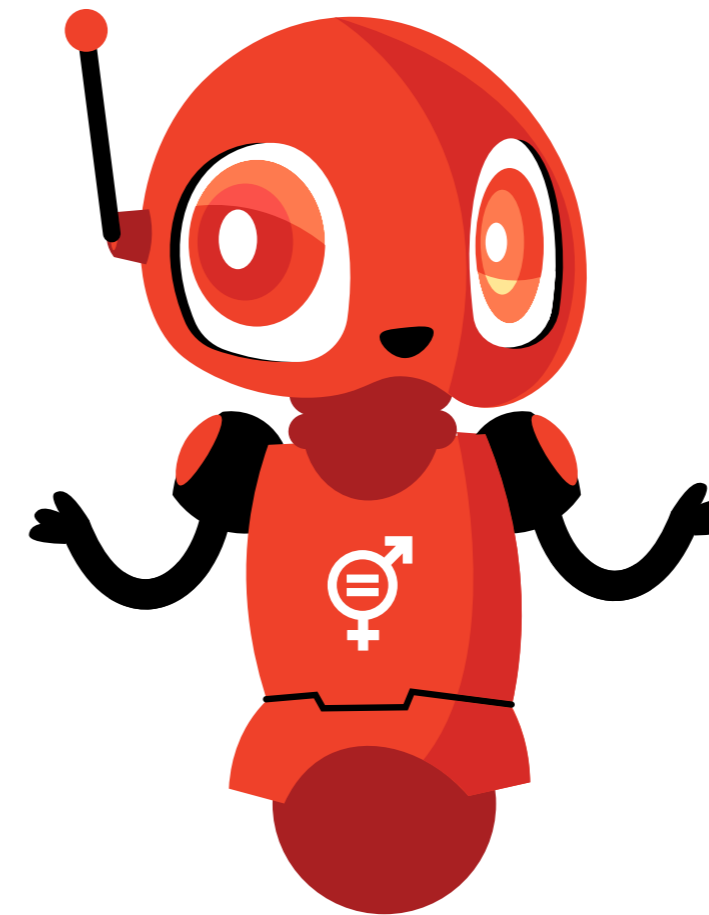
7.3 SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Within SDG 5, eight targets have been set: to eliminate all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere (5.1); eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls (5.2); eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage (5.3); recognize and value unpaid domestic work (5.4); ensure full and effective participation of women in decision making (5.5); ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health (5.6); undertake reforms for women's equal rights to resources (5.a); use technologies to empower women (5.b); and adopt appropriate policies to empower all women and girls (5.c).

SDG 5 targets are integrated into NSSD 2030 within strategic goal 2.1 (thematic area 2: Social resources – support for values, norms and patterns of behaviour important for the sustainability of society).

Out of a total of 14 indicators envisaged for monitoring SDG 5 targets, through reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030 it was reported that only certain, mostly partial data or data on the basis of which it is not possible to assess trends exists for only a few indicators: 5.1.1, 5.3.1, 5.5.1(a) and 5.a.1(b).⁶² Data for indicator 5.5.1 is available for women's participation in the national parliament, but not fully for the local authorities. In preparation for the Second VNR, some more data was collected that reflects progress in areas relevant to achieving gender equality (e.g. processing cases of violence against women, and educating women); this data is presented in the following paragraphs and was used to assess progress on SDG 5 targets.

⁶² Data from the MICS survey for target 5.3.1 is available for 2018 only; data on an indicator similar to 5.a.1 (b) exists only for 2010.





The proportion of processed cases that ended in imprisonment out of the total number of cases increased from

7% in 2016
to **15%** in 2021

With regard to [target 5.1](#), the development of gender equality policies has continued in the last five years. The legal framework has been amended and a number of plans and strategies have been adopted, including the Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality 2017–2021 and the National Strategy for Gender Equality with the Action Plan 2021–2023.⁶³ Also, the Protocol on the Treatment, Prevention of and Protection from Domestic Violence was adopted in 2018, while the Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023 was adopted in 2019. The Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2017–2021 was also adopted, as well as the Standard Operating Procedures for a Multisector Response to Violence against Children. In addition to working on the legal and strategic framework, the competent ministry, in cooperation with the UNDP Office in Montenegro, presented the Gender Map for Montenegro with the aim of drawing attention to gender equality, the status of women and gender-based violence in the country.

Although indicator 5.1.1 (existence of an adequate legal framework) has improved, the implementation of regulations and implementation of plans remains a weak point; budget support for measures and activities in the field of gender equality (more details in section 7.6 on goal 17) in the past five years has been insufficient. Overall, it can be assessed that Montenegro is facing significant challenges in achieving target 5.1.

Regarding the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls ([target 5.2](#)), both positive and negative developments have been recorded.

⁶³ The Strategy is a comprehensive and interdepartmental document that deals with the improvement of conditions for the exercising of children's rights in all areas covered by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

⁶⁴ The impact of COVID-19 on domestic violence is also discussed in chapter 5.

⁶⁵ An increase of about 5% over the previous year.

Violence against women is still believed to be widespread; several extreme cases recorded recently strongly warn that more effective responses from the relevant institutions and society as a whole are needed. The European Commission's Progress Reports on Montenegro for 2019, 2020 and 2021 state that "gender-based violence and violence against children are issues of genuine concern".

As in other countries, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in gender-based violence, especially in the first months of the pandemic.⁶⁴ Data from the specialized service for victims of gender-based violence (National SOS Line) shows that the number of calls for victims of violence in this period increased by 15%.

With respect to the state's response to violence against women (in its various forms), there are positive trends, but a number of social actors emphasize that significant improvements are still needed in this area. According to the State Prosecutor's Office, the number of processed cases of violence against women is increasing, and the proportion of processed cases that ended in imprisonment out of the total number of cases increased from 7% in 2016 to 15% in 2021.

According to data for 2021, the Police Directorate registered 251 criminal offences of violence in the family or family community⁶⁵ and 38 criminal offences related to violence between relatives. Criminal charges were filed against 294 persons (including seven minors), of whom 260 (88.4%) were males. There were 340 victims of domestic violence, of whom 62.6% were women; 44 victims were minors (16 males and 28 females). In 2021,

1,632⁶⁶ cases of infractions of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence were processed. There were 1,916 cases in the misdemeanour courts (in the field of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence), of which 63% have been completed. Fines and protection measures dominate the sentences imposed.

Regarding [target 5.3](#), Montenegro has still not raised the minimum age for marriage in line with UN recommendations. Arranged and child marriages remain a problem, especially for the Roma and Egyptian communities. Indicator 5.3.1 of the proportion of women aged 20 to 24 who were married/in a partnership before the age of 15 or 18 is available based on the UNICEF MICS survey for 2018 only, so it is not possible to determine a trend. According to this survey, the share of women/girls who were married before the age of 15 was 1.8%, and before the age of 18 is was 5.8%. The situation is significantly different for young Roma and Egyptian women, where 21.5% of girls marry before the age of 15, and as many as 60% before the age of 18. The causes that contribute to child marriage include a low level of education of girls, poverty, a lack of opportunities, outdated social norms and customs, marginalization of the Roma community, existing legislation allowing marriage at the age of 16, shortcomings in law enforcement, a lack of clear definition of child marriage, a lack of statistical data and a weak system of protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims.

For [target 5.4](#), data for an assessment of the situation is missing. According to the UN's *Analysis of the Situation in the Country*, surveys conducted for the calculation of the Gender Equality Index showed that only one in every 10 women in Montenegro has a partner who participates in doing household chores and looking after others.

⁶⁶ Which is an increase of about 16% compared to the same period in the previous year.

Regarding the participation of women in political, economic and public life (target 5.5), the figures show a significant increase in the number of women deputies in the 2016–2020 parliament when the share of women reached 29.6% (compared to 18.5% in the 2012–2016 parliament). In the current convocation (since 2020), a slight decline to 27% was registered.

Although the data shows that we are generally moving in the right direction, the practice is not in line with the intention of the Law on the Election of Councillors and Deputies, which stipulates that at least 30% of the names on electoral lists must be female candidates, at both the state and local levels. Of the 15 working bodies in the Parliament of Montenegro, women are chairs in three (the Constitutional Committee, the Gender Equality Committee and the Anti-Corruption Committee). Of the members of the 43rd government (since 2022), four are women, one of whom is the deputy prime minister. In the municipalities of Danilovgrad and Gusinje, the mayors are women, while in five municipalities (Bar, Cetinje, Kotor, Plav and Šavnik) the presidents of the local assemblies are women. Surveys conducted for the Gender Equality Index have shown that only 20% of women manage to reach decision-making positions, including managerial positions in companies.

The causes of low participation of women in public and political life are complex. UNDP research shows that work on the political scene is not protected from violence (verbal, psychological, economic), which, with examples of aggressive communication being made through social networks, can also reduce the motivation of the female population to engage in these jobs.

the share of women/girls who were married before the age of 15 was

1.8%
and before the age of 18 was
5.8%



The situation is significantly different for young Roma and Egyptian women, where

21.5%
of girls marry before the age of 15, and as many as

60%
before the age of 18



only one in every 10 women in Montenegro has a partner who participates in doing household chores and looking after others

Access to health (target 5.6) and education is universal. Data from the Strategy for the Preservation and Improvement of Reproductive and Sexual Health shows, however, that a total of 1,400 abortions are performed annually, only a part of which are justified on health reasons.

Women are representing a more educated part of society, as more and more of them graduate at all levels of education every year. The share of women with undergraduate and master’s degrees increased from 50% (of the total number of diplomas) in the period until 2016 to 54% in 2021; the share of women with doctoral degrees for the same period increased from 26.3% to 56.5%.

The presence and influence of customary norms is especially reflected in the inheritance and ownership of immovable property. Although, according to the Competitiveness Council, there is an increase in the number of women who own small businesses, women own only 4% of houses and 8% of land. For indicator 5.a.1 (b): the proportion of women out of all owners or holders of rights to agricultural land – available data from NSSD 2030 reporting shows that women were holders of family farms in only 12.9% of cases in 2010.

The share of women with undergraduate and master’s degrees increased from

50% of the total number of diplomas in the period until 2016 to **54%** in 2021



the share of women with doctoral degrees for the same period increased

from **26.3%** to **56%**

According to the data from Monstat’s Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate for women fell from 17.1% in 2016 to 15.8% in 2021 (with an increase to 18.4% in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19).⁶⁷ In the observed period, the unemployment rate for women was mostly 1 pp higher than the unemployment rate for men, with the exception of 2016 and 2020 when the situation was reversed. In spite of the favourable trends in the unemployment rate, some problems related to the employment of women remain: according to Monstat data, for example, the number of women without any work experience was two times higher in 2019 than the number of men in the same category. According to the UN Common Country Analysis, the gender gap in salaries in public institutions is stagnating at 16%, while 48% of women experienced violation of their rights at work, in the process of employment or termination of labour relations. Research done at the same time the gender equality index was calculated showed that motherhood is considered the most frequent reason for difficulties in the employment of women, and that was frequently the reason for termination of employment too.

67 <https://monstat.org/cg/page.php?id=22&pageid=22>.

Assessment for SDG 5 is presented in the figure below:

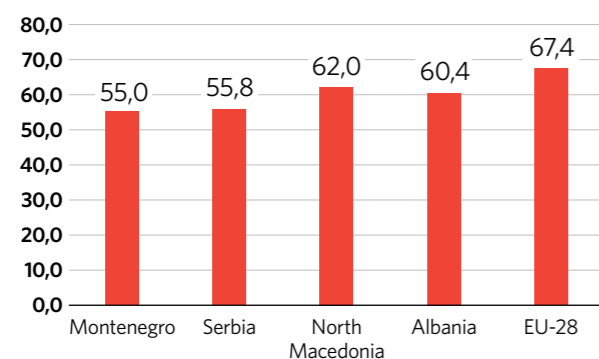
Available indicators	Trend 2016-2021	SDG targets	Status
5.1.1 Legal framework for promoting, implementing and monitoring equality		5.1	
		5.2	
		5.3	
Number of processed cases of violence		5.4	
		5.5	
5.5.1 (a) Proportion of women in the national parliament		5.6	
		5.a	
		5.b	
Number of women with an undergraduate, master’s or PhD degree		5.c	
		SDG 5	

On the basis of the available data and analysing the activities, we can conclude that there has been progress in achieving SDG 5, particularly when it comes to the legal framework and strategic planning, as well as empowering women. A limitation in assessing the progress is the lack of/incomplete or missing data for precise analysis in all SDG 5 targets/indicators. The system of monitoring has been improved in the last two years, inter alia through cooperation with UNDP Montenegro and through the contribution of active NGOs. Montenegro needs to intensify the application of regulations and plans; it also needs to define the responsibilities of the relevant institutions and ensure that there is continuous monitoring of SDG indicators (as a minimum) and similar indicators that are easy to calculate (e.g. participation of women in local authorities, for example).

Significant progress in defining the legal framework is promising. However, it still does not solve the key challenges that are related to the status of gender equality in Montenegro, i.e. the fact that the society is still highly patriarchal. Traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes persist in all spheres of life, particularly at home, but also in political life and in the labour market and education. This is supported by the Gender Equality Index of 55, in which Montenegro lags behind the average for both the EU and the countries in the region. (Figure 7-5).⁶⁸

68 www.monstat.org/cg/page.php?id=1767&pageid=1767.

Figure 7-5: Gender equality index 2019: Montenegro, the region and the EU average



Source: Monstat

Significant attention was dedicated to gender equality at the consultative meetings in Bijelo Polje, Nikšić and Podgorica, as well as in the meeting with the Ombudsman’s adviser for anti-discrimination. In the meetings we were able to hear some interesting and sometimes conflicting opinions of participants about the position of women in Montenegro and about the necessary activities to achieve improvements in this field.

Some of the participants in the meeting were of the opinion that the traditional role for women is a good model and that it should be maintained, particularly in the light of the contribution that women give to the preservation and wellbeing of the family; the professional ambitions of women should, in the opinion of the participants, be put to one side. We could also hear the opinion that there is nothing bad in a woman waiving her inheritance right in relation to the property of her parents, to the benefit of her brothers.

On the other hand, the meetings also discussed the topic of selective abortions aimed at choosing the gender of the child (at the expense of the female gender), which is an indicator of deeply rooted discrimination and the unequal position of women

in Montenegro. Several participants expressed their opinion that this topic is not in the past and that the situation in which a family is happier if they get a boy than if they get a girl is very widespread and common. They also mentioned the campaign “Unwanted” within which, in 2018, over 6,000 signatures were collected and used to request that the responsible institutions examine the facts and reduce the practice of selective abortions.

One of the key recommendations from consultative meetings was that data about the position of women should be monitored more closely and with a high degree of classification, and that the data that is being collected now in several organizations (the Employment Agency, Institution of the Protector of Human Rights, UNDP, NGOs) should, in the future, be integrated so that a higher-quality database is created, that could yield better results in monitoring the gender equality situation in the country and be a better basis for monitoring sustainable development goals.

About 375 citizens of various profiles, education levels and professions responded to the questions on gender equality and the position of women and girls by using the platform www.sdgmontenegro.me, including a certain number of young people, high school pupils and students of both genders.

