Evaluation of the “SDGs for All” Project– Fostering the participatory implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia” Phase 2 (2022-2025)

Main Report

February 2025

Acknowledgments

The evaluation team Ion Craciunel and Biljana Ledican ,SDC and GIZ would like to express their gratitude to the many stakeholders who contributed their time and knowledge to inform this evaluation report.

Disclaimer

The analysis and recommendations of this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the SDC. This is an independent evaluation report undertaken by external reviewers.

Table of Contents

ABBREVIATIONS AND ADDENDA 4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5
INTRODUCTION 6
METHODOLOGY 8
EVALUATION FINDINGS 9
SOME LESSONS LEARNT 21
MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS 22
ANNEXES 23
Annex 1 List of interviewees - internal only
Annex 2 List of Consulted documents
Annex 3 Interpretation of Indicators - internal only
Annex 4 Terms of references

ABBREVIATIONS AND ADDENDA

BFPE	Foundation Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence for a Responsible Society
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
BOS	Belgrade Open Schools
CDF	Centre for Democracy Foundation
CEVES	Centre for Advanced Economic Studies
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DAC	Development Assistance Criteria
EC	European Commission
ERP	Economic Reforms Programme
EU	European Union
Eurostat	European Statistics. Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union, responsible for publishing high-quality Europe-wide statistics and indicators.
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
IFD	Investment Facilitation for Development
LSGs	Local self-governments
MEI	Ministry of European Integration
MHMRSD	Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue
NDP	National Development Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPS	Public Policies Secretariat
SECO PFM	Secretariat for Economic Affair Public Finance Management
SCTM	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SORS	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN RCO	United Nations Regional Coordinator's Office
TOC	Association for Sustainable Communities
TOR	Terms of Reference
VNR	Voluntary National Report
WB	World Bank

II EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is prepared by a team of two external evaluators during the period October-December 2024 and based on a ToR launched by SDC in mid- 2024.It has a predominant review focus on the effectiveness of the overall Project and to specifically assess the achievements and lessons learned of “SDG for All” Phase II drawing the overall conclusions on the Project's progress since it began and formulating recommendations for the remaining period of the Project.

According to the Terms of Reference, the purpose of this evaluation is “to examine the extent to which the Project has achieved its planned objectives and outcomes”.

The evaluation has been conducted through a desk review, included a 4 days field visit to Serbia and a final synthesis phase. Some evaluation challenges occurred in relation to the offered length for the evaluation, organization of field visits and reducing the number of visited municipalities and availability of key interlocutors within the timeframe of the evaluation and the existent institutional memories related to the Project activities.

The evaluation is based on the assessment of the OECD criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact and sustainability and it has taken into account the range of evaluation questions provided in the ToR which were reshuffled and aggregated through the inception period for a better adaptation to the context of the evaluation.

The report outlines main conclusions for all criteria (linked to a list of 19 key identified and developed findings through the text) as follows:

Conclusions on Relevance: The Project has remained highly relevant in all its components to the challenging implementation circumstances and to the needs of its beneficiaries. Its continuation through an intensified bottom-up approach could bring even more benefits in the current context.

Conclusions on Coherence: Some complementarity with EU agenda in the country emerges. The Project reflects only random linkages to other projects and donors and insufficiently using UN global thematic expertise. Involvement of Academia seems insufficient.

Conclusion on Effectiveness: The Project has been effective at both central and local level but it requires a reflection on its lessons learnt and further influencing potential at the central level while trying to maximise its mainstreaming efforts at local level where success potential appears higher.

Conclusions on Efficiency: The Project seems well-managed and overall costly effective and so far not posing implementation challenges or critical risks. SDC has provided recommendations to the Project to improve budget design and refining logical framework indicators which were duly considered. The budget allocated to the activities performed by the Platform is regarded as rather narrow but manageable. More flexibility on approving the communication and visibility materials needed. Risk assessment is realistic but rather repetitively analysed through the provided reports.

Conclusions on Impact and Sustainability: The impact is visibly emerging at both central and local levels despite a rapidly changing external environment. Need to accentuate the ownership of the Project results. Sustainability of the Platform is of concern and securing of

a credible Sustainability Plan for the Project remains of high priority to this Phase of the Project.

The report also reflects several lessons learnt detected by the evaluators and making possible to suggest the bellow seven major recommendations to both the funders and implementers of the Project:

R1	Search for pragmatic solutions to maintain the functionality of the current Platform beyond the Project's end in 2025.
R2	Further investments in similar Projects may also include the UN and be based on signing of a cooperation protocol with the Government of Serbia to secure sufficient governmental support and continuity.
R3	Need for revision of the Project Operational Plans, updated risks and creation of reserve plans with the aim to maximization of the impact
R4	Develop a solid sustainable plan for all Project components
R5	Exploration of closer synergies and creation of an effective coordination system with UN and other donors in the country to enhance achievement of SDGs in Serbia
R6	Allow for more and direct exposure and thus motivation for the Government Officials on how SDGs are complementing the EU Agenda in European countries (possibly combination of old new EU Member States) from ministries to LGs through learning visits and events
R7	Reaching an urgent consensus among Pillars participants on the future format of the Platform is crucial

The primary beneficiary of the evaluation report is SDC. The sharing of this evaluation report with third parties is at the SDC's discretion.

III INTRODUCTION

Description of the Project context

The UN has introduced in 2015 the 2030 Agenda as an universal strategy and aiming that countries will mobilize all resources in order to achieve targets by 2030. The 2030 Agenda has 17 goals comprising all three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection[1].

The Republic of Serbia (hereafter Serbia) has committed to contributing to achievement of the 2030 Agenda and according to the UN Sustainable Development Report Serbia ranks 35th out of 167 countries, with a sustainable development index of 77.03[2], compared to 2023, when that index was 77.30"[3].

The governments of Germany and Switzerland support Serbia in its efforts by the current "SDGs for ALL" Project, amongst other projects, which is part of a broader initiative "Public Finance Reform – 2030 Agenda"[4], funded by the German (Federal) Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by GIZ. The SDC contribution is earmarked to the "SDGs for All" component (hereafter the Project) which is co-financed by SDC and BMZ. Its budget amounts to CHF 4,700'000 and the Project has been implemented in two phases Phase I: 2019 – 2022 and an ongoing Phase II: 2022 – mid 2025. The first phase has not been subject to an evaluation but extended by an internal memo.

[1] Home » | SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
[2] Sustainable Development Report 2024
[3] National Strategic Framework of Serbia in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals - German Cooperation in Serbia
[4] Implementing public finance reform – 2030 Agenda - giz.de

The Project localizes the SDGs to align with the national priorities, accelerates their implementation, and monitors progress through a participatory process involving the government, local self-governments, and non-state actors. A Platform has been established in March 2020 to foster dialogue and cooperation between state and non-state actors. The Platform consists of a Consortium of 7 civil society organizations being structured in three Pillars according to the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental.

The Pillars cover the following SDGs:

Social Pillar	Economic Pillar	Environmental Pillar
Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and	Goal 7: Affordable and Clean
Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being	Goal 10: Reduced Inequality	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
Goal 4: Quality	Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and	Goal 13: Climate Action
Goal 5: Gender	Goal 16: Peace and Justice Strong	Goal 14: Life Below Water
		Goal 15: Life on Land

The implementers of the above Pillars are:

Pillar 1: Foundation Ana and Vlade Divac in partnership with the Center for Democracy Foundation (CDF); Pillar 2: Center for Advanced Economic Studies (CEVES) in partnership with the TOC – Association for Sustainable Communities Development; Pillar 3: Belgrade Open School (BOS) in partnership with the Foundation BFPE for a Responsible Society.

An additional organization Smart Kolektiv works to improve knowledge and better understanding of SDGs within the corporate sector, and their inclusion in business strategies.

The Platform has a rotating Secretariat in which all organizations participate. Goal 17 "Partnerships to achieve the Goals" is of cross-cutting nature and covered by all three pillar coordinators equally.

In the first phase, the Platform has implemented activities across 10 municipalities: Užice, Požega, Priboj, Sremski Karlovci, Zaječar, Bor, Knjaževac, Pirot, Apatin and Sombor while currently it continues with 31 municipalities and having the municipalities of Sombor, Apatin, Zajecar, Uzice. Pozega and Pirot in the second phase.

The current key stakeholders of the Project at national level include the Public Policy Secretariat, line Ministries (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the European Integration, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue), and the Statistical Office which are also members of the Project Steering Group.

The EU reform and accession process is a priority of Serbian Government. Nonetheless, at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development Goals held in September 2023, Serbia renewed its commitment to 2030 Agenda[5].

However, a 2023 State Audit Institution's Report[6] underlines certain gaps indicating that "*Serbia has shown its willingness to incorporate SDGs into its national context, but it is necessary to define long-term national development priorities and establish continuous coordination of all competent authorities and interested parties*". It has also recommended

[5] Serbia Reaffirms its Commitment to Agenda 2030 at the SDG Summit in New York | United Nations in Serbia

[6] 2023-2-Ciljevi odrzivog razvoja.pdf

"*the adoption of the Development Plan" and a decision of the establishment of a new Interdepartmental Working Group for the implementation of the UN Agenda on Sustainable Development until 2030*" and "*to create a National Roadmap for Statistics for SDGs, which represents a strategy for measuring progress in their achievement in Serbia*". The deadline to implement the audit recommendations is set by December 2024.

