

CHALLENGES FACING SERBIA¹

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Poverty and long-term unemployment, income inequality, declining access to public services, growing pollution and other environmental damage, rising consumption levels, and limited use of brownfields for new industrial facilities are significant challenges facing Serbia at the beginning of the new millennium.

Environmental issues remain largely unresolved, with urban communities experiencing industrial pollution, sanitation of varying quality, insufficient regulation, and patchy monitoring and enforcement. Local sustainable development initiatives are few, as communities tend to receive limited attention in national and international sustainable development initiatives. Urban and other local communities in Serbia are particularly challenged by decentralisation, the absence of infrastructural investments, weak local institutions, frequent shifts in political structures and the slow speed of institutional reform.



- **Decentralisation** is a declared priority of the national government with reforms only just getting underway. Regionalisation is slow. Local governments in urban areas are forced to operate in administrative systems with unclear division of responsibilities and resources. They must follow national government decisions and frequently manage very limited funds that mainly fail to satisfy their needs.
- **Weak local institutions** and shifts in political structures continue to threaten the viability of urban communities. These shifts affect human resources in local administrations, leading to instability that often blocks further development. Local sectoral policies/strategies are often lacking or not followed. Rigid legal and institutional frameworks, weak institutions at all levels, corruption, and troubled relations between ethnic groups add to the complexity of the current situation.
- **The speed of institutional reform** remains very slow. Unregulated ownership impacts on investment and other plans (land-use, spatial and urban plans) and this is compounded by a lack of concern among authorities for the environment as a legal and policy priority, the lack of effective cooperation among different levels of government and a lack of viable local sectoral policies.

Among the specific challenges facing urban communities in Serbia are the following: municipal waste disposal, where there is almost no recycling; a lack of proper landfills and no incinerators; a lack of wastewater treatment; and, in some areas, poor drinking water quality. Air pollution arising from transport is also a major concern with leaded petrol still in use. There is an aging vehicle fleet and traffic congestion is a growing problem in Serbian cities.

Outside of urban areas, the main concerns are environmental hot spots in regions close to thermal power plants (e.g. Kostolac, Obrenovac), the oil and chemical industry (Pančevo, Novi Sad and Sabac) and very polluted mining areas (Bor and Majdanpek).

¹ Map is available online at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>