Answering the question of what they consider to be the key obstacles (i.e. what is needed) to achieve a higher degree of gender equality, more than half of the respondents underlined the level of education and devotedness of women, but also their level of self-confidence. A quarter of the respondents think that the key problem is economic inequality and that women with the same level of education doing the same job earn less than men. Almost the same percentage of the respondents think that the society needs stronger institutions that could be more efficient in dealing with violence against

women, but also that it takes better implementation of the provisions of law and a higher-quality human resource policy. Some of the typical comments/

answers to the question about the key obstacles to achieving a higher level of gender equality are presented in Box 7-5.

Box 7-5: How do citizens perceive obstacles to achieving gender equality?



A patriarchal view of women is still very present. A woman who wants to have a career and does not want to have a family is stigmatized.

Women in Montenegro are frequently not supported in their own families to inherit property or to be asked for their opinion. Greater promotion of women’s rights is needed.

We need more women in leading positions.

Protection of women from violence, ensuring paid work during pregnancy and in the period after giving birth.

Adequate education and upbringing. Good relations between parents, allocated activities and obligations for both mother and father, no division into “male” and “female” tasks... Children learn from what they see.

The Balkan mindset –a woman should sit at home, prepare food and care for the children. If there is a bad driver on the road, they usually say “it must be a woman”. Everything is in your head – who knows when equality will happen, if ever?

Women frequently do not have full-time jobs and they earn less than men with the same education level.

I think women today are represented too much in the world of work, and not in the world of bringing up children.

I think that women are sufficiently equal.

When discussing the problems that affect women the most, the respondents to the survey (out of several offered answers) chose violence and a lack of ownership over property and finances. A smaller number of respondents think that it is unpaid labour, insufficient participation in decision making and a lack of understanding in the institutions. To the question “Are women in Montenegro equal to men?” 38% of the respondents said “yes”; the remaining 62% had a negative response. It is interesting that in the group that gave a positive answer there were 70 women and 75 men, while in the group that said “no” there were almost four times as many women as men.

Opinions on whether women have equal opportunities to decide in political, economic and public life were divided:

- Approximately the same number of citizens (about 7–8% of the total number) said “not at all” or “fully”, which were the extreme options on the given scale;
- Slightly more than a fifth (22%) said that women “mostly” have equal opportunities, while 29% said that this was the case “to a low extent”;
- The largest number of respondents (33%) think that the opportunities for women to participate in decision making are “to a certain extent” equal for women as for men.

The fact that over 90% of citizens who responded to this question are employed in public administration says that the results should be interpreted with caution and that they possibly do not reflect the whole range of public opinion.

As for the frequency of violence against women, the perception of the majority (54%) in the survey is that it is on the increase; about one third of the

respondents think that it is not on the increase, while others could not say. Several typical quotes from the answers to this question are presented in Box 7-6.

Box 7-6: The opinions of citizens about the frequency of violence against women



The worst thing is that, in the twenty-first century, where violence should be openly discussed, speaking about it publicly leads to horrible condemnation. That is probably worse than 50 years ago.

The last examples show that violence against women is very present.

Yes, and it is hidden due to the traditional community or because women are afraid.

In the last two years of Covid isolation and the economic crisis that went with that, it became obvious that domestic violence and poverty are closely linked and that both are on the increase.

Yes, unfortunately we can see that the number of cases of violence against women has been growing lately. Another question is, though, whether it is just that women are more aware that they should report it, which influences higher figures.

It is not on the increase, but there is definitely a lot of it. Women are more educated, they work, they are more independent, but conservative thinking is still present in the society and therefore they suffer violence silently very often to “preserve” their families.

No, it is only more visible because the number of internet users has increased.

No! There are random cases, but that is a minimal percentage.



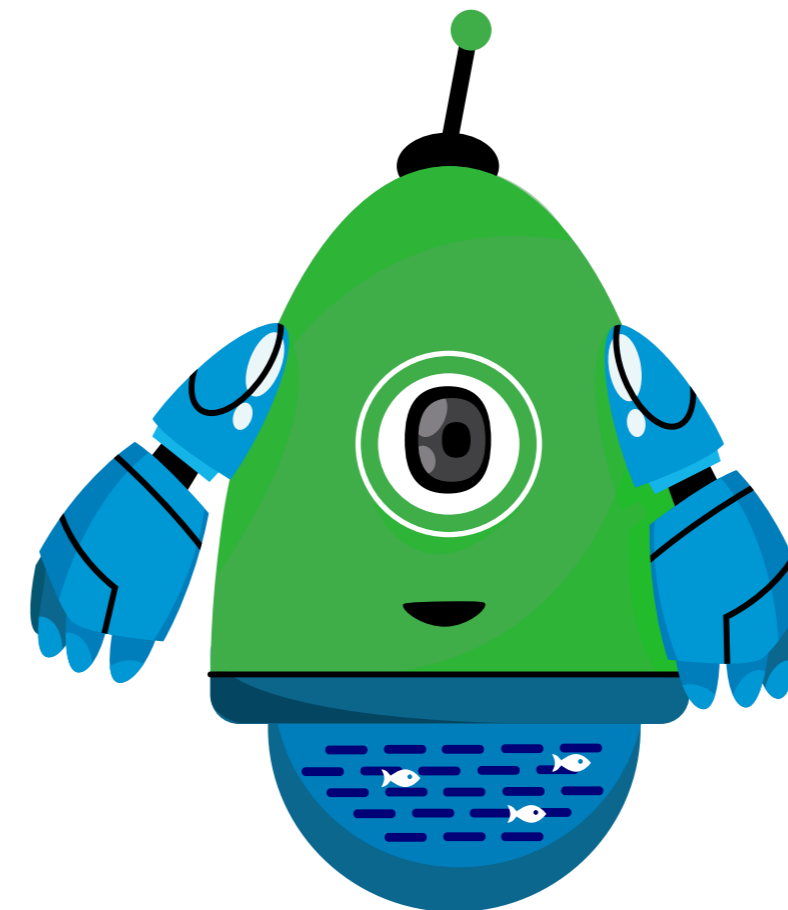
7.4 SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

SDG 14 and the accompanying targets are mostly integrated into NSSD 2030 in its section on the conservation of natural capital, i.e. through strategic goals 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4, as well as through strategic goal 4.4 regarding the sustainable management of coastal resources and development of a blue economy.

SDG 14's targets pertain to: the prevention/reduction of marine pollution (14.1); sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems (14.2); minimizing the impacts of ocean acidification (14.3); effective regulation of fisheries (14.4); conservation of at least 10% of the coastal and marine areas (14.5); elimination of subsidies which contribute to overfishing (14.6); provision of access for small-scale artisanal fisheries to marine resources (14.b); and the implementation of international law as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea – UNCLOS (14.c); SDG targets 14.7 and 14a refer primarily to small island countries. The deadline for target 14.1 is 2025, and for targets 14.2, 14.4, 14.5 and 14.6 it is 2020.

The plan was to use eight indicators (relevant for Montenegro) to measure progress under SDG 14, but no data was provided for any of them within the process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation. Some data (similar to that which is required by SDG 14 indicators) exists⁶⁹ for five indicators. A broad overview of the developments under individual SDG 14 targets and their status can be obtained based on those indicators. Thus, together with other available information, the values of these indicators will be used to assess progress on this goal in the Second VNR.

⁶⁹ They are collected by the Environment Protection Agency, relevant ministries, professional institutions and official statistics.



The construction and operation of a wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) in the coastal area with a total capacity of 241,700 PE (population equivalent) has significantly contributed to the reduction of marine pollution (SDG target 14.1) since 2014. The municipalities of Bar and Ulcinj still do not have a WWTP. Marine debris, especially plastic, is a significant and growing problem. Data on marine debris (floating, on the seabed and/or on beaches) is still available only on an *ad hoc* basis.

SDG indicator 14.1.1 (index of coastal eutrophication and floating plastic debris density) is not being monitored in line with the prescribed methodology. Instead, the trophic index TRIX⁷⁰ is a nationally available indicator, which generally indicates (with seasonal oscillations) a good (declining) trend, with increased values (or higher eutrophication) occasionally in some locations in the Bay of Kotor and near the River Bojana.⁷¹ The bathing water quality has been monitored for the past several years at about 100–110 bathing areas, a high percentage (about or over 90%) of which have excellent water quality.

Significant progress was made under SDG target 14.2 – Sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems. The Law on Protection of the Marine Environment with an ecosystem-based approach was adopted in 2019. In line with the law's provisions, and within the IPA-funded *Support for Water Management and Monitoring in Montenegro* project, the Initial Assessment of the Status of the Marine Environment was prepared, and the characteristics as well as objectives and indicators of good ecological status (GES) were defined. In late 2021, the Draft Marine Ecosystem Monitoring Programme was finalized and aligned with the requirements of the EU Marine Strategy Framework

70 Which is calculated based on four parameters: chlorophyll a; oxygen saturation level; inorganic nitrogen; and total dissolved phosphorus.

71 The source of this data is the Initial Assessment of the Status of the Marine Environment.

Directive and the accompanying EU Decision; the Programme of Measures for the Conservation/Achievement of GES is being finalized. In 2021, the project supported the collection of data on the status of the marine ecosystem, especially in the field of biodiversity, fisheries, pollution and hydrography.

Marine biodiversity was included in the National Monitoring Programme for the first time in 2018. In 2019, in parallel with the monitoring programme implemented with the support of the *GEF Adriatic* project, detailed research of the marine ecosystem was conducted in accordance with the Integrated Marine Environment Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Barcelona Convention (IMAP). These positive developments were temporarily halted in 2021, when no funds for marine monitoring were allocated from the national budget.

The *GEF Adriatic* project (May 2018 – June 2021) also created a database, analytical bases and marine spatial planning bases in accordance with the ecosystem-based approach and EU Directive establishing the Framework for Marine Spatial Planning. In 2020 and 2021, the *GEF Adriatic* project organized workshops and training sessions on marine spatial planning. Furthermore, inter-ministerial working group meetings and training on the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive were organized through the IPA-funded *Support for Water Management and Monitoring in Montenegro* project.

There was no major progress in the implementation of NSSD 2030's measures related to spatial management and construction. The coastal area in general, and especially valuable coastal ecosystems, remain exposed to significant pressures from the construction industry.

As for target 14.3, despite the fact that a growing trend has been recorded at several locations since 2017, the pH value is generally good, within the range of 8.1–8.3, which suggests a slightly alkaline environment.⁷²

A number of measures and activities have been implemented that contribute to the achievement of SDG target 14.4 (effective regulation of fisheries), and which are also relevant for targets 14.6 and 14.b. The progress cannot be unambiguously determined due to the lack of accurate data to calculate the indicators, such as, for example, SDG indicator 14.4.1 on the proportion of fish stocks within a biologically sustainable level.

Based on the available annual assessment of demersal and pelagic fish species and other marine organisms (conducted by the Institute for Marine Biology in Kotor), recommendations are given for fishing within sustainable limits. The estimated maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for 60% of the continental shelf for demersal species is about 600 tonnes, while the total allowable catch of small blue fish amounts to 3,000 tonnes per year. The reported annual catch has increased significantly since 2016 (which is seen as a negative trend in the context of fish stock conservation), but still far below the MSY with 254 tonnes of demersal and 794 tonnes of pelagic fish species in 2019.⁷³ The Montenegrin fishing fleet had 290 vessels in 2020, of which 91% were less than 12 metres long; two thirds of the

72 Data from the process of reporting about the implementation of NSSD 2030.

73 The catch was almost halved in 2020 due to reduced tourist traffic and reduced demand for fish.

74 Which is in line with Aichi target 11 on the protection of at least 10% of coastal and marine ecosystems by 2020.

vessels are equipped with small-scale coastal fishing tools (the source of data on catches and the fishing fleet is Monstat).

Control measures were implemented and international instruments were applied to prevent illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as to eliminate illegal fishing, using methods set by the Law on Marine Fisheries and Mariculture and the Law ratifying the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU fishing. In addition, the Annual Montenegrin Fisheries Data Collection Programme was adopted and aligned with the EU legal framework and the recommendations of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean. The Ministerial Declaration MEDFISH4EVER, which sets specific goals and defines the dynamic for addressing the main fisheries-related issues in the Mediterranean, was signed. A working group to fight the use of explosive devices and other illicit tools to catch fish was formed in 2017. The IPA-funded project *Strengthening Control and Management of Fisheries* was implemented. It enhanced the Fisheries Information System and the capacities for its use, as well as the safety of navigation with fishing vessels. Despite all these activities, according to a number of sources, there is still a lot of work to be done to eradicate unsustainable practices in marine fisheries.

As for target 14.5,⁷⁴ the many years of work undertaken to protect valuable marine ecosystem were crowned by the decisions of the Government of Montenegro to designate three marine protected areas in 2021: Platamuni, Katič and Stari Ulcinj. All three areas were designated as nature parks. In addition, the localities of Dražin vrt and Sopot in the Bay of Kotor were put under preventive protection



Montenegro protected three marine areas in 2021: Platamuni, Katič and Stari Ulcinj

The proportion of Montenegro's marine area protected in this way is 1%

as special nature reserves.⁷⁵ With these decisions, the surface area of protected areas in Montenegro was enlarged by 4,764.7 ha, and marine ecosystems were protected for the first time, including the narrow coastal land area as well. The proportion of Montenegro’s marine area protected in this way is 0.98%. Indicator 14.5.1, which according to the UNSD methodology is calculated as the mean percentage of each key biodiversity area (KBA) covered by protected areas based on information from global databases on protected areas and KBAs, is not monitored at the national level.

Regarding the protection of coastal ecosystems, significant progress was made in 2019 when Ulcinj’s Salt pans were designated a nature park with a surface area of 1,477 ha. The salt pans are an area with specific ecosystems and an

internationally important bird area (IBA), especially for migratory birds, and also a potential Natura 2000 and Ramsar area. Other coastal protected areas include Tivat’s Solila and a number of smaller sites, mostly beaches. A review of the protected areas’ status in the coastal zone is planned for 2021 and 2022 (within a GEF project).

The most significant initiatives that contributed to the designation of marine protected areas from 2016 were the MEDKEYHABITATS project supported by UNEP MAP RAC SPA,⁷⁶ and the GEF (Global Environment Facility) project *Promoting Protected Areas Management through Integrated Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Protection in the Coastal Area of Montenegro*. Conservation studies were prepared for all three nature parks, among other results of this project.

The assessment for SDG 14 is shown in the figure below:

Available indicators	Trend 2016–2021	SDG targets	Status
Index TRIX		14.1	
14.2.1 Use of an ecosystem-based approach		14.2	
pH value		14.3	
MSY assessment, data on reported catch		14.4	
Area of marine protected areas		14.5	
		14.6	
		14.b	
		14.c	
		SDG 14	

75 The reason for placing them under preventive protection is the exposure of valuable biodiversity, especially coralligenous communities of the golden coral species (*Savalia savaglia* Bertolini), to a high level of anthropogenic risk.

76 The Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas within the Mediterranean Action Plan of the UN Environment Programme.

A lot of progress was made in the systematization of information and knowledge about marine ecosystems from 2016 to 2021, both in the regulatory framework and with the designation of marine protected areas. Progress was also made with regard to development and implementation of the fisheries policy. Accomplishing target 14.5 is likely, although not within the set deadline, i.e. by 2020.