With direct help of the Project, the National Roadmap for Statistics was finalised in mid-November 2024[7] . An Inter-ministerial Working Group has been established on 20th December 2024. . Moreover, Serbia hold several elections which resulted in a lack of continuous work and coordinating activities among state authorities and other stakeholders regarding the SDGs.

In April 2024, the Public Policy Secretariat published its latest report **"**Serbia and the 2030 Agenda – Mapping the National Strategic Framework in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals**"** for 2023[8] underlining the progress and the remaining areas needing attention ahead "*in the previous period, the greatest progress in terms of the level of SDG coverage was achieved in planning documents in the areas of health, economic growth and decent work, as well as in the area of adaptation to climate change. The coverage of SDGs in the areas of food availability, reduction of inequality and responsible consumption and production are somewhat less covered by the existing planning framework. In the coming period, the determination of sectoral goals through public policy documents in the areas of social protection, traffic development, as well as cultural development would contribute to increasing the coverage of SDGs*".[9]

Purpose of the Evaluation

This external evaluation has a predominant review focus on the effectiveness of the overall Project and to specifically assess the achievements and lessons learned of "SDG for All" Phase II drawing the overall conclusions on the Project's progress since it began and formulating recommendations for the remaining period of the Project. According to the Terms of Reference, the purpose of this evaluation is "to examine the extent to which the Project has achieved its planned objectives and outcomes".

IV METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the Project has been guided by a ToR prepared by SDC and conducted during the period October-December 2024. It included a desk review, 4 days field visits to Serbia and a final synthesis phase. A list of meetings and interviews is included in the Annex1. The list of key informants has been provided by GIZ and SDC while the evaluation team has been allowed to recommend some additions. The selection of the two municipalities to be included in the evaluation it was solely the decision of the GIZ and SDC considering mainly geographical distance and conditions to travel, timelines and length of performed activities and level of participation in the Project etc. The Information collection has been carried out through a variety of tools, such as structured documentary analysis; individual in-depth non structured interviews; collective semi-structured interviews; "rapid appraisal techniques" for observation and informal consultation during field visits.

[7] sajt-nacionalna-mapa-puta_za_statistiku_eng.pdf
[8] rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Srbija-i-Agenda-2030.-februar-2024.-lat.pdf
[9] National Strategic Framework of Serbia in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals - German Cooperation in Serbia

The evaluation is based on the assessment of the OECD criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact and sustainability and it has taken into account the range of evaluation questions provided in the ToR which were limitedly reshuffled and aggregated through the inception report for a better adaptation to the context of the evaluation. The overall approach to the evaluation has been non experimental and its methodology based on triangulation, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to build and test a picture of the above mentioned criteria.

There have been no significant unexpected effects during the Project and due to the ongoing implementation, rather than using complex evaluation matrix and indicators to define to what extent the Project is successful, the used methods of the evaluation has included collecting information for supporting the identification of some emerging issues and lesson learnt at more horizontal level by using of a mixed-methods approach to answer the evaluation questions. The evaluators has reviewed a variety of project documentation and reports and the consulted bibliography it is included in the Annex 2.

V EVALUATION FINDINGS

Relevance

The analysis aimed to measure: the responsiveness of the Project to the emerging challenges and opportunities within Serbia; to the extent to which the Project has been aligned with, or have enhanced, national policies and strategies aimed at sustainable development and EU integration; the level of engagement with stakeholders to ensure the usefulness of the Project addressing their needs.

Finding 1: The Project is highly relevant at both national and local levels.

Despite the abovementioned contextual challenges, the Project continued to sustain good level of partnership with both public and civil sectors to promote constructive, evidence-based, policy-making and public dialogue on sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda.

The Platform has extensively promoted the alignment of public policies with SDGs, inputting with policy recommendations the institutional stakeholders and actively participating in their Working Groups for the development of various sectoral policies and strategies. It has included specific technical assistance to PPS and line ministries.

The relevance is particularly evidenced by various tailored activities at both national and local level which is highly praised by all interlocutors of this evaluation.

Overall, the Platform has been providing extensive advocacy support organizing a series of public events on SDG-related topics and conducting advocacy campaigns on a range of issues such as the adoption of the Social Protection Strategy, the improvement of the business environment for SMEs and Serbia's accession to the EU Trading Emissions Market. Particularly, as regards the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue (MHMRSD), the Platform assisted with enabling social dialogue on issues related to the SDGs aimed at raising awareness on the 2030 Agenda at national and local level among state and non-state structures.

Another important milestone is the organization of inter-municipal learning and exchange events on SDG-related topics such as environmental protection, local economic development and the integration of a gender perspective in policy planning at the local levels.

Finding 2: The Project has been fully relevant to the needs of the engaged stakeholders.

Closely linked to the above, the evaluation interviews revealed that the Project has been demonstrating relevance to the needs of their stakeholders. Provision of qualified methodological expertise in drafting of the local development plans has been mostly appreciated together with the support in generating data and publications on SDGs in Serbia at the Statistical Office.

The Platform has been offering a perspective on 2030 Agenda implementation from the point of view of the civil sector by publishing their regular monitoring report and such input is reportedly beneficially and constantly used by the institutional stakeholders. The SORS Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of SDGs in Serbia[10] produced with the support of the Project has been indicated as a step forward and regarded as a solid reference for assessing 2030 Agenda implementation in Serbia and having also a solid focus on vulnerable groups. The Report underlines "*the SDGs for All Project contributed to developing nationally recognized Leave no one behind briefs with focus on vulnerable groups. At the same time, the monitoring reports published by the SDGs for All Platform give a perspective on 2030 Agenda implementation from the point of view of the civil sector*".

Finding 3: The Project demonstrated adaptability to the contextual challenges, but amplification of a bottom-up approach may be needed.

While the Project demonstrated maintaining a balanced significance at both national and local level, majority of interviewees have indicated that strengthening its focus towards local levels and by adopting a bottom–up approach may be more beneficial. While the further developments at national level remain dependent on the political and institutional commitments agendas (see context above) and the Project shall continue its support, interlocutors also indicated that "much is needed at local levels" by mostly intensifying some activities .For instance, the need to collect rapidly updated baseline data from local levels for reporting remains a major constrain as stressed by the Statistical Office.

The technical and process support of the Project to the elaboration of a number of Local Development Plans that consider SDGs appears as a comprehensive exercise to mainstream SDGs in local development planning and this has been also unanimously praised through the evaluation interaction.

The Project has been also able to strengthen and multiply its support at the local level by provision of financial support to local CSOs for promoting sustainable development in their local communities by establishing the Local Sustainability Fund administered by BOS, as the Environmental Pillar of the Platform.GIZ reports that "by the end of September, two of the three grantees, EPUS from Leskovac and Zlatibor circle from Cajetina held public events on the topics of green growth in the municipality of Vlasotince and the incorporation of SDGs into local planning documents in the municipality of Cajetina, respectively". A visit to the Green Sad NGO grantee has revealed the local efforts of a promoter led by youth of SDGs and sustainable agricultural practices among some municipalities in the Vojvodina region with high relevance and mainstreaming added value to the goals of the Project. Such re-granting approach through active local independent actors could be further explored as it appears as highly relevant in terms of visibility of the project activities and in effectively creating a link between national and local levels for the Project.

[10] Progress Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the Republic of Serbia (Report for 2023)-ENG.pdf

The evaluation team has been able to detect that significant support has been provided by the Platform in terms of generating data on vulnerable groups at the local level through the social mapping research in some selected municipalities (Apatin, Sombor, Zrenjanin, Arilje, Nova Varos) which has been particularly praised by the national and local interlocutors as a best practice and with high potential for replication.

Conclusions on Relevance: The Project has remained highly relevant in all its components to the challenging implementation circumstances and to the needs of its beneficiaries. Its continuation through an intensified bottom-up approach could bring even more benefits in the current context.

Coherence:

This Chapter examined the interactions with other ongoing development initiatives in Serbia related to the Agenda 2030 to try to identify what mechanisms are in place to ensure coordination and avoid duplication of efforts among different actors and detect any comparative advantages and disadvantages of the work of Platforms members in comparison with other organisations.

Finding 4: Complementarity of the Project to the overall implementation of the EU-led Reform Agenda and EU integration efforts in the country is visible.

The 2022 Annual Project Report[11] underlines that "*given that EU integration is Serbia's strategic goal and all reforms are geared towards the attainment of that goal, there is full consensus to implement the sustainable development goals through the EU integration process*". The follow up 2024 Report[12] assesses that *"the sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia cannot be seen separately from the process of European integration. The principles of the 2030 Agenda as well as the SDGs are an integral part of European policies and legislation. Accordingly, the process of the European integrations is an integral part of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, given that by harmonizing with EU policies and regulations in the accession process of the Republic of Serbia, it inevitably contributes to the realization of the SDGs. The process of prioritization of the SDGs in the Republic of Serbia should follow the same principle and standards established within the EU, which means that all planning documents of the Republic of Serbia, including public policy documents, should be drafted and in accordance with the EU accession policy and the 2030 Agenda*" and those have been confirmed through this evaluation interviews. The Project is indicated by the interviewees as bringing complementarity to the design and overall implementation of the overall EU Agenda in Serbia despite there are also some shared opinions that most of the Governmental priorities focus on implementation of the EU *Acquis* and organization of the Expo 2027.

