Serbia

19		
18 17 16 15		**Upper secondary school** **General** (26 %) **Vocational** (74 %)
14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6	**Compulsory schooling**	**Primary & lower secondary school (Common track)**
5 4 3		**Pre-school**

33% Population aged 30-34 with a tertiary degree [a]

9.1% Percentage of immigrant stock (% population) [b]

9.5% Population below the poverty line [c]

16% Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) [d]

Average TIMSS/PIRLS scores (4th grade) [e]

Center point: 500

Reading	Math	Science
NA	508	517

Average PISA scores (10th grade) [f]

OECD average

Reading	Math	Science
439 *487*	448 *489*	440 *489*

3.6% public spending in education as a % of GDP [g]

0.38 billions allocated in NPRR [h]

Sources: a, b, c, d, g: World Bank Indicators ; e: TIMSS 2019 report, PIRLS 2016 report; f: PISA 2018 results, h: European Commission

General features

Educational system

In Serbia compulsory education starts at 6, with the last year of pre-primary school, and lasts until pupils are 14 years old. Similar to other eastern countries (such as Slovak Republic) primary and lower secondary grades are grouped together into a single school, where students follow approximately a common curriculum. The educational system is mostly public, with a negligible percentage of students (around 1%) enrolled in private secondary education[133]. The official language of instruction is Serbian, but education is also provided in 8 other languages (Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, and Croatian, Hungarian, Rumanian, Ruthenian and Slovak), depending on the presence of ethnic minorities in the territory. However, the curriculum is the same for everybody. Available upper secondary school tracks are (i) general education (which lasts 4 years) (ii) 4-year vocational schools (iii) 3-year vocational schools. Access to higher education is guaranteed upon being awarded a high-school diploma, which can be achieved by attending general education or a 4-year vocational school and passing a final examination. The percentage of youth not in employment nor in education and training (NEET) is high and amounts to 16%. The proportion of early school leaver was 5.6%[134], a proportion comparable to other neighbouring countries[135]. The share of people with tertiary educational attainment is 33%, lower than the EU average.

Governance and funding

Public education is free for everybody. The majority of the funding comes from the central government (80%), followed by local governments (15%) and provinces (5%). The central government is mostly in charge of administrative expenses, such as teacher salaries, while local governments take care of operational expenses. Local authorities are also in charge of coordinating and implementing any financing related to inclusive education.

Performance

According to the last PISA assessment (2018), although Serbia performs better than other western Balkan countries[136], scores are still lower than the OECD average in all the subjects of the assessment (reading, maths and science). The percentage of students who reached basic skills in reading, maths and science was lower than the OECD average in all subjects: (respectively 62% 60% 62% compared to OECD averages of 77% 76% and 78%). The gender gap in reading is in favour of girls (36 percentage point), higher than the OECD average (30), while in science and maths the gap between boys and girls is not significantly different. Socio-economically advantaged students outperformed disadvantaged ones by 73 score points, a number that is smaller than the OECD average of 89, and 13%, (OECD average: 11%) was able to score in the top quarter for reading. Among high-achieving students, a conspicuous percentage of disadvantaged ones (13%) expected not to complete tertiary education, compared to roughly 2% of the advantaged students.

Key policy challenges

According to OECD (2020) the level of spending in education is still low, although the trend has been increasing in the past few years.

Early school leaving and segregation in the educational system remain problematic posing a serious threat of equity: school dropout rates are high especially among ethnic minorities, such as Roma girls. Jointly with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, UNICEF created the Monitoring Framework for Inclusive Education in Serbia, which defines indicators, provides guidelines on how to conduct the collection of data and defines targets[137]. Despite these efforts, **there is still a lack of a unified monitoring and evaluation system, fundamental to assess the effectiveness and inform policies**.

As Serbia works to develop a new national education strategy for 2030, it needs **strong evaluation and assessment systems to detect and address areas of low and inequitable performance.**

Recently enacted policies and investments

Despite the lack of a comprehensive framework for targeting educational interventions, some efforts have been made by the government to advance the digital transformation of the education sector and allow to cope with remote learning and digital

[133] UNESCO 2019

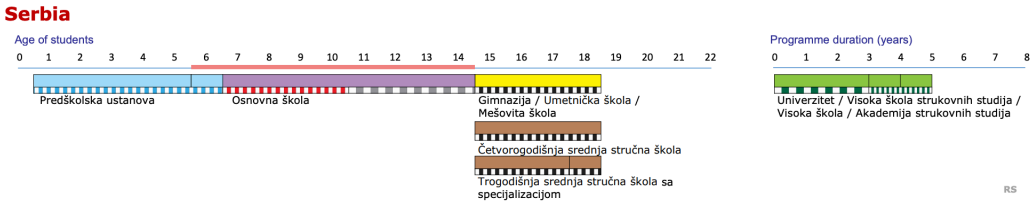
[134] Enlargement countries - education statistics

[135] North Macedonia (5.7 % of young men and 5.8 % of young women) and Montenegro (5.2 % of young men and 4.9 % of young women – 2019 data)

[136] https://pisabyregion.oecd.org/serbia/

[137] https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/reports/monitoring-framework-inclusive-education-serbia

Figure 1.10: Educational system in Serbia



Source:

The Structure of the European Education Systems 2021/22, Eurydice. European Commission

divide in the aftermath of COVID-19.

In 2021 the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed a €1.2 million grant for supporting the successful implementation of the Connected Schools Programme in Serbia. This funding complements the €65 million EIB loan signed in 2020 for improving digital capacities and skills in over 1500 schools in Serbia. The EIB backed a €65 million loan to upgrade digital infrastructures and digital teaching materials, as well as teacher training (with UNICEF support)[138]. According to Eurostat, the level of individual digital skills in Serbia has increased from 32% in 2015 to 46% in 2019. In 2018, there were 2 000 digitally equipped classroom across Serbia which raised to over 10000 in 2019. Moreover, computer science has became compulsory for first graders, while programming has been introduced in the third grade starting from the academic year 2020/2021 [139].

[138] EIB 2020
[139] EIB 2020