The main challenges in the forthcoming period will be to ensure sufficient capacities and funding sources to implement a complex system for monitoring the status of the marine environment and implement measures to achieve GES. The same applies to the implementation of the fisheries policy and especially to the management of marine protected areas (that the country has had no experience with so far). Better control and consistent enforcement of regulations are needed, as evidenced by the views of citizens and NGOs presented during the public consultation process.

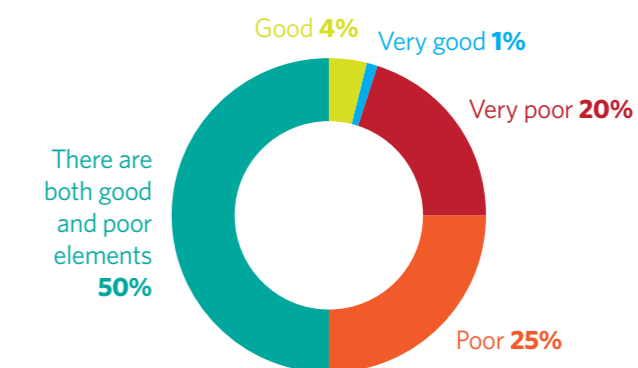
There was not much discussion on the topics covered by SDG 14 in the public consultation meetings, while around 330 people aged 16 to 68 took part in the online consultations on matters related to this goal. The survey respondents had different levels of education, they were mostly employed in public administration and education; about 5% of respondents were from the private sector.

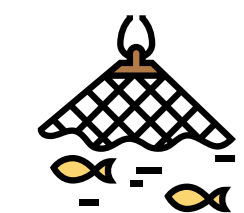
The citizens who participated in the survey identified wastewater and waste as the main sources of marine pollution, and also identified some of the causes, such as the inadequate municipal infrastructure, tourist development, excessive urbanization, but also negligence and carelessness. The words humans and people appeared in about 15% of the answers about the main sources of pollution. Some of the responses

were very accurate, highlighting problems that plastic and plastic debris cause to the conservation of marine ecosystems’ health and productivity. Maritime traffic was identified as another important source of pollution (especially from ships and cruisers), as well as ports/shipyards.

Participants in the online consultations did not recognize the progress in marine conservation that has been made in the previous period, as only a small number of them (about 5%) rated the quality of marine and costal management as high. On the other hand, almost half of them thought the management was poor or very poor (Figure 7-6). The explanation could be that it will take a lot of time and effort to implement the good systemic solutions adopted in the past few years and get practical results. Or, as one of the citizens put it: “... more people should be trained to carry out checks and not just pass laws and regulations that remain a dead letter”.

Figure 7-6: How citizens rate marine and coastal zone management





More than two thirds of the survey respondents thought that marine biological resources were being exploited excessively and/or illegally, while

58%

deemed that marine fisheries were sustainable

About half of the citizens did not know which marine areas were protected, while one quarter said that they had heard about them (among those who knew about marine protected areas, some 10% were able to give their names, while 15% only answered affirmatively). Some other responses show that there is a certain amount of misunderstanding about what marine protected areas are. This situation is not surprising as these are a novelty in Montenegro, but it indicates the need to raise awareness about the importance and role of those sites.

More than two thirds of the survey respondents thought that marine biological resources were being exploited excessively and/or illegally, while 58% deemed that marine fisheries were sustainable.

Box 7-7: Opinion of NGOs on progress made in achieving goal 14

These responses also indicate a certain discrepancy between citizens' views (it must be borne in mind, however, that these views were collected based on a sample that is not statistically representative) and the official information collected through the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030 and from other relevant sources.

NGOs involved in the process of preparation of the Second VNR (through the working group or through consultative meetings) gave their contribution by assessing three targets under SDG 14 (Box 7-7), which mainly correspond to the official assessments. The exception is, to some extent, the opinion on SDG target 4.4 where NGOs highlighted the problem of illegal fishing.



Target 14.1: A good part of the waste from Montenegro ends up on the coast and in the sea. In addition to municipal waste, pressure from wastewaters is also significant. Waste is most often carried by rivers (the River Bojana) that flow into the sea.

Target 14.2: Montenegro designated three protected areas: Platamuni, Katić and Stari Ulcinj. Management plans must be prepared and their proper implementation should be ensured.

Target 14.4: Illegal fishing is still a frequent practice, both in the sea and in lakes and rivers. Situations in which illegal fishing threatens the number and habitats of protected species require special attention. Fishing with electricity generators and dynamite is common. Perpetrators of illegal activities are usually unknown persons and those who do get caught while fishing illegally are not punished adequately, as a rule.

7.5 SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

SDG target 15.1 is about the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, while sustainable forest management, restoration of degraded forests and afforestation are the focus of target 15.2; the deadline for both is 2020. Targets 15.3 and 15.4 are about combating land degradation and the conservation of mountain ecosystems by 2030; SDG target 15.5 is about taking action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats and halt the loss of biodiversity, while protecting and preventing the extinction of endangered species by 2020.

Target 15.6 refers to equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources and target 15.7 refers to ending the poaching and trafficking of protected species. Targets 15.8 and 15.9 are set to be achieved by 2020 and refer to the prevention of the introduction and the reduction of the impact of invasive alien species and integration of ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning and strategies, development processes and accounts. Other SDG 15 targets are about the mobilization and increase of financial resources for biodiversity conservation (15.a), and the mobilization of resources from all sources to finance sustainable forest management. Target 15.c (enhance global

support for efforts to combat poaching, including by supporting local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities) is not directly relevant to Montenegro.

All the relevant SDG 15 targets are integrated into NSSD 2030, mostly within strategic goals 3.1 and 3.2 concerning the protection and more efficient management of natural resources. Certain measures designed for achieving NSSD strategic goals 3.5 (resource-efficient use of raw materials), 4.1 (reduction of greenhouse gas emissions) and 4.2 (enhance resource efficiency in key economic sectors) are also relevant for SDG 15.

Of the 14 indicators under SDG 15, the institutions responsible for monitoring the implementation of NSSD 2030 do not report about a single one. Certain data exists and this was provided for three indicators: the proportion of forest area and important sites for biodiversity that are covered by protected areas (15.1.1 and 15.1.2), and for a part of indicator 15.9.1, which is about establishing national targets in accordance with Aichi target 2⁷⁷ and reporting. Similar to indicator 14.5.1, indicator 15.1.2 is calculated based on the data on key biodiversity areas (KBAs) and protected areas from the global databases. Global data may differ from the nationally generated data because internationally protected areas (such as Ramsar or World Heritage sites) are not taken into account for calculation purposes.

As regards target 15.1, the proportion of forest area according to the 2010 National Inventory is 59.9%. Data on the forest area published by official statistics (despite small variations in absolute figures) shows that there have been no major changes in the proportion of forest areas out of the total land area, for example for 2016 and 2020, when this indicator was 59.6%.



the proportion of the total nationally protected area increased from

11.7%

in 2016 to

13.44%

in 2020⁷⁹

Significant progress was made with the designation of new protected areas (Dragišnica and Komarnica Nature Park, as well as the Cijevna Canyon Natural Monument)⁷⁸ in 2017. Thus, the proportion of the total nationally protected area increased from 11.7% in 2016 to 13.44% in 2020.⁷⁹ Data according to protected ecosystem type is not available. There is a significant problem of the management of protected areas (PAs). Not all PAs have management plans, for example, the PA Registry often lacks data on area category and size, and in many cases it lacks an official decision on the designation and managing authority. The infrastructure needed for proper management is often missing, as well as a stable and long-term source of funding. The situation with national parks is better than with other PAs.

Activities to identify Natura 2000 sites continued after the completion of the IPA project (implemented from 2016 to 2019) following the same methodology. Field research to map habitat types and species was carried out by the Environmental Protection Agency with budget support of about €0.5 million for the period 2019–2021.

Significant progress was also recorded within efforts to establish a water management planning framework in line with the EU Water Framework Directive, i.e. with adoption of the Water Management Strategy in 2017, development of river basin management plans for the period 2019–2021, and preparation of the draft Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment.

Sustainable forest management ([target 15.2](#)) became part of the national framework as a principle back in 2008, with the adoption of the National Forestry Policy, and then in the 2010 Forest Law. The Strategy with the Forests and Forestry Development Plan 2014–2023 is also based on

⁷⁸ Including Ulcinj's Salt pans, mentioned under goal 14.

⁷⁹ Data forms the process of reporting about the implementation of NSSD 2030.

this principle. However, weaknesses are evident in implementation. The Plan for the Rehabilitation of Forests Degraded by Abiotic and Biotic Factors for State-Owned Forests was also prepared. The forestry information system was improved during the reporting period, but we still do not have indicators for sustainable forest management.

Significant challenges were identified in the past period regarding mobilization of financial resources for sustainable forest management (SDG target 15.b). Annual forest management programmes do not include all the necessary measures, while the Plan for Rehabilitation of Degraded Forests was partially implemented only in 2020, but not in 2021. The main reason for this situation was the failure to allocate necessary budget funds for these activities, which negatively affected the sustainability of forest management.

Seeds collected/harvested in accordance with the Law on Reproductive Material of Forest Trees and of the “known origin” category were used for the production of propagating material in the nurseries owned by the Forest Administration. Measures for prevention and suppression of wildfires are continuously being implemented, but the frequency, intensity and effects of wildfires have become increasingly destructive.

Overall, one could say that there is obvious stagnation in achieving the SDG target pertaining to sustainable forest management and that there are concerns about unsustainable forest management in Montenegro.

As for [target 15.3](#), progress refers to the adoption of the 2018 Land Degradation Neutrality Report and the 2020 National Drought Plan. Preparatory and specific activities have been under way since 2017 to remediate several sites degraded by previous

industrial activities, including Bijela Shipyard, Maljevac slag and ash landfill, Gradac flotation tailings pond in Pljevlja, and the solid waste landfill at the Aluminium Plant in Podgorica. These activities have been implemented within the *Industrial Waste Management and Clean-Up* project.

According to the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030, there were no special activities related to [SDG target 15.4](#) about the conservation of mountain ecosystems in the observed period. The same applies to target 15.6 on the equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources.

Although it has been a legal requirement since 2008, the Red List of Threatened Species⁸⁰ has not been prepared yet, the exception being the Red List of Birds, the draft of which was finalized in late 2021 (and adopted in May 2022). Consequently, it is not possible to calculate the SDG indicator for target 15.5: Red List Index, which measures the aggregate risk of extinction of different groups of species based on changes in the number of species in each of the endangered categories from the 2015 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Despite the lack of data on the scale of enlargement of species, based on information available on the endangerment of valuable habitats, it can be assessed that the country faces significant challenges in achieving target 15.5.

The completion of the legal framework to control the trade in protected species (2017) is relevant for [target 15.7](#). A number of activities were undertaken in 2021 to combat poaching on Lake Skadar, but a lot of work still remains to be done to ensure efficient suppression of poaching.

⁸⁰ Based on the Red Lists, the Environmental Protection Agency prepares a Red Book with information on the area of distribution of protected wild species of plants, animals and fungi, measures to protect species and their habitats, as well as measures to improve the status of endangered species.

⁸¹ One of the NSSD's measures foresees the following of EU trends in the modification of national accounts to include the contribution of natural resources to the added value in the national economy.



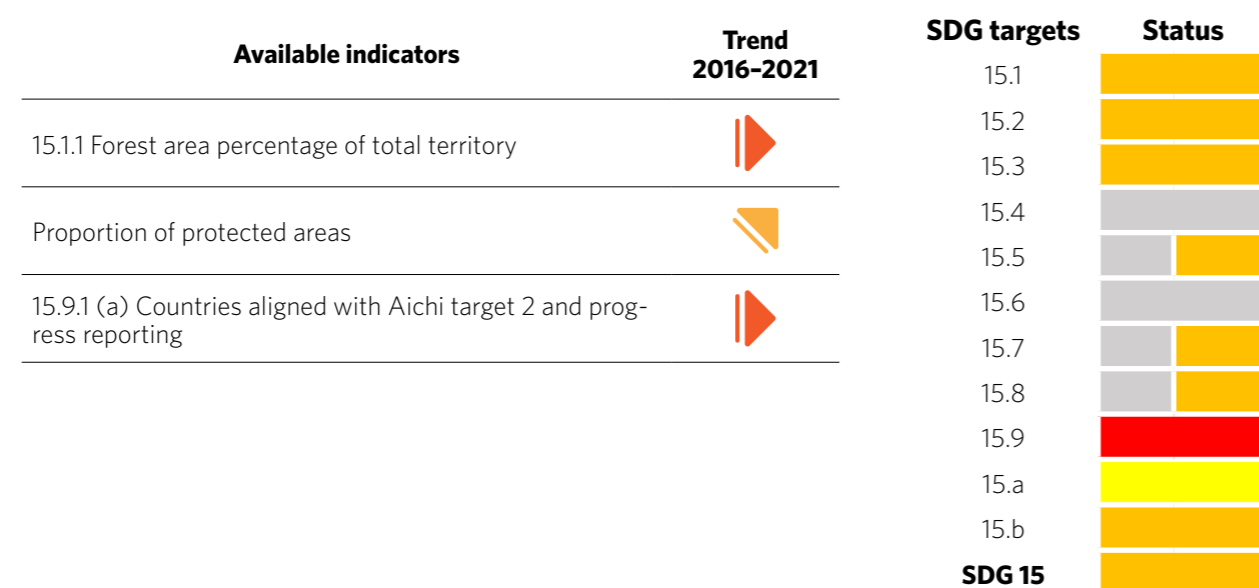
The forestry information system was improved during the reporting period, but we still do not have indicators for sustainable forest management

As for [target 15.8](#), the Law on Alien and Invasive Alien Species of Plants, Animals and Fungi was adopted in 2019. Control measures have been enforced in accordance with this law. Several studies were conducted on the presence of invasive species in some protected areas and in the sea in the past few years. However, more detailed and targeted studies are necessary. The Environmental Protection Agency publishes data on non-indigenous and invasive species on a 10-year basis (the most recent data is from 2013).

Apart from a few illustrative assessments of the value of ecosystem services, little has been done to integrate ecosystem values and biodiversity (target 15.9). This remains a major challenge for the country. Regarding indicator 15.9.1(a), Montenegro reports to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity – UNCBD (last report submitted in 2019) – and transposed Aichi's targets, but it did not achieve target 2 pertaining to the integration of biodiversity values into development plans and national accounts. There was also no progress in integrating biodiversity into the national accounting system (which is the topic of indicator 15.9.1(b)).⁸¹

According to the information from the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030, funds for biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management (targets 5.a and 5.b) were increased in the past period, but there was no progress as regards aspirations to generate a part of those funds through economic instruments relevant to biodiversity (SDG indicators 15.a.1 (b) and 15.b.1 (b)).

Based on the information presented above, the assessment of achieving SDG 15 is shown in the figure below:



Expansion of the protected areas network and improvement of the forestry and water management policies, as well as prevention of land degradation, are the main achievements under SDG 15. Some progress was made within efforts to protect endangered species and control poaching and the spreading of invasive species. Moreover, more funds have been provided over the past few years to map valuable habitats and species, including funds from the budget. Consistent implementation of forestry and especially water management policy in the coming period will be a major challenge. The citizens' views presented during the consultation process also support this. Protected area management is also a significant challenge, and the same applies to the protection of endangered species and the prevention of poaching. It is particularly important to take steps towards adequate biodiversity valuation and modification of national accounts.