The Project has provided inputs towards various strategic reports including the Programme for Public Policy Management and Regulatory Reform with Action Plan for the Period 2021-2025 prepared by PPS and maintaining a mainstreaming scope of SDGs and 2030 Development Agenda.

As part of the EU integrations process, in 2023, Serbia became included in the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. This mean more structural reforms to be incorporated into the Reform Agenda, additional commitments but also a possibility to identify the complementarities between SGD and just green transition Agenda. Under the general political

[11] Serbia-and-2030-Agenda_November-2021.pdf
[12] Srbija-i-Agenda-2030.-februar-2024.-lat.pdf

guidelines set by the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), the Republic of Serbia adopted the SEE 2030 Strategy committing itself to achieving 45 distinct socio-economic targets aligned with the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, the Strategy for the Fight Against Corruption 2024-2028 was also adopted along the way

The 2023 report[13] on Economic Reform Programme was the first EU required report that included (linked SDGs with Serbian strategic reforms).The new Reform Programme resulting from the EU Growth Plan is overall regarded as potentially benefiting from the Project data although at the time of this evaluation, the design process of a new ERP portal was ongoing and there are were institutional discussions with EU on its future roles and ownership.

The EU complementarity is also visible through the used Eurostat methodology by the Statistical Office in its latest report[14] to monitor the progress on SDGs achievement.

Finding 5: The UN participation appears as not being maximised.

The field interviews revealed that the cooperation with UN agencies has been sporadic but somehow reinforcing during 2024 as GIZ and UN have cooperated on the production of the latest monitoring report of the Statistical Office. UN declares it has been only sporadically invited in the Project Steering meetings. As the UN is a custodian of the SDGs mainstreaming process in many countries it considers "more could have been achieved had UN be included in the overall mechanism of the Project". Meantime, GIZ reports UNRCO was invited to each Project Steering meetings but their presence was only sporadic and that the Project team has met UN Habitat several times to discuss synergies and cooperation options with the SDG Localization Programme in Serbia.

In Serbia, UN RCO considers it is necessary to continue the work on developing new indicators and provide adequate support for the Statistical Office to set up a sustainable system but equally enough it is necessary to secure sustainability of harvesting data for the existing indicators in order not to lose the momentum and valuable data input and continuity. The UN will by default be continuing development of new indicators that they will need for their cooperation frameworks. UNICEF, for example, was unable to convince the Government in Serbia to invest in continuing harvesting of information for particular indicators, such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey[15] (MICS), an international household survey programme used to assess the situation of children and women. MICS has provided valuable data for SDG monitoring. The next round of MICS has the capacity to produce data for 40 SDG indicators under 11 different goals – comprising 43 percent of all household survey-based SDG indicators. MICS are conducted every 5 years. The next round of MICS for Serbia was planned for 2024, but not sufficient funds could be raised.

UNDP currently implements at central level a project "The SDG Leadership Lab" project focused on direct support to the President's Cabinet and indicated as working in rather isolation of other related initiatives.

Finding 6: Offering opportunities for enlarged Project participation of Academia and closer steering communication could have been more beneficial.

The offered feedback from the interviews varies from having full appreciation for the multi-stakeholders approach within the Project - regarded as highly beneficial to the systematic mainstreaming of the SDGs in the country, but also a criticism on the limited academia participation in the Project and representation in its Steering Committee The roles of Universities in SDGs are considered to be a core of the 2030 Agenda according to United Nations. The Target 4.3 refers specifically to universities by demanding equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. Hence, the vital role that may have been better explored by the Project but also on another side there is the specific role that the participation of academia in platforms

[13] 8de2f821-f453-4fd5-9cad-f9aa90c6ef9d_en

[14] Progress Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the Republic of Serbia (Report for 2023)-ENG.pdf

[15] SRB (1).pdf

has an added value and that it the research that universities may offer when it comes to analysing the process of implementation of 2030 Agenda.
Action-oriented research, with an understanding of its different users such policymakers as well as the private sector in addition to CSOs seems necessary. University researchers and students are participating hands-on in projects with their expertise, time and financial resources. And finally, universities are the primary institutions for the dissemination of knowledge, through teaching, and for the generation of new knowledge, through research. These aspects make universities essential players in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Involvement of academia seems ever more momentous given the Government's endorsement of the "Decade of Science" at the UN SDG Summit in September 2023.
It has been also noted by various stakeholders that Project Steering Committee could benefit from more interactive and timely lengthier participation in their sessions as those sessions were short and being rather formal with insufficient time for extended discussions.

Finding 7: Operational synergies with other SDC and EU actions appeared rather random, there are risks of overlapping socio-economic activities that other donors similarly implement at the local levels.

While the Project seems well-informed on the activities of other initiatives at central level, the evaluation team detects that a clear strategy for ensuring synergy or to avoid duplication with other EU and SDC projects is lacking. The participation of the Platform in range of events of other donors appear overall rather opportunistic at local level or mostly counting on organization of sessions based on the availability of their subcontracted partners. The initial concept of the Platform has emphasised the opportunity to create extensive synergies through close partnering with a variety of organizations and donors which could not be entirely detected through the evaluation interviews. There are some illustrative examples reported by GIZ on the Platform participating" in the working groups within the National Convention of the EU Convention provide inputs to various initiatives and processes run by the Convention, thus ensuring synergies of the Platform with priorities stemming from the EU accession process".
At the end of 2023, the Project Steering Committee has also emphasised "*the need and desire to continue the synergetic coordination and cooperation with other technical cooperation projects, especially at the local level".* In the project documentation, SDC has insisted in its approval note that *"synergies may be needed, especially at the local levels*" aiming largely to increasing connectivity "to situational assessments in different sectors and contributing to coordinated civic participation in policy-making".
Another aspect is linked to the applicable selection criteria of the targeted municipalities which may include an in-depth analysis of the local context to ensure that beside their needs there are no risks of duplication with other donors and similar projects activities. The Project Steering Committee has also requested creation of "a regional mapping, to visually show in which municipalities the project is operating and to disclose selection criteria" while "special attention should be given to underdeveloped municipalities especially in Serbia's south and the Western region". The evaluation team could not identify a distinct follow-up on the creation of such mapping.

Conclusions on Coherence: Some complementarity with EU agenda in the country emerges. The Project reflects only random linkages to other projects and donors and insufficiently using UN global thematic expertise. Involvement of Academia seems insufficient.

Effectiveness:

The effectiveness of a Project can be defined as the extent to which an organization manages to deliver products and services according to its intentions and the contribution it makes to stated outcomes. Here, the relevance, quality and opportunity of the performed activities are also explicitly taken into account while the primary focus is on the Project's performance in terms of the level of implementation of the planned activities and created outputs and key factors that have facilitated or hindered their achievement and any emerging lessons and good practices.

Finding 8: Effective contribution to the declared objectives of the Project appears reasonable but strongly influenced by external factors.

The Annual Project reports highlight so far a good progress on reaching its specific objectives and targets. At the end of June 2024, GIZ report logframe highlights that 72 indicators were achieved and representing a 52.5% rate against a 50% targeted value and " 58% of the SDG targets prioritized by the SDG for All Platform show a positive trend comparing to the overall 60% targeted value. Partial progress is recorded in relation to SDG16[16] (with 3 targets showing positive trends, 1 shows negative trend) and possibly influenced by the existent public policies as" while governments have a leading role to play, the achievement of SDG 16 depends on a 'whole of society' approach that engages all relevant stakeholders across and at all levels of government"[17]

As illustrated above in the Relevance section and Contextual analysis, the Platform is actively engaged at both central and local levels to foster the mainstreaming and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and participate in decision-making and monitoring of the Government's work on the 2030 Agenda. The practical engagement of the members through related policy inputs contributions, dialogue stimulation and professional interactions are highly acknowledged by all beneficiaries. The Project has also provided light support to the Supreme Audit Institution that assessed in 2023 Serbia's preparedness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Its findings where amplified by the project through the organisation of a Social Dialogue organised by the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and also echoed by the Platform with a press conference and advocacy messages.Additionally, the Platform has been able to prepare different position papers and reports underlining and key recommendations to the Government as specified in the Annual Monitoring Report published in 2023 by the Platform, coordinated by BOS: "*the Development Plan at the* structural problems *national level was not adopted, which would have greatly facilitated the planning process at all levels*" as well as: "*the opportunity for further legitimization of the 2030 Agenda in the public through the operational documents of the Government was missed*"[18].At the time of the evaluation, no progress could be reported as such, except a generic expectation "that the Government of Serbia is aware of these problems and would probably act soon". The external factors influencing the related process have been linked to the reoccurring pre-term elections and so far lack of central governmental decision.

Finding 9: Implementation modality through the Platform pillars has been pragmatic and helped effectively to enhance "coordination and exchange between national level stakeholders, civil society, the private sector and their local counterparts".

