

**Flagship Program 1- Strengthen National Evaluation Systems
Phase 2 - Project Scope - Serbia**

EVALUATION AS THE BASIS OF THE EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING PRACTICE IN SERBIA



March, 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The project “EVALUATION AS A BASIS FOR CREATING INFORMED PUBLIC POLICIES IN SERBIA” is being implemented within the program “Strengthening National Evaluation Capacities” funded by the International Association of Evaluators - EvalPartners - <https://www.evalpartners.org/>. The project in Serbia is implemented by SeConS Development Initiative and Informal Association of Evaluators – INES. The main goal of the project refers to mapping evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia and create a basis for further dissemination of the practice of conducting public policy evaluations and strengthening evaluation capacities in Serbia.

ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
EVALSED	Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights and Governance
FREN	Foundation for the Advancement of Economics
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoIA	Ministry of Interior Affairs
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SeConS	SeConS Development Initiative
SIPRU	Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
VNR	Voluntary National Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evidence-based policy making system represents important foundation of democratic societies. The whole concept is based on the idea that public policies should be developed within processes of open discussions based on data and independent research evidence rather than intuition, ideology or political interests. Evidence based policy making is also a way through which scientists could find a way to enter the political arena increasing quality of public policies. For a policy to be considered as evidence-based, it is necessary to be evaluated, since only an independent evaluation could verify its effectiveness. In case of conducting regular evaluations, policy makers are supposed to start behaving in a different manner, knowing that their work will be certainly assessed. The purpose of the assessment is not only to ask for responsibility of those in charge of developing and implementing policies, but for learning. Assessments are supposed to help developing more effective policies in the future. Evaluation practice is relatively young, still not representing a standard even in developed countries. However, most of developed countries have to a certain extent developed monitoring and evaluation systems with an aim to improve quality of their public policies. Evaluation and impact assessments are now regular practice of analysing programmes, public policies, strategic documents, etc. at the EU level and in most of EU members at the national level. National evaluation architectures, characteristics of the evaluation systems worldwide and examples of good practice analysed also within this Study, helped us when developing methodology for this research. The values of evidence-based policy are indisputable, especially if considering importance of high-quality evidence. However, it should be taken into account that process through which quality evidence could influence policy can often be disrupted by various (external) pressures. Namely, it is not enough just to conduct a “good research” and produce relevant evidence, but also to make policy makers, decision makers, and other potential users the evaluation results familiar with the importance, appropriate use and advantages, as well as limitations of adequate information and findings.

Serbia is supposed to follow EU trends, at least as a country candidate for the EU membership. After reaching candidate status in 2012 and ratification of Stabilisation and Association Agreement (2013), Serbia completed the EU Acquis Screening in 2015. Process of chapter opening started in 2015 and could be assessed as a very slow process, partly due to changes in political priorities of the EU, but also due to weak state administration capacities in the Serbia itself. M&E practice in Serbia is not sufficiently developed, neither recognised by decision makers as important for developing effective public policies. M&E have been often initiated and funded by international donors interested in assessing the impact of their projects, programmes or national strategies or action plans (especially those related to the EU accession agenda). They have been conducted for the purpose of learning and/or redesigning new development interventions. Over the recent years, as a part of the public administration reform, there could be noticed certain systematic improvements (referring to adoption of the Law on Planning System in April 2018), which might result in a wider use of M&E practice in the future. However, capacities of public administration in the field of both supply and demand for M&E are questionable.

Methodology for conducting this research is as follows. Firstly, we analysed characteristics of the evaluation practice in Serbia (Sections 2.1. and 2.2.). Following brief analysis of the institutional framework, demand for evaluation as well as existing capacities reflecting evaluation supply, we analysed main documents that have been locally developed to support M&E activities. In the second step (Section 2.3.), there have been analysed elements of the EVALSED network resources related to the evaluation architecture (location, structure, and coordination of evaluation functions) in a broader and narrower

sense. Third step refers to empirical research conducted through online questionnaires/interviews that helped us in obtaining views from the representatives of the state institutions. Questions have been developed with regard to main desk research findings and with a support of the relevant international studies dealing with evaluation capacities worldwide (EVALSED, 2013; Lazaro, 2015; European Commission, 2008). Results of the research provided us with the following conclusions:

- **M&E institutional framework is not a barrier for conducting evaluations of the crucial programmes, policies and strategic documents in Serbia.** Law on Planning System, related bylaws, guidelines and handbooks produced both by civil society and state institutions (Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit - SIPRU and Secretariat for Public Policies) represent solid basis for further institutionalisation of evaluation within the national political system. There have been also developed manuals for conducting public policy assessments.
- **Desk research showed that there are several examples of good practice within both state institutions and research/civil sector.** Republic Secretariat for Public Policies fueled the process evidence-based political culture. Unfortunately, it does not have political power to influence changes. Among other state institutions, there have been noticed efforts made by SIPRU and Fiscal Council of the Republic of Serbia that have continuously insisted on producing evidence for the purpose of adopting different policies and discussing potential scenarios when adopting specific public policy. However, most of other state institutions are not prone to conducting evaluations, even for the most important political documents. There are no available evaluation studies within their official webpages and no budgets for conducting evaluation research. However, some international donors require evaluation as a prerequisite for approving funds.
- **Insufficient political will (no political consensus over the importance of evaluation) and low evaluation culture are crucial impediments for evidence-based policy making including conducting regular evaluations.** Desk research provided us with solid evidence on relatively indifferent attitude of the most of state institutions towards evaluations. There is no even one available independent evaluation available on their webpages, excluding those funded and required by international donors. Therefore, demand for evaluations in Serbia is relatively low.
- **Evaluation capacities of the researchers and civil society organisations are quite solid,** especially if low demand for evaluations is taken into account. Our analysis provided us with solid evidence on the quality of evaluations and research aimed to provide evidence-based analysis of certain public policies. Analysed studies are of solid quality, with well developed methodology and evaluation questions. They have been developed respecting both evaluation dimensions – responsibility and learning. However, analysis showed that evaluations have been often conducted independently from the policy cycle suggesting that new public policies have been developed without consulting evaluation reports.

Obtained findings have been amended with results of the empirical research – online questionnaires filled out by civil servants in the Republic of Serbia. In total, out of the 80 targeted state institutions 20 questionnaires were filled out. In overall, results of the survey suggest that the evaluation system in Serbia is in the initial phase of development. Although public policy evaluations are being conducted over the last year, there is a solid share of institutions that, despite of regulatory requirements, have not still adopted evaluation practice. Some institutions do not have internal organizational units in charge of commissioning and/or conducting evaluations. Evaluation assignments are often not budgeted, since funds for their realization are being provided from external sources, usually from donors. As per obtained answers, it is difficult to assess the current level of technical capacities of the state institutions not only for conducting monitoring and evaluation activities, but also for commissioning evaluations and use of the evaluation results for the policy improvements. Reasonable explanation for

that could be that the evaluation concept is still not sufficiently promoted, whereas policy makers are not aware of the benefits which evaluation findings could have in terms of effectiveness. In addition to legal requirements, providing reasonable budgets for conducting evaluations and various systemic incentives including capacity building of the state administration, would help greater use of evaluation results for the improvement of public policies. Results of the empirical research are as follows:

- **Policy makers in Serbia are still not commissioning evaluation on regular basis.** Results indicate that 14 out of 20 analysed institutions commissioned external evaluations.
- **Evaluation is not recognized within organizational structures of the state institutions.** Separate evaluation organizational units in charge of internal evaluation are present in 6 out of 20 institutions. Evaluation reports are often publicly available as confirmed by 13 out of 20 respondents.
- **Funds for conducting evaluation are by rule provided by external donors.** Evaluation assignments have been conducted by diverse institutions – research institutes, civil society organisations, consulting companies and individual experts. Respondents are in general satisfied by the quality of the submitted evaluation reports.
- **Research results suggest that the use of evaluation results for the public policy development is still not considered as an important policy making issue.** Therefore, 8 out of 20 respondents did not have enough information to answer the question related to the extent of using evaluation findings for the public policy development in Serbia. Representatives of the state institutions seem not still fully aware of the benefits which further development and promotion of the evaluation could bring to the policy makers.
- **There is a still significant space for capacity building and delivery of the public policy evaluation courses.** Although survey results (self-assessment of the state capacities) did not provide clear answers in terms of current capacities for commissioning evaluation assignments and use of evaluation findings, almost half of the respondents stated not being familiar with capacity building possibilities in Serbia, including those provided by the National Academy of Public Administration.

Final report also includes **Action Plan for further development of the evaluation practice in Serbia** including practical tips for improvement of the evaluation capacities, establishing efficient monitoring and evaluation systems and greater cooperation in promoting evaluation culture and conducting different types of evaluation among key stakeholders – state institutions, research organisations and civil society.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. SERBIA OUTLOOK

Demography, political, and economy context

Serbia is a landlocked nation in Southeastern Europe that covers 34,116 square miles (88,361 square kilometers). It is located between the Adriatic Sea, Mediterranean, and Black Seas but is touched by none of them, but shares its borders with Romania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Hungary. The land itself is broken down into thirds as far as geography, with the northern third being plains, the middle third is made up of hills and rivers, and the southern third is mountainous.

The estimated number of inhabitants in the Republic of Serbia in 2019 is 6,945,235. Observed by gender, 51.3% are women (3,561,503), and 48.7% are men (3,383,732). The trend of depopulation continued, which means that the population growth rate, compared to the previous year, is negative and amounts to -5.4 %.¹ Serbia's population decreased at a rate of 0.40% from 2019 to 2020, resulting in a population loss of about 35,000 people. This population decline rate has been increasing every year since 2015. The fertility rate is low at 1.46 births per woman. Additionally, Serbia has a "brain drain," where the most educated skilled people leave to other countries to find better opportunities. Serbia itself has been in demographic crisis since the early 1990's with a death rate that still exceeds its birth rate. Serbia, along with Bulgaria, has one of the most negative population growth rates in the world, with one of the lowest fertility rates (just 1.44 children per woman) and 1/5 of all households consist of just one person and Serbia has among the 10 oldest populations in the world.

The population decline is considered a national emergency by the Serbian government, who enlisted the help of the United Nations to try and slow the shrinking. Here are some more data that give a clearer picture of Serbia, where it served as a source Worldometers.

- Serbia population is equivalent to 0.11% of the [total world population](#).
- Serbia ranks number 99 in the list of [countries \(and dependencies\) by population](#).
- The population density in Serbia is 100 per km² (259 people per mi²).
- The total land area is 87,460 km² (33,768 sq. miles)
- 56.2 % of the population is urban (4,913,067 people in 2020)
- The median age in Serbia is 41.6 years.²
-

As can be seen on the World Bank website where Serbia is described with key characteristics - the global financial crisis exposed the structural weaknesses in Serbia's economic growth model and prompted the need for fiscal consolidation and an acceleration of the unfinished transition to a market

¹ Population estimates are based on results of population census and results of processing of natural and mechanical population changes. Estimation results are done by sex, age, type of settlement and are published up to the level of municipalities. Apart from the mid-year estimation, presenting average estimated population number in the referent year, available are also the data on population number at the beginning of the observed year (January 1st) and at the end of the same year (December 31st). See more: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/oblasti/stanovnistvo/procene-stanovnistva>.

² Source: **Worldometer** (www.Worldometers.info) accessed June 2020.

economy. Serbia's rapid growth in 2001–08 was driven mainly by domestic consumption and led to significant internal and external imbalances that proved to be unsustainable.

The Government that formed after the April 2016 elections stepped up the implementation of structural reforms, broadening the focus to include social sector transformation. Although the results of the spring 2017 presidential election led to a change in prime minister (as the incumbent became Serbia's new president), the Government experienced only minor changes, enabling it to maintain an emphasis on reforming state administration, public finances, and the economy, along with pursuing the European Union (EU) accession process. The Government's current economic reform program focuses on ensuring economic and financial stability, reducing debt, and creating an environment for economic recovery and growth to foster employment and raise living standards. There have been signs lately that the reform momentum has slowed³.

Table 1. Serbia – overall info

Serbia	2019
Population, million	6.9
GDP, current US\$ billion	51.5
GDP per capita, current US\$	7,409
School Enrollment, primary (% gross, 2016)	100.6
Life Expectancy at Birth, years (2016)	75.7

Source: The World Bank in Serbia: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/serbia/overview>

GDP is forecast to contract this year due to Covid-19 containment measures dragging on domestic and foreign demand. As such, private consumption and business activity as well as tourism and exports of goods are expected to suffer. The fiscal and monetary stimulus should cushion the fall somewhat, although a second wave of Covid-19 cases poses a risk. Focus Economics panelists see GDP contracting 2.8% in 2020, which is up 0.3 percentage points from last month's forecast, before growing 4.9% in 2021.⁴

Economic trends of the Serbian economy is based on the forecasts of international organizations, such as the IMF, and the World Bank, the European Commission, and domestic organizations, such as the Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and other. Since the global environment has deteriorated and indicators suggest a further slowdown in global growth and trade, Serbia is trying in 2020 to safeguard its hardly achieved macroeconomic stability and take its economic transformation to the next level.⁵

As stated in the Serbia Report of European Commission "Serbia is moderately prepared in the area of public administration reform. No progress was made overall as the excessive number of acting senior manager positions was not sizeably reduced. Lack of transparency and respect of the merit-based recruitment procedure for senior civil service positions is an issue of increasingly serious concern. The

³ The World Bank in Serbia: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/serbia/overview>, accessed, June, 2020.

⁴ Serbia Economy Growth, <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/serbia>, accessed: June, 2020.