The consultative meeting organized in Nikšić was mostly about the environment and SDG 15. Representatives of the local government, non-governmental organizations and citizens emphasized that numerous weaknesses in the protected areas management were evident, and that the potentials of the local government as a manager were very limited. In the participants' opinion, forest ecosystems were especially threatened by unsustainable use and wildfires. Environmental awareness of citizens and the need/ways to develop it were also discussed.

Representatives of the Office of the Protector of Human Rights (at a meeting in Podgorica) shared their experiences in exercising environmental human rights in the context of the protection of citizens' rights, in accordance with the national legislation and the European Convention on Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. The Ombudsman's Office acts upon complaints in cases when citizens believe

their right to the environment has been violated. Previous cases, in which the Ombudsman's Office issued opinions and recommendations, mostly concern situations when air quality and urban noise thresholds were exceeded, or when waste was disposed of illegally. Recommendations to the relevant inspection services to continuously monitor the environment and implement measures prescribed by the law, as well as recommendations to strengthen cooperation among all relevant stakeholders can be highlighted as a common denominator of the Ombudsman's actions so far in cases when violations of complainants' rights were established. The representatives of the Ombudsman's Office also pointed out that the right to launch an environmental lawsuit (in line with the Law on Contracts and Torts) was not used enough.

About 350 people aged 16–82 responded to the questions related to SDG 15 via the www.sgdmontenegro.me platform. Public administration employees dominated (76%) among those who participated in the survey. Citizens were mostly dissatisfied with the performance of state institutions and responded in large numbers (68%) that the institutions were not taking adequate measures to protect the environment or nature, which is especially interesting given the high proportion of public administration employees in the sample. More than half of the respondents (54.1%) believed that forests in Montenegro were not being used in a sustainable way at all, while an additional 42.8% believed that this was the case to a lesser extent or to some extent. The fact that only about 3% of survey respondents assessed the use of forests as sustainable or completely satisfactory is alarming.

Almost all survey respondents (94%) deemed that terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems were not being properly protected. When asked which ecosystems they believed were most endangered, the majority of citizens (299) singled out forest ecosystems, then river ecosystems (256 responses) and lake ecosystems (156). Almost 90% of survey respondents believed that nature and biodiversity were not properly valued within the planning and implementation of development policies and projects, which confirms the official assessment that Montenegro faces major challenges in achieving SDG target 15.9.

As for the ways to improve the protection of nature and the environment in general, the majority of citizens thought that the solutions included compliance with the law, stricter regulations that would have a preventive and repressive character, better enforcement, rigorous inspection checks and a stricter penal policy. The proposals of the second group of citizens (in terms of number) referred to education and awareness raising, while a slightly smaller group believed that specific actions should be carried out (such as afforestation, strengthening ranger services, cleaning actions, etc). The smallest number of respondents suggested better technical and human capacities in the relevant institutions, better cooperation between institutions and the civil sector and larger investments in the environment.

The opinion of NGOs involved in the VNR process regarding SDG 15 targets related to the conservation of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems (15.1), sustainable forest management (15.2) and ending poaching (15.7) is presented in Box 7-8.



Almost all survey respondents (94%) deemed that terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems were not being properly protected.

When asked which ecosystems they believed were most endangered, the majority of citizens (299) singled out forest ecosystems, then river ecosystems (256 responses) and lake ecosystems (156).

Box 7-8: NGOs on the challenges to achieving SDG 15



Target 15.1: Montenegro has many protected areas that are of exceptional ecological value and in which the habitats of many protected species can be found. Management of these areas is at an unsatisfactory level. Stronger control is needed to prevent damage to these habitats. The use of obsolete data to draft strategies and other important documents at the national level is one of the shortcomings. Consequently, the real situation is not reflected. Continuous monitoring of the status of species and habitats is missing. Moreover, more serious steps need to be taken in an effort to establish Natura 2000 areas.

Target 15.2: Illegal logging is a threat to forests of high ecological value, some of which are under national protection. In addition, the system of concessions has led to the destruction of entire areas, some of which have turned into barren land. There is no wood processing and this has led to the export of huge quantities of round wood and timber assortments to neighbouring countries. Frequent wildfires, which have left some parts of the country in ruins, are also a problem. Forest fruits are harvested without any control, and there is no accurate data on how much forests are exploited in this way annually.

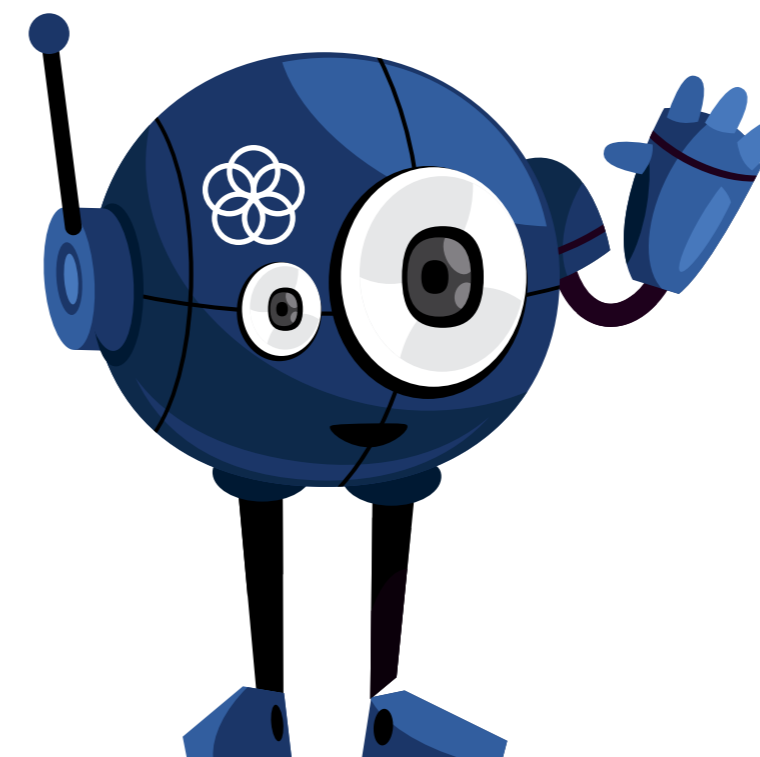
Target 15.7: The problem of poaching has been present for a long time. Rare species are shot in protected areas occasionally, and poaching of various bird and fish species happens all the time. Baseline game assessment does not exist, the game warden service is not efficient and punitive measures are poorly enforced.



7.6 SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

The targets defined under goal 17 largely pertain to international cooperation and support mechanisms for developing countries.⁸² Targets are divided into several sub-groups, including funding (targets 17.1–17.5), technology (17.6–17.8), capacity building (17.9)⁸³ and trade (17.10–17.12), as well as systemic issues – *the coherence of policies and institutions* (17.13–17.15), *multi-stakeholder partnerships* (17.16–17.17) and *data, monitoring and accountability* (17.18–17.19).

SDG 17 is integrated into the national framework through a number of the NSSD's strategic goals, especially in thematic areas 4 (Introduction of a green economy), 5 (Improvement of governance system) and 6 (Financing for sustainable development). The assessment of the SDG 17 status was made based on the information available from action plans for the relevant NSSD strategic goals, by groups of SDG 17's targets. Other relevant sources were also taken into consideration.



82 Developing countries are considered to be countries that, according to the World Bank classification, have low and lower-middle gross national income (GNI) per capita, while countries with higher-middle and high GNI constitute the group of developed countries. Montenegro is a developed country with higher/middle GNI (\$4,046–12,535 per capita). According to Monstat, the GNI per capita in 2020 was €6,844.

83 The target primarily pertains to developing countries (including cooperation modalities such as north-south, south-south and triangular cooperation) and it is not directly relevant for Montenegro; the available information on capacity building for SDG implementation in Montenegro is included in other sections of the Review.



the proportion of individuals using the internet increased significantly from 69.9% in 2016 to 82.2% in 2021

around **€1.6 billion** was allocated to finance institutions, programmes and measures linked to the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17



The proportion of public expenditure (for these five targets) out of GDP ranged from **5.7% to 6.9% per year**

Funding (targets 17.1-17.5): The main progress in meeting the SDG funding targets concerns the implementation of programme-based (and gender-sensitive) budgeting⁸⁴ (from 2022) for more efficient and effective use and control of budget spending, as well as the establishment of the Eco Fund. The Fund was established in late 2018, and has been operational since 2020. So far, it has been involved in supporting energy efficiency, renewable energy and e-mobility projects. The 2022 Eco Fund's Work Programme foresees improvement of the register of polluters with the aim of enhancing the calculation and collection of ecological fees. Funds collected from the sale of emission credits (once the emissions trading system is established) are also planned to become revenues of the Eco Fund.

Data for indicators 17.1.1 and 17.1.2 is available but the indicators are not being monitored continuously within the NSSD reporting process in the manner foreseen under target 17. The value of indicator 17.1.1 (Total government revenue as a proportion of GDP) was 37.9% in 2019. Foreign direct investment

(indicator 17.3.1) ranged from 7% to 11% of GDP from 2016 to 2020; the lowest levels of foreign direct investment were recorded in 2018 and 2019.

A budget spending analysis supported by the UN system in Montenegro (the preliminary results are presented in Table 7.2) showed that around €1.55 billion was allocated to finance institutions, programmes and measures linked to the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 in the period 2015–2020, of which 78% (€1.2 billion) was for education.⁸⁵ Expenditures on gender equality during this entire period amounted to €4.2 million (0.3% of the total amount for the five observed goals) and had a strong declining trend. Expenditures on marine and terrestrial biodiversity protection were around €112.4 million and doubled in the observed period. Almost €222 million was allocated for various interventions aimed at achieving goal 17. The proportion of public expenditure (for these five targets) out of GDP ranged from 5.7% to 6.9% per year.

Table 7-2: Budget expenditures for five SDGs (in € million)

SDG	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015-2020	%
4	171.44	193.02	195.61	207.67	216.17	226.04	1,209.95	78.2
5	1.52	1.25	0.74	0.58	0.08	0.01	4.18	0.3
14	2.60	2.93	3.62	6.65	10.94	7.78	34.51	2.2
15	11.47	9.69	12.22	12.79	14.65	17.03	77.86	5.0
17	35.86	36.65	32.51	36.74	40.73	39.12	221.61	14.3
Total	222.90	243.54	244.69	264.42	282.57	289.98	1,548.11	
GDP	3,654	3,954	4,299	4,663	4,951	4,193		
% GDP	6.1	6.2	5.7	5.7	5.7	6.9		

84 There is still no progress in introducing child-responsive budgeting, which is one of the EU requirements (under the EU Child Guarantee).

85 Despite the fact that investments in education (measured in absolute terms) grew from 2015 to 2019, their share within GDP fell from 4.7% to 3.8%.

A more detailed analysis of expenditures by individual goal and SDG target reveals that capital budgets for preschool education accounted for 5.1% and for and primary and secondary education 2.4% of the overall expenditures, which shows that the investments in refurbishing infrastructure and equipping buildings are low, which corresponds to the education quality assessments heard during the consultation process (about the unsatisfactory condition of many school buildings).

The data also shows that the budgets of some institutions were extremely small and insufficient to support the implementation of the complex mandates they have, especially in the context of EU accession and achieving the SDGs. One such example was the Water Administration, whose budgets in 2019 and 2020 were around €0.3–0.4 million. The Administration has an important role to play in enforcing water regulations and river basin management plans.

As mentioned above, the funds needed to implement commitments arising from the EU accession process under Chapter 27 on Environment and Climate Change (which are complementary to SDGs 14 and 15 and other SDGs) are estimated at €1.4 billion. A combination of instruments and resources is planned to ensure the funding, including the national budget and the Eco Fund. The amount of needed funds indicates that institutions, programmes and measures that contribute to the achievement of SDGs 14 and 15 will require significant budget support in the forthcoming period.

The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) provided support worth €279.5 million to Montenegro from 2014 to 2020 to implement the EU agenda. Support worth €165 million was provided within the first IPA cycle (2007–2013). International financial institutions, the UN system and bilateral donors were also significant funding sources for programmes and projects involving SDGs that are in the focus of the Second VNR. The implementation of economic instruments needs to be strengthened and mechanisms identified for greater involvement of the private sector in funding the sustainable development priorities in the coming period.

Technology (targets 17.6-17.8): Data for targets 17.6 and 17.7 concerning cooperation and exchanges in the field of science and innovation, and dissemination of environmentally sound technologies is almost completely unavailable from the NSSD 2030 reporting process. The analysis of the UN system showed that the budget expenditures for target 17.6 amounted to €70.4 from 2015 to 2020, including programmes that supported development of the information society, telecommunications, science and others.

Judging by the available data, these expenditures were effective. The value of indicator 17.8.1 – the proportion of individuals using the internet – increased significantly from 69.9% in 2016 to 82.2% in 2021. This success in expanding the use of information and communication technologies is significant. According to the NSSD reporting data, the availability of NGA (new generation access networks that provide access speeds of at least 30 Mb/s) reached 81% of households in late 2021, which is a significant improvement compared to 2016 when the availability of NGA (new generation access) networks for broadband access was 26.5%.



Trade (17.10–17.12): The Trade Facilitation Strategy 2018–2022 and the Action Plan for its implementation have been adopted. They specify a set of measures and activities to implement the concept of trade facilitation defined by the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and Additional Protocol 5 to CEFTA. Montenegro actively pursued, primarily within CEFTA, reduction of trade barriers through the abolition of unnecessary non-tariff measures and through trade facilitation.

Budget expenditures for target 17.10, i.e. for the implementation of measures to ensure a non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the WTO (World Trade Organization), amounted to €2.6 million from 2015 to 2020. The values of indicators under targets 17.10–17.12 were not collected within the process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation.

System-related matters – coherence of policies and institutions (17.13–17.15): Significant progress was achieved under indicator 17.14.1 (Number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development), as a result of the operation and reform of the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSO) in 2021. Formation of a working group for sustainable development at the local level is also planned, which should further contribute to the coherence of policies (national and local). With the exception of the municipality of Danilovgrad, no other local councils for sustainable development have been established so far.

In addition to the NCSO, the role of the Sector for Coordination, Compliance and Monitoring of Implementation of Public Policy Strategies, which is part of the General Secretariat of the Government and which issued 88 opinions⁸⁶ about draft and

86 Based on the Regulation on the method and procedure for drafting, harmonizing and monitoring the implementation of strategic documents and the accompanying Methodology.

proposed strategic documents in 2021, is also important. In addition to assessing alignment with strategic goals identified in NCSO 2030, as well as with Montenegro’s commitments under the 2030 Agenda, the opinions also include recommendations for alignment of sector-level strategic documents and improvement of their quality. Based on the opinion issued by the Coordination Sector in 2021, an analysis of the alignment of new strategic documents with the existing strategic framework was conducted. The analysis showed that the overall alignment of the adopted strategic documents with the existing strategic framework in 2021 was 58%, which shows that there is significant room to improve policy coherence; the alignment assessment includes the alignment of strategic documents with NCSO 2030 and sector-level policies in the field of environmental protection and conservation.

A working group was formed (in 2021) within the Council for Competitiveness for the promotion and identification of projects in the field of the green economy.