The multilevel focus and multi-stakeholders' modality in which the Project is implemented appear as bringing a specific added value and effectiveness which have been widely recognized by all interlocutors. The Platform includes some of the most experienced and

[16] progress-report-on-the-implementation-of-sustainable-development-goals-by-2030-in-the-republic-of-serbia-2023.pdf

17 GIZ_TAP_2020_SDG-16-in-VNRs-and-Spotlight-Reports_Final-Version.pdf

18 2023 BOS Report-SERBIA 2030- MANY CHALLENGES, LITTLE TIME:IS SERBIA SET ON ITS DEVELOPMENT PATH?

prominent CSOs in the country with high cross sectorial expertise, capacities and good organizational reputation and having already good cooperation with Ministries and other government bodies dealing with the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Among Platform members there are founders of the EU Convent and in charge of some of its working groups and organizations with potential for enhancing cross-sector cooperation with the academia and private sector (which were detected as missing links through the implementation process) and linkages with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM), added to the list of interviewed upon the suggestion from the Ministry of Finance in order to provide expert views on any institutional issues impinging on central-local relations. The Platform has a rotating Secretariat among its Pillars and it has been duly based on an adaptive management approach and reallocation of resources as per the identified needs and opportunities, including creation of a re-granting component at local levels. This includes the Local Sustainability Fund managed by BOS which has been added to the current BOS grant agreement by the Project (GIZ).The Platform has reportedly continued with its advocacy activities from the previous phase in a better tailored thematic approach and stakeholders focus and better incorporating cross cutting aspects as gender and poverty.

Finding 10: The Project and Platform contributions at all levels are visibly emerging.
The Project with its Platform is indicated by the interviewees as a key interlocutor and promoter of the SDGs in Serbia. The main reported contributions brought by the Project at the level of interlocutors included capacity building inputs, policy contributions, provided guidance and expertise, networking and exchanges. The close cooperation and support to SORS to enhance its regular reporting capacity remains a praising and practical milestone as well as in regard to the help with the creation and finalisation of the SDGs inclusive Vojvodina Regional Development Plan while the approval of both initial and mid-term development plans in Pirot Municipality are fully confirmed as important strategic tools in their daily work.
The October 2024 Project Report reflects some already visible success effects of the provided support such as" *The number of disaggregated indicators published by SORS has increased from 50 to 57 (indicator 4.1.1 added in October 2023, 4.4.1 added in January 2024, and two additional indicators 11.5.3 and 12.4.2 with other disaggregation dimensions")*, and conducting surveys which "provided valuable insights for enhancing the disaggregation, availability, and visibility of SDG data. The results were instrumental in formulating recommendations for improving the SORS SDG web portal and a proposal for a new SDG metadata structure".
Some progress is also outlined nationally on SDG achievement by external reports which could be assumed by the contribution of the Project. According to the "Europe Sustainable Development Report 2023/24", *the Republic of Serbia ranks 30th out of 34 European countries analysed, marking an improvement of one position compared to the previous year. Five goals are reported to be on track for achievement, slight progress has been observed for another five goals, while stagnation is noted for the remaining five. Data are unavailable for SDG 2: Zero Hunger and SDG 14: Life Below Water*[19].
Annual monitoring reports continue to be published by the Platform to provide evidence on the alignment of newly formulated or amended national and local policies with the 2030 Agenda priorities (including also the proposals of the Platform) as well as progress on the 2030 Agenda implementation. At the same time, it is worth mentioning the highly effective initiative to create analysis of the structural reforms included in the ERP and the overall review of the state of affairs with sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda. Such analysis has been based on

[19] New Monitoring Report by the "SDGs for All" Platform: Is the End Goal in Sight? - Održivi razvoj za sve

the 8 priority areas identified in the Report on Evidence-Based Priorities produced by the Platform in December 2020.

The Platform has succeeded to strategically position in some of the major national level policy processes by providing inputs and contributions to overarching policy documents and nominating solutions for the institutionalization of the 2030 Agenda coordination in Serbia while in parallel continuing to support its inter-municipal exchanges at local levels which were mentioned and highly appreciated by majority of interviewed stakeholders. This is also much connected to the bellow next two findings and lesson learnt.

Finding 11: Mainstreaming activities towards local levels prove to be highly effective, including re-granting.

The evaluation team takes note of the variety of challenges and needs at local level and the high effectiveness of the Project in addressing the lack of coordination and interaction between the central government and local communities and the emphasized need for active involvement of civil society in the process of drafting local plans and in making SDGs and development agendas visible. In this context, the role of the Platform, which provides a space for dialogue between decision-makers, civil society, and other non-governmental actors remained very important.

The Platform has been also proving its effectiveness and adaptation capacity by creation and piloting of a re-granting fund towards local CSOs on environmental issues such as of green growth and the incorporation of SDGs into local planning documents. The grants are under implementation and the evaluation team has been only able to organize a visit to one of the grant recipients in Novi Sad which has revealed a high commitment and potential to maintain a smooth SDGs localization process and promotion of related green agendas.

Finding 12: Using of some lessons learnt to increase effectiveness of the Project over the next period and beyond.

The Project had the opportunity to improve its effectiveness through the two designated phases using the lessons learnt that are evidenced in the past Project reports, including the proposed format for the Platform and their activities to be implemented in the second phase. With this phase ending in May 2025, there is still an opportunity that new lessons learnt are brought on board. GIZ indicates that as of November 2024 ongoing negotiations are in place with the Government of Serbia and one future governance program is discussed which aims to build on the existent projects which may be an opportunity to bring in some lessons learnt and possibly contributing towards an effective exit of this Project.

At the moment, the lack of political will to invest in SDGs achievement may present itself as a problem for the Project's outcome since it may lead to the loss of many indicators and the quality of the future reports would subsequently diminish. Reviewing baselines appears as much needed in the view of several Project stakeholders .It equally appears important to conduct horizontal scanning and foresight prior to engaging further and the opinion of the SDC is that if the baseline is already set, the question is whether it makes sense to conduct scanning and foresight afterward, as those activities are usually done to inform the setting of the baseline or early strategy.

The social mapping process undertaken by the Platform could benefit from collecting data at both central and local levels in a more structured manner gathering also info on existent or potential initiatives which could add possible synergies to other projects supporting in this way to an effective later hand over process and maximizing the capitalization effects of the Project. A study visit to Germany has been initially included in the operational plan but with no evidence this has taken place by now. There were shared opinions in the field that the Project could have also benefit from allowing for more exposure of how SDGs are being complemented with

the EU Agenda in other European countries through organization of learning visits and participation in events for the stakeholders.

Conclusion on Effectiveness: The Project has been effective at both central and local level but it requires a reflection on its lessons learnt and further influencing potential at the central level while trying to maximise its mainstreaming efforts at local level where success potential appears higher.

Efficiency

In project evaluation terms, Efficiency refers to the utilization of resources (inputs) in relation to creation of outputs. To clarify, this evaluation is not meant to present a cost benefit analysis but the key question here is to find out whether the inputs are used in an economic way in order to produce effective services or products and related outputs. The analysis of the overall organizing of the Projects including management and timing also determine relations between the inputs and outputs.

Finding 13: Efficient use of Project financial resources and no deviations from the implementation plan.

The Project has been a subject to an internal audit and evaluation of its first phase with no results being disclosed to the evaluation team.

At the first glance, analysing the budget expenditure of the Project and provided reports, it is noticeable that the Project is efficiently managed. Based on the documentation provided, it can be concluded that the project resources were used efficiently reaching the planned results as the reports underline the strict applicability of the GIZ rules on procurement of services, approval of expenditure and related financial reporting. As per the provided financial data, it could be assessed that SDC has continued with no interruption its annual contributions towards the Project estimated to a total CHF 4.750.000 by end of September 2025. The payment tranches were disbursed based on the submitted reports by GIZ against regular interim progress and final reports presented by GIZ to SDC.The budget appears duly constructed and redesigned after SDC requested in 2022 a closer alignment of expenditure with the key outputs of the Project which include: Output 1- The capacities of relevant state institutions to foster the systematic implementation of the 2030 Agenda have improved Output 2- Selected local governments, local CSOs, citizens and the private sector have increased their cooperation for sustainable and participatory local development and policy-making processes Output 3-The internal coordination and use of external expertise by the SDGs4All Platform have improved. Output 4- Available data and evidence for 2030 Agenda mainstreaming, monitoring and implementation has increased.A particular observation could be made on the major budget provisions of 1,179,000 EUR planned as “Subsidy and grant agreements to non-government partners” out of which 1,119,000 EUR appears as allocated to Output 4 in which the Platform has presumably been the main beneficiary of the funding. The feedback collected from the Pillar Coordinators has been concluding that the respective funding has not been sufficient to implement all planned activities which required mobilization of additional own financial and human resources but at a manageable level giving their internal availability of resources.The Project seems sufficiently staffed and with an efficient human resources structure and has reported only minor staff adjustments including management changes through the years but with no influence on the activities. There were no delays or time adjustments needed through the Project implementation process.

Finding 14: Appropriate Project management and internal reporting system, coordination mechanisms and risk mitigations are also duly in place.

The Project seems to maintain a solid internal monitoring, coordination and reporting system with GIZ regularly providing comprehensive regular reports to SDC and BMZ. In 2022, the

SDC has proposed improvements to the project cycle management and its reporting but no information as to what lead to that decision. The budget redesign, the logical framework of the Project operating under BMZ methodology it has been also aligned at the end of 2023 to the SDC requirements to bring better interpretation to the indicators for the 2030 Agenda component and creation of a common results matrix. Those aspects are presented in the Annex 3.