⁵ Serbia economy briefing: Economic Outlook for Serbia in 2020, <https://china-cee.eu/2020/03/09/serbia-economy-briefing-economic-outlook-for-serbia-in-2020/>, accessed:06.10.2020

effective implementation of the law on the planning system needs to be ensured through a strong quality control of the Public Policy Secretariat. Serbia's judicial system has some level. On the economic criteria, Serbia made some progress and is moderately prepared/at a good level of preparation in developing a functioning market economy. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the pace of GDP growth picked up as domestic demand strengthened. External imbalances widened but their financing remained healthy due to high inflows of foreign direct investment. Price pressures remained subdued and inflation expectations contained. By reducing the budgetary deficit and maintaining a prudent fiscal stance, Serbia has significantly improved debt sustainability.

Labour market performance has improved, with the lowest unemployment rates in the last decade; however, this was also due to large-scale emigration. The COVID-19 crisis is however projected to strongly deteriorate the economic outlook in 2020, in particular as regards GDP growth, public finances and employment. While some progress has been made in the reforms of the tax administration and the privatisation of state-owned banks, other structural reforms of public administration and state owned enterprises advanced slowly. Weaknesses in the budgetary framework need to be addressed. There has been no progress in strengthening the fiscal rules. The state retains a strong footprint in the economy and the private sector is hampered by weaknesses in the rule of law.”⁶

1.2. M&E CONTEXT BEFORE FLAGSHIP INTERVENTION

M&E practice in Serbia is not sufficiently developed, neither recognised by decision makers as important for developing effective public policies. M&E have been often initiated and funded by international donors interested in assessing the impact of their projects, programmes or national strategies or action plans (especially those related to the EU accession agenda). They have been conducted for the purpose of learning and/or redesigning new development interventions. Over the recent years, as a part of the public administration reform, there could be noticed certain systematic improvements (referring to adoption of the Law on Planning System in April 2018), which might result in a wider use of M&E practice in the future. However, capacities of public administration in the field of both supply and demand for M&E are questionable.

In terms of demand for evaluations, it could be noticed several important initiatives aimed at encouraging public institutions to adopt M&E as regular activities, which might result in significant improvements of the decision-making processes. Those have been advocated by the civil society and/or research organisations already familiar with the M&E concept and practice, being aware of the potential benefits M&E could bring for the society wellbeing^{7, 8}. In exceptional cases, ex-post external

⁶ European Commission, Serbia 2020 Report, Brussels, 06.10.2020. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/serbia_report_2020.pdf

⁷ Foundation for the Advancement of Economics and European Policy Centre, (2014), Getting Results in Public Policy: Monitoring and Evaluation with Evidence Supplied by the Civil Society, Research conducted under the project “Achieving Effective Policy Monitoring and Evaluation through Evidence Supplied by the Civil Society” funded by the European Union.

⁸ Jelena Žarković-Rakić, Dejan Stanković, Igor Bandović and Mihajlo Đukić, (2016), Implementation of Scientific Results in the Field of Social Sciences in the Process of Creating Public Policies in Serbia, Institute of Economic Sciences, Belgrade, research conducted under the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans, funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation

evaluations have been conducted at the request of international organisations/ donors, mostly for the purpose of evaluation of internationally funded projects.

In terms of supply, Evaluation is still not recognised as a profession. Evaluation practitioners in Serbia are often employed in academia, research organisations and civil society, accepting evaluation assignments as a consultancy job. Evaluation assignments have been often conducted by the international experts, while the local experts/institutions have been engaged as a local support staff which is more familiar with local environment. Creation of new generations of evaluation practitioners and spreading the evaluation culture would require initiation of the informal education programmes, creation of the university curricula, strengthening evaluation community and investing more efforts in promotion of the benefits of evaluation.

Evaluation of the national strategic documents and specific policy measures has been recognised within the Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (VNR) as important step towards SDG achievement in Serbia. It is supposed to increase effectiveness and result in tailoring specific policies with respect to identified sustainable development priorities. VNR particularly stressed importance of the self-evaluation of the entire Government including all ministries and agencies, which would require significant capacity building of the public administration and institutionalisation of the evaluation as mandatory stage within public policy life-cycle⁹.

Over the last couple of years, state institutions in Serbia have invested some efforts aimed at incorporating evaluation concept, at least formally, to improve the quality of governance, decision-making, accountability and to support learning. In that context, it would be fair to mention two important documents - Strategy of Regulatory Reform and Improvement of the System of Managing Public Policies for the period 2016-2020, Law on Planning System (2018), as well as Republican Secretariat for Public Policy (special entity of the Government of the Republic of Serbia) established in 2014, which provides expert support to the Government and public administration bodies in the process of planning, developing, adopting and coordinating public policies and implementing regulatory reform.

With regard to public policies in the field of monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals, it could be noted that the UN Global Compact exists since 2007 in the Republic of Serbia, and within it there is a Working Group for the Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda (2030). The Cabinet of Ministers without portfolio in charge of demography and population policy is also responsible for 2030 Agenda and this ministry initiated preparation of the RS Voluntary National Report on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This report is signed by Prime Minister and presented to the UN in July 2019. Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the Implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development coordinates the work of all Ministries and State institutions in the process of implementation of Agenda 2030¹⁰. Devinfo team of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, deals with indicators for monitoring the SDGs through database system for monitoring human development and for planning and reporting

⁹ <https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/VNR%2C%20eng.pdf>

¹⁰ Serbia, Voluntary National Review 2019, Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/serbia>

purposes. Out of 244 defined indicators, national statistics covered only 68 so far¹¹. SDC and GIZ launched big 3 years project to support localisation of SDGs with developed monitoring matrix. From the institutional point of view, policy makers in Serbia are mainly using ex-ante assessment of the policy effects for the purpose of preparation of strategic documents (national and local strategies) and laws. Those have been conducted in a relatively unsystematic manner and without precisely defined or transparent methodology, without consulting other related strategic documents, often without real consultations with the research community and other interested stakeholders. Additional problem represents the fact that strategic documents in later phases have been rarely evaluated. Ideas of responsibility for the achieved results or learning from the experience have been relatively strange for most of the policy makers in Serbia. For that reason, it seems that even the ex-ante assessment practice has been conducted to fill the form rather to be really used in the following phases of the decision-making processes.

1.3. THEORETICAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Theoretical background

Over the last couple of decades, not only in the Western parts of the world, but in developing countries as well, Government programmes and strategies have been critically assessed towards their efficiency and effectiveness. Credible critique requires use of rigorous scientific methodologies and obtaining enough evidence to support debates on the specific public policy issues. Following rising popularity of the evidence-based policy making initiatives, public sector is also changing. Internal processes of designing policies have been increasingly using public policy evaluation (both ex-ante and ex-post) as a tool that would help in achieving envisaged objectives.

Citing Scriven (1991), evaluation could be defined as the systematic determination of the value of something as per defined criteria or standard. It encompasses group of activities and processes including description, analysis, valuation/assessment, appraisal of the project/programme/process, organisational unit, human resources, etc. As a result of evaluation, it is possible to determine and compare results of the activities conducted by individuals/teams/institutions. Evaluation therefore discovers which individuals have been the most productive in completing certain tasks and why. The main objective for conducting evaluation is to provide credible and useful information – “lessons learned” that could be used to support policy decisions in the future. Therefore, evaluation culture is often promoted as the culture of learning.

Evidence based policy requires good quality and reliable data, analytical skills and political support. Everyone in favour of this approach is referring to rigorous research evidence as policy arguments to support or dispute certain public policies (Head, 2010). In that context, primary goal should be to improve reliability of advice and recommendations referring to effectiveness and efficiency of the specific policy and potential alternatives. This could be attractive to both evaluation experts/policy

¹¹ DevInfo, Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, Available at: <http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs/diSrbija/diSDG.aspx>

makers wishing to determine the effectiveness of the policy measures, reasons behind their failure or success and sensitivity of the results depending on the specific external conditions.

Similarly to scientific, there have been occasional public debates over the necessity for greater use of quantitative data as well as the appropriateness of applying specific evaluation approaches, methods and instruments depending on the policy context. However, most of the evaluation experts agree on the importance of strengthening evidence-based policy making environment, collecting good-quality data, acquiring adequate knowledge of analytical skills and assessment theories, as well as providing political support as important factors of successful decision-making processes and achieving desired outcomes.

Decision-making policy inherently involves a mix of science, value preferences, and practical judgments about feasibility and legitimacy (Head, 2010, 2015). It is considered that outside the scientific community, the field of knowledge and evidence is even more diverse and contextualized. If carefully processed and analysed by the evaluation professionals, different sets of evidence and testimonies, often mutually competitive, could be sometimes equally informative and useful for policy making. According to Head and Shonkoff, in addition to scientific knowledge as one of the most important inputs to evidence-based policy making, wider political community include several other knowledge fields and types of expertise that are also representing very important “voice” in democratic societies:

1. **Political knowledge** (produced by political leaders and organisations that create political strategies, tactics and policy agendas with regard to their priorities mobilizing ideas and values to support satisfying political goals and developing broader support coalitions).
2. **Managerial/professional knowledge** (has key role in delivering services and coordination of programmes aiming to provide advices on feasibility, field experience and understanding of the effectiveness of certain policies under specific conditions)
3. **Knowledge and experience of the service users and other stakeholders** (views of the ordinary citizens often differ from service providers and programme designers, and their attitudes are usually taken into account when assessing effectiveness of certain programmes and assuring that services provided meet specific needs and resolve problems) (Shonkoff, 2000, Head, 2008).

To summarize, the values of evidence-based policy are indisputable, especially if considering importance of high-quality evidence. However, it should be taken into account that process through which quality evidence could influence policy can often be disrupted by various (external) pressures. Namely, it is not enough just to conduct “good research” and produce relevant evidence, but also to make policy makers, decision makers, and other potential users the evaluation results familiar with the importance, appropriate use and advantages, as well as limitations of adequate information and findings. Therefore, depending on the political context, some types of evidence may be considered more relevant than others when supporting political views or in case when the political arena is characterised by serious conflicts and compromises. In that situation, initially ambitious evidence-based policy approach could be replaced by a more modest concept of “evidence-informed policy”.

Importance of developed evaluation capacities

If capacities are defined as “ability in achieving defined objectives” or “ability of an organization to produce adequate results” (Boesen & Therkildsen 2005), they need to be understood in the context of process-outcome logic, being developed through iterations and multidimensional. Common to all characteristics of capacities is the assumption that capacities are related to concrete performances. Development of capacities could be defined as dynamic and multidimensional process which aims to improve ability of an individual/group/organization/system to work better and reach objectives. Most of development organisations during the 90s engaged with some form of building capacities to develop capacities for reaching development objectives (UNDP, 1998).

Over the last decades it has been present common agreement on the role of developed of capacities/abilities in supporting good governance as a tool to achieve high level of public sector performances. MacKay argues that development of evaluation capacities ensures that evaluation results are disposable in the 4 key areas (MacKay, 1999):

1. Input for the resource distribution and budget related Government decisions;
2. Tool for good governance which reveals performances of the current activities on several levels leading to learning and improvements;
3. Mechanism that supports responsibility, making both Governments and decision makers to be responsible for the results of their work;
4. Demonstration of the results of development activities.

When demonstrating the degree of success in conducting development activities Governments should focus their activities on strengthening evaluation skills, as such a system would help them to improve allocation of resources and management methods. Evaluation and development of evaluation capacities, as central elements of the “results-oriented” (or “new public governance”) approach, have been adopted in many European countries over the last decades. Evaluation could be therefore seen as one component of a much broader management framework.

Thus, the online resources including guidelines on the evaluation of socio-economic development (EVALSED) consider the development of evaluation capacities as “part of the broader needs for institutional and administrative capacity building, being an important goal of socio-economic development policy.” Both needs and goals stem from the overcoming inefficiencies in traditional public administration as well as the opening the policy-making processes towards civil society and citizens requiring democratic governance. Evaluation is therefore increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for modernization of the public sector, costs reduction and increasing citizens’ participation in policy making processes. In overall, it provides mechanisms for the supervision of political processes by external stakeholders and citizens, which in turn, represents the embodiment of the principles of democratic governance.

Methodology

The ultimate objective of the analysis presented within this study refers to assessment of the current evaluation capacities in Serbia since, mapping evaluation capacities of the Government and civil society is supposed to be starting point of the broader processes of incorporating evaluation practice into policy making processes. EVALSED, as a resource that includes guidelines for evaluation of the socio-economic development and considering evaluation as institutional, human, resource and procedural

basis for assessing effectiveness of public policies and systems of governance, has been chosen as methodological basis for conducting research¹².

In that context, for the assessment of evaluation capacities, the following elements should be analysed:

1. **ARCHITECTURE** refers to locating, structuring and coordinating of evaluation functions that include the following elements:
 - centralized or decentralized approach
 - internal or external evaluation approach
 - the link between evaluation and budgeting and auditing functions
 - responsibility for development of strategy for building evaluation capacities of the relevant institutions - Ministry of Finance, Office of the Prime Minister, Department / Ministry responsible for EU Structural Funds, etc.
2. **DEMAND** refers to assessing existing official demands for evaluation services requested by the state administration and related institutions
3. **SUPPLY** refers to assessing current state of skills and competencies needed for evaluation including possibilities of developing adequate organizational support
4. **INSTITUTIONALIZATION** implies the incorporation of the evaluation process into policy-making systems as well as within the broader political system.