System-related matters – multi-stakeholder partnerships (17.16–17.17): There are mechanisms to strengthen partnerships between all stakeholders in the society, including partnerships with the private and civil sectors. Partnerships are also strengthened through the transformed NCSO, which includes representatives of business associations, the banking sector, the Foreign Investors’ Council and others. Cooperation with the civil sector was established, but needs to be strengthened. Although some progress has been made in the past five years, much remains to be done to fully mobilize the potentials and contribute to the implementation of sustainable development policy.



Monitoring and reporting on the implementation of strategic documents is done regularly, with varying levels of success (a lack of data being one of the main limitations) and different effects on further implementation. This is one of the areas where significant improvements are needed, too. Information on indicators 17.16.1 and 17.17.1 were not collected through the NCSO 2030 reporting process.

System-related matters – data, monitoring and accountability (targets 17.18 and 17.19): Targets 17.18 and 17.19 primarily pertain to developing countries. However, they are also very relevant for Montenegro where the availability of quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, sex, age, geographical location and other relevant categories is still very limited. Therefore, capacity building for the introduction of sustainable development progress indicators that would be complementary to gross domestic product (and income) is essential.

The relevant ministry (the organizational unit that was transformed into the current Sustainable Development Office) implemented the project “Establishment of an integrated system for reporting on progress in the implementation of the NCSO – initial phase”, which carried out the methodological and technical tests necessary to establish this system. Indicator Reporting Information System (IRIS) software was installed at the relevant ministry with the support of UNEP. The aim of this software was to ensure data exchange between various entities – the official and administrative producers of statistics identified by the NCSO as the entities responsible for implementing measures and monitoring sustainable development indicators. Through this project, and based on consultations with the ministries and administrative authorities responsible for monitoring indicators, measures and sub-measures of the NCSO 2030 Action Plan, a meta-database and information sheets for individual indicators were established. The project

also produced a detailed analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of using the IRIS software, as well as a proposal for alternative options. One of the ambitions in designing the reporting information system is to connect the national system with the UNEP Live platform that supports reporting by UN member states. Establishment of an adequate system for monitoring sustainable development goals in the national context is a significant challenge for the public administration system, given that IRIS is not compatible with the national systems from which information would be drawn, and that IRIS itself was not fully developed at that time. A new information system will be built or some of the existing ones, already used by the public administration, upgraded in the coming period.

The Environmental Information System (EIS) developed under the IPA project completed in 2017 provides support to the Environmental Protection Agency in its mission to provide accurate, reliable and timely environmental information. Further upgrade of the system is needed because the system development so far has covered only some environmental segments.

As for indicators, it would be useful to calculate indicator 17.18.1 – Statistical capacity indicator for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring – once the methodology for it is defined. Although significant progress and improvements in the environment, waste and forestry statistics have been made in the past few years, more needs to be done in these fields as well as in agricultural statistics. Indicators 17.18.2 and 17.8.3 are monitored within the NCSO 2030 reporting process, and they show that Montenegro is among the countries that have national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (17.18.2) and countries with a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation (17.18.3).



According to the data of the relevant ministry collected within the NSSD 2030 reporting process, 100% of births and deaths are registered and entered into proper records in Montenegro, which is the value for indicator 17.19.2 (b). Regarding part (a) of indicator 17.19.2, the last census in Montenegro was conducted in 2011.

Despite the fact that the available indicators are positive, Montenegro still faces major challenges to achieve goal 17 in the category of data, monitoring and accountability (which will be discussed additionally under chapter 8).

Based on the previous considerations, the progress in achieving SDG 17 (by groups of targets) was assessed as shown in the figure below:

Group of SDG targets

- Funding (17.1–17.5)
- Technology (17.6–17.8)
- Trade (17.10–17.12)
- Coherence of policies and institutions (17.13–17.15)
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships (17.16–17.17)
- Data, monitoring and accountability (17.18–17.19)

SDG 17



7.7 Other Sustainable Development Goals

7.7.1 SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Through the process of reporting on implementation of NSSD 2030, no data was collected for indicators pertaining to the prevalence of malnutrition, food insecurity, stunting, undernutrition and relevant activities, so it is not possible to assess progress in achieving SDG targets 2.1 and 2.2 about ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition.

Some data is available for indicators 2.3.1 (Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size) and 2.4.1 (Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture) only for 2010 and 2016, so it is not possible to draw conclusions about progress in the analysed period for the Second VNR, in particular for target 2.3, where the aim is to double the agricultural productivity of small food producers, especially women. With regard to target 2.4 – Ensure sustainable food production systems by 2030, some progress has been made with implementation of agricultural policy measures supported through the Agricultural Budget and Agriculture and Rural Development Programmes, which are also relevant to target 2.a (Increase investment in rural infrastructure).

Over the past five years, activities have been carried out to introduce a system of food quality and safety and designation of origin, with a significant step forward in the field of improving the quality of domestic products through the protection of trade names. Participation of agricultural producers in both domestic and international agricultural fairs, implementation of projects of importance in the field of agriculture and rural development, and

study trips to neighbouring countries and the EU were supported. Support was also provided for the development of clusters.

The Agricultural Budget measures support organic production, conservation of genetic resources (which is relevant for target 2.5 – Maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals), direct payments in crop production and animal husbandry, introduction of quality systems and certification. Significant funds to support agricultural development are provided through the IPARD⁸⁷ programmes.

SDG 2 is characterized by a lack of information – of both indicators as well as detailed information on activities carried out to implement the relevant NSSD 2030 measures, which makes it difficult to assess progress. It is evident that the available funds to support the development of sustainable agriculture and rural areas are significant and growing.

7.7.2 SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

Activities to improve the health system to achieve universal healthcare (which is set as a goal by the national planning framework, and which is in line with SDG target 3.8) and the increase of budget expenditures⁸⁸ on healthcare brought some improvements, as evidenced by the review of the SDG health indicators, which are also available in the process of reporting on 2030 NSSD implementation (Table 7.3).

Developments in the right direction have been noted in SDG targets 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7 and 3.c, which pertain to reducing the global maternal mortality ratio, ending the preventable deaths of new-borns and children under 5 years of age, ending the epidemic of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, and increasing health financing and funds for the development of the health workforce. Numerous challenges remain – both in the access to and in the quality of health services.

87 Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development.

88 According to the *UN Common Country Analysis*, health expenditures increased from 3.7% of GDP in 2014 to 5.2% in 2018, but they are still among the lowest in the European region.

Table 7-3: Indicators available through the NSSD 2030 monitoring process

SDG	Indicator	Value	Comment
3.1.2	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel (2018)	(2018) 98.8%	97.5% for the Roma and Egyptian communities
3.2.1	Under-5 mortality rate per 1,000 births	(2020) 3.7	Stable value (with fewer oscillations) in the period from 2016–2020, significantly lower than in 2010
3.2.2	Neonatal mortality rate per 1,000 births	(2020) 2.8	Slight decline compared to 2016, significant compared to 2010 (lowest value 1.3 in 2017)
3.3.1	Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected members of population	(2020) 0.05	25–26 newly infected per year, no disaggregated data (by sex, age, etc.) is available
3.3.2	Tuberculosis incidence per 1,000 members of population	(2019) 13.2	Gradually decreasing
3.3.3	Malaria incidence per 1,000 members of population	(2020) 0.001613	One or two cases per year (not including cases in 2016 and 2019)
3.7.1	Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods	(2018) 27.7%	Available from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MISC), 15.5% in the Roma community
3.7.2	Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group	(2020) 0.11 9.4	Stable values, with certain oscillations in the period 2016–2021, declining compared to 2010; the rate for the Roma and Egyptian communities is approximately 15 times higher than in the general population
3.a.1	Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older	(2017) 35.4%	The latest available data is for 2017
3.c.1	Health worker density and distribution (physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists)	+	Slightly increasing for all categories in the period 2015–2020

The target to reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by 2030 (target 3.4) is one of those where Montenegrin society faces significant challenges. The frequency and effects of the most common non-communicable

diseases – diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases – are of concern. Cumulatively, these four groups of diseases cause an estimated 72.7% of deaths and 32.4% of the disease burden.⁸⁹

89 Estimates of the Public Health Institute published in the *UN Common Country Analysis*, 2021.



Air pollution especially in urban areas, poses a risk to the health of children and adults



The percentage of children vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella in Montenegro fell from 90% in 2010 to only 24% in 2020. In addition, only 24% of new-borns are breastfed in the first hour after birth, and 20% are breastfed during the first six months of life

Developments in substance abuse (target 3.5), global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents (target 3.6) and tobacco control (target 3.a) are also concerning. The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to be analysed.

As for target 3.9, which is about reducing the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air pollution, the Public Health Institute, with the assistance of the WHO, prepared a health impact assessment of air pollution in the municipalities of Podgorica, Nikšić and Pljevlja in 2016. Air pollution, especially in urban areas, poses a risk to the health of children and adults. It is measured in Pljevlja, Bijelo Polje, Nikšić, Podgorica, Bar and Kotor; the results show that the legally permitted thresholds are exceeded on a regular basis in several municipalities. The mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and a lack of hygiene (SDG indicator 3.9.2) was last updated for Montenegro by the WHO in 2019 and was equal to <0.1.⁹⁰

Health indicators show a significant difference for certain vulnerable groups compared to the general population. Thus, for example, life expectancy for the general population is 76.7 years of age (74.1 for men and 79.4 for women), while it is 20 years less (55 years of age)⁹¹ for members of the Roma and Egyptian populations; differences in health outcomes for Roma and Egyptians are also shown in Table 7.3.

90 Reporting on the NSSD 2030 implementation – Action Plan for Strategic Goal 3.3.

91 Data from the research conducted for the purposes of drafting the National Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians for the period 2016–2020, published in the UN Common Country Analysis, 2021.

92 https://montenegro.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Report%20on%20the%20Rapid%20Social%20Impact%20Assessment%20of%20the%20COVID-19%20outbreak%20in%20Montenegro%2C%20April-June%202020_0.pdf

93 Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey in Montenegro (MICS) 2018, MONSTAT, UNICEF and UNHCR: www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/MICS/MNE/n/MNE_MICS6%20Statistical%20Snapshot%20ECD%20ENG_Montenegro%202018_FINAL.pdf.

94 UN Common Country Analysis, 2021.

Concerning the health of children and young people, the data on the immunization of children is particularly worrying. The percentage of children vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella in Montenegro fell from 90% in 2010 to only 24% in 2020. In addition, only 24% of new-borns are breastfed in the first hour after birth, and 20% are breastfed during the first six months of life (MICS, 2018).

Both children and young people emphasize the importance of mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and believe that the psychological support in general is insufficient, especially for young people.⁹² One of the key issues is limited involvement of parents in activities with their children. Collectively, 44% of fathers were engaged in four or more activities with their young children in 2018, compared to 84% of mothers.⁹³

The existing health information system is incomplete, fragmented and insufficiently interoperable to provide satisfactory information for the efficient management of the health system.⁹⁴

7.7.3 SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Within the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030, no data was provided on the indicators for SDG 6 (except for indicator 6.3.1 – Proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flows safely treated – whose value was estimated at 74.4% in 2017),⁹⁵ and there is very little information on implementation of the relevant measures and sub-measures. Significant progress is evident in target 6.5 – Implementing integrated water resources management by 2030, as river basin management plans were finalized in 2021. It will be a major challenge for Montenegro to implement the plans. Within the process of reporting on the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the value of indicator 6.5.2 was calculated – The proportion of the transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation – and amounted to 61%.

As for targets 6.1 and 6.2 on achieving universal access to safe and affordable drinking water and access to adequate sanitation and hygiene for all, the UN Common Country Analysis states that over 90% of the population had access to a basic supply of drinking water and basic sanitation in 2017, and yet there were still shortcomings in ensuring equitable access to safely managed services in all environments, especially in rural settlements, but also in institutions such as schools and health facilities.

95 Source: Second Draft Report on NSSD 2030 Implementation.

Concerning schools/children's rights, there is no adequate data on access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WATER, Sanitation, Hygiene – WASH), but consultations conducted within preparation of the Second VNR indicated that it was a major problem for a significant number of children, especially those who were exposed to vulnerability on various grounds (poverty, belonging to the Roma and Egyptian communities, living in rural and less accessible parts of the country, etc.).

Regarding targets 6.3 (Halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, increasing reuse) and 6.4 (Increasing water-use efficiency), the following information is relevant:

- The long-term water demand forecast was adopted in 2017, including the planned dynamics of reducing losses until 2025 and 2040;
- Preparation of the Rulebook on Reuse of Treated Municipal Wastewater was planned for 2019;
- According to the 2019 Municipal Wastewater Management Plan, 47% of the total population or 58.4% of the population living in agglomerations (with more than 2,000 PE) had connections to wastewater collection systems; there were seven wastewater treatment plants operating with a total capacity of 400,000 PE.

The views of NGOs involved in the VNR process on the progress and challenges to achieve SDG 6's targets are presented in Box 7-9.



The proportion of the transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation is amounted to

61%

Box 7-9: The views of NGOs on challenges to achieve SGD 6



Target 6.1: In Montenegro, water is generally safe for drinking, while in some regions there are accidents that contaminate water. Water turbidity often occurs during bad weather.

In 2020, a total of 18,012 samples of drinking water from city waterworks and other public water supply facilities were tested. Of the total number of those tested, 6.82% samples were bad. This problem is especially pronounced in Pljevlja, where citizens very often face the fact that it is impossible to use water from the urban waterworks.

Target 6.2: The households of approximately 50% of Montenegrin citizens are connected to the sewerage network, while the rest often use septic tanks or storm water drainage channels. The process of building a sewerage network and a wastewater treatment plant is delayed. There are also situations where newly built urban collectors do not operate in accordance with the design and there is a free outflow of untreated or semi-treated wastewater (in the case of Nikšić), or the capacities are oversized, as is the case with the collector in Pljevlja. The problem with some collectors is sewage sludge as a by-product (in the cases of Budva and Nikšić).

Target 6.3: Waste management is at an undesirable level. The proportion of recycled waste is between 1% and 2%. Much of the waste ends up in unregulated dumpsites, next to trash containers, in riverbeds or in the sea. Municipal and non-hazardous construction waste management is delegated to local governments, which lack the capacities to deal with a large-scale problem such as waste management. Most local governments do not have Waste Management Plans or those plans have expired.

Target 6.6: (protect and restore water-related ecosystems): Progress was made in increasing the proportion of protected areas by designating marine protected areas, namely Platamuni Nature Park, Katić Nature Park and Stari Ulcinj Nature Park.

The National Parks of Montenegro have serious management problems. None of the five national parks in Montenegro has a valid management plan. Organization of the national parks has not been defined yet.

The Ulcinj Salt pans were protected in 2019 as a nature park and included on the RAMSAR list of wetlands of international importance. However, the issue of management still remains unresolved.

Target 6.b (Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management): Local communities are involved in planning the construction of wastewater treatment plants only if a site in their immediate vicinity is selected or if it somehow affects the interests of the local community. Mobilizing the community to get involved in a timely manner has been reduced to public advertising that would comply with the procedure but not encourage citizens to make a real contribution.

7.7.4 SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Significant progress was made in target 7.2 (by 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix) and target 7.3 (by 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency), which is confirmed by the participants in the VNR consultations who singled out renewable energy sources and energy efficiency as an area of importance for sustainable development and the environment in which the greatest progress was made.