The Evaluation takes note of the cautious approach adopted by the implementing team to largely describe the executing paths rather than presenting comparative analysis of the Project progress over the various reporting periods. As the current Project phase lasted for almost 3 years, inclusion of a summary of the key achievements in the descriptive annual reports in order to capture the progress measurability over the past year could have been a better tool rather than adding repetitive operational plans to reflect the achievement of the outputs of the Project or progress being incorporated solely in the description of the performed activities. Such approach appears emerging in the annual and interim reports content only as of 2023.

The Project Steering Committee meets annually, and its composition seemed to have been enlarging through the Project implementation with SCTM actively participating and UN being offered an observatory role in line with the SDC recommendations (*See also Findings under Coherence)*.

The Platform functions through a Secretariat and the Steering Committee. The Platform Coordinators submit every 6 months activity reports beside the thematic inputs through their implemented actions which seem to be efficient and pragmatic. However, the Pillar Coordinators report fully abiding to the internal procedures of the GIZ in terms of procurement, design of publications, reporting which are assessed as strict and more bureaucratic, needing more time for approval comparing with the experiences from other projects.

The Project reports so far not facing critical risks in the implementation. A plan for "regular monitoring of operational risks and discussions on mitigation measures with partners, including SDC" is in place which also includes an adequate risks assessment with realistic mitigations proposed by the management. The risks which remain with the highest probability are those related to the contextual factors and institutional commitments and funding and those appear as not being in a full control of the Project such as "lack of financial resources of LSGs to implement projects aiming at sustainable development" or" financial and human resources of a ministry or institution responsible for coordinating the 2030 Agenda implementation hinder effective coordination". Nevertheless, the Reports submitted by GIZ to SDC include a risk monitoring section with rather repetitive analysis provided behind.

Conclusion on Efficiency: The Project seems well-managed and overall costly effective and so far not posing implementation challenges or critical risks. SDC has provided recommendations to the Project to improve budget design and refining logical framework indicators which were duly considered. The budget allocated to the activities performed by the Platform is regarded as rather narrow but manageable. More flexibility on approving the communication and visibility materials needed. Risk assessment is realistic but rather repetitively analysed through the provided reports.

Impact and Sustainability prospects

As the Project is currently ongoing, the prospects of impact and sustainability could not be separated. The Impact review is conducted here from the perspectives of long –term effects created by the Project. Whether the knowledge, skills and tools provided by the Project will remain useful, and continue to be applicable to the work of partners in the future remains to be seen. Sustainability is

reviewed from the aspect on how much the Project activities will be possible to continue even after the donor funding has stopped?

Finding 15: Assessment and evaluation of the impact and sustainability of the Project activities appear so far relatively limited.

The evaluation team, based on the examined Project documentation and conducted interviews, detects a rather limited attention to impact and sustainability aspects.

SDC has correctly identified from the inception phase endorsement document that "'the main concern is the sustainability of the activities promoted and the results achieved by the project through the generation of systemic changes. Given the political context is uncertain and that the framework conditions are not necessarily conducive at the moment" and that particular attention will have to be paid to these questions during the whole project implementation and addressed regularly by the Project Steering Committee".

The risks mitigation solutions include some general perceptions on factors possibly affecting the impact and sustainability of the Project as indicated in the risk assessment of the reports i.e. "having in mind that the EU accession process and other geopolitical dynamics drive the political agenda in Serbia, the sustained ownership of the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda remains unclear/ The Project does not have influence on the human and financial resources of the responsible institutions/ LSGs generally lack resources to fulfil the mandates they are responsible for".

Probably, a rapid impact assessment and sustainability analysis could be beneficial to be undertaken by the Project management as soon as possible to support creation of a solid sustainability strategy. Such analysis is justified given that about 6 months ahead of closure of Platform activities in the current Project, it appears there is no final scenario agreed for the future of the Platform. A general Declaration of Cooperation has been signed by the Platform partners and a Platform coordinators meeting has been reportedly organized in 2024 to discuss four possible solutions including possible registration of the Platform to continue as an independent entity which may be the most viable solution to ensure sufficient capitalization and ownership of the current Project and given the well-created institutional linkages.. Adopting a fragmented continuation at the activities by each Pillar Coordinator may be counterproductive and diluter created opportunities. The current situation with the Platform implies that further donor funding will be necessary to ensure the mechanism's functionality and sustainability. Identification of funding may be also necessary, including possibility for creation of a multi-donor trust fund, incorporation in future governance related programmes of bilateral donors or supporting to access existent EU funding.

Finding 16: The Impact surfaces at both macro (policy) level and micro (local) levels with ownership of the created results requiring more attention.

Given the multi-stakeholders focus, the Project continues to deliver impact at various levels. Overall, the Project has been able to identify policy areas still important to the Government and align the 2030 Agenda mainstreaming discourse to these priorities and to provide inputs and contributions to overarching policy documents and nominating solutions for the institutionalization of the 2030 Agenda coordination in Serbia. In addition, several institutions including MEI, PPS have benefited from tailor-made and targeted capacity development from the Project. Good practices and innovative reporting methods were introduced to SORS.

At local levels, the Project has contributed to drafting of realistic local plans that match available financial resources and/or local initiatives that can be implemented with little financial resources in several locations and sustained the advocacy process and dissemination of good practices through the inter-municipal exchange meetings.

The Platform continued to strategically position itself both in some of the major national level policy processes and at local levels through an active promotion standing on both development aspects and cross cutting issues and ensuring visibility of the Project.
The strategic focus of the Platform to influence policymaking and national strategies also managed to increase the attention of the Government on the relevance of sustainable development. The Project commits that data produced or gathered in the context of the project will be made publicly available wherever possible and therefore, other stakeholders will have the opportunity to consult and question the interpretation of the data by government institutions and assuming its created spill over and multiplication effects.
The question on the ownership of the Project results may appear in the context of all above impactful actions. While learning that Memorandum of Understanding are signed with majority of the involved counterparts, there is no guarantee at the moment that further developments will occur beyond the Project. This is clearly evidenced at local level where the created deliverables are not followed by proposing a solid results capitalization support strategy. For instance, in Vojvodina the created Regional Development Strategy risks to be outdated soon requiring design of a new strategy and in this way the Project efforts vanishing The re-granting could have had a significant role in continuing to advocate for its applicability in front of relevant institutional stakeholders. Pirot Municipality declares availability of an annual budget of 0.2 mil EUR to be disbursed towards a diverse and sufficiently developed local civil society sector in which the Project could identify, if necessary and interested, strong partners to take over part of the created ownership and continue to create awareness and promotion of SDGs and development agendas in communities.

Finding 17: Sustainability of the Project components appears mixed and potentially affected by political or administrative changes.

As indicated above, the sustainability of the Project remains much dependent on the various political decisions and administrative changes to be taken in the country. The continuity of the advocacy at central level remains crucial in ensuring a long running effect of the Project and by maintaining a conductive and evidence-based dialogue with the institutional stakeholders. Such advocacy shall also emphasise the importance of the Project inputs contributing to fulfilment of the EU agenda priorities.
The momentums seem right and necessary for developing a Sustainability Plan as Serbia has recently adopted the EU Reform Agenda Plan which is now endorsed by the EC. Having the State Audit Institution's Report on SDGs as a solid endorsement document, the Project is well-positioned to continue addressing the coordination and opportunities for a clearer distinction of mandates between the various bodies for coordinating the work and approval of the NDP and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as such.
As it is recognized in the risk assessment that the institutional capacities remain relatively weak and facing a lot of staff fluctuation and brain drain, the Project needs signing by default specific hand-over institutional protocols with those institutions in order to ensure sufficient "institutional memory and follow-up" and those protocols may remain biding for accessing further related funding from both Swiss and German donors. As elaborated above, a bottom-up approach may also help on maintaining a certain level of sustainability of the advocacy at central levels by using relevant actors such as SCTM, Employment Associations, civil society, business and academia and the Platform continuing its official existence and contributions. UN may be also a key contributor in maintaining by its overall influence and reputation on promoting of development agendas in the country. The local sustainability re-granting component for environmental activities could be regarded as a step forward which may be extended beyond May 2025 and thematically in case funds remain available.

The interest at local levels for continuation of further collaboration remains high. The Pillar Coordinators have sent invitation adherence letters to the organizations and regional agencies from the regions/municipalities where the Platform has operated so far and the interest appears as being high. For instance, Divac Foundation has confirmed that 14 entities have already positively responded by already submitting their signed declarations.

Conclusions on Impact and Sustainability: The impact is visibly emerging at both central and local levels despite a rapidly changing external environment. Need to accentuate the ownership of the Project results. Sustainability of the Platform is of concern and securing of a credible Sustainability Plan for the Project remains of high priority to this Phase of the Project.

VI SOME LESSONS LEARNT:

Overall, the Project seems well-managed and effective, including implementation modalities, timeframe and budgets. The Project is in line with the Swiss Cooperation Strategy priorities in the country and the aspirations and international commitments of the Serbian Government.

Despite some opinions that the governmental priorities and institutional resources are massively turned towards the EU Agenda, the Project still has an opportunity to bring an added value to that process, illustrated by the recent approval by the EC of Serbia Reform Agenda duly including 2030 Agenda priorities.

The work of the Project is highly valued and visible in the country and this has been evidenced by all interviewed stakeholders and through consulted reports assuming its direct overall contributions to improving SDGs country ranking, its reporting system and increasing the number of reported indicators.