Firstly, we analysed characteristics of the evaluation practice in Serbia (Sections 2.1. and 2.2.). Following brief analysis of the institutional framework, demand for evaluation as well as existing capacities reflecting evaluation supply, we analysed main documents that have been locally developed to support M&E activities. They have been produced by civil society organisations and independent state institutions, usually with a support of individual researchers. Consequently, we analysed available evaluation reports, mainly those in the field of public policy evaluations. Such analysis provided us with main characteristics of the Serbian evaluation practice. We presented **7 illustrative evaluation case studies focusing on 5 important issues:**

- **Who commissioned evaluation assignments?**
- **Who conducted evaluation?**
- **What is the field of evaluation?**
- **What were the evaluation questions?**
- **What have been the most important findings and recommendations?**

In the second step (Section 2.3.), there have been analysed elements of the EVALSED network resources related to the evaluation architecture (location, structure, and coordination of evaluation functions) in a broader and narrower sense. In a broader sense, we aimed to determine whether there is a centralized or decentralized approach to evaluation, whether priority is given to internal or external evaluation approach, whether there is a clear link between evaluation and budgeting/auditing functions, and finally, whether responsibilities for development of strategies related to the development of evaluation capacities are clearly defined.

In a narrower sense, we tried to assess the architecture quality at the level of an individual institution. Additionally, we tried to examine whether and to what extent there is a demand for evaluation, what

¹² <http://www.evaled.info/glossaryDefinition.aspx?id=66>

is the current level of supply, what skills do human resources (in terms of evaluation commissioners) have for monitoring and evaluation activities, what is the organizational support in terms of defining evaluation assignments and providing training and development in the field of evaluation. Finally, we tried to determine to what extent evaluation procedures have been implemented in the policy-making as well as wider political system.

The process of mapping of the existing capacities of state institutions was conducted in the period from April 2020 to December 2020. The mapping primarily included state institutions in domain of executive and legislative power. Process itself has been conducted under relatively unfavorable conditions for research, due to parliamentary elections at all levels being held in May and remote work of administration influenced by COVID-19 pandemic, which also to the certain extent changed policy priorities. At the time of compiling this part of the report, a new parliament was being elected, and then the government, that opened space for organizational and personnel changes, partially prevented us from accessing certain data in a timely manner, which affected the final results of our findings.

Third step refers to empirical research conducted through online questionnaires/interviews that helped us in obtaining views from the representatives of the state institutions. Questions have been developed (See Appendix) with regard to main desk research findings and with a support of the relevant international studies dealing with evaluation capacities worldwide (EVALSED, 2013; Lazaro, 2015; European Commission, 2008). Questionnaires were distributed to 80 state institutions (Ministries, Agencies, Secretariats, etc.). We received 20 filled out questionnaires in total.

In terms of capacities for evaluation of civil society organizations, we used results of the report *How to achieve results in public policies* prepared by the Foundation for the Advancement of Economic Science and the Center for European Policies realised within the project *Civil Society Support Program 2012* and funded by the EU and co-financed by the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. This report, regardless of the time distance, served as a solid basis for obtaining a fair picture of the capacity of civil society which could be involved in the monitoring and evaluation processes. It has been found that several civil society organizations published evaluation reports that often covered the local level and their strategic policies in the field of social issues, such as youth employment. Other secondary resources, research analysis and data collected and/or produced by the independent research and civil society organisations were also used in order to obtain adequate picture of the current evaluation capacities.

Certain degradation of the civil sector has occurred over the last couple of years which, in addition to the financial challenges, has been largely influenced by the state administration itself. Namely, foreign donors, as the largest source of financial support, have been gradually reducing the budget for their project activities, imposing search for new models of sustainability of these organizations crucial, taking into account importance of their role as a corrective mechanism to the work of the Government.

Annual reports of the European Commission that are following development in this area, also served as a confirmation of the above. Namely, the latest EC report underlined struggle of civil society organizations to raise awareness on civil and political rights for the purpose of protecting human rights in a polarized environment that is mostly not open to criticism. The government is continuously producing more negative statements about CSOs critical to the Government, initiating investigations into their sources of financing and exerting increasing pressure in tabloid newspapers, especially during the period of parliamentary elections (EC Serbia 2020 Report, 2020).

The main project idea is to improve the capacity and strengthen the Voluntary Organisation for Professional Evaluation (VOPE) in Serbia, currently organised within the Informal Network of Evaluators in Serbia (INES) that will be used as an “umbrella organisation” for gathering different institutions and individuals dealing with public policy evaluation in Serbia and spreading the evaluation culture. Additionally, project aims to promote importance of the concept of public policy evaluation as a necessary tool for the evidence-based policy making which has been assumed as necessary condition to achieve sustainable development. Project is to reach the following objectives:

Increased awareness of the policy makers, CSOs and other interested stakeholders on benefits of conducting M&E for the effective policy making with a gender-focus and equity responsive (EFG) dimension?

Improved capacities of the (local) evaluation community and Informal Network of Evaluators in Serbia to support M&E development in Serbia, particularly for evaluation of the SDGs.

To reach the aforementioned objectives, the following project activities were implemented:

Mapping of the existing capacities¹³ of state and CSOs (desk research plus a survey questionnaire to the official e-mail addresses);

Organisation of (online) meetings with the representatives of the most relevant organisations identified during the mapping process, particularly in the field of SDG evaluation;

Organisation of the (online) multi-stakeholder Roundtable with selected representatives of government bodies and CSOs and other stakeholders (academia, UN and development agencies, private sector, etc...) to present project results and identify common capacity building needs. Representatives of the Western Balkan Evaluation Network (WBEN) and people involved in successful “evaluation stories” from the Western Balkan region will be invited to contribute to successful Roundtable discussion;

Uploading project results to the INES webpage with an aim to promote evaluation as a concept and its importance for developing evidence-based policy making.

With regard to defined project activities and objectives, this section provides insight into methodologies and approaches used when mapping state institutions in the M&E field including brief assessment of their evaluation capacities. Therefore, collection of the secondary data included:

- Review of official web pages and internet presentations of government institutions of the Republic of Serbia;
- Review of existing studies, reports, newsletters and other relevant documents that included evaluation as required project activity;
- Interviews with key stakeholders, recognized as important and influential in the process of defining, analyzing, and providing opinions and recommendations within the public policy cycles;
- Review of international donors’ monitoring and evaluation systems, evaluation standards they use, comparing them with the government’s monitoring and evaluation systems.

¹³ Human and organisational capacities (sectoral and horizontal) in terms of their abilities, usability and acquired knowledge and skills to conduct monitoring and evaluation.

Given the organization structure of the Government of the Republic of Serbia until the election of the new Government (October 28, 2020), the following state institutions have been included in the analysis¹⁴:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of the Internal Affairs
- Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications
- Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Economy
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management
- Ministry of Environmental Protection
- Ministry of Mining and Energy
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government
- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of European Integration
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs
- Ministry of Youth and Sports
- Ministry of Culture and Information
- Minister without portfolio in charge of Violence Prevention and Protection of Children and the Disabled
- Minister without portfolio in charge of Regional Development and Coordination of Public Enterprises
- Minister without portfolio in charge of Innovations and Technological Development

In the meantime, with the election of a new government, three new ministries have been set up:

- Ministries of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue
- Ministry of Family Care and Demography
- Ministry of Village Care.

It should be noted that, apart from Ministries, other state administration bodies such as: Government agencies, research institutes, secretariats, administrative bodies as well as independent national and local bodies, are also interesting for research and analysis. There is no single official databases of state bodies and entities according to any criteria (entities that are holders or holders of public authority, bodies and other entities that are fully or partially financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. autonomous provinces, local self-government units, etc.). There are some activities that determine the necessary measures, in the normative and operational sense, for the establishment of a register of bodies and other entities according to the name of the body or other entity; the body performing

¹⁴ Parliamentary elections held in June 2020

supervision, if prescribed; legal basis of establishment; types of organs, ie other subject; competencies determined by the regulation and the total number of employees; but still without a clear and concrete result (Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia, 2018). So that the number of over 80 state administration bodies was reached by searching the following addresses:

1. Directory of the RS Government - ministries and offices
2. Agencies, offices and services of the RS Government
3. Agencies, institutes and administrations and
4. Independent republican bodies and independent bodies

It was noticed that there is no clear typology and criteria according to which they were recorded, so there was a repetition of some bodies and organs in the records / lists, which we managed to separate and avoid repetition when trying to determine the exact number.

In total, out of over 80 state institutions, it has been selected sample of 21 ministries, which is approximately a quarter of the total number of state administration bodies. They have been considered as institutions being in charge of leading/monitoring at least one policy within their area of work and therefore should have officials dealing with issues related to monitoring and evaluation.

2. EVALUATION CAPACITIES IN SERBIA – DESK RESEARCH FINDINGS

Desk research on evaluation capacities in Serbia aimed to determine current level of development of evaluation practice and its use in public policy development processes. For that purpose, desk research activities have been designed to provide answers to the following questions:

- *What are the local documents that have been produced to support M&E activities in Serbia so far?*
- *What are the most important publicly available M&E reports in the field of public policy evaluation?*
- *What is the evaluation practice within the analytical units of the Government institutions in Serbia, as per available information from their official web pages and official documents?*

2.1. LOCAL GUIDELINES ON CONDUCTING EVALUATION IN SERBIA

Despite of relatively low level of evaluation culture and lacking practise of assessing effects of public policies in Serbia in general, there have been produced several documents that provide useful strategic and operational recommendations on conducting monitoring and evaluation for different purposes. They provide solid input for the evaluation commissioners and emerging evaluators on how to analyse, monitor and evaluate public policies, defining also key elements and phases of the evaluation process, and explaining steps in development of the evaluation questions. Some of the documents focus particularly on the specific evaluation beneficiaries, whereas others provide overall recommendations on how to resolve challenges of the evaluation in Serbia taking into account characteristics of the Serbian political and economic system. They might be, to a certain extent, lacking analytical perspective of the state institutions. However, they have been developed, among others, with an aim to bridge the gap between research and policy, especially documents produced by civil society organisations who often perform mission of the knowledge brokers translating technical scientific language into useful policy recommendations.

Law on Planning System represents “breakthrough” in terms of building evidence-based policy making system in Serbia. It is the first document that envisages mandatory evaluation of the national and local strategies and development plans. Indirectly, it is probably the most important step towards developing evaluation culture putting the focus on responsibility of the state institutions. However, building of the evaluation culture is a long and painful process which needs political power and courage to implement reforms. Therefore, obligations listed within the Law on Planning System have to be operationalised and clarified through other concrete documents explaining methods and techniques of conducting M&E activities¹⁵. In addition to the Law, there have been adopted two bylaws - Regulation on the methodology of public policy management impact analysis of public policies and regulations,

¹⁵ Official Gazette of the RS No. 30/18

and the content of individual public policy documents¹⁶ and Regulation on the Methodology of Development of Mid-Term Plans¹⁷.

The Regulation on the Methodology of Public Policy Management, Policy and Regulatory Impact Assessment, and Content of Individual Public Policy Documents regulates in more specific terms the process and the control of impact assessment done in the course of development of public policies and regulations, as well as the procedure for carrying out consultations, the content and the form of public policy documents, the process of reporting on results of implemented public policies, the analysis and evaluation of these results, and the areas of public policy planning and implementation. The enforcement of the regulation will unify the processes of planning, development and adoption of public policy documents and regulations, which will in turn result in a more transparent process of their development, their better quality, and a more efficient implementation, i.e. the achievement of better outcomes (Republic Secretariat for Public Policies, 2019)¹⁸.

The Regulation on the Methodology of Development of Mid-Term Plans more closely prescribes the methodology of mid-term planning, i.e. the content and the process of development and carrying out of mid-term planning, as well as the role of the Information system for planning, monitoring of the implementation and reporting, which will serve as the base of public policy documents and mid-term plans and provide for the reporting on their outcomes. The implementation of the regulation will enable the joining of processes of mid-term planning and budget development, i.e. a better prioritization of expenditure and more effective allocation of budget resources within the mid-term framework. This will altogether contribute to a more efficient enforcement of envisaged measures and the achievement of targets set by various planning documents (public policy documents and development planning documents), (Republic Secretariat for Public Policies, 2019)¹⁹.

In 2020 Republic Secretariate produced another three very important operational documents to support development of the evaluation capacities of the state administration:

1. Handbook for development of the mid-term plans²⁰
2. Handbook for the analysis of the effects of public policies²¹
3. Handbook for determining the costs of public policies²²

In addition to the Law on planning system and related bylaws and handbooks, “**Guidelines for Social Impact Assessments**” (SIPRU, 2016) represent another important systemic document in the field of M&E²³. They have been developed with an aim to support all stakeholders in assessing social impact of public policies. They are to the large extent based on Guidelines of the European Commission and slightly modified with regard to specifics of the Serbian political system. Methodology created within Guidelines for social impact assessment have been for the first time applied when developing key

¹⁶ Official Gazette of the RS No. 8/19

¹⁷ Official Gazette of the RS No. 8/19

¹⁸ <https://rsjp.gov.rs/en/news/regulations-enabling-more-specific-implementation-of-the-law-on-the-planning-system-adopted/>

¹⁹ <https://rsjp.gov.rs/en/news/regulations-enabling-more-specific-implementation-of-the-law-on-the-planning-system-adopted/>

²⁰ <https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Prirucnik-za-izradu-srednjorocnih-planova-09032020.pdf>

²¹ <https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Prirucnik-za-analizu-efekata-javnih-politika-i-propisa-21012021-srb.pdf>

²² <https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Prirucnik-za-utvrdivanje-troskova-javnih-politika-i-propisa.pdf>

²³ <http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Smernice-za-procenu-uticaja-na-drustvo-ENG.pdf>

structural priorities of the Economic Reform Programme for 2016-2018. Guidelines envisage key steps when assessing social impact of the specific public policy (SIPRU, 2016):

- Establish the envisaged measures and causal links;
- Analyse the expected forms of impact (e.g. job creation / loss of jobs, change of working conditions, distribution of income, access to goods and services, impact on the labour market);
- Analyse the population groups most affected by these measures (e.g. men/women, regional impact, sectoral impact, vulnerable social groups, persons with low qualifications, children, migrants);
- Assessment of the effects, starting with a systematic qualitative testing aimed at identifying the points of significant effect for the draft and potential options.