The national target of 33% of final energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020 was achieved and exceeded. Indicator 7.2.1 – The share of renewable energy within the total final energy consumption in the period that the VNR refers to was constantly above the level of 35%: the minimum (37.7%) and maximum (43.8%) values

were recorded in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

In the period 2016–2021, several energy efficiency programmes were implemented that targeted various sectors, including the residential and public sectors. The values of indicator 7.3.1 – Energy intensity – were not reported in the NSSD 2030 monitoring process.

Indicator 7.1.1 – Proportion of the population with access to electricity – is available for 2018 (MICS) and amounted to 99.9%, and 96.4% in Roma settlements. Within the process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation, indicator 7.1.2 (Proportion of the population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology for cooking, heating and lighting) was calculated at 28% in 2018.

Despite these successes, certain challenges remain in the energy sector; attention to some of them is drawn by the NGOs that contributed to the preparation of the Second VNR (Box 7-10).



Target 7.2: TPP Pljevlja produces 40% of the electricity required to meet the needs of Montenegro and is the largest single polluter in the country. More progress is needed in finding alternatives to electricity generation, in order to ensure energy stability and, on the other hand, preserve human health and the environment. The ecological reconstruction of TPP Pljevlja turned out to be a poorly planned process, with an increase in costs of €15 million and delays, and the management showed negligence and incompetence in planning that process.

In addition to the existing and planned energy sources based on wind energy, significantly more attention needs to be paid to the use of the large potentials of solar energy. Incentive measures in the form of loans for the installation of solar panels for sanitary hot water in households did not yield adequate results, but that does not mean that incentive measures should be abolished. Instead, the problems need to be considered and the measures improved. A large number of family/small hotels and the hospitality sector in general are a significant target group when it comes to the use of this type of energy. In addition, we expect that the planned projects for obtaining energy from solar sources will be more dynamic. The goals of our country when it comes to renewable energy sources are to be more ambitious, not only because we are signatories to various agreements, but also because they will contribute to better living conditions.

Target 7.3: Energy efficiency in all sectors has to be our priority. Rationalization of energy use and incentives for households can significantly reduce our energy requirements, reduce pollution and mitigate climate change. The country's goals in this area need to be much more ambitious. Given that residential buildings in Montenegro are relatively old, and therefore energy-inefficient, additional investments in energy efficiency are needed. Energy efficiency measures are implemented through a call for interest-free loans announced by the relevant ministry, as well as through a call published by the Eco Fund, which partially subsidizes the implementation of energy efficiency measures for individuals and legal entities.

Target 7.a (Enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology): Information on cooperation in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources at the international level is hardly available and not sufficiently visible (promoted).

Box 7-10: Views and recommendations of NGOs for SDG 7



The national target of **33%** of final energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020 was achieved and exceeded



Proportion of the population with access to electricity is available for 2018 (MICS) and amounted to **99.9%** and **96.4%** in Roma settlements



The average GDP growth rate in the period 2016–2019 (indicator 8.1.1) was approximately 4%, and in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, GDP decreased by 15.3%

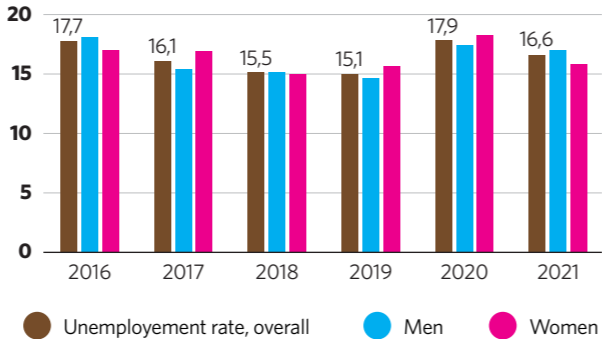
7.7.5 SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

SDG 8 was identified in the NSSD 2030 implementation reporting process as one of the SGDs where progress had been made. The review made while preparing the Second VNR confirms this.

Over the past five years, progress has been made in target 8.1, with the exception of 2020, when COVID-19 affected GDP significantly. The average GDP growth rate in the period 2016–2019 (indicator 8.1.1) was approximately 4%, and in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, GDP decreased by 15.3%. There was no significant progress in achieving target 8.2 – Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on the high-value-added and labour-intensive sectors.

Developments in indicator 8.5.2 – Unemployment rate – are shown in Figure 7-7 indicating that the overall unemployment rate increased by almost 3 percentage points in 2020 compared to 2019. Data for 2021 shows that the economy is recovering: the unemployment rate has fallen to 16.6% (from 17.9% in 2020), while GDP data is not yet available.

Figure 7-7: Unemployment rate, 2016–2021



Source: Monstat (Statistical Office of Montenegro), Labour Force Survey

Despite the significant progress made with the reduction of unemployment in the period up to 2020, including the recovery in 2021, significant challenges remain for target 8.5, which is also about achieving decent work for all women and men, including young people and people with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value. In addition to ending gender imbalances, much remains to be done to employ people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. One of the challenges is also the diversification of the economy, as the high degree of dependence on tourism proved to be a particular weakness during the COVID-19 crisis. Although the unemployment rate among people with disabilities is not known, the available data indicates that half of all persons with disabilities registered with the Employment Office in 2019 do not have formal education (48%),⁹⁶ which makes their access to the labour market more difficult. In 2021, the Employment Office worked to activate all beneficiaries of financial support (type of social benefit) who were active jobseekers, by providing information, counselling and motivation services for inclusion in employment programmes.

96 Employment Office of Montenegro, Work Report 2019, available at: www.zzzcg.me/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/lzvjestaj-oradu-ZZZCG-za-2019.-godinu.pdf.

A large number of programmes and measures implemented during the Second VNR period with the aim of creating new jobs, encouraging entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and supporting the growth of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (target 8.3) contributed to positive unemployment rate developments.

The share of young people (aged 15–24) not covered by education, employment or training in the first year of COVID-19 increased by almost 4 pp compared to 2019, reaching 21.1%, and indicating a deterioration in target 8.6 and a moving away from the goal of significantly reducing the proportion of young people not covered by employment, education or training by 2020; in the years preceding COVID-19 this indicator ranged approximately from 16% to 18%.

Indicator 8.4.2 – Domestic material consumption (DMC) – was calculated for a few years only (2010–2013) within a UNDP project, so it is not possible to assess progress on target 8.4.

Data for indicator 8.7.1 – Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour – is available only for 2018 based on the MICS survey, when this indicator amounted to 10.3%.

Creativity and diversity are key to the sustainable development of Montenegro. Within its activities, culture helps foster sustainability, promotes inclusive and balanced economic development and environmental protection, and contributes to peace and security. In target 8.9, which is about promotion of sustainable tourism, it is important to emphasize the importance of cultural heritage, which (in addition to having an important social and educational role) contributes to the development of sustainable tourism activities, especially cultural tourism. Although entities engaged in cultural heritage activities make up a small part (2.6%) of the total number of entities in the cultural and creative industries, they are employers of 13.9% of the total number of employees in these sectors. In 2017, the total revenue from cultural heritage activities was estimated at €3.6 million; this figure does not include cultural-heritage-based tourism activities that generate large economic revenues for the country.

Ensuring full respect for the rights of workers, especially vulnerable groups, is also one of the significant challenges for the coming period.



The share of young people (aged 15–24) not covered by education, employment or training in the first year of COVID-19 increased by almost 4 pp compared to 2019, reaching 21.1%



The biggest progress recorded in improving the business environment and infrastructure

7.7.6 SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

SDG 9 was identified in the process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation as one of the SDGs where progress had been made. The review made while preparing the Second VNR partially confirms this.

In target 9.1, some progress was made in infrastructure development, and yet problems with inadequate infrastructure in the country remain; aspects of sustainability and resilience are not being sufficiently taken into account in infrastructure planning and development. Challenges are also present in ensuring favourable and equitable access. There was no progress in industrialization (target 9.2); this is supported by the values of indicator 9.2.1 – Manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP and per capita – which has been at the level of approximately 4% in recent years, and indicator 9.2.2 – Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment – which stagnated at around 6% (but declined significantly compared to 2010).

The most significant progress in the previous period was achieved in target 9.3 by implementing several activities aimed at improving the working environment of small (industrial and other) enterprises and facilitating their integration into value chains and markets.

The line ministry and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have been implementing the “Improving Entrepreneurship through Advanced Advisory Support and Information Services” project with the support of IPA since 2020. The project supports the implementation of small and medium-sized enterprise development policy.

Support for the development of clusters was continuously provided in the previous period. A decision was made in 2019 to transform the current cluster initiatives into sustainable clusters, within activities defined by the new Operational Programme for Implementation of the Smart Specialization Strategy.

Within the Competitiveness Council, eight working groups were established to improve the business environment and investment climate in Montenegro, which, among other things, deal with the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, partnership for lifelong entrepreneurial learning, economic empowerment of women, measures to eliminate barriers for the development of electronic services in the private sector and promotion of the green economy, etc.

There was no significant progress in target 9.4 – Greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes. In contrast, target 9.5 and indicator 9.5.2 – Researchers (full-time equivalents) per million inhabitants – recorded progress over a three-year period (2015–2017) for which values were provided; in 2017, the indicator value was 0.00153. Very significant progress was made in target 9.c – Significantly increase access to information and communications technology (relevant indicators are given in SDG 17). According to the calculation made in the process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation, the value of indicator 9.4.1 (CO₂ emissions per unit of value added for the whole economy) was 0.45 kgCO₂ per GDP unit in 2016 and 2017.

7.7.7 SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and between countries

As mentioned within deliberations about several SDGs (including SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and others), significant efforts have been made in the last five years to eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and to promote and implement social, economic and political inclusion of all, which led to some positive developments in achieving targets 10.2 and 10.3. However, inequalities remain in all areas and have even deepened in some, affecting particularly vulnerable groups and some parts of the country (the northern region, rural areas).

The reforms of fiscal and wage policies that came into force in early 2022 (as part of the Europe Now programme) have the potential to contribute to inequality reduction, but it remains to be seen what exactly their effects will be. In parallel with the analysis of the effects of the Europe Now programme, further adjustments of the fiscal/wage policy, as well as reforms of social protection and pension policies, are needed in the coming period in order to ensure, among other things, income growth for those with the lowest income at rates that are higher than the national average (which is the obligation under target 10.4).

Reducing inequality is a key prerequisite for sustainable development of the society and a way to mobilize and realize all development potentials. The importance of reducing inequality was also emphasized in the consultations within the preparation of the Second VNR: young people, for example, identified inequality, especially income inequality, as one of the causes of violence.

The process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation did not provide sufficient information on measures to reduce inequalities from the Strategy Action Plan (for example, to target socially vulnerable groups with efficient social and other policies, improve the social benefit granting system and support programmes, reduce the gap between rich and poor, implement programmes aimed at groups at risk of marginalization, and others). As for indicators under SDG 10, information was provided only for indicator 10.6.1 (also repeating as indicator 16.8.1) on Montenegro’s membership and voting rights in international organizations. This area of NSSD 2030 requires more attention in the coming period, with possible adaptation of the originally designed measures, which would give a strong contribution to the achievement of SDG 10.



Inequalities remain in all areas, affecting the most vulnerable groups



Air quality in urban areas and waste collection/disposal were only partially improved in the previous period.



Examples of excessive planning or construction in certain parts of the country (especially on the coast) are widespread.

7.7.8 SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Similar to SDG 10, both positive and negative trends were observed under SDG 11. Regarding housing and access to basic services (targets 11.1 and 11.7), support programmes were implemented to address housing issues for different categories of people in the period covered by the Second VNR, which is a positive development. On the other hand, there were negative trends in the planning and construction of new neighbourhoods, where, for example, the availability of green and public areas and preschool/school facilities is neglected. Housing prices are on the rise.

Public transport in cities is not developed, i.e. harmonized with citizens' needs, and road safety is not at a satisfactory level (target 11.2). Large numbers of cars and traffic jams are one of the causes of air pollution. Air quality in urban areas and waste collection/disposal were only partially improved in the previous period. Multi-year data for indicator 11.6.2 – Annual mean levels of fine particular matter (PM2.5 and PM10) in cities – shows a declining trend generally, but the levels in many city centres still often exceed the legal thresholds.⁹⁷

Examples of excessive planning or construction in certain parts of the country (especially on the coast) are widespread. The spatial planning/urbanization system (target 11.3) faces significant challenges.

Montenegro has a rich and diverse cultural heritage, which is an integral part of the European and Mediterranean tradition. This heritage is, therefore, of great importance. Protected cultural heritage

⁹⁷ Within the NSSD 2030 reporting, data for indicator 11.6.1 – The proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge, out of the total urban solid waste generated, by city – was provided for one year only, and it is therefore impossible to determine a trend.

sites, elements of the intangible cultural heritage, including those on the UNESCO list, contribute to economic development by generating innovative services and products aimed at sustainability, development and employment. The government and local communities contribute significantly to the protection and conservation of natural and cultural heritage. Montenegro is currently drafting the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Cultural Heritage 2023–2028, as well as the National Strategy for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Cultural Heritage, which demonstrates the government's intention to include key instruments and protect World Heritage sites within its strategic planning efforts. At the international level, these efforts include participation in UNESCO conventions, European conventions and directives and other forms of international cooperation. Nonetheless, trends that threaten to undermine the status of World Heritage sites (protection of which is the subject of target 11.4) were observed.

Climate change adaptation plans and local disaster risk reduction strategies (target 11.b) have been drafted by a few municipalities over the past five years.

Indicators 11.2.1 (Access to public transport) and 11.7.1 (The share of open space for public use) were calculated for the Capital City, based on the census and spatial plans (with data available for five or 10 years), so it is still not possible to determine a trend.

7.7.9 SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Within the process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation, goal 12 was identified as one of the SDGs where progress has been achieved. The review completed within the preparation of the Second VNR confirms this to a lesser extent as there was no significant progress in the preparation and implementation of sustainable consumption and production programmes, while the waste management system still faces significant issues.

As regards efficient use of natural resources, several activities that contribute to SDG target 12.2 were identified through the process of reporting on the implementation of NSSD 2030, including:

- Use of more environmentally friendly materials and improvement of resource efficiency, primarily in the tourist and construction sectors; the MEST standard in construction was adopted, and with it European standards were accepted;
- In cooperation with UNIDO, a study was prepared on how to improve the metal industry with investments based on energy efficiency and improve its environmental performances; technical support was provided for preparatory activities to improve energy efficiency in the manufacturing sector;
- Programmes aimed at the development of entrepreneurship and the business sector were implemented continuously, with a recent emphasis on a green/resource-efficient economy.

⁹⁸ Indicator 12.5.1 – National recycling rate – is not calculated regularly through waste statistics. Instead, only estimates are available. The data monitored is the quantities of waste generated and the quantities of treated waste.

The effects of these initiatives cannot be accurately assessed yet. As already mentioned, SDG indicator 12.2.2 (also 8.4.2) – Domestic material consumption (DMC) – has not been not calculated continuously.