The Project proved sufficient adaptability and flexibility to the overall process and need not be discouraged on the slow institutional decision-making process. The Project appears to use all its available means to achieve its foreseen results beyond its quantifiable targets. Such momentum comes with an important opportunity due to an institutional deadline to implement some of the State Audit Institution's Report recommendation (for instance, the National Road map for statistics for SDGs) by the end of 2024.

The support of the Project to the PPS appeared also highly valuable in undertaking measures to prepare the Decree on the Procedure for the Preparation of the National Development Plan and submit the draft to the Government but also equally important now it is that the Project could help the PPS in finally defining a more precise scope of authority when it comes to coordination of public policies on SDGs as prescribed within their mandate. Such support to PPS could also be focused on securing transparency on SDGs related expenditures against the state budget by initiating a practice for enumerating and classifying spending and costs for that purpose. There is still time and opportunity to continue the work on developing new indicators and provide adequate support the Statistical Office to set up a sustainable system while equally enough it is important to secure sustainability of harvesting data for the existing indicators in order not to lose the momentum and valuable data input and continuity. At the same time, there is an opportunity the Project could engage in Green Agenda Reform Processes with the MEI to complement SDGs and Just Transition Processes and possibly secure continuation of its activities.

Particularly, the Platform remains a highly relevant for advocacy, consultations and valuable policy inputs to central institutions while actively involved in cross-thematic development agenda mainstreaming and SDGs localization.

Lack of further donor investments in the Platform may be a big loss given its developed dialogue, expertise and its well positioning in the current development context in Serbia. A

tailored support in designing a sustainable strategy for the Platform to continue beyond May 2025 may be necessary.

VII MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings and emerging conclusions, the evaluation team could make the following key recommendations:

a. To the SDC&BMZ:

1. Search for pragmatic solutions to maintain the functionality of the current Platform beyond the Project's end.

Such options may include possibility to create a local multi-donor trust fund to support its activities and possibly to consider developing another layer of support for the Platform which may include SCTM and engaging academia in a more systematic and accountable manner. A rapid impact assessment of the Platform may be necessary together with elaboration of a solid sustainability plan which to include the available scenarios already discussed.

2. Further investments in similar Projects may also include the UN and be based on signing of a cooperation protocol with the Government of Serbia to secure sufficient governmental support and continuity.

Such format could offer exposure to the vast UN expertise and may create an enlarged advocacy opportunity for the future actions. The donors may have a formal referral instrument in front of the Government including committed targets and timeframes to respect. Having the Government more in the lead shall be advisable to ensure such needed backing. Finding 5 is particularly detailing.

b. To the GIZ Project Management:

3. Need for revision of the Project Operational Plans, updated risks and creation of reserve plans with the aim to maximization of the impact.

As the impasse on approval of National Development Plan and appointment of an Inter-Ministerial Coordinator continues, the Project management shall revisit its operational plan and seek approval from the Steering Group on intensifying those activities with more realistic impact prospects. This could be based on a rapid impact assessment to be additionally undertaken and as per the lessons learnt and some findings of this evaluation.Reviewing baselines appears as highly necessary and it would be essential to determine the kind of proxy data or administrative data to mix indicators with or substitute as such harvesting process may require months to be completed.

4. Develop a solid sustainable plan for all Project components.

It is evident that having a sustainable plan remains critical for the Platform coupled.to the needs to secure ownership and follow-up of the activities and created outputs in all targeted municipalities. Some lessons learnt from the so far piloted re-granting fund may be a good starting point of reflection. Added value of SCTM involvement may be to ensure complementarity and harmonisation of all projects.

5. Exploration of closer synergies and creation of an effective coordination system with UN and other donors in the country to enhance achievement of SDGs in Serbia.

Seeking for concrete synergies with other projects it is an aspect repetitively remarked by the Steering Committee which remains a recurrent weakness of the current Project particularly at local level. UN remains keen to contribute with its expertise as a global custodian of the Agenda 2030 processes. With an increased institutional attention to EU Agenda in the country, closer coordination with EU may only bring added value. Ministry of Finance discussed the access to a WB loan and IFD project on public finance towards green transition. Furthermore, there were discussions with the German Government on merging

several projects into one larger programme on good governance that may further be considered.

6. Allow for more and direct exposure and thus motivation for the Government Officials on how SDGs are complementing the EU Agenda in European countries (possibly combination of old new EU Member States) from ministries to LGs through learning visits and events.

It is notable that the Project strategy has a systematic / structural approach *vis a vis* institutions and putting less emphasis on staff capacity building (training and mentoring), but this may be important now in line with the new contextual evolution and by prioritization of the EU Reform Agenda. The Operational Plan foresees learning events and SDC has recommended that in its proposal endorsement. Organizing exchanges and visits to both Finland and Estonia may be potentially relevant as best practice countries to explore in relation to prioritising SDGs to their contexts, statistics design and reporting, overall planning, to mainstreaming in sectorial policies or to reflect SDGs at sub-national levels.

c. To the Platform:

7. Reaching an urgent consensus among Pillars participants on the future format of the Platform is crucial.

Urgency to reach a consensus among members of the Platform on its future is obviously needed given the remaining few months of its funding till May 2025. A legal registration to maintain the current functionality may be ideal but other options could be discussed but opened to enlarged and diverse membership, including more academia. CEVES may be potentially tasked on leading the coordination of such process given its "independent think-and-do-tank focus dedicated to the sustainable socio-economic development of Serbia and the Western Balkans"[20] and as having assumed by its management being an initiator of the concept of the Platform.

ANNEX 1-List of interviewees (Internal only)

ANNEX 2- Bibliography consulted

Annex 3 – Results Matrix with interpretation of Indicators BMZ-SDC (Internal only)

Annex 4- ToR of the Evaluation

[20] About CEVES | Ceves | Center for Advanced Economic Studies

Annex 2-List of Consulted documents

1. Package of SDC documents submitted by SDC to external evaluators on 3rd of October, 2024 (their listing and disclosure is subject to the SDC approval).
2. References to a variety of background reports, data and info as per the inserted footnotes though the main report.

ANNEX 4

Annex 1

Terms of references

Contract no. 81081908 (Local Mandate)

External evaluation 'SDGs for All – Fostering the participatory implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia' Ph.2 (i)

---

1. Context of the Review

The "SDGs for ALL" project is part of a broader initiative "**Public Finance Reform – 2030 Agenda**", funded by the German (Federal) Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The SDC contribution is earmarked to the SDGs for All component (hereafter the project) which is co-financed by SDC and BMZ. Its budget amounts to CHF 4'700'000.

The co-financed component aims to ensure Serbia's population benefits from sustainable and inclusive development. The project provides technical assistance, improves sustainable development policy formulation, and fosters cooperation between state and non-state actors. It addresses economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure no one is left behind. The project localizes the SDGs to align with national priorities, accelerates their implementation, and monitors progress. Key challenges include limited capacity for integrated, evidence-based development plans, alignment with the EU accession process, and effective monitoring and evaluation specific to Serbia.

Background and Genesis:

The "SDGs for ALL" project originated from the global commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN member states in 2015. This agenda's 17 SDGs aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030. In response, the SDC and GIZ launched the project to help Serbia localize and achieve these goals by aligning national and local policies with the 2030 Agenda through a participatory process involving the government, local self-governments, and non-state actors.

The project addresses challenges such as outdated policies and lack of stakeholder involvement, which hinder inclusive and sustainable development. It aims to strengthen state and non-state actors to integrate the SDGs into policies and strategies, enhance policy coherence, and facilitate dialogue and cooperation. The strategy emphasizes capacity development, institutional changes, evidence-based planning, and effective monitoring, relying on national ownership and a country-driven process.

Phase I Overview:

Phase I of the "SDGs for ALL" project, implemented from 2019 to 2022, laid the groundwork for SDG implementation in Serbia. This phase focused on establishing robust institutional frameworks, fostering strategic partnerships, and developing policy instruments tailored to local contexts. Key achievements of Phase I included:

- **Capacity Building:** Training programs for government officials and civil society leaders to enhance their understanding and implementation capabilities regarding the SDGs.
- **Institutional Coordination Mechanisms**: Efforts to improve coordination included supporting key stakeholders like Public Policy Secretariat (PPS), Prime Ministers Office (PMO) and the Special Advisor on the 2030 Agenda, Ministry for EU Integration (MEI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MfA), Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Societal Dialogues (MHMRSD), the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and Ministry of Finance (MoF) in fulfilling their roles related to the 2030 Agenda.

- **Mainstreaming the SDGs in Policy Development and Localization of SDGs**: Formulation of SDG-aligned policies and action plans, ensuring that national and local development strategies are consistent with global goals and contributing progress on achievement of SDGs.
- **Multi-stakeholder Engagement**: Establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms to facilitate dialogue and collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and international partners.
- **Public Awareness**: Initiatives to raise awareness about the SDGs among the general public, including educational campaigns and community outreach programs.

Despite these successes, Phase I encountered several challenges, such as limited institutional capacities, inadequate funding mechanisms, and socio-political barriers. These challenges highlighted the need for a more integrated and adaptive approach, setting the stage for Phase II.