They have been widely used when assessing impact of policies under SIPRU portfolio – unemployment, poverty, social inclusion, social policy innovations, etc.

“Monitoring and evaluation of the local development strategies” (Marosek, et al. 2012) provides set of recommendations for the local level officials of the public administration on how to monitor and evaluate local sustainable development documents – sectoral strategies, action plans and other strategic documents. It has been created by the team of international and local experts coordinated by the GIZ International services and funded by the European Union within IPA 2007 program²⁴. The most important contribution of the document represents its very clear and simplified approach in reflecting the key elements of the strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation. It is developed as glossary, list of definitions, concepts and examples easily understandable for the policy makers with insufficient knowledge about the importance and technical implementation of the public policy cycles. Therefore, its targeted audience are the representatives of the state institutions as evaluation commissioners or the officials in charge of M&E which perform monitoring activities or conducts some preliminary and internal evaluations. It provides crucial elements required for creation of the terms of reference for evaluators, explains the logic and rationale for the evaluation and describes what are the most important benefits of the evaluations for the policy makers. Finally, this document summarizes potential solutions for the most often questions and dilemmas policy makers face when establishing M&E system or developing terms of reference such as – *whether to conduct internal or external evaluation, how to use monitoring and evaluation results, how to communicate evaluation results, how to conduct benchmarking and who to compare with, etc.*

Publication **“Getting results in Public Policy”** (Maric, et al. 2014) is one of the pioneer steps in reviewing the current state of the public policy environment in Serbia jointly produced in 2014 by the two civil society organisations – Center for European Policies (CEP) and Foundation for the Advancement of Economics (FREN)²⁵. It has been prepared within the “Achieving Effective Policy Monitoring and Evaluation through Evidence Supplied by the Civil Society” and funded by the European Union. It synthesizes the the main obstacles and options for systemic solutions in terms of developing effective M&E system. Results of the research summarize several most important characteristics of the Serbian policy making system, proved to be still valid with regard to findings obtained within current analysis:

²⁴ <http://indicator.sepa.gov.rs/slike/pdf/o-indikatorima/prirucnik-lor>

²⁵ https://cep.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/study_final.pdf

- Measuring policy performance in Serbia is somewhat neglected;
- Civil society is expected to take over the process of advocating for the evidence-based policy making and use of research evidence;
- There is observable lack of institutional support for conducting M&E and mechanisms that require and stimulate cooperation between stakeholders, particularly civil society organisations;
- Civil society organisations are still lacking institutional and human capacities;
- Main support for development of the evidence-based policy practise and active role of the civil society have been provided by the EU within the EU negotiations processes;
- Social policy and employment are the fields where examples of good practice could be observed particularly due to the role of the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction unit (SIPRU).

With regard to the specifics of the policy making system in Serbia, level of the evaluation culture and centralisation, authors of the study offered 3 different modalities of developing the M&E system that would also provide greater involvement of the CSOs – (1) basic; (2) advanced; (3) developed. They advocated for the first option – basic, which assumes gradual involvement of the civil society organisations, orientation on the implementation rather than results, and high level of centralisation which envisages central position of the Government which manages centralised databases of the institutions and reports and coordinate the work of the M&E units within Ministries. This approach, as suggested by the authors, would fit into the Serbian system characterised by the relatively low evaluation culture and weak evaluation capacities.

External evaluation assignments have been often conducted by the civil society organisations, think-tanks, and individual consultants. Methodologically complex evaluation tasks usually require engagement of academics, researchers employed with academia and/or research institutes. Cooperation between researchers and decision makers in Serbia is everything but smooth and frequent. Working group led by the Institute of Economic Sciences consisted of researchers and representatives of the civil society conducted research funded by the SDC project entitled Regional Research Promotion Programme (RRPP) in social sciences, and its Policy dialogue component²⁶. It aimed to assess current level of cooperation between research community and decision makers, identify current gaps in their relations, as well as to develop adequate policy recommendations. Methodology included online survey that was filled out by the researchers in the field of social sciences (n=164), and 23 in-depth face-to-face interviews with key actors, representatives of the state institutions and research organisations. The main project output was study **“Implementation of scientific results in the field of social sciences”** (Zarkovic, et al. 2016), which summarised the main barriers and recommendations for greater cooperation between researchers and policy makers. The main barriers include:

- Insufficient human capacities within public sector to support evidence-based policy making;
- Strategic documents and policies are not well developed, lacking clear and measurable objectives;
- Lack of intersectoral cooperation between state institutions and lack of multidisciplinary within Serbian research practice;

²⁶ <https://www.library.iien.bg.ac.rs/index.php/monog/article/view/406>

- Research capacities are still not adequate to meet policy requirements since even having adequate methodology they often lack precise and understandable recommendations.

Research group developed set of recommendations that would be important step towards evidence-based policy making system in Serbia. They could be classified into 4 areas:

- Communication between researchers and policy creators
- Higher involvement of researchers in the processes of creation of public policy documents
- Development of research capacities
- Institutional mechanisms and channels of regular communication between researchers and policy creators

Analysis of the public policy effects on the society – review of the international and local methodologies with critical perspective (Bradas and Sekulovic, 2020) has been prepared within the project “Policies Beneficial to All: Measuring the Social Impact of Public Policies through Empowerment and Inclusion of Citizens” coordinated by the Center for Democracy Foundation and supported by the Open Society Foundation, Serbia²⁷. It has twofold objectives. First one refers to creating of the theoretical basis for the collection of data that would support analysis of the social effects of the public policies. It is particularly developed for the needs of the civil society which is supposed to provide greater support for the public policy making and objective independent assessment of the social impact of certain policies. Second one aims to identify weak points of the existing methodologies that have been applied in Serbia, provide recommendations for their improvement and suggest measures that would stimulate greater involvement of the citizens in all phases of the policy making cycle, especially the policy development and impact analysis.

Selected and analysed social assessment methodologies include those developed by the well-known international organisations such as World Bank, United Nations, International Labour Organisations, World Health Organisations, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the European Commission. As per conducted analysis and with regard to the research aims, authors argued that methodologies created by the World Health Organisation and the European Commission provide the most developed mechanisms for the participation of citizens. Conducted analysis of the local methodologies covered “Guidelines for the social impact assessment” developed by the SIPRU in 2016 and the Law on planning system adopted in 2018. As per conducted research, the most important **characteristics of the Serbian M&E system** are as follows:

- Developed theoretical background and poor implementation (SIPRU Guidelines)
- Simplicity and slow beginning of the implementation (Law on planning system)
- Insufficient engagement of citizens in creating and analyzing effects of public policies
- Poor state administration capacities for public policy analysis

The fact is that Serbia was among the first non-EU countries that adopted policy recommendations of the public policy effects on the society. However, decision makers’ actions did not follow observable international trends. Created assessment standards and criteria have not been incorporated into the current legislative framework. International stakeholders such as World Bank and the EU did not insist on respecting developed methodologies, whereas capacities of the state administration have been

²⁷ <http://www.centaronline.org/en/project/1780/policies-beneficial-to-all>

even worsened over the last couple of years. Therefore, authors of the study suggest several policy measures to improve both of the analysed documents:

- Improve SIPRU “Guidelines for the social impact assessment” in cooperation with civil society, academic institutions, business entities and other associations or citizen movements with respect to knowledge and needs of the non-Government sector
- Public discussions and consultations should be amended to include “Guidelines for the social impact assessment” as its mandatory part
- Organise trainings to improve capacities of both private and public sector on social impact assessments
- Promote application of the social assessment on development projects and initiatives (to be) conducted in the Republic of Serbia
- Improve Law on Planning System by adopting standards of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, European Pillar of Social Rights and SIPRU Recommendations
- Include as mandatory consultations with non-Government stakeholders, especially during ex-ante analysis
- Unify data sources at the national level to match the standards of the EU, ILO, United Nations, etc.
- Organise exchange of experience with institutions from the countries such as UK and Austria, characterised by developed social impact assessments

Analysis entitled **DRG Evaluation in Serbia** (INES, 2020), has been conducted as a part of the regional evaluation project initiative **Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights, and Good Governance (DRG) Evaluation in Europe** funded by the IOCE/EvalPartners Small Grants Programme “Strengthening the Role of VOPEs in Democratizing Learning and Evaluation: Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance as a Showcase”. The project focus was on investigating DRG evaluation capacities across European VOPEs based on which recommendations for integrating DRG in evaluation practices are presented.

The specific project outputs include:

- Overview of DRG evaluation practices across seven European countries
- Awareness assessment in seven European VOPEs with respect to DRG evaluation
- Exploration, discussion and identification of assessment capacity needs for the DRG evaluation within the NESE
- Production and distribution of the “Thessaloniki Statement” across European VOPEs to build awareness for DRG in evaluation.

In the scope of the project, “understanding current practices on DRG and creating awareness for DRG in evaluation” is achieved through data gathered by means of focus group studies on current DRG practices across Europe. This can be considered as the first step in developing further policies and practices for training and capacity building. The main contribution of the project was its focus on assessment of the evaluation practice in certain field (democracy, human rights, and governance) and raising awareness on the importance of strengthening evaluation capacities among different stakeholders at the local level. It also provided opportunity for cooperation between relatively small evaluation communities in the Eastern Europe.

2.2 EVALUATION REPORTS CONDUCTED IN SERBIA OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS – SOME ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

As previously stated, available evaluation reports in Serbia have been almost exclusively conducted by teams of evaluation experts or individual consultants engaged by international donors or state institutions that provided donor sources of funding. Budget for realisation of the evaluation projects has been often initially planned as a separate budget line within a larger internationally funded project. In case of complex evaluation tasks, team of evaluators is usually led by international expert that is supported by local consultant familiar with a local policy environment, institutions and state of play in the specific field. Thus, evaluation studies in Serbia are:

- not being conducted on a regular basis as the funding is not provided regularly through regular administration budgets;
- initiated or required by international donors;
- often conducted by mixed team consisting of experienced international experts whose knowledge is coupled with local consultants familiar with local environment;
- sometimes publicly available if external, and almost never as internal evaluation.

Hereby, we provide a short description of the seven publicly available evaluation reports conducted in Serbia over the last 5 years. When analysing their content, we focused on the several key elements:

- The main evaluation objective (its usefulness for the public policy)
- Key evaluation questions
- Methodology
- Findings
- Recommendations

1. External evaluation of Serbian Public Administration Reform (PAR) Strategy (2019)²⁸. The evaluation has been conducted within the project “Support to Public Administration Reform under the PAR Sector Reform Contract” which aims to strengthen Government capacities to manage reform of the public administration reform initiated by The Public Administration Reform Strategy adopted in 2014 and the two related Action Plans. Project has been implemented by the consortium led by international consulting company. Evaluation was conducted by two local evaluation experts and one international expert in charge of quality control. Evaluation had 4 key objectives:

- To assess the quality of the strategic framework for PAR, midterm review and Action plans;
- To form the basis for decision-making with regard to eventual revision of the current strategic framework
- To assess the existing strategy with regard to OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability)
- To draft recommendations for capacity building and technical assistance measures, and improvements of the existing strategic framework for PAR

²⁸ <http://mduls.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/190524-Final-Evaluation-Report-EN.pdf>

Evaluation covered 10 evaluation questions classified within 5 OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. Methodological basis has been developed taking into account two Guidelines – The DG NEAR Guidelines on linking planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation (EC, 2016), and the EC’s Evaluation Methods for the European Union’s External Assistance, Methodological Bases for Evaluation Volumes (1-4), (EC, 2016). Evaluation methodology included review of the documents, cost-effectiveness analysis, ten online surveys, seven focus groups, SWOT analysis, and interviews (n=75). Evaluation design included three phases – inception phase which included desk research along with development of the methodology, implementation phase which included data collection using envisaged research instruments, and synthesis and reporting phase during when the final report has been created.

The main findings are as follows:

- Strategy and related documents are of good quality containing highly relevant objectives
- Quality of the documents gradually increased over the observed period
- Documents are highly participative
- Strategy is overambitious and does not correspond with limited capacities of the administration
- Strategy does not explain problems that should be solved
- It is not time-bound and lacks envisaged resources that need to be engaged for its implementation as well as performance management tools
- It does not provide clear strategic framework for other related strategic documents and policies

Key recommendation refers to development of the new strategic framework that would improve existing gaps in terms of compliance with Law on planning system, gender issues, and ensurance of the hierarchical clarity between different documents in the field of PAR.

2. Evaluation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Serbia National Strategy for Gender Equality (2019)²⁹. Its realisation was commissioned by the Coordination Body for Gender Equality of the Republic of Serbia and supported by the UN Women Office in Serbia. It has been realised by the local evaluation team led by the civil society organisation from Serbia – SeConS Development Initiative Group.

