

# COMPREHENSIVE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN SERBIA

## From response to resilience

### AT A GLANCE

**Country** Serbia

**Risks** Climate change exacerbating extreme weather events

**Area of Engagement** Deepening engagements in resilience to climate change

After catastrophic flooding, the Government of Serbia takes proactive steps to better predict and lessen the impact of future disasters

## A NEW NORMAL OF CLIMATE EXTREMES

Heatwaves and extreme weather events are fast becoming routine in Serbia and the surrounding countries, as the impacts of climate change make themselves felt. A recent World Bank report found that summer temperatures in the Balkans could average 7.5°C higher than in pre-industrial times, with water shortages and extreme weather events becoming far more frequent and severe.

This growing climate risk is already threatening Serbia's recent socioeconomic progress. In 2014, the country suffered its worst flooding in over a century. The floods caused nearly \$1.5 billion in damages, forcing more than 125,000 people into poverty and pushing the country into a recession. A severe and prolonged heat wave stifled much of Central Europe in August 2017, buckling train tracks in Serbia and forcing at least 10 countries to issue red alerts for health concerns and water conservation. Once a rare nuisance, extreme weather events like these are becoming more commonplace throughout the region – and more dangerous.

For development in the region to be sustainable, governments will need to be able to better absorb budgetary shocks from events like these, and be better prepared to cope with their socioeconomic impacts.

A thermal map showing the extent of the historic 2014 floods in Serbia



## MOVING FROM RESPONSE TO RESILIENCE

To meet these challenges, Serbia has taken a proactive approach to building resilience to climate and disaster risk. With support from the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) and the World Bank, the government has made tremendous strides to ensure effective recovery from disasters, and benefits from one of the most comprehensive disaster risk management strategies to date. This strategy includes:

- ▶ The establishment of a National Disaster Risk Management Program (NDRMP) to coordinate efforts to boost resilience throughout the country;



## Emergency funds up to **\$70 million** to protect development gains

- ▶ The procurement of a Disaster Risk Management Development Policy Loan from the World Bank, the first loan in the region to take advantage of the Catastrophe-Deferred Drawdown Option (Cat-DDO), which makes up to €66.1 million (US\$ 70 million) available 24 hours after a disaster without affecting development priorities.
- ▶ The creation, supported by GFDRR, the European Union, and the World Bank, of Digital Terrain Models using advanced LiDAR surveying technology to better predict and respond to flood risks.

## LESSONS LEARNED

A changing climate means that governments need to create forward-looking resilience strategies.

A recent World Bank report found that summer temperatures in the Balkans could average 7.5°C higher than in pre-industrial times, with water shortages and extreme weather events becoming far more frequent and severe. A substantial shift towards preparedness will be needed to secure development gains globally. Serbia's comprehensive approach to managing climate and disaster risk is a step in the right direction.

Aligning legal and institutional frameworks before a disaster strikes results in a more efficient response.

In the aftermath of a disaster, the urgency of aid and recovery efforts can cause confusion and inefficiencies unless strategic laws and institutional capacities are already in place. In the case of Serbia, GFDRR provided technical assistance to inform the new Law on Reconstruction following Natural and other Hazards, which reformed the government's assistance and reconstruction system. This will help streamline responses to future events, reducing recovery time and helping communities bounce back quickly from disasters.

*"The Cat-DDO is a rapid and agile financing instrument that contributes to Serbia's proactive approach to disaster risk management. This innovative instrument will help Serbia strengthen its financial resilience by accessing rapid liquidity for recovery and reconstruction, and to better anticipate budget deviations generated by extreme weather events."*

-- Dušan Vujović, Minister of Finance of Serbia

### A BROAD RESILIENCE STRATEGY

In 2017, the government launched its National Disaster Risk Management Action Plan, outlining a robust four-year road map to scale up and mainstream resilience building activities, including strengthening crisis management systems, informing risk reduction interventions, and implementing measures to better absorb fiscal shocks caused by natural disasters.

### RISK- INFORMED INVESTMENTS

After the floods, the government sought support from GFDRR, the World Bank, the EU, and UNDP to perform a detailed recovery needs assessment to streamline recovery processes. This effort helped inform a generalized risk profile for the country to guide decision makers in priority DRM investments, and in the development of a comprehensive financial protection strategy.

### PRESERVING PROGRESS

The Cat-DDO enables the Government of Serbia to directly support affected municipalities in the aftermath of catastrophe, without disrupting long-term development efforts.

### ACTIONABLE INFORMATION

New high-resolution flood risk maps can be integrated into national information systems, which will also benefit from hydrometeorological modernization efforts.