It is evident that the quantities of generated waste are increasing and that the pressures on the environment caused by waste are not decreasing. The problem of plastic waste/bags is particularly evident, as they often end up in the natural environment due to inadequate management. Disposal is still the dominant option in waste management, while the recycling rate⁹⁸ is very low. Municipal infrastructure is inadequate: despite significant improvements, separate waste collection and recycling/reuse systems are poorly developed or inadequately used. There are still many unmanaged and/or illegal waste disposal sites. Management of waste streams is a significant challenge, despite the fact that the legal basis is in place (aligned with European regulations). Hazardous waste management is also a significant challenge.

The previous National Waste Management Plan (2015–2020) was partially implemented, including, among other things, the construction of part of the necessary infrastructure (landfills, transfer stations, recycling centres and yards, etc.). In 2018, the relevant ministry, in cooperation with local governments, implemented an informative and educational project “Separate waste collection is my decision”, to promote a system of primary waste selection.



The problem of plastic waste/bags is particularly evident, as they often end up in the natural environment due to inadequate management



Disposal is still the dominant option in waste management, while the recycling rate is very low

Regarding hazardous waste management, the option of constructing a hazardous waste treatment plant near the Aluminium Plant in Podgorica was considered. The plan is to conduct additional analyses and explore other options to address the issue of hazardous waste management in Montenegro in the coming period.

To further improve waste management, there is a plan to adopt a new law and a new National Waste Management Plan for the period 2023–2028. The

establishment of a single database on waste is also planned for 2023.

The views of non-governmental organizations with an emphasis on some negative practices and opportunities for improvement (regarding quantities of waste and treatment of certain types of waste, sustainable consumption in public procurement and information on sustainable consumption and production) are presented in Box 7-11.

Box 7-11: Challenges in achieving SDG 12 – views of NGOs



Target 12.4: By 2020, achieve environmentally sound management of chemicals and all types of waste throughout their lifecycle

The practice of burning waste, especially car tyres, to make a profit from selling the metal fraction, is still present in Montenegro and poses a significant risk to human health and the environment, considering the release of many heavy metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and permanent organic pollutants. The legal provision on extended producer responsibility, transposed from the EU Waste Framework Directive, has failed to address this challenge properly, and the situation is similar with some other waste streams (such as electrical and electronic waste).

Target 12.5: By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.

Disposable plastic and plastic bags are still in wide use, although there are acceptable alternatives to these products. The proportion of municipal waste prepared for recycling or reuse is alarmingly low (1–2%), while national and EU legislation prescribes it should be 50%. Construction waste is disposed of, and only a small quantity of this waste is used to cover landfill liner. There is only one construction waste landfill in Montenegro – Mojanski krst in Golubovci. Construction waste (as well as other types of waste) is often disposed of in irregular sites. Along with poor preventive and repressive measures, this practice poses a major risk to the environment.

Target 12.6: Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.

Sustainable practices of large companies are most often conditioned by the cost-effectiveness of a practice, legal obligation, or positive PR.

Target 12.7: Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities.

Public procurement should reflect the strategic orientation of state administration authorities. Harmonization of public procurement systems is required to enable prioritization of sustainable practices.

Target 12.8: By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

The civil sector is actively involved in raising citizens' awareness about the impact of sustainable policies on their quality of life and the environment. We are promoting sustainable development and making efforts to incorporate that concept into legal and strategic documents.

7.7.10 SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Regarding target 13.1, which is about strengthening resilience and adaptation, a limited number of activities have been implemented so far. The project “Enhancing Montenegro’s capacity to integrate climate change risk into planning” is under way. The Climate Change National Adaptation Plan (NAP) will be prepared within this project, which is supported by the Green Climate Fund. The health system’s programme of adaptation to climate change was adopted in 2020. At the local level, the municipality of Podgorica is the only one that has prepared an adaptation plan. The National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2018–2023 was adopted, and the Disaster Risk Assessment of Montenegro was published in 2021. It was prepared in line with the EU guidelines for risk assessment and mapping for disaster management.

Significant progress was made regarding target 13.2, which is about integration of climate change measures into national policies. After adoption of the Law on Protection against the Adverse Impacts of Climate Change (2019), 15 pieces of secondary legislation were adopted by January 2022. In addition, the following policies were also adopted: the National Climate Change Strategy until 2030 (2015), the Second Report on the Implementation of the National Climate Change Strategy (2022), the Third National Communication, the Third Biennial Update Report on Climate Change and the updated Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (in 2021), which increases the emissions reduction target to 35% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels). The initial target to reduce emissions by 30% was already achieved. The Greenhouse Gas Inventory is regularly updated. Specific activities implemented in the previous period, which contributed to the reduction of emissions, include primarily

programmes and projects to enhance energy efficiency (in several sectors).

Despite the evident successes, the implementation of laws and policies in this field remains a significant challenge. As a rule, policy development processes and project implementation are accompanied by educational, capacity-building and awareness-raising activities. Nonetheless, overall capacities (which are the focus of target 3.3) remain limited.

As for the public perception, a survey conducted by Ipsos showed that one in five citizens of Montenegro (20%) believe that global warming and climate change are fake news, and 23% believe that reports on global warming and climate change are unrealistic and exaggerated. However, adolescents and young people identify climate change as the most important or one of the most important priorities that humanity needs to address, and 84% of the more than 900 respondents in the U-Report survey say they believe climate change is affecting Montenegro.

The views of NGOs that took part in the preparation of the Second VNR about the progress in this SDG are shown in Box 7-12



Climate change identified in the consultations as one of the most important issues of humanity and that it is affecting Montenegro

Box 7-12: Challenges for achieving SDG 13: views of NGOs



Target 13.1: A number of documents have been prepared, but their implementation in practice is the biggest problem. For some hazards, such as wildfires and floods, there is no prevention. Mutual communication, cooperation and exchange of experiences between different institutions is also a weakness. Capacities at the local level are limited in most cases, primarily with regard to the number of employees, as well as their level of training to perform certain tasks. Limited capacities are also typical for the national level.

Target 13.2: Preparation of the National Energy and Climate Plan is planned for late 2024, although the government was required to adopt it by August 2022 according to the Energy Law.

Target 13.3: Prevention and networking of all institutions involved in protection are the problem. In addition, protection and rescue services are not adequately equipped. Poor organization or assessment at the national level makes early reaction to fires difficult.

7.7.11 SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

There are 12 targets formulated under SDG 16 that are extremely relevant to Montenegrin society and most of them are closely linked to the commitments from the EU accession process (such as: targets 16.3 – The rule of law and equal access to justice; 16.4 – Combating organized crime (and other illegal activities); 16.5 – Reducing corruption; 16.6 – Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions; 16.7 – Ensuring responsible, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making). Progress in these areas has been limited in the past five years, which reflects to some extent on the slowdown in EU negotiations with the EU. According to the UN, social cohesion in Montenegro has become increasingly fragile in recent years, due to a low level of trust in institutions.⁹⁹

Under these circumstances, and for the development and achievement of this SDG, it is essential to ensure progress in achieving targets 16.3, 16.4 and 16.5 and also to restore confidence in institutions and in particular in the judiciary system. Targets 16.6 and 16.7 require better implementation of formally accepted solutions (integrated into laws) for dialogue, public participation in decision making and building of institutions that will act professionally, be protected from undue political influence and advance in knowledge and skills.

As for target 16.2 (about ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and

torture of children), Montenegro has made progress in ensuring respect for the rights of the child over the past five years, according to the available data and analyses. The most important achievements include increased coverage and quality of prenatal care for mothers and new-borns, a low and declining child mortality rate, increased coverage of children in preschool programmes and increased inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education, a reduced number of children placed in institutions and a significant number of children in conflict with the law who are referred to alternative solutions and not to criminal prosecution, as well as the generally improved status of the child in judicial proceedings. In addition, there were evident efforts to combat violence against children and ensure children's access to justice, as well as continuous efforts to reduce the number of children placed in protection institutions.¹⁰⁰

After the implementation of the first Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children against Violence (2017–2021), an Evaluation of the Strategy implementation was made with the support from UNICEF. This evaluation provided recommendations and a roadmap for preparation of a new strategic document. Among other things, it was noted that existing family support services were not sustainable. One of the evaluation's recommendations highlighted the need to consider establishment and expansion of a network of primary prevention and early intervention services, as well as specialized services for victims and perpetrators of violence, including shelters for victims of violence.

Montenegro is characterized by a serious lack of support services for children, families and victims

⁹⁹ According to the data from the Balkan Barometer published in the UN Common Country Analysis from 2021, the perception of about half of the citizens is that laws do not apply equally to everyone. The Balkan Barometer is an annual public opinion survey conducted in the Western Balkans.

¹⁰⁰ www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/reports/situation-analysis-children-and-adolescents-montenegro.



Council for the Rights of the Child re-established

of violence and exploitation.¹⁰¹ Basic services for children and families are not provided, or those services are not sustainable. Limited services that are available, such as family services, SOS helplines for children victims of violence and NGO services – psychosocial support, a telephone helpline for parents, legal aid, shelters for female and child victims of violence – do not have sustainable funding. There is also no clear vision about expanding and funding sustainably prevention services, community outreach, and child, family and victim support services, although numerous studies indicate that the existing services are limited in number and scope and do not cover the basic/essential needs of those at greatest risk.¹⁰² At the same time, budget investments in social and child protection services are worryingly low. This deserves special attention if interpreted in light of the fact that services are an essential way to prevent reliance on material benefits in the long run.

When it comes to data indicating a limited number of professionals and limited capacity of centres for social work,¹⁰³ the current state of affairs, which has lasted for many years, has made the social and child protection system primarily reactive, relying too much on institutional care, and unable to respond to the growing social and child protection risks faced by children and families in Montenegro. As for the health sector, basic services of support, counselling and work with children victims of violence and exploitation do not exist.

The development of direct family support services to prevent family separation, violence and other risks, and access to sustainable alternative services, such as foster care, represent the basis for improving protection of children in general, and especially children deprived of parental care. In order to carry out the deinstitutionalization and transformation of institutions for children without parental care, additional efforts and investments in support services for children and families at risk of child abandonment are needed. Foster care, on the other hand, as the most desirable alternative for placing children who have been removed from their biological families, needs to be strengthened and expanded. For that purpose, Montenegro needs to create conditions for the development of professional foster care, and development of new types of foster care, such as emergency foster care for children younger than 3 and for child victims of violence and exploitation, as well as specialized foster care for children with disabilities and children with behavioural disorders.

An important novelty is the re-establishment of the Council for the Rights of the Child, whose status was elevated from the ministerial level to the level of the deputy prime minister. It now includes line ministers as members, who will address improvement of a cross-sector and inter-disciplinary approach to the promotion, prevention and protection of the rights of the child, as well as oversee implementation of Montenegro's international commitments in the field of protection of the rights of children and women.

101 Roadmap for Social and Child Protection Reform (CODI analysis), UNICEF and the Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare, 2021; Roadmap for the transition from institutional placement to family and community life, based on a minimum package of community and family life support services, including costing analysis, 2019, UNICEF; Foster Care System Review, 2020, MFSW, UNICEF; Analysis of the multi-sector response to the needs of children with disabilities in Montenegro, 2020, Council for the Rights of the Child and UNICEF, 2020.

102 Government of Montenegro, Institute for Social and Child Protection and European Union supported the *Analysis of needs for scaling up and standardization of new social and child protection services in Montenegro* (G. Matković, July 2021).

103 Analysis of the work of the Centres for Social Work in Montenegro (2018), MFSW, UNICEF.

Cross-sector cooperation, as well as the coordination of support for children with disabilities and their families, is poor despite the fact that there are procedures in place for cooperation between the health, social and education sectors. Weaknesses in cooperation are also illustrated by the fact that there is no data on the number of these children, and a lack of data is typical for other areas as well. The intervention and referral systems still rely heavily on the medical model of disability assessment, and an integrated approach to provision of services for children with disabilities does not exist. Monitoring development based on standardized monitoring tools is not part of regular health practice, and developmental disabilities are not detected in a timely manner.

The full consequences of the pandemic on children's development have not been fully assessed yet, but it is already evident that the pandemic has led to an increase in the number of cases of violence against children. Centres for Social Work and organizations dealing with it recorded an increase in the number and intensity of cases of domestic violence, in which children are direct or indirect victims.¹⁰⁴

Irrespective of COVID-19, almost 66% of children aged 1–14 were exposed to physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by guardians in the month preceding the (MICS) survey.¹⁰⁵

104 https://montenegro.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Report%20on%20the%20Rapid%20Social%20Impact%20Assessment%20of%20the%20COVID-19%20outbreak%20in%20Montenegro%2C%20April-June%202020_0.pdf.

105 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2018, MONSTAT, UNICEF and UNHCR: www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/MICS/MNE/n/MNE_MICS6%20Statistical%20Snapshot%20ECD%20ENG_Montenegro%202018_FINAL.pdf.



Irrespective of COVID-19, almost 66% of children aged 1–14 were exposed to physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by guardians in the month preceding the (MICS) survey

Insufficient allocation of financial and human resources at the national and local levels leads to unequal access of the most vulnerable boys and girls to child protection services, as well as to geographical discrepancies in the coverage with services. Montenegro is not putting enough effort or investing financial resources in the development and sustainability of support services for families and children, including children who are victims of violence and exploitation. A projection of the expansion and sustainable funding of prevention and support services for children, families and victims should be made.

Despite some progress, there is an evident lack of access to justice for children due to limited understanding of children as rights holders, poor access to information on children's rights, obstacles of a legal and practical nature, a lack of data on the number of children in contact with the law and, what could be the most acute problem, deeply rooted social and cultural norms that do not recognize a child as an entity with legal rights and obligations. The lack of specialization of professionals who work with children in contact with the law and the lack of full application of standards of child-friendly justice and judicial and administrative procedures, which are not child-friendly in principle, are also an acute problem. There are also no specialized services for child victims of violence, exploitation and abuse, nor specialized professionals, who would work to reduce further traumatization and victimization of children during their examination in court. Continuous investments in the improvement of the free legal aid system for all children in Montenegro are necessary, so that they can use it without restrictions and under equal terms.



8 Monitoring and evaluation of the progress in implementing NSSD 2030 and SDGs

NSSD 2030 defines the system for monitoring national development sustainability, including implementation of goals, measures and targets from the Action Plan containing integrated global SDGs. The plan was also to connect the national reporting system with the UNEP Live platform. A complex set of indicators for monitoring NSSD 2030 and SDGs was elaborated in detail, and responsibilities of relevant entities were identified as regards collection and storage of input data for the calculation and statistical processing of indicators, as well as methods of data exchange and enabling their compatibility.

The process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation (both in 2019 when the first working report was prepared, as well as within the process of drafting the Second Report on NSSD implementation, which is expected to be finalized by mid-2022) shows that, in spite of significant efforts, very little has been accomplished as regards establishment of the planned system for monitoring the achievement of the NSSD goals or SDGs.

Four groups of indicators were defined to measure progress in the implementation of NSSD 2030:

- SDG indicators (231 unique indicator);¹⁰⁶
- National indicators (252 indicators);
- International indicators (31); and
- 10 so-called complex indicators.

The plan was to introduce these indicators in phases. Initially, 26 official and administrative data producers were identified as responsible for calculation of the indicators.¹⁰⁷

During the consultations organized in 2017 with all institutions involved in the NSSD 2030 implementation and reporting, the plan for introduction of sustainable development indicators into the Montenegrin statistical system was also updated. According to the updated status, 77 indicators should have been monitored and calculated in 2018, and 91 additional indicators should have been introduced into the statistical system of Montenegro by 2020. The plan was not carried out, while the process of preparing input analyses for the First Report on NSSD 2030 Implementation showed that 61 SDG indicators were being monitored in the country.