The main objective of the evaluation was to provide insight into results of the implementation of the first phase of the National Strategy for Gender Equality for period 2016–2020 with Action Plan for period 2016–2018, and provide recommendations for the next implementation phase. Evaluation was conducted in line with to the UN Women evaluation standards, respecting OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. It has been implemented in 4 phases – inception, data collection and analysis, validation and reporting. Data were obtained through analysis of the primary data sources – standardized questionnaire which included questions related to all measures and activities envisaged within Action Plan. Questionnaire was filled out by 34 Ministries and other state institutions, and 6 UN Agencies, EU Delegation, and OSCE; Interviews with all stakeholders identified as implementing and partnering institutions within Action Plan. In total 45 interviews were held; Three focus groups were organised with total 27 participants, and workshops to validate results. Over 100 stakeholders took participation

²⁹ <https://www.secons.net/files/publications/100-publication.pdf>

during the evaluation process. Evaluation process resulted with 8 key findings, 7 lessons learnt, as well as 3 process and 9 nine thematic recommendations.

3. Evaluation of the Youth Service Package and the Relevant Programmes and Measures Funded from the Republic of Serbia Budget and Targeted at Youth (2017)³⁰. It has been commissioned by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU), and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Evaluation has been conducted by the local team of experts led by the local think-tank - Foundation for the Advancement of Economics (FREN).

The aim of the evaluation was to provide evidence on the net effects of the programmes and measures funded by the Republic of Serbia to increase youth employment. Evaluted measures include those envisaged within The Youth Service Package was delivered between 2013 and 2015, National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) 2016 and the Employment and Social Reform Programme (ESRP). Evaluation also included analysis of the net impact of the Professional Practice and Acquisition of Practical Knowledge measures, as well as other relevant programmes and measures funded from the national budget, but implemented by other institutions, and/or supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Evaluation methods included analysis of the secondary data and conducting interviews to obtain data from the target group of youth population. Evaluation questions were defined as a part of the evaluation framework designed by the commissioner:

- 1) What has been the coverage of the Youth Service Package since 2013 and what does it comprise, and how has the introduction of the Package improved the services delivered by the NES to its young clients?
- 2) What is the net impact of the two active labour market measures targeting youth from 2013 – Professional Practice and Acquisition of Practical Knowledge, and why is employers’ interest in the latter measure relatively low?
- 3) What are the coverage and the results of the measures aimed at youth employment and employability enhancement supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sport in 2014 and 2015?

With regard to evaluation questions and conducted evaluation activities, evaluators obtained several findings and defined recommendations for the policy makers to improve National Employment Action Plan and the Action Plan for the implementation of the youth strategy (2018-2020).

4. GIZ VET - Impact Assessment Report (2019)³¹. It was typical impact evaluation study conducted within the programme “Sustainable Economic Growth and Employment” in Serbia”, in the project “Reform of Vocational Education and Training in Serbia”, implemented by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Project goal was to improve education in technical professions as a part of the formal Serbian vocational education programme and training system.

The main objective of the evaluation was to assess the net impact of the intervention provided by the project on the employment status of the VET graduates who attended one of the profiles with

³⁰ <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Evaluation-of-the-Youth-Service-Package-and-the-Relevant-Programmes-and-Measures-Funded-from-the-Republic-of-Serbia-Budget-and-Targeted-at-Youth-Summary.pdf>

³¹ http://www.kooperativnoobrazovanje.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/impact_assessment_report.pdf

elements of dual education. Evaluation methodology involved analysis of the impact of the treatment on the “threatened” group in comparison with 3 control groups:

- Comparison group 1: Pupils attending a non-treated profile in a treated school.
- Comparison group 2: Pupils attending a profile similar to the modernized profile, who are attending a comparison school
- Comparison group 3: Pupils attending a non-treated profile in a comparison school. Ideally, comparison group 1 and comparison group 3 profiles should be the same.

To assess the impact of the programme, difference in difference methodology was applied.

Data for the analysis have been obtained through questionnaires filled out within phone interviews.

Evaluation results included very specific findings which enabled commissioner to derive very concrete recommendations for the future development programmes.

5. Unlike the aforementioned rigorous evaluation of the active labour market measures, **Assessment of the institutional capacities of the local municipalities** (Swiss PRO, 2019) was qualitative evaluation of the existing government capacities at the level of local municipalities. It has been conducted with an aim to assess current level of development in the field of social support and inclusion of the marginalized groups. The main objective of the evaluation was to provide inputs for further capacity building activities supposed to improve level of governance and help in developing grant support schemes at the local level.

Key evaluation questions referred to current state and practices in terms of implementation of the social protection and support policies including:

- existence/functioning of local councils for social inclusion of the marginal groups (number, structure, activities)
- development of social inclusion mechanisms
- intersectoral cooperation (health, education, social support)
- cooperation between municipalities

Assessment of the development of the capacity of local self-government units in achieving social inclusion of vulnerable groups covered the following areas:

- Strategic framework and policies supporting social inclusion of vulnerable groups
- Local institutional framework for the implementation of planned policies
- Evaluation of strategic and planning documents
- Identifying needs for community social services
- Normative basis and transparency of the process of procurement of social protection services
- Pluralism of providers, coverage of different user groups and sustainability of social services
- protection
- Cross-sectoral integrated services and social protection services coordinated between municipalities.

For each area it has been estimated:

- a) the desired level of capacity development of local self-government, and
- b) set of indicators

Applied methodology included questionnaire that was filled out by the local municipality representatives with a support of previously selected mentors. There have 31 local municipality involved in the research.

Findings of the assessment are as follows:

- Relatively small number of local municipalities are conducting planning activities in the field of social protection. Apart from local employment plans, one in four analysed municipalities did not have any valid strategic document in the field of social protection. M&E activities are almost completely neglected.
- Social needs assessments are missing. Therefore, selection of priorities is being conducted intuitively rather than evidence-based.
- Poor capacities in terms of number and structure of the social support services. In more than 80% municipalities services are being provided to one/two target groups.
- Lack of intersectoral cooperation
- Lack of capacity building programs for the local administration officials

Derived recommendations are as follows:

- Strengthening local planning capacities in the field of social protection
- Strengthening local capacities for detecting social protection target groups and priorities
- Strengthening capacities for developing new (innovative) social protection services and improvement of the existing ones
- Raising awareness about necessity for developing multisectoral policies
- Development of the specific education modules

6. Ex-post Evaluation of the Strategy for National Employment Strategy 2011-2020³² was conducted by the Foundation for Development of Economics (FREN) and published in December 2020. It has been ordered by the SIPRU, but realised within a process of development of the new Strategy for Employment 2021 – 2026 initiated by the Ministry for Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy. It was a process evaluation which aimed to analyse the effects of the Strategy and determine to what extent were noticeable changes in the labour market result of the strategic activities and measures. Evaluation questions were developed given the 4 evaluation criteria – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Applied methodology included analysis of the official secondary quantitative data on labour market trends in Serbia, internal data provided by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy of the Republic of Serbia as well as qualitative data obtained through interviews with key stakeholders. Evaluation did not apply some of the methods often used when conducting impact assessments of the strategic programs

³² http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Ex_post_analiza_Nacionalne_strategije_zaposljavanja_za_period_2011-2020.pdf

– quasiexperimental evaluation methods (regression discontinuity, propensity score matching, etc.). Therefore, it did not provide clear and credible research evidence to what extent strategic activities really contributed to the results rather than overall economic situation, economic cycle or some other measures realised by other institutions. However, it provided detailed description on the realised activities, labour market trends and discussed the most relevant issues tackled by the measures realised within strategic priorities. Some of the main findings are as follows:

- Strategy could be assessed as relevant, although adopted in completely different economic and political environment (it was based on “post-crisis” growth model). It contributed to achievement of the key strategic goal – increasing employment and solid results of 4 subgoals. However, there is no evidence to support relationship between activities and achieved results;
- Strategy was well designed document, but hard to implement due to relatively weak political influence of the responsible Ministry and lack of coordination between crucial stakeholders;
- Budget for realisation of the strategic activities was insufficient (ie. Budget for realisation of the active labour market measures was one of the lowest in Europe);
- Selection of the participants should be targeted with regard to specific measures. Unfortunately, cost-effectiveness principle was not respected;
- Institutional solutions created during the implementation represented barrier for achieving strategic objectives;
- Reliance on quantitative data led to increase of employment but also to lower quality of employment.

On the basis of listed findings, evaluation team created recommendations to support adoption of the new Strategy:

- Improve capacities of the Ministry, sector for jobs and employment in particular;
- Socio-economic Council is very important institute of intersectoral cooperation and coordination that should be remained and further strengthened;
- Social dialogue processes should be encouraged and further strengthened included capacity building of its partners;
- Fullfillment of indicators of success has been followed by worsening other important characteristics of the labour market (quality of jobs, income inequality, etc.). Therefore, additional indicators of success should be adopted in the following strategic document.

7. Ex-ante evaluation of the National Strategy for Employment 2021 – 2026 was conducted in parallel to Ex-post Evaluation of the previous strategy. It was conducted by the Institute of Economic Sciences and ordered by the SIPRU. Although methodology for ex-ante assessment was predefined by the Regulation on the Methodology of Public Policy Management³³, Impact Analysis of Public Policies and Regulations, and the Content of Individual Public Policy Documents, it would be rational to conduct such analysis after realisation of the Ex-post analysis, so the findings of the Ex-post should be taken into account when developing future documents. Therefore, its realisation leaves impression that the aim of evaluation was more to fill the form rather to provide inputs for

³³ <https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Prirucnik-za-analizu-efekata-javnih-politika-i-propisa-21012021-srb.pdf>

developing future documents. The main objective of the evaluation was to provide evidence-based support to the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy for development of the new Strategy for Employment 2021 – 2026 and present different scenarios which would probably occur depending on the chosen employment policy options. Analysis has been conducted using several methodologies – desk research + focus groups + scenario analysis to assess social effects of conducting different policies. Social costs were calculated using methodology for costs estimation published by the Republic Secretariate for Public Policies³⁴.

Main findings and recommendations of the Ex-ante assessment are as follows:

- Strategy is the most appropriate public policy document for further implementation of the employment policy measures
- There are three employment scenarios each of them leading to different policy outcomes:
 - Status quo
 - Progressive employment policy
 - Holistic employment policy

Holistic policy option is selected as the most desirable one as it would lead to the best outcomes in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. However, it would require higher costs and significant improvement of administrative capacities if compared to other two. Taking into account all of the obtained evidence, holistic policy would be the most appropriate one.

Presented illustrative evaluation studies indicate that evaluation in Serbia are often donor-driven, conducted with an aim to assess effects of the projects funded by foreign donors. Even evaluations of national strategic documents are funded by donors. There is local knowledge for conducting evaluations, although international experts are often engaged as team leaders, probably due to their larger experience and references in the field that was unattainable for most of the local evaluators, but also due to their independency. Our analysis has shown that most of the evaluation reports, at least those publicly available, were conducted in the field of education, social support, youth, unemployment, etc.

Rigorous analysis of the fiscal/environmental/gender/ impacts of certain policies including external evaluations of the national and local strategic documents are very rare. As the “best practice” state institutions in Serbia in the field of evaluation, we could particularly underline **Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU)** and **Fiscal Council of the Republic of Serbia**. They are oriented towards evidence-based policy making also having solid internal capacities for conducting impact assessments (Fiscal Council) and spreading evaluation culture (SIPRU) within the state administration commissioning different types of external evaluations and assessments in order to obtain rigorous evidence on the effects of different public policies.

³⁴ <https://rsjp.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Prirucnik-za-utvrđivanje-troskova-javnih-politika-i-propisa.pdf>

2.3. MAPPING THE CURRENT EVALUATION CAPACITIES OF THE STATE INSTITUTIONS

For the purpose of understanding political transition of the Serbian society over the last two decades it should be analysed main reform processes. From the systemic point of view, one of the most important refers to the reform of public administration which is supposed to result in more efficient and effective public administration capable of providing excellent public services. Greater M&E capacities of the public institutions are prerequisite of institutional learning, accountability and adaptiveness to changes in the external environment.

Strategic framework of public administration reform (2004) initiated adoption of the numerous legislative changes which shaped policy environment. Some of the most important are as follows: National Program for Integration of the Republic of Serbia into the European Union; National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire (2013-2016), Strategy for Professional Development of Civil Servants in the Republic of Serbia; Strategy of Regulatory Reform and Improvement of the System of Managing Public Policies for the period 2016-2020. Meanwhile, it was adopted Public Administration Reform Strategy (2014), operationalized through two Action plans for the period 2015-2017 and for the period 2018-2020.

For the successful implementation of the public administration reform, it was required to define and implement important processes contributing to the creation of an institutional framework, such as: decentralization, professionalization and depoliticization, rationalization, public policy coordination, establishment of control mechanisms and modernization of the public administration. Some of the processes were only declaratively adopted rather than producing substantial policy changes, whereas others initiated positive transformation. Although initial steps provided solid strategic framework for the future reforms, they were followed by a serious inconsistency which directly blocked reform processes including development of the independent institutions. For example, although Government formally supported decentralization as an important condition of the local economic development, National Council for Decentralisation has been abolished in 2013, only four years after its establishment.

Decentralization is supposed to ensure greater territorial, political and financial independence of the local institutions. In that context, it would be important to point out some of the following legal solutions that have undergone changes several times in the past: Law on Territorial Organization of the Republic of Serbia - 2007, 2016, 2018, 2020 (local self-government units were defined: municipalities, cities and the city of Belgrade); Law on Local Self-Government - 2007, 2014, 2016, 2018 (significant competencies became the original tasks of local self-government units, and significant tasks within the competence of the Republic of Serbia were entrusted); Law on Financing of Local Self-Government - 2006, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 (changed the manner of distribution of payroll taxes and distribution of transfers by individual local self-government units); Law on Public Property - 2011, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, Law on Communal Police - 2019 (executive power at the local level has been strengthened).