Phase II Focus:

Building on the lessons learned from Phase I, Phase II of the "SDGs for ALL" project aims to scale up successful interventions, address identified gaps, and enhance the overall impact of the project. The planned outcomes of Phase II are:

- **Outcome 1**: Local and national institutions meaningfully involve non-state actors in decision and policy making in order to foster the mainstreaming and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Outcome 2**: Non-state actors (CSOs, businesses, academia) participate in decision-making and monitoring of Government's work relevant to the 2030 Agenda.

Current policies and strategies of the Serbian Government are outdated and lack clear orientation for inclusive and sustainable development. They suffer from a lack of coherence and insufficient stakeholder involvement, failing to reflect the concerns of independent experts and marginalized populations. Limited consultation mechanisms further exacerbate these issues. The project addresses these challenges by strengthening national and local state actors to integrate the SDGs into policies, increasing policy coherence, and enhancing the role of non-state actors through the SDGs for All-Platform. It fosters dialogue and cooperation between state and non-state actors to fully implement the 2030 Agenda. The project's intervention logic employs a multi-level approach and interlinked outputs to achieve its outcomes.

SDGs for all – Society Wide Dialogue Platform

To realize an increased multi-stakeholder participation in SDG relevant policy-making (outcome 2), non-state actors are engaged around the "SDGs for ALL - Society Wide Dialogue Platform" which is in place since April 2020 and managed by a consortium of seven civil society organizations. It aims to facilitate dialogue among key non-state actors in Serbia, including civil society organizations (CSOs), the corporate sector, academia, the media, and citizens, to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. By engaging all relevant societal resources and stakeholders, the Platform aims to create a cohesive approach to defining and implementing SDG-related policy priorities in Serbia, ensuring long-term sustainability and impact.
This initiative was crucial for making the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) understandable to various stakeholders and raising awareness about the benefits of their implementation for the well-being of Serbian citizens.

The Platform is structured into three Pillars, each managed by a responsible Pillar coordinator:

- Social Pillar: Coordinated by Foundation Ana and Vlade Divac with Center for Democracy Foundation (CDF).
- Economic Pillar: Coordinated by Center for Advanced Economic Studies (CEVES) with Timok Youth Center (TYC).
- Environmental Pillar: Coordinated by Belgrade Open School (BOS) with Foundation BFPE for a Responsible Society.

Corporate sector integration in the Platform's work is coordinated by Smart Kolektiv.

2. Objectives of Review

The second phase of the "SDGs for ALL" project, implemented by GIZ, will be completed by the end of 2025. The main assignment of the reviewers will be to assess the achievements and lessons learned of Phase II, and to draw overall conclusions on the project's progress since it began in 2020. The external reviewers will evaluate various dimensions of the project in line with OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, particularly focusing on effectiveness. They will assess the application of good governance principles, with a specific emphasis on participation, transparency, and accountability. The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the extent to which the project has achieved its planned objectives and outcomes.

The external reviewers are also asked to reflect on the following questions, which may be complemented by additional questions in the inception report:

Relevance:

1. How effectively has the project's design addressed the key socio-economic and political challenges in Serbia, particularly regarding the inclusion of marginalized communities and regional disparities?
2. To what extent have the project's objectives and outcomes remained relevant and aligned with Serbia's evolving policies and priorities, especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda?
3. How responsive has the project been in adapting its strategies to align with changes in Serbia's socio-economic and political environment?
4. Were the institutions and stakeholders with which the project collaborated the most relevant to engage with and was the collaboration responsive to the contextual dynamics?

Coherence:

1. How effectively has the project integrated with other ongoing initiatives related to the 2030 Agenda in Serbia, ensuring synergy and avoiding duplication?
2. To what extent has the project contributed to enhancing the coherence of national policies and strategies aimed at sustainable development and EU integration goals?

Effectiveness:

1. To what degree has the project achieved its specific objectives related to enhancing institutional capacity, promoting policy coherence, and ensuring inclusive participation in the SDG process?
2. What measurable improvements have resulted from the project in terms of aligning national and sectoral policies with the SDG targets in Serbia?
3. How effective has the "SDGs for All - Society Wide Dialogue Platform" been in engaging diverse stakeholders and influencing policy-making processes?

Efficiency:

1. How efficiently has the project utilized its available resources (including funds, expertise, and time) to deliver its activities on time and within budget, and what has been the impact of these efforts on achieving the intended outcomes and the overall effectiveness of the project?

Sustainability:

1. How effectively has the project established mechanisms to ensure that its benefits will continue after its completion?
2. To what extent are local institutions and stakeholders capable of sustaining the project's outcomes, and how effectively has the project prepared them to do so?

Other:

1. What adjustments can be made to the project in its final phase to enhance its effectiveness?
2. What strategies should be considered for future initiatives to build on the project's successes and address any identified weaknesses?

3. Scope and Method of Work

The external reviewers will observe the implementation and effectiveness of the "SDGs for ALL" project across various sectors in Serbia and formulate recommendations for the remaining period of the project. The review will be led by an international consultant (team leader) with the support of a national consultant. The reviewers shall independently organize the review; however, GIZ may support the reviewers logistically and facilitate contacts and meetings with the interviewees.

Methodology:

The review will start with a desk review of key documents and follow the methodology agreed in the inception report, which will also contain the draft agenda of the meetings with the interviewees. The review will be conducted based on semi-structured interviews and focus groups with project staff, subgrantees from all three pillars (social, economic, environmental) and corporate sector, partner institutions at central and local government level, civil society organizations (CSOs), private sector stakeholders, and other relevant actors. The reviewers may conduct additional field visits to selected project sites to gather comprehensive insights.

4. Overview of functions of team members and their required qualifications:

Function	Role in Review	Required Qualifications
International Team Leader	• Overall responsibility for the planning and execution of the review and the management of the review team • Desk review and development of a review methodology in the inception report • Lead during stakeholder interviews • Preparation of debriefing at SDC and GIZ • Drafting, consultation, and finalization of the review report	• Degree in social sciences, development studies, or a related field • More than five years of experience with external evaluations, preferably in the area of sustainable development and SDG implementation • Expertise in development cooperation, project management, and evaluation • Experience as an evaluation team leader • Strong report writing skills • Very good command of written and spoken English
Local Consultant	• Provides inputs to the review on the political, economic, and social context of Serbia, particularly concerning sustainable development and SDG implementation • Prepares mission agenda and organizes meetings in consultation with SDC and GIZ • Conducts desk review • Participates in the review (briefing, interviews/field mission, debriefing) • Provides inputs and comments to the review report • Logistics (interpreters)	• Degree in social sciences, development studies, or a related field • Sound understanding of the political, economic, and social context of Serbia, including sustainable development and SDG implementation • Good knowledge of governance, social inclusion, and gender equality • Previous experience in donor external reviews of national partners or related activities • Serbian as a mother tongue and excellent command of English (written and oral)

The team leader will closely liaise with SDC and GIZ for the duration of his/her assignment.

The main tasks of the reviewing team include:

a) Desk research of existing documents. The documents include:

- Credit proposal
- Project documents
- Operational reports
- End of Phase Report (Phases 1)
- Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2022-2025
- Other relevant documents

b) Drafting of an Inception Report (Team Leader):

The objective of the inception report is to confirm a common understanding of the review mission between the reviewing team, the Swiss Cooperation Office and GIZ.
The inception report will propose or reconfirm the methodology of the review, highlight potential additional review questions and contain a detailed list of respondents.
and should be submitted at least seven days before the scheduled briefing meeting in Serbia.

c) Briefing at the Swiss Cooperation Office / Swiss Embassy in Serbia with relevant GIZ representatives present:

Particularly with the Head of Governance Domain and the National Program Officer(s) at the beginning of the mission. The Head of Cooperation may also participate in the briefing.

d) Meetings with Representatives:

- Representatives of three pillars (social, economic, environmental) and corporate sector
- Representatives of partner institutions at the central government level (PPS, SORS, MEI, MHMRSD, SAI) and at the local level (LSGs in Pirot, Knjaževac, Užice, Sombor)
- Project staff
- CSOs
- Private sector stakeholders
- Relevant local and international organizations, including the UN Resident Coordinator Office, donors, and development programs.

e) Debriefing at the Swiss Cooperation Office in Serbia and Finalization of the Review Report:

- Presentation of the preliminary findings and recommendations of the review team to the SCO and GIZ.
- Written feedback by the representatives of SCO and GIZ to the draft review report.
- Addressing the comments in the report, wrapping up lessons learned and future recommendations, and finalization of the review report.

f) Presentation of the recommendations of the Review Report during the ad hoc meeting for project partners.

5. Reporting deliverables

The external reviewers are expected to produce the following deliverables:

- Inception report
- Presentation of the findings and recommendations to be discussed during a debriefing session in the Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO) with relevant GIZ representatives present.
- Draft report to be electronically submitted to SCO within 20 working days after the review mission. The SCO may forward the draft report to the implementing partner for questions and comments.

- Final review report reflecting all prospects to be reviewed as mentioned before. It shall contain a brief description of the applied work methodology as well as separate chapters dedicated to the key findings and recommendations. The report shall be written in English (Arial 11) and not exceed 15 pages (without executive summary and annexes).