After the first five years of the NSSD implementation, we can say that significant steps forward were made for certain indicators/ in certain areas, but that the overall achievements are modest. A review of the available documents for SDG indicators used for the Second VNR, for example, showed that information was provided for 48 indicators, i.e. that 48 information sheets with certain values from the meta-database¹⁰⁸ were provided. Some of the indicators for which information sheets/values were provided are not

¹⁰⁶ The total number of SDG indicators listed by goals and targets is 248, but 13 are repeated under targets 2 or 3. Two hundred and forty-one SDG indicators were defined when the NSSD was adopted.

¹⁰⁷ The number varies due to changes in the organizational status of some institutions.

¹⁰⁸ Set up in 2018 within the "Establishment of the integrated system for reporting on progress in the implementation of the National Sustainable Strategy for Development (NSSD) – initial phase" project. Among other things, the project explored the possibilities for introducing IRIS (Indicator Reporting Information System), which did not happen in the end.

really monitored, as neither data in line with the UNSD definition nor similar national data exists for them. A good example is SDG indicator 1.1.1 – Proportion of the population below the international poverty line. For other SDGs, there are similar indicators that are monitored and that are fully acceptable for monitoring relevant targets, such as, for example, target 1.2.1 – Proportion of the population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age – which is not calculated according to UNSD methodology, but with an adequate replacement instead – the at-risk-of-poverty rate based on the SILC survey. Some of the delivered similar indicators are only partially adequate.

There are also indicators that were calculated only over a certain period of time (for example indicator 8.4.2/12.2.2 – Domestic material consumption (DMC)), or those whose values are available only for one year, such as indicators from the MICS survey that are relevant to multiple goals – SDGs 3, 4, 5, 6 and others).

Of the 48 delivered information sheets/indicators, majority of them concern SDG 3 (10 indicators), while none of the indicators were provided for goals 6, 13, 14 and 15; only one to two indicators were provided for SDGs 2, 5, 7, 10, 11 and 12.

8.1 Availability of quality, up-to-date and disaggregated data

The availability of quality, up-to-date and disaggregated data/indicators for NSSD 2030 and the SDGs is not at a satisfactory level, which makes it very difficult to assess the situation and continuously adjust policies and measures to ensure the goals are achieved. The importance of collecting, processing, analysing and publishing reliable, timely, high-quality and disaggregated data

on indicators to create evidence-based policies was emphasized by UN DESA as well as in numerous UN and EU analyses and reports about the situation in Montenegro. In addition, UN DESA emphasizes that providing support for national statistical systems so that they can generate detailed and comprehensive data, is essential for achieving the SDGs.¹⁰⁹

The limitations that cause poor availability of SDG and other indicators, which can be used to monitor progress, are numerous and varied. The assessment of individual goals, as well as the materials from the NSSD reporting that those assessments are based on, highlighted the weaknesses (incompleteness) or unsuitability of the primary information systems in several sectors of importance for SDGs, including health, education, environment, waste and others.

In addition, available capacities (human and technical) and time that the competent institutions can allocate for SDG indicators, data collection and analysis, given the set of priorities from their work plans and daily agendas, are also a significant limitation. Connected with this is the issue of commitment to sustainable development and NSSD 2030 itself, which often does not seem to be a priority in the planning and execution of daily obligations, despite being defined as an overarching national strategy. The complexity and fragmentation of the document may have contributed to this.

Finally, a limitation that is very important is the issue of cooperation and coordination within the joint effort to improve the system for monitoring the implementation of SDGs, especially between official statistics and administrative data producers, but also among the relevant institutions in general. There is significant room for improvement in this regard.

109 UN DESA, 2021 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report.

8.2 Recommendations to strengthen the system of progress monitoring and evaluation

Building on the previous considerations, the following recommendations can be made to improve data collection and analysis so that the SDG progress assessment (as well as the assessment of other important processes) can be made with greater certainty and that the processes of drafting and amending policies and planning documents are of better quality and better integrated:

1. In the coming period, the focus should be on identifying the priority SDG indicators and those that require little effort to be systematically calculated; examples of the latter include coverage and completion rates for different levels of education under SDG 4, forest area (15.1.1) under SDG 15 and others. The priority indicators should be agreed by the relevant institutions.
2. In cases where there are national indicators that sufficiently match the intention and content of certain SDG targets, they should be accepted as adequate and resources should be directed to other indicators/areas; a plan for the next period is necessary to identify the needs and opportunities for all 17 SDGs.
3. Formulation of indicators should be based as much as possible on information on vulnerable groups, disaggregated by sex, age and other key parameters.
4. Significant progress was made on indicators pertinent to SDG 1 after the SILC survey was conducted and its data, which provides a good basis for monitoring poverty, was published. In the coming period, efforts should be focused on the calculation of indicators 1.a.1 and 1.a.2, as well as indicator 1.b.1. (Public expenditures for poverty reduction programmes, health, education and social protection, or sectors that particularly benefit women, the poor and vulnerable groups). The calculation of these indicators should be made easier with introduction of programmatic and gender-sensitive budgeting. Indicator 1.3.1 is also very important, as it implies disaggregated data on the population covered by the social protection system.
5. In SDG 4, the emphasis should be on providing missing data in order to calculate/monitor more indicators (than now) in line with the UNSD methodology; attention should also be paid to indicators that can be used to monitor the quality of education.
6. In SDG 5, efforts should be made to continuously monitor indicators that are relatively easy to calculate – by specifying the responsibilities for data collection, calculation and reporting. An example of such an indicator is 5.5.1 on the proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament and local governments, which is now only partially monitored. Efforts are also necessary to better assess unpaid work (indicator 5.4.1).
7. Regarding the availability of indicators under SDG 14, it is very important to ensure monitoring of the status of the marine ecosystem and the availability of data on marine waste. It is also important to consider the options for improving the fisheries information system and calculation/regular full monitoring of indicator 14.4.1.

8. Regarding SDG 15, the availability of indicators on sustainable forest management should be improved (by analysing the shortcomings in the current practices and capacities of the forest information system, i.e. through better coordination and cooperation between the relevant ministry, the Forestry Administration and Monstat). The availability of data on endangered species and on the presence of different types of ecosystems in protected areas should also be improved, in relation to key biodiversity areas and through further efforts to establish the Natura 2000 network.
9. Regarding SDG 17, indicators 17.1.1 and 17.1.2 about the budget/budget revenues need to be monitored, as well as (the particularly important) indicator 17.18.1 about the statistical capacities for monitoring SDGs, once the methodology for it is defined. In addition to these, it is very important to plan and introduce, over time, development indicators that complement the gross domestic product.
10. Efforts need to be made to regularly calculate/monitor indicator 12.5.1 – Recycling rate – after the establishment of a single waste database planned for 2023.
11. The renewed NCSD should initiate and guide the dialogue of relevant institutions about the improvement of the SDG monitoring system and ensure the implementation of agreed actions. The NCSD and the SDC have a mandate and are well-positioned to contribute to that process. Furthermore, procedures should be established/responsibilities defined to ensure that the existing indicators (those already monitored by certain institutions) are regularly reported to all data users.

9 Conclusions and next steps

A snapshot of the situation, after one third of the period set for achieving SDGs and NSSD 2030 strategic goals has elapsed, shows that the SDGs (as well as the NSSD 2030 goals) are not the focus of attention of the relevant institutions in their full formulation and intention, but that significant progress has been made nevertheless in the past five years in achieving multiple goals, both through the NSSD 2030 implementation process and through other complementary processes and initiatives.

There were positive developments in achieving certain targets under all the goals that were the focus of the Second VNR, but there are also reasons for concern and significant challenges.

In SDG 1, moderate progress has been made by reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate; progress could not be assessed for multiple targets due to a lack of data. In general, it has been assessed that the country faces significant challenges in achieving SDG 1.

Regarding SDG 4, significant progress has been made in the coverage of children with early childhood development; the chances of achieving target 4.4 (skills of young people) are assessed as good. Overall, the assessment of SDG 4 is that there are challenges in achieving it.

As for gender equality, the Second VNR assessment says that the country faces significant challenges in achieving SDG 5, despite encouraging signals, such as women's empowerment and stronger (though still ineffective) responses to violence against women and girls.

Significant progress has been made under SDG 14 with introduction of an ecosystem-based approach

and designation of marine protected areas. Progress was made in protecting coastal ecosystems, but weaknesses in the management of protected areas remain. Within efforts to achieve this goal, the country continues to face a number of challenges, including a lack of data. A lack of data is also evident in goal 15, and stagnation was noted in several targets. Therefore, the assessment is that there are significant challenges for achieving SDG 15.

As for SDG 17, there has been a strong positive trend in the use of ICT, but also major challenges in the targets pertaining to data, monitoring and accountability. Overall, the assessment for this goal is that the country faces significant challenges.

As for other goals, the assessment of the Second VNR is that significant progress has been made in SDGs 3, 7, 8 and 13. On the other hand, stagnation or insufficiently fast progress was identified in SDGs 6, 9, 12 and partially in 11. Concerning trends were noted in SDGs 10 and 16, as well as in some elements of SDG 11. There was not sufficient data to assess SDG 2.

These assessments mostly coincide with those made within the process of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation (which is based on the assessment of the proportion of implemented measures from the NSSD 2030 Action Plan), while in case of some goals they deviate to some extent from those reporting assessments (for example, SDGs 9 and 12).

The Second VNR's findings about the level of implementation of SDGs in the period 2016–2021 offer a basis for formulation of several recommendations for next steps:

1. **For a more accurate and reliable situation assessment, the system of reporting on NSSD 2030 implementation needs to be improved.** Creation of a proper system should start from the existing infrastructure and procedures, bearing in mind **the need to improve the availability of quality, reliable and timely data and the need for exchange with international institutions.**
2. **Support should be provided for the statistical system and other administrative data producers to monitor SDGs, with stronger coordination through the NCSD and other mechanisms.**
3. **Implementation of the NSSD 2030 needs to intensify, possibly by updating the Strategy/ Action Plan in the coming period** in order to reflect new challenges and integrate previous experiences in the implementation of SDGs. The strategy should be adapted to the needs and possibilities, **and greater commitment to the implementation and monitoring should be ensured through the NCSD.** Emphasis should be put on the responsibility of leading entities, both in implementation and in monitoring and reporting.
4. **The long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic remains to be assessed.** Available indicators for 2021 show that the economy is recovering, but every opportunity should be used to put the future development and overcoming of problems, created or deepened by the pandemic, on a better footing than they were before 2020. **Success in achieving the SDGs will also depend on how much we have learned from the COVID-19 crisis and how we will use the lessons learned.**
5. **Responsible entities need to identify the priority goals and targets and focus on those in which the country is lagging behind, as well as those that are essential for the society's further development and in which the synergy with the requirements of the EU accession process is strongest** (such as SDGs 1, 13, 14, 15, 16 and others).
6. **SDG 1 provides a good framework for the formulation and implementation of poverty reduction policies that are currently not explicitly formulated; data and citizens' perceptions show that this is a significant problem of Montenegrin society, which particularly affects children.** In addition to the economic and social policy measures, achieving goal 16 (about an inclusive society, strong institutions and access to justice), as well as goal 10 (about reducing inequality), could contribute significantly to poverty reduction. **A more effective regional development policy and better implementation** (with opportunities to use EU funds in the future) **is also needed.**
7. **Complementarity between the requirements of Agenda 2030 and EU accession should be used to the fullest extent possible.** This is particularly relevant for goals 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 14, 14, 15 and 16.
8. Further efforts are needed in SDG 4 to cover vulnerable categories and target the needs of children with lower access to education, using targeted support. **Education quality improvement is a *conditio sine qua non* for the country's sustainable development.** The messages heard during the VNR consultation process also support this. In addition to positive trends, there are certain aspects in which more needs to be achieved regarding the exercising of children's rights. **Adequate responses to peer violence are also needed.**

9. **SDG 5 requires intensified activities,** especially in the targets pertaining to the elimination of arranged/underage marriages, elimination of violence, exercising of equal rights to property and resources, and the full participation of women in decision making.
10. **Consistent implementation and better control of regulations** are needed to reap the full benefits of positive developments **in marine environment management policy.**
11. **SDG 15 and environment-related goals** (primarily SDG 6, 12, 13) **also require implementation of the policies adopted in the previous period,** as well as significant investments and mindset changes.
12. **The analysis of the funding of some SDGs from the national budget showed that some activities did not receive adequate support** (for example, school infrastructure, implementation of marine monitoring programmes, water management budgets, and gender equality). **Given the high amount of estimated funds needed to meet the requirements of EU accession in the field of the environment, all sources of funding need to be mobilized** (SDG target 17.1) and the use of economic instruments/fees based on the principle "the beneficiary/polluter pays" needs to be improved. **A higher level of funding sustainable development policies from the private sector needs to be achieved as well.** Analysis of expenditures for individual SDGs should be continuously possible.
13. **Further improvement of the coordination and involvement of all actors are necessary; public opinion should be heard. The NCSD has a key role to play in these matters.**
14. **Analyses of public policies should always include an analysis of their impact on vulnerable groups** and ensure that the measures do not harm them, that they are not left behind and that they get help.

Finally, as the most important recommendation and a guiding idea for the next steps in the implementation of SDGs in Montenegro, we offer the views and specific quotes of those citizens who participated in the online VNR consultation process. The following messages were most frequently heard as answers to the question of what kind of country they would like to see 10 years from now:

Economically more developed, with zero poverty, focused on domestic production and the energy sector, agriculture, renewable energy sources, technologies, with more developed tourism. A country with a lower corruption rate, better quality of education, a stable health system and higher employment rate, a country with developed health and eco-tourism, and larger investments in the north. A country of the rule of law, which preserves its cultural and historical heritage, and nurtures creative industries. Multi-ethnic, with a higher birth rate, ecological, clean, with improved infrastructure and a higher level of environmental awareness, with an adequate waste management system, green energy, a more developed north, higher production of food, especially organic food.

Some of the specific quotes are presented in Box 9-1.

Box 9-1: Montenegro 2030: How do you see it, what would you like it to be like?



Green, clean, people talking less about political, religious and national divisions. To raise education to a higher level. The birth rate to increase.

It is a short period for some major changes (it is 2022 now), but here is an optimistic scenario: in 2030, the labour market is better, because if people do not have a job, they can hardly think about sustainability of any other kind. All houses have solar panels, plastic bags are a thing of the past...

A green, modern, ecological state in the full sense of the word...

Exactly as was declared a long time ago – ecological!

A country where people live in harmony with nature and not with capital.

A country of equal opportunities, a country where people come to stay, and do not leave...

A country with 50% of women in the parliament and where women own 30% of businesses. This is a prerequisite for the other sustainable development goals.

Unfortunately, I am not optimistic that anything will ever get better in this country.

A happier country... There are indicators that go beyond GDP, which are not measured by economic development and the poverty rate. It would be wonderful if people were happier. "Gross national happiness is a set of collective conditions that are generally necessary for a good life", Buddhist monks in Bhutan claim.