The Law on Civil Servants (2018) introduces a civil service system based on the principles of depoliticization, professionalization, as well as on the model of promotion and reward in accordance with some standards (the so-called merit system). This law has been amended several times, and a particularly important change refers to the introduction of performance and fulfillment of the goals appraisals, as well as the adoption of a new system of professional development in accordance with the

Strategy for Professional Development of Civil Servants in the Republic of Serbia (2017). In this regard, it was established a central national institution for the implementation of professional development programs for civil servants - the National Academy of Public Administration (2018). Over the last three years, National Academy of Public Administration developed and accredited training programs, using contemporary programs and methods to improve chances for professional development and improvement of competences of the public administration employees at all levels, both national and local.

Similarly, the strategy of professional development of employees in local self-government units, envisages the establishment of a unique system of professional training of employees in local municipalities. This document respects the specifics if compared to the national bodies, and above all distinguishes between general and special training programs including the specific needs of local municipalities as a special employer (Official Gazette of RS No. 9/2014, 42/2014 - corr. 54/2018).

In terms of rationalization of the state administration, it has been considered as continuous process, never completed but often announced as a reform priority from one election cycle to another. However, progress achieved so far was relatively modest. There has been a linear reduction in the number of officials in some institutions (ie. judiciary system), whereas others experienced reduction by a certain percentage, although without a rigorous analysis of their needs for performing certain tasks (ie. overlapping or duplication of tasks and opportunities for their modernization). Therefore, it could be noticed a situation that in some institutions and administrative bodies there are too many employees, whereas other institutions lack human capacities. Whole process is largely politicized, and the employment is mainly depending on deals between political parties. Some sectors have been particularly damaged by this approach, which could be noticed in the situation of Covid-19 pandemic, which revealed lack of health workers³⁵ and specific competences, as well as weaknesses of the health system and its inability to adequately respond to the pandemic. In that context, it should be noted that Serbia has traditionally been an “emigration” country, exporting large number of educated population. This is resulting in continuous reduction of the labour supply and potentials for sustainable economic development³⁶.

Public policy coordination is a process by which policy creators within the planning system manage the public policy processes, including determination and implementation of public policies, also taking into account the mutual harmonization and prioritization of public policy documents they adopt and implement (Law on Planning System, 2018, Article 2).

In the observed period, there have been adopted Guidelines for drafting strategic documents, Analysis of strategic documents³⁷ and the Regulation on the methodology of public policy management, analysis of the effects of public policies and regulations and the content of individual public policy documents. It could be noted that legal and institutional framework for public financial management has been

³⁵ There is no official data on the outflow of health workers, but according to unofficial data from the Medical Chamber of Serbia, at the beginning of 2020, there is an estimate that about 800 doctors emigrate from Serbia every year, and this trend has been present for several years.

³⁶ Emigration since the 1960s has had impact on decrease of population and has taken place mainly at the level of unskilled workers. However, modern emigration of the most educated population represents a huge economic loss for Serbia, because, among other things, the human factor in the analysis of national economies is treated as a first-class economic resource. See more: Strategy on economic migration of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2027. year 21 / 2020-45.

³⁷ Government of the Republic of Serbia – Republic Secretariate for Public Policies: <https://rsjp.gov.rs/cir/vesti-cir/analiza-strateskih-dokumenata/>

established and largely harmonized with the European and international standards. Despite of created institutional framework, Serbia is still at the beginning of the process of systemic planning, developing, monitoring and evaluating the performance of public policies. There are many more activities that will largely depend on the work of Government and other public institutions.

Control mechanisms have been significantly improved, both through adopted legislation and setting the bodies with control competencies and powers (administrative inspections, for example), or the capacity to resolve issues within administrative disputes (ie. Administrative Court). Additionally, it should be noted the establishment of independent regulatory bodies, such as following: The Protector of Citizens - Ombudsman, the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, the State Audit Institution, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality.

The initial enthusiasm with regard to independent bodies has declined over time, whereas their reports or recommendations addressing certain issues and controversies failed to result with adequate reaction of the state administration being in charge. According to the latest reports of the independent state institutions for 2019, adopted by the National Assembly in December 2020, there have been noticed serious irregularities in public procurements, rights for free access to the information of public importance, which again refer to budget spendings and management of public funds and properties. As an example, the State Audit Institution, recorded deficiencies in the system of internal controls in 55% out of a total of 159 inspected entities, while internal audit was not properly established in 57% users of public funds. In addition, the State Audit Institution identified mistakes in the financial statements in the amount of 441 billion dinars, whereas the value of operational irregularities amounted to 10 billion dinars.³⁸

Important reform steps have been taken in the field of modernization of state administration, mostly referring to development of E-Government and introduction of information technology in the work of state bodies at both national and local level. Some of the adopted legal solutions are particularly important in that context - Law on Electronic Document, Electronic Identification and Trust Services for example, as well as strategic documents, such as the Strategy for the Development of the Information Society in the Republic of Serbia until 2020, the Plan of Priority Activities for Reducing Administrative Burdens for 2019-2021, E-Government Development Program 2020-2022, Program for simplification of administrative procedures “E-Paper” 2019-2021, etc.

It should be noted the establishment of various databases - registers (economic entities, public media, associations, measures and incentives for regional development, endowments and foundations, court injunctions and many others), digitalization of services, introduction of program budgets, gender responsibility, budgeting, introduction of mid-term planning, as well as the establishment of the Public Procurement Portal, by which, based on the Law on Public Procurement³⁹, all bodies are obliged to publish their high-value procurements.

As it could be noticed, public administration reform processes in Serbia have been conducted over the last two decades with a relatively changing efforts and success. European integration process is one of the most important reform process which encompasses reforms in almost every field of society. Within the EU accession process, developed “administrative capacities” are of crucial importance not only in

³⁸ More at: State Audit Institution Report for 2019. Accessed at: 15.01.2021.

<https://www.dri.rs/mediji/Izvestaj-o-radu-Drzavne-revizorske-institucije-za-2019.-godinu.n-516.107.html>

³⁹ Article 41. Law on public procurements, „Official Gazette RS”, No 9/2019. See more at: <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon-o-javnim-nabavkama.html>.

terms of adoption of the relevant legislation, but even more in terms of its successful implementation. Namely, the Republic of Serbia formally started negotiations on EU membership in 2014, and a part of the negotiations also refers to the so-called administrative capacities to implement the “acquis”. In order to fully implement the acquis, public administrations must comply with EU legislation having an optimal number of state officials who will effectively apply the acquis within the domestic legal system. Achieving high standards for the implementation of the acquis is also a complementary process of creating an efficient and modern public administration system.

The analyzed period of reform activities aimed to provide us with the answer to the question whether the public administration has approached the needs of citizens. On the basis of the annual reports on the implementation of the Public Administration Reform Strategy from 2014, there is a tendency to increase the achieved results (57% of results in 2019, 46% of results in 2018, 23% of results for the period 2015-2017). However, as stated within the Draft of the Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2030, the achievement rate is half of the total number of results particularly due to lack of capacity to implement changes, overambitious or unrealistic plans and insufficiently efficient coordination⁴⁰.

To assess evaluation/administration capacities of the state administration, ministries in particular, following the aforementioned EVALSED methodology and links with compatible processes such as evaluation and monitoring, we started from the idea to determine eventual existence of the special organizational units or units that are in charge / have the authority to perform the specified tasks (audit, monitoring, evaluation). Before that, we have provided a brief description of what we considered as adequate interpretation of these processes within the context of this research.

In a broader sense, audit is a process of examining the accuracy, completeness, credibility, legality and objectivity of a certain phenomena and processes. It is often used to examine and evaluate financial statements, with regard to reality and objectivity of the value of assets, capital, liabilities and business results (Audit Act, 2019). It can also be explained as the legality and regularity of the project costs and revenues, testing their compliance with laws and regulations including assessment of efficient, effective and economical use of (project) funds. The OECD / DAC Glossary describes evaluation as a more in-depth assessment of the objectives, implementation and results of an intervention, with the question of attribution as its main focus. Monitoring is an instrument of internal management. It aims, on the basis of a fixed set of indicators, to provide a regular insight into the progress made in implementing defined activities. Monitoring allows a budget holder or the implementer of an intervention to stay up to date on inputs invested and activities performed (outputs). Monitoring shows whether intended activities have actually been carried out. Systemic monitoring is of great importance for conducting evaluation, as it provides a significant data that are important basis for evaluation activities (OECD / DAC, Glossary).

⁴⁰ More at the webpage of the Ministry: <http://mduls.gov.rs/javne-rasprave-i-konsultacije/pocetak-javne-rasprave-o-predlogu-strategije-reforme-javne-uprave-za-period-2021-2030-i-ap-za-period-2021-2025/>.

Internal audit units

Following organizational structure of the analysed Ministries research revealed that each Ministry has functional and independent audit unit. This unit is positioned within the office of a Minister and often named “group”, “department”, etc. As per the Law on budget system⁴¹, internal audit is the activity that provides objective independent assurance and advice with the aim to contribute to improve performances of the organization, support the organization in achieving envisaged goals through systematic assessment and evaluation of the risk management, control and management of the organization.

As per Article 10 of the Rulebook on common criteria for organisation and standards and methodological instructions for internal audit acting and reporting in the public sector “Internal audit supports users of public funds in achieving its objectives assessing their financial management systems and controls in systemic and disciplined manner through:

- 1) identifying, assessing, and managing risks by executive officers employed with public institutions - users of public funds, at all levels.
- 2) analysing compliance of operations with laws, internal acts and contracts.
- 3) assessing reliability and completeness of financial and other information.
- 4) assessing efficiency, effectiveness and economy of business.
- 5) ensuring protection of funds and data (information).
- 6) ensuring completion of tasks and achievement of goals (2013).

Audit is performed by applying international standards of Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, which refers to: strategic and operational planning, organization and execution of audit tasks. Based on an objective review of the evidence, it provides assurance on the adequacy and functioning of existing risk management processes, established internal controls and process management. Internal audit provides independent, objective and professional opinion on risk management and internal controls, evaluates the effectiveness of achieving goals defined by laws, regulations and internal acts. The scope of work of internal audit includes the audit of EU funds, as well as all other resources provided by other international bodies and institutions, intended for the implementation of international programs and projects, in accordance with international agreements.

Audit activities are performed on the basis of the Strategic, Annual Work Plan and operational plans and work programs that are the basis for the implementation of the internal audit function, as well as the Charter of Internal Audit and the Code of Ethics of Internal Audit. Within their work, internal auditors, in addition to applying international standards and a code of ethics, respect the principles of objectivity, competence and integrity. According to the Article 84 of the Law on Budget System, the Minister prescribes common criteria for standards and methodological instructions for performing audit activities and reporting of internal audit and regulates in more detail the activities of internal audit in the public sector.

With regard to audit, it would be important to note that within the processes of the reform of public finance it has been also initiated process of improving program model of the budget through the introduction of the principle of gender responsive budgeting. Thus, within the Independent Articles

⁴¹ Basic Provisions - Definitions Article 2 (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 103/2015, 72/2019 and 149/2020). See: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_budzetskom_sistemu.html

of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Budget System⁴², the following is stated: “The provisions of this law referring to gender responsive budgeting will be applied to budget users in accordance with the annual plan for the gradual introduction of gender responsive budgeting, and in general until the adoption of the budget of the Republic of Serbia and the local government budget for 2024. The plan for gradual introduction of gender responsive budgeting stated within Paragraph 1 of this Article, ie. the number of programs and the number of budget users shall be adopted by the Minister responsible for finance, the Secretary for Finance of the Autonomous Province Vojvodina, ie. the body responsible for the budget of the local self-government unit, in cooperation with institutions in charge of gender equality, no later than March 31 of the current year for the following year.

Units for M&E

As already elaborated, M&E system is required to provide:

- support for budget decisions,
- support to the national departments and local planning process
- help in defining policies and programs
- assistance to ministries, bodies and the local level in management
- help in strengthening the public accountability relationship.

When considering the issue of strategic development of reforms in the Republic of Serbia, it is important to note once again that the initial period of the incorporating reform documents into the legal system of the Republic of Serbia was characterised by the lack of mechanisms for monitoring results. In certain areas, according to “learning by doing”, this problem has been gradually overcome, while in others it is still representing a great challenge. In that context, we were interested whether the ministries, as specialized organizations for managing the affairs of the state administration, introduced the practice of monitoring and evaluation, at what level and whether there exist special organizational units that deal with this issue. In essence, there is no (separate) M&E unit in any of the analysed ministry. However, these activities were planned within organizational units dealing with normative, administrative, planning or international cooperation and European integration. Some examples could be provided: sector for International Cooperation, European Affairs and Planning (Ministry of Internal Affairs)⁴³, Sector for Normative, Administrative and European Integration Affairs (Ministry of Telecommunication, Trade and Tourism), Sector/Department for International Cooperation and European Integration (Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy), Sector for Strategic Planning, Projects, International Cooperation i European Integration (Ministry of Environmental Protection), Sector for European Integration, International Cooperation and Project Management (Ministry of Mining and Energy), Sector for European Integration and International Projects (Ministry of Justice)⁴⁴, Sector for European Integration and International Cooperation (Ministry

42 Law and Budget System Član 16[s7] ("Sl. glasnik RS", br. 103/2015, 72/2019 i 149/2020). See: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_budzetskom_sistemu.html

43 Sector for International Cooperation, European Affairs and Planning - Responsible for drafting public policy documents and other planning documents of the Ministry, monitoring implementation, evaluation of implementation and reporting on their implementation, preparation of impact assessment analyzes of these documents. It provides expert advice and coordination in the development and implementation of public policy documents, medium-term and annual plans. See more at: <http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/sektori/smsepp>

44 It is important to note that the existence of the Group for Coordination of the Implementation of the National

of Health, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Governments)⁴⁵, Directorate for European Integration and Project Management (Ministry of Defense), Sector for International Cooperation and European Integration (Ministry of Science and Technological Development, Ministry of Youth and Sports), Sector for International Cooperation, European Integration and projects (Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs), the Sector for International Relations and European Integration in the Field of Culture (Ministry of Culture and Information) and data for three new ministries in the RS Government are still not available, as their websites were under construction.