6. Duration, Timetable, and Implementation Arrangement

The external review of the "SDGs for ALL" project should take place in September 2024(September 15th – October 15th). The following table provides an indicative overview of the work schedule and allocated time:

Task / Activity	No. of days - Team Leader	No. of days - Local Consultant
Research & analysis of relevant documents	2	2
Other preparatory activities	1	2
Field assessments and elaboration of draft findings	5	4
Briefing and debriefing at SCO/GIZ in Serbia	1	1
Report writing and presentation to project partners	5	4
International travel	1	0
Total amount (max.) per reviewer	**Up to 15**	**Up to 13**

The exact work schedule and time allocation is subject to negotiations between SDC and the consultants when concluding the contracts.

7. Application procedure

Individuals are requested to submit an offer electronically by the 26th of July 2024, to the SDC office in Belgrade, using the following email address: andrea.dimoski@eda.admin.ch.

The application documents must include the following, mandatory parts:

- A signed covering letter highlighting the specific assets and experiences of the individual consultant for conducting this evaluation.
- CV of individual applying consultant, highlighting the experiences most relevant to this assignment
- Financial offer, including total number of workdays, daily fee, and separate travel and accommodation costs.
- A tentative workplan including a breakdown of the workdays according to task (preparation, analysis and reporting). The table above is indicative and can be adjusted if necessary. The workplan must clearly mention the proposed dates for the in-country mission (start date, end date), and proposed deadline for submission of the draft report.

The application document can include the following, optional information

- Comments and suggested modifications to the ToRs, including proposals to focus on selected evaluation questions (max 1 page)
- Selected reports from previously completed evaluations as a reference (max 3 reports)

Date: ……..…….. Date: ……..……..

Signature: …… Signature: ……

Management response to the External evaluation of the "SDGs for All" Project – Fostering the participatory implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia, Phase 2 (2022-2025)

Management Response

The Management Response (MR) states the position of the SDC related to the recommendations of the **Evaluation of the "SDGs for All" Project – Fostering the participatory implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia**. The MR provides a basis for strategic decision-making.

Assessment of the evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by the team of independent experts Ion Craciunel and Biljana Ledenican, during the period October-December 2024, in accordance with OECD criteria. The evaluation process was well managed and included close involvement of the SDC's reference group comprising Melina Papageorgiou, Head of Governance domain and Andrea Dimoski, National Programme Officer of the Swiss Embassy in Belgrade.

The main objectives – **to examine the extent to which the Project has achieved its planned objectives and outcomes** – have been met by the evaluators. The SDC appreciates the external perspective on the project and the sound analysis of key elements of the **SDGs for All" Project – Fostering the participatory implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Serbia.**

The report's analysis and resulting recommendations are considered to be useful for strengthening the strategic orientation of **"SDGs for All" Project.**

Main findings

Overall, the evaluators find that the SDGs for All project is **highly relevant** in all its components to the challenging implementation circumstances and to the needs of its beneficiaries. They further conclude that **some complementarity** with the EU accession agenda in the country emerges, while the project reflects only random linkages to other projects and donors and is insufficiently using UN global thematic expertise. The Project has been assessed as **effective** at both central and local level, but it requires a reflection on its lessons learnt and further influencing potential at the central level, while trying to maximise its mainstreaming efforts at local level where success potential appears higher. At the same time, the Project was assessed as well-managed and overall **cost effective** and so far not posing implementation challenges or critical risks. While the **results** are visibly emerging at both central and local levels despite a rapidly changing external environment, there is a need to better anchor the ownership of the Project results.

The implementation modality through the multi-stakeholder Platform has been pragmatic and helped effectively to enhance "coordination and exchange between national level stakeholders, civil society, the private sector and their local counterparts". The Platform includes some of the most experienced and prominent CSOs in the country with high cross sectorial

expertise, capacities and good organizational reputation and which had in the previous period good cooperation with the Ministries and other government bodies dealing with the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. However, involvement of Academia seems insufficient as the CSOs pillar moderators took central stage. Moreover, the **Sustainability of the Platform is of concern** and securing a credible Sustainability Plan for the Project remains of high priority to this Phase of the Project.

Out of seven recommendations, three recommendations are 'fully agreed' (green), three recommendations are 'partially agreed' (orange) and one recommendation is not agreed ('disagree' - red) – see table below. The SDC agrees to seize this opportunity to improve its results by taking specific measures in line with the recommendations.

Table: Overview of recommendations (key words) and SDC position

1.	Search for pragmatic solutions to maintain the functionality of the current Platform beyond the Project's end in 2025.
2.	Further investments in similar Projects may also include the UN and be based on signing of a cooperation protocol with the Government of Serbia to secure sufficient governmental support and continuity.
3.	Need for revision of the Project Operational Plans, updated risks and creation of reserve plans with the aim to maximization of the impact
4.	Develop a solid sustainable plan for all Project components
5.	Exploration of closer synergies and creation of an effective coordination system with UN and other donors in the country to enhance achievement of SDGs in Serbia
6.	Allow for more and direct exposure and thus motivation for the Government Officials on how SDGs are complementing the EU Agenda in European countries (possibly combination of old and new EU Member States) from ministries to LGs through learning visits and events
7.	Reaching an urgent consensus among Pillars participants on the future format of the Platform is crucial

Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree

Overview of recommendations, management response and measures

Recommendation 1		
Search for pragmatic solutions to maintain the functionality of the current Platform beyond the Project's end in 2025.		
Management response		
Fully agree	**Partially agree**	Disagree
SDC recognizes the importance of the multi-stakeholder Platform, particularly in terms of advocating for participatory implementation of the SDGs and overall awareness raising. Yet, the objective defined in the project document is to enhance the Platform's institutional independence/sustainability, either by keeping its structure as a loose network, practicing joint advocacy (possibly with a lower activity level without external funding beyond the life of the project), or through a more institutionalized set-up. In January 2024 the project organized a three days workshop for the Pillar moderators of the Platform to support them in defining the scenarios for future functioning of the Platform beyond project duration.		

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) See recommendations 4 and 7	N/A	N/A

Recommendation 2		
Further investments in similar Projects may also include the UN and be based on signing of a cooperation protocol with the Government of Serbia to secure sufficient governmental support and continuity.		
Management response		
Fully agree	**Partially agree**	Disagree
SDC acknowledges this recommendation. There are no relevant measures to take before closure of the project.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) N/A	N/A	N/A

Recommendation 3		
Need for revision of the Project Operational Plans, updated risks and creation of reserve plans with the aim to maximization of the impact		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	**Disagree**
SDC agrees with this recommendation. Given the changing context (announced reconstruction of the government as a reaction to the mass protests), certain adaptations of the operational plan and a more adaptive management would be needed to maximise the impact of the project in the limited time left.		
a) SDC invites the implementing partner to propose the revised operational plan, corresponding to the contextual changes.	SDGs for All management	At earliest convenience

Recommendation 4		
Develop a solid sustainable plan for all Project components		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
SDC agrees that developing a solid sustainability plan for all project components and particularly for the Platform is needed.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) SDC invites the implementing partner to develop a sustainability plan for all Project components.	SDGs for All management	At earliest convenience

Recommendation 5		
Exploration of closer synergies and creation of an effective coordination system with UN and other donors in the country to enhance achievement of SDGs in Serbia		
Management response		
Fully agree	**Partially agree**	Disagree

SDC reiterates the importance of achieving synergies with other projects, particularly Swiss-funded, both at the national and at the local level.

Yet, SDC is aware of the challenges related to the functioning of the governmental donor coordination mechanism under the leadership of the Ministry of European Integration (the mechanism of the Sector working groups).

At the same time, SDC acknowledges the efforts to coordinate with the Swiss projects like on mapping of social services at local level with PRO-LGPN or on preparation of the Employment Action Plan with the E2E project. Nevertheless, SDC agrees that more could have been done to identify synergies with the UN and the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities and the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-governance, as key stakeholders related to local governments, in order to seek more systemic support to LGs through the project.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) SDC invites the GIZ to explore opportunities for achieving synergies with other donors and UN in the remaining period.	SDGs for All management	At earliest convenience

Recommendation 6		
Allow for more and direct exposure and thus motivation for the Government Officials on how SDGs are complementing the EU Agenda in European countries (possibly combination of old and new EU Member States) from ministries to LGs through learning visits and events		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	**Disagree**

Some learning visits have been already supported by the project, such as participation of the SORS representatives at the UNECE Workshop and Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs in Tirana in October 2024.

Given the lack of political attention to Agenda 2030, the staff changes in partner institutions and uncertainties related to announced reconstruction of the Government, SDC disagrees that organization of learning/study visits to EU Member States for the representatives of the ministries and LGs is optimal at the moment. Alternately, online exchange with the experts from the EU states (e.g. Finland and Estonia) for the mid-level staff should be considered.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
a) SDC invites the implementing partner to consider alternative learning opportunities (online exchange) for the representatives of the government on SDG complementarities with the EU Agenda in European countries.	SDGs for All management	At earliest convenience

Recommendation 7		
Reaching an urgent consensus among Pillars participants on the future format of the Platform is crucial		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree

While being aware of all challenges the pillar moderators are facing due to contextual developments, SDC reiterates the importance of defining a sustainability plan of the SDG

Platform in order to secure ownership and follow-up of the activities. Four scenarios for achieving sustainability, developed by the Platform in February 2024, might be a good starting point.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
b) SDC invites pillar moderators to reach consensus on future format of the SDG Platform.	Pillar moderators of the SDG Platform	At earliest convenience