Human resources

Human resources management, with regard to the new proposal of the Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia (2021-2030), will not anymore rely on two strategies in the field of professional development at the national and local level (Strategy for Professional Development of Civil Servants in the Republic of Serbia and Strategy of professional development of employees in local self-government units), and the area of internal audit, financial management and control becomes an integral part of the Public Finance Reform Program. Therefore, no special policy document (strategy) will be adopted, which is in line with the analysis of the effects set out in the Law on the Planning System and the intention to improve and at the same time reduce the number of public policy documents.

It should be noted that the adoption of the Strategy for Professional Development of Civil Servants in the Republic of Serbia (2013), as very important document that took into account the lack of systematic and purposeful approach to address the problem of professional development of civil servants, allowed setting guidelines for establishing a new – comprehensive, binding and sustainable training system for civil servants. In addition to the Strategy, the Law on Civil Servants, the Law on Budget System, as well as the accompanying bylaws also played a significant role in this process. According to the Public Administration Reform Strategy from 2014 and already mentioned public policy documents in the field of human resources management, the normative framework governing the civil service system has been significantly improved, based on the system of competencies, improvement of the employment system and strengthening the competition procedures. A completely new model of performance evaluation has been introduced in order to further professionalize civil servants and performance evaluation in order to further professionalize civil servants and evaluate the performance of organizational units. Within the Personnel Management Service of the Government, the Center for Career Management of Civil Servants was established in 2018. Its role refers to assessment and development of competencies for the purpose of career development.

In the previous period, special attention was paid to the reform of professional training in public administration, the establishment of a legislative framework, but also the establishment of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), which provided equal access to the right to professional training for all employees in public administration. Training programs for civil servants but also for

Anti-Corruption Strategy, which, among other things, participates in the preparation of the Strategy and Action Plan, monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan, coordination and liaison of bodies implementing the Strategy.

45 There is also the Public Administration Sector, which specifically deals with the development of strategic documents, laws and other regulations and general acts in the field of state administration / public administration, monitoring the implementation of systemic laws, regulations and general acts within the scope of the Sector, etc.

managers have been developed, both for civil servants and for civil servants in local self-government units⁴⁶. The NAPA is developing a methodology and standard instruments that enable continuous and flexible monitoring and modification of training programs in accordance with the needs of administrative bodies and conducts the process of determination of needs for education of the public servants. Based on legislation and previous experience, it has been created a set of steps in conducting an analysis of needs for professional development of employees in public administration, which is based on the previously adopted *Instruction on methodology for needs assessment for professional training in public administration* (2019).⁴⁷

It is very important to determine the process of systematic research, planning, analysis, ie. determining the level of (non)possession of knowledge and skills of employees in relation to the knowledge and skills required to perform specific duties, which fall under the analysis of professional development needs. A review of the Questionnaire for Determining the Needs for Professional Development for Civil Servants clearly show the thematic areas of professional development that are common to all, or most of state administration institutions. Among the offered topics, some refer to public policies, their development, implementation, analysis of effects, monitoring of implementation and evaluation. Authorities are expected to select thematic areas with regard to specific needs, determine the number of employees they need, the method of implementation and the level of priority⁴⁸. Also, they have opportunity to suggest topics that they consider relevant, although not already listed within the Questionnaire. In this section, it is very important to obtain information from the National Academy of Public Administration on the needs for training related to monitoring and evaluation of public policies, as well as type of trainings offered.

A specific inquiry should be created in order to obtain data about the response rate, the most popular topics, whether there is interest in evaluation, how much, and if not, why not - whether the need has been identified. This is impossible to determine by conducting desk research. The questionnaire could also determine whether certain officials have completed some trainings through others organisations - international, governmental and non-governmental institutions, individual online courses, etc.

Evaluation/Revision report –

In addition to the laws and bylaws regulating their work, among the documents published on the website of ministries and other administration bodies, there could be also found reports / newsletters including evaluation reports and results. According to Article 43 of the Law on Planning System (2018), “If the proposer of a public policy document is a state administration institution, that institution shall report to the Government, through the state administration body responsible for public policy coordination on the results of implementation of that document, ie. ex post analysis of the policies”. Since 2018 it has become a legal obligation, although unfortunately with noticeable delays often without transparent explanations about the reasons for breaking legal deadlines (for example: opening a public hearing, conducting and publishing consultations with stakeholders during the drafting of a

⁴⁶ National Academy of Public Administration, review of current trainings and registration for trainings: <https://www.napa.gov.rs/tekst/1235/prijava-na-obuke.php>

⁴⁷ National Academy of Public Administration, review of current trainings and registration for trainings: <https://www.napa.gov.rs/tekst/1235/prijava-na-obuke.php>

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the National Academy of Public Administration offers a really wide range of ways or forms of professional development, such as: lecture, seminar, training, workshop, round table, conference, internship, coaching, mentoring, study visits, e-learning and courses.

public policy document, publishing a report on the public hearing, with allegations and opinions of stakeholders and target groups who participated in the public hearing, etc.).

Hereby, it would be important to refer once again to the “Guidelines for Social Impact Assessments” (SIPRU, 2016), which set out certain guidelines that would help public administration, as well as all other social actors, in assessing the social impact and conducting public policy impact assessments in generak. The analysis of the effects of policy proposals on society proved to be especially important during the period of economic crisis and austerity measures. They will be also important in the post-Covid 19 pandemic context.

In the meantime, the Analysis of the Effects on Public Policy Society was published⁴⁹ - a review of international and domestic methodologies with a critical review (Bradas, Sekulovic, 2020), where the need for impact assessment in relation to different groups or stakeholders was particularly emphasized. There have been produced significant findings that critically examine both the “Guidelines for Social Impact Assessments” (SIPRU, 2016) and the Law on Planning System (2018), as well as the Regulation on Public Policy Management Methodology, Analysis of the Effects of Public Policies and Regulations and Content of Individual Public Policy Documents. Namely, the main critique refer to the following:

- the analysis of the effects on society which is developed for the use of a narrow target group, ie. decision-makers in the public sector, while neglecting the possibility of their adaptation to stakeholders (civil society, social partners, business community, etc.)
- the lack of establishing methods for assessing the impact on gender equality and gender-sensitive indicators, which would facilitate the work of state bodies and monitoring progress by stakeholders
- failing to prescribe the obligation to express costs and benefits in quantitative, qualitative and monetary form, in accordance with the Guidelines of the European Commission and many others.

As for the beginning, the desk research found that all ministries published a directory containing key facts on description of its powers, duties and internal organization, Rules and decisions of the government body concerning the transparency of its operations, etc. which is a legal obligation since 2010 (according to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance). It has been regularly updated from the moment of its first publication. State bodies are obliged to publish a directory on that website fill out all items that are included in the obligatory parts of the directory from the content, basic data on the state body and organizational structure to data on public procurement, types of information in possession and types of information to which the state body provide access⁵⁰.

Within each Directory, the competencies of the sector, department or some other organizational units that have in their competence the project management activity are presented, which include the preparation, implementation and monitoring of project implementation, strategic planning, European integration and monitoring the implementation of the Agreement on stabilization and association between RS and EU within the competences of a specific ministry. Analyzing the directories on the work of each ministry individually, we can conclude that the basic legal requirements and guidelines related to drafting of this document have been met. However, when attempting to find out more about

⁴⁹ <http://www.centaronline.org/userfiles/files/publikacije/fcd-analiza-efekata-na-drustvo-javnih-politika-pregled-metodologija.pdf>

⁵⁰ See more at: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/uputstvo_za_izradu_i_objavljivanje_informatora_o_radu_drzavnog_organa.html

the implemented projects, monitoring implementation, concrete results, it has been barely found even reduced information. For example, on the website of the Ministry of Interior it could be found information on international projects, bilateral, projects implemented with the support of international organizations, IPA projects where only basic information related to the name of the project, project holder, total project value, main project results and project duration. As much as this information is insufficient, within some ministries it has been noticed even lower level of transparency, so on the website of the Ministry of Health we can find data on the Second Health Development Project of Serbia where only information on the project goal is given and where four project components are listed with only a brief explanation. Although noticeable lack of data on project start, value and the expected results, etc., after a long search it could be found more information in the Information Booklet, as well as on the websites of municipalities where the project is being implemented. When it comes to programs, the same ministry lists three programs: the Program of Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations, the Program on the Protection of Mental Health in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2019-2026 and the Program for Rare Diseases and Action Plan. Apart from the content of these programs, there is no more detailed information on their implementation, monitoring or evaluation. Directory on the work of the ministry was updated in January 2021, although all information related to the budget was updated only by 2019, whereas work of some inspection bodies and services was presented only by 2018. It is particularly disputable that in the mentioned documents, there could not be find a single word about Covid 19, the pandemic which represents a cross-cutting issue which influenced almost all public policies. In that context, implementation of health policies, based on disputable legal provision, would be hard to analyse and evaluate.

On the other hand, there is an example of the Ministry of Finance, which according to the organizational structure has a very complex organization of units dealing with control, monitoring and evaluation related to the management of EU funds and development assistance, internal control of IPA projects, monitoring capital projects, etc. It has regular practice of publishing key public policy documents that have recently been adopted or are being prepared, such as: Fiscal Strategy, Economic Reform Program, Public Financial Management Reform Program, which clearly analyze the negative effects of the pandemic on the labor market, economic activities, opportunities recovery and stabilization.

It would be important to point out the significant activity of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which adopted on January 28, 2021, the Program of Economic Reforms for the period 2021-2023. (Economic Reform Program - ERP), as the most important strategic document in the economic dialogue with the European Commission and the EU member states. Drafting of this document on an annual basis is important for the Republic of Serbia, as a candidate country for membership in the European Union, because it shows readiness for participation in the process of economic and fiscal surveillance by EU member states, also being discussed with the European Commission within the negotiation chapter 17 - Economic and Monetary Policy, opened in December 2018

The Ministry of Finance, in accordance with Article 32 of the Law on the RS Planning System ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 30/18), informs the public on beginning of development of a new Public Financial Management Reform Program for the period 2021-2025.

3. EVALUATION CAPACITIES IN SERBIA – FIELD RESEARCH

In order to obtain more details on the use of evaluation for the purpose of creating public policies in Serbia, it has been developed questionnaire containing questions on the attitudes of the policy makers towards evaluation and their experience in conducting and/or commissioning evaluation tasks. In total, 15 questions have been raised containing the following issues:

- **Existence of the unit dealing with evaluation**
- **Experience in conducting and commissioning evaluation tasks (number of evaluations, satisfaction with results, etc.)**
- **Sources of funding evaluation assignments**
- **Evaluation methods used**
- **Availability of the evaluation reports**
- **Self-assessment of the evaluation capacities, etc.**

For more details regarding the questionnaire, see the Appendix section.

In total 20 questionnaires have been filled out, with an overall response rate of 20%. Questionnaire was filled out by 9 ministries and 11 other state institutions (agencies, independent state institutions, secretariats, etc.). Most of the interviewed state representatives responded that, within their institutions, there is no separate unit for conducting internal evaluation of policies, programmes, projects, strategies, etc. Internal control in the state administration institutions mainly deals with administrative requirements checking formal compliance of their with legislative. However, 6 out of 20 respondents confirmed existence of internal organizational unit in charge of carrying out internal evaluations (Table 2).

Table 2. Is there an internal evaluation unit which carries out internal evaluations of the policy/ programme/project/strategy, etc. that your institution is associated with?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	6
No	9
I don't know	5
Total	20

Source: Results of the survey – "Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia"

As previously identified within desk research, internal evaluations are not a "business as usual" practice in Serbia. 16 out 20 respondents answered that internal evaluations were not carried out or lacked information to answer the question on the number of internal evaluations conducted over the last 5 years. However, internal evaluations of at least one policy per year have been conducted in three out of 20 analysed institutions (Table 3) showing that some of the examined institutions has implemented such a practice.

Table 3. How many internal evaluations were undertaken within your institutions over the last 5 years?

Answer	Frequency
None	7
1 – 2	1
5 and more	3
I don't know	9
Total	20

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

As per research results, commissioning external evaluations is more frequent, with 14 out of 20 respondents that provided positive answer to that question (Table 4.). Although envisaged within Law on Planning System adopted in 2018, external evaluation is still not integral part of the governance practice in Serbia. Collected data suggest that evaluations have been conducted by diverse set of institutions including research organisations, consulting companies, civil society organisations or individual experts. As previously confirmed through desk research, funding for almost all external evaluations has been obtained through external donors. Therefore, since often not budgeted within regular budgets, conducting evaluations is still not treated as regular activity but timely practice of certain state institutions.

Table 4. Has your institution commissioned external evaluations of the programmes/policies/projects/strategic documents?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	14
No	6
Total	20

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

Around 2 out of 3 evaluation reports are completely available for public. Alternatively, there are some reports treated confidentially or being available only partially. Despite of legislative requirements, 2 out of 20 institutions consider evaluation report not publicly available (Table 5).

Table 5. Is any of the evaluation reports commissioned by your institution publicly available?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	13
No	2
Partially, some parts	2
Only some of the reports	3
Total	20

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

Since both conducting and commissioning evaluations is relatively new practice in Serbia, further progress requires dedicated work, capacity building, external expert support as well as practice of “learning by doing”. Around half of the respondents are not familiar with possibility of building capacities in the field

of evaluation in Serbia (Table 6), which means that despite of the recent establishing master programmes in the field of public policy development and analysis including evaluation, as well as several evaluation courses being regularly delivered in Serbia and the neighbouring countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc.), capacity building activities are still not sufficient to cover potential and rising demand.

Table 6. Are you aware of any evaluation capacity building activities (e.g. training, conferences, evaluation guides) carried out for public administration officials?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	9
No	11
Total	20

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

With regard to existing capacities, results of the self-assessment suggest that state administration representatives consider current evaluation capacities solid, meanwhile being aware of the huge potential for improvement. Most of the respondents stated that they are not familiar with capacities of the state administration refusing to assess current skills in drafting terms of reference, monitoring evaluation work conducted by others, conducting internal assessments as well as human and financial capacities (Tables 7 – 11).

Table 7. How would you assess capacity and skills of public administration in developing Terms of Reference for external evaluators?

Answer	Frequency
I don't know	5
Poor	3
Fair	5
Very good	3
Excellent	2
Total	18

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

Table 8. How would you assess capacity and skills of public administration in monitoring evaluation conducted by external evaluators?

Answer	Frequency
I don't know	7
Very poor	1
Poor	2
Solid	8
Very good	2
Total	20

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

Table 9. How would you assess capacity and skills of public administration in conducting internal evaluations?

Answer	Frequency
I don't know	7
Very poor	1
Poor	2
Solid	5
Very good	2
Excellent	2
Total	19

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

Table 10. How would you assess capacity and skills of public administration in assessing quality of the evaluation reports conducted by external evaluators?

Answer	Frequency
I don't know	8
Very poor	1
Poor	2
Solid	6
Very good	2
Excellent	1
Total	20

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

Table 11. Do you consider that the financial and human resources devoted to the evaluation of policies/ programmes in your country are adequate?

Answer	Financial (frequency)	Human (frequency)
I don't know	4	5
Completely inadequate		1
Inadequate	1	2
Adequate	4	3
Very good	1	4
Excellent	4	3
Total	14	18

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

Expectedly, only 7 out of 20 respondents argued that results of evaluations have been often or always used when developing public policy documents in Serbia (Table 12). This is reflecting relatively new practice of conducting formal evaluations as defined within Law on Planning System, while being also in line with our assumption that evaluation concept has not been sufficiently promoted, while its importance has still not been understood.

Table 12. By your opinion, to what extent are evaluations in Serbia used in strategy and policy formulation at sectoral / ministry level?

Answer	Frequency
Sometimes	5
Often	3
Always	4
I don't know	8
Total	20

Source: Results of the survey – “Evaluation capacities in the Republic of Serbia”

In overall, results of the survey suggest that the evaluation system in Serbia is in the initial phase of development. Although public policy evaluations are being conducted over the last year, there is a solid share of institutions that, despite of regulatory requirements, have not still adopted evaluation practice. Some institutions do not have internal organizational units in charge of commissioning and/or conducting evaluations. Evaluation assignments are often not budgeted, since funds for their realization are being provided from external sources, usually from donors. As per obtained answers, it is difficult to assess the current level of technical capacities of the state institutions not only for conducting monitoring and evaluation activities, but also for commissioning evaluations and use of the evaluation results for the policy improvements. Reasonable explanation for that could be that the evaluation concept is still not sufficiently promoted, whereas policy makers are not aware of the benefits which evaluation findings could have in terms of effectiveness. In addition to legal requirements, providing reasonable budgets for conducting evaluations and various systemic incentives including capacity building of the state administration, would help greater use of evaluation results for the improvement of public policies.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the second decade of the twentieth century, the governments of the Republic of Serbia are increasingly showing a tendency not to engage in essential reforms, and thus decentralization, depoliticization, rationalization and other processes necessary for successful public administration reform. It is clear that every reform, including public administration reform, implies not only the adoption of numerous laws, regulations and public policies, but also commitment to the process of their implementation, in the form of enacting the necessary bylaws to ensure the implementation of adopted policies at central and local level. Also, not only the interests of the governing structures are satisfied with the reform, but also the interests of the citizens, which has been completely neglected in numerous examples. As stated in the European Commission's October report (2020): *"Serbia is moderately prepared with the reform of its public administration. There was no sizeable reduction of the excessive number of acting senior manager positions. The law on the planning system and its implementing legislation started being applied."* However, line institutions need to further take into account the quality control role of the Public Policy Secretariat, whose opinions are mandatory – meaning that the Secretariat must be consulted – but not legally binding, as there is no mechanism to verify that the Secretariat's comments have been incorporated and that the final draft versions of laws and policy documents are compliant with the legislation. Despite of the adoption of a decree on capital projects management, the recommendation to develop a single mechanism for prioritizing all investments regardless of the type and source of financing still needs to be fully addressed. There is an urgent need to address all those persisting shortcomings.

As recommended by the European Commission in its October 2020 Report in the coming year, Serbia should in particular:

- start recruiting senior civil servants effectively through a merit-based procedure and reduce the excessive number of acting positions;
- ensure a strong quality control role of the Public Policy Secretariat to allow for the effective implementation of the law on the planning system;
- put in place a unified, comprehensive and transparent system for capital investment planning and management.

This research aimed to analyse existing capacities and examples of good practice in the field of public policy evaluation in Serbia. It was based on the extensive literature for assessing evaluation capacities at the national level, analysing important aspects of incorporating institutional framework for supporting development evaluation capacities and evaluation culture. The main **results of the desk research** are as follows:

- **Serbian legal system is not a barrier for conducting evaluations of the crucial programmes, policies and strategic documents.** Law on Planning System, related bylaws, guidelines and handbooks produced both by civil society and state institutions (SIPRU and Secretariat for Public Policies) represent solid basis for further institutionalisation of evaluation within the national political system. There have been also developed manuals for conducting public policy assessments.

- **Desk research showed that there are several examples of good practice within both state institutions and research/civil sector.** Republic Secretariat for Public Policies fueled the process evidence-based political culture. Unfortunately, it does not have sufficient political power to influence changes. Among other state institutions, there have been noticed SIPRU and Fiscal Council of the Republic of Serbia that have continuously insisted on producing evidence for the purpose of adopting different policies and discussing potential scenarios when adopting specific public policy. However, most of other state institutions are not prone to conducting evaluations, even for the most important political documents. There are no available evaluation studies within their official webpages and no budgets for conducting evaluation research. However, some international donors require evaluation as a prerequisite for approving funds.
- **Insufficient political will (no political consensus over the importance of evaluation) and low evaluation culture are crucial impediments for evidence-based policy making including evaluation.** Desk research provided us with solid evidence on relatively indifferent attitude of the most of state institutions towards evaluations. Independent evaluation reports are often not available on their webpages, excluding those funded and required by international donors. Therefore, demand for evaluations in Serbia is considered to be at relatively low level.
- **Evaluation capacities of the researchers and civil society organisations are quite solid,** especially if low demand for evaluations is taken into account. However, for more credible conclusion, further empirical research is required. Our analysis provided us with solid evidence on the quality of evaluations and research aimed to provide evidence-based analysis of certain public policies. Analysed studies are of solid quality, with well developed methodology and evaluation questions. They have been developed respecting both evaluation dimensions – responsibility and learning. However, analysis showed that evaluations have been often conducted independently from the policy cycle suggesting that new public policies have been developed without consulting evaluation reports.

Results of the field research, conducted through online questionnaire filled out by 20 state representatives (9 ministries and 11 other state institutions), indicate that development of the evaluation system is in initial phase. In overall, results of the empirical research are as follows:

- **Policy makers in Serbia are still not commissioning evaluation on regular basis.** Results indicate that 14 out of 20 analysed institutions commissioned external evaluations.
- **Evaluation is not recognized within organizational structures of the state institutions.** Separate evaluation organizational units in charge of internal evaluation are present in 6 out of 20 institutions. Evaluation reports are often publicly available as confirmed by 13 out of 20 respondents.
- **Funds for conducting evaluation are by rule provided by external donors.** Evaluation assignments have been conducted by diverse institutions – research institutes, civil society organisations, consulting companies and individual experts. Respondents are in general satisfied by the quality of the submitted evaluation reports.
- **Research results suggest that the use of evaluation results for the public policy development is still not considered as an important policy making issue.** Therefore, 8 out of 20 respondents did not have enough information to answer the question related to the extent of using evaluation findings for the public policy development in Serbia. Representatives of

the state institutions seem not still fully aware of the benefits which further development and promotion of the evaluation could bring to the policy makers.

- **There is a still significant space for capacity building and delivery of the public policy evaluation courses.** Although survey results (self-assessment of the state capacities) did not provide clear answers in terms of current capacities for commissioning evaluation assignments and use of evaluation findings, almost half of the respondents stated not being familiar with capacity building possibilities in Serbia, including those provided by the National Academy of Public Administration.

Serbian administration is, therefore, moderately prepared for the process of incorporating European legislative and greater application of public policy monitoring and evaluation as a regular phase of the public policy management. Key systemic laws and guidelines for conducting ex-ante and ex-post social impact assessments as well as public policy evaluations have been adopted. Reforms in the following years should put more accent to capacity building of the human resources. In the future period, policy makers in Serbia need to focus on developing evaluation culture strengthening cooperation with civil society and research institutions for the purpose of assessing main policies, programmes and strategic documents. Publicly available, professional, independent, rigorous, and publicly available evaluations of key reform policies have to be regular practice in the Serbian policy-making system. For that purpose, it is necessary to:

- **Fully respect existing legislative and particularly provisions stated within the Law on Planning System**
- **Develop transparent and professional monitoring and evaluation systems in state institutions**
- **Publish independent external evaluation reports**
- **Implement mandatory courses in monitoring and evaluation for public servants aimed at building capacities for commissioning evaluation assignments and use of evaluation findings**
- **Promote evaluation culture and adopt evaluation standards**

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

EVALUATION CAPACITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA – STATE INSTITUTIONS

Your institution:

Ministry

Government Agency

Independent state institutions

Other – Please specify

1. Is there an internal evaluation unit which carries out internal evaluations of the policy/ programme/project/strategy, etc. that your institution is associated with?

No
Yes
Don't know

2. How many internal evaluations were undertaken within your institutions over the last 5 years?

None
1-2
3-4
5 and more

3. Has your institution commissioned external evaluations of the programmes/policies/projects/ strategic documents?

No
Yes – please specify what was the subject of evaluation – Action plan, Strategy, Project
Don't know

4. If the answer to Q3. was Yes, please state the following:**a. Source of funding:**

Budget
Donor
Other – please specify

b. How many external evaluation reports your institution commissioned?

1
2-3
4-5
More than 5

c. What have been the evaluation methods used?

Qualitative – interviews, focus groups, etc.
Quantitative – statistical analysis, cost-benefit, etc.
Mixed
Experimental/quasiexperimental (control group approaches)
Don't know

d. Who conducted external evaluation?

Faculty
Research institute
Foreign company/entity
Individual local expert
Individual foreign expert
Other – please specify

e. In general, how would you rate the quality of evaluation reports carried out by external evaluators over recent years?

Very poor Poor Fair Good Very good Don't know

5. Is any of the evaluation reports commissioned by your institution publicly available?

Yes
No
Partly/Some of them

6. Is there a separate dedicated unit with responsibility for the monitoring & evaluation function within your institution?

Yes – please specify
No
Don't know

7. Is there a document (e.g. procedures manual or similar) that defines institutional responsibilities for the evaluation function?

Yes
No
In preparation
Don't know

8. Are you aware of any evaluation capacity building activities (e.g. training, conferences, evaluation guides) carried out for public administration officials?

Yes
No

9. Have you taken participation in trainings organized within programmes of National Academy of Public Administration?

Yes
No
Have not heard about them

10. Have you or your colleagues participated in any of the evaluation capacity building event?

Yes

No

11. How would you assess capacity and skills of public administration in charge of evaluation in the following areas:**Drafting Terms of Reference for evaluation assignments**

Very poor Poor Fair Good Very good Don't know

Steering evaluation projects performed by external evaluators

Very poor Poor Fair Good Very good Don't know

Conducting internal evaluations

Very poor Poor Fair Good Very good Don't know

Assessing quality of the evaluation reports

Very poor Poor Fair Good Very good Don't know

12. Do you consider that the financial and human resources devoted to the evaluation of policies/ programmes in your country are adequate?**Financial**

Completely inadequate Inadequate Adequate Good Excellent Don't know

Human

Completely inadequate Inadequate Adequate Good Excellent Don't know

13. Is key official statistical economic and social data available to evaluators?

Yes

No

Don't know

14. By your opinion, to what extent are evaluations in Serbia used in strategy and policy formulation at sectoral / ministry level?

Never

Sometimes

Often

Always

Don't know

15. Please state your comments and suggestions for development of the evaluation practice in Serbia: