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COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

SERBIA

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1. Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information Key Documents (COI Key Documents) on Serbia has been produced by COI Service, UK Border Agency (UKBA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 22 February 2010. It was issued on 1 March 2010.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any UKBA opinion or policy.
- iii For UK Border Agency users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Serbia is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

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Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

- vii The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency to make recommendations to him about the content of the UKBA's country of origin information material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on UKBA's COI Reports, COI Key Documents and other country of origin information material. Information about the IAGCI's work can be found on the Chief Inspector's website at <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk>
- viii In the course of its work, the IAGCI reviews the content of selected UKBA COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. A list of the COI Reports and other documents which

have been reviewed by the IAGCI or the Advisory Panel on Country Information (the independent organisation which monitored UKBA's COI material from September 2003 to October 2008) is available at <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

- ix Please note: it is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any UKBA material or procedures. Some of the material examined by the Group relates to countries designated or proposed for designation to the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Group's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

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2. Background information on Serbia

Full Country Name: The Republic of Serbia (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook, 25 November 2009) [9a]

Capital City: Belgrade

Area: 88,361 sq.km

Population: 7,498,001 (Serbian Government census, 2002)

Languages: Serbian (majority), Hungarian, Bosniak, Roma, Croat, Montenegrin, Albanian, Slovak, Vlach, Romanian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Ruthenian, Slovak and Ukrainian. In the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, the languages and scripts of the minorities are in official use.

Major Ethnic Communities: Serbs 82.86%; Hungarians 3.91%; Bosniaks 1.82%; Roma 1.44%; Montenegrins 0.92%; Yugoslavs 1.08%; Croats 0.94%; Albanians 0.82% (Serbian Government census, 2002).

Major Religions and Denominations: Christianity: Serbian Orthodox dominant), Roman Catholicism, Islam.

Major Political Parties: Democratic Party (DS), Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), Serbian Radical Party (SRS), G17 Plus, Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), New Serbia (NS), League of Vojvodina Social Democrats (LSDV), Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP), Coalition for Sandzak, Vojvodina Hungarians Alliance (SVM), Party of Democratic Action (PDD), roma Party (RP), Union of Roma of Serbia (URS).

Parliament of the Republic of Serbia: The national legislature of Serbia is a unicameral assembly of 250 deputies elected through general elections for a term of four years. The deputies in the National Assembly elect the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which, together with the President of the Republic, represents the country's executive authority. The Judiciary is independent. The President of the Republic is elected for a term of 5 years by direct election and has important powers under the Constitution. The President is not a member of the National Assembly or the government.

President and Head of State: Boris Tadic.

Government: On 7 July 2008 a coalition government was formed in Serbia between the Democratic Party, Socialist Party of Serbia and G17 PLUS. See the Internal Politics section below, for further information, on the political parties that are in the coalition.

Key ministerial posts:

Prime Minister: Mirko Cvetkovic (DS)

First Deputy Prime Minister: Ivica Dacic (SPS)

Deputy Prime Minister in charge of EU integration: Mr Bozidar Djelic (DS)

Foreign Minister: Vuk Jeremic (DS)

Defence Minister: Dragan Sutanovac (DS) (Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile: Serbia, last reviewed 11 December 2008) [3a]

Finance Minister: Diana Dragutinovic (DS) (Jane's Country Risk Assessments: Serbia – Political Leadership updated 26 October 2009) [1d]

Interior Minister: Ivica Dacic (SPS)

Justice Minister: Snezana Malovic (DS) (Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile: Serbia, updated 11 December 2008) [3a]

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GEOGRAPHY

Jane's Country Risk Assessments: Serbia – Geography, updated 23 October 2009, stated:

"Serbia is situated in the geographic centre of the Balkans. It borders Croatia (241 km), Hungary (151 km), Romania (5476 km), Bulgaria (318 km), Macedonia (62 km), Montenegro (124 km), Bosnia-Herzegovina (302 km) and now Kosovo (352 km)... The capital of Serbia, Belgrade, is located on the junction of the rivers Sava and Danube; southeast and southwest of Belgrade the terrain becomes progressively mountainous, particularly so in the southern border areas." [1a]

See map below (United Nations Cartographic Section April 2007) [15a]





(Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook, last updated 25 November 2009.)
[9a]

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RECENT HISTORY

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile: Serbia, last reviewed 11 December 2008, noted:

"Tito's death in 1980 signalled the beginning of the end of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The state's economic decline continued and, increasingly, the power sharing issue rose up the agenda. In 1989 Slobodan Milosevic, riding a wave of nationalist sentiment, came to power in Serbia, and quickly installed his supporters in positions of power and severely restricted the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina. In January 1990, the Yugoslav League of Communists failed to reach agreement on urgent questions of reform and the Slovenian delegation walked out.

"The next eighteen months witnessed a round of largely insincere negotiations over how to resolve Yugoslavia's collective problems. In June 1991 Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence. Macedonia withdrew from Yugoslavia after its independence referendum in September 1991, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. Serbia, under Milosevic, opposed the independence moves and actively participated in wars and armed conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-95) under the pretext of 'protecting' Croatian and Bosnian Serbs.

"Following the secession of the other Yugoslav republics, Serbia and Montenegro adopted the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) on 27 April 1992, and declared themselves a new state. "When Kosovo and Vojvodina were stripped of their previous degree of autonomy, Kosovo Albanians began boycotting the Serbian institutions and elections. However, after several years of passive resistance, violent

opposition to Serbian hegemony grew in Kosovo. Milosevic turned to the policy of ethnic cleansing, this time against the Kosovo Albanian population. NATO intervened between March and June 1999 with a 78-day bombing campaign across Serbia and Montenegro to push repressive Serb troops out of Kosovo and force Milosevic to relinquish control of the province.

"Since June 1999, UNMIK has exercised administrative control of Kosovo, whilst the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) has maintained security within the province." [3a]

The FCO continued:

"A landslide victory by the newly elected President Kostunica's [Democratic Opposition of Serbia] DOS coalition in the Serbian Assembly elections in December 2000 saw Democratic Party (DS) leader Zoran Djindjic appointed as Serbian Prime Minister.

"From 2001 until 2003, the DOS coalition government made good progress in building a democratic and stable future for Serbia. They implemented reforms in Serbia's administrative and legal institutions; devolved more power to the regions; brought stability to Southern Serbia (the Presevo Valley); and helped foster better relations with neighbours and the international community. Also the government's team of mainly young technocrat economists succeeded in reforming the banking system and tackling the inflation and currency instability that were a feature of life under Milosevic." [3a]

Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments, Executive Summary, last updated 26 October 2009, noted that: "The assassination of then prime minister Zoran Dindic [sic] in 2003 marked a sea change in Serbian politics, as a majority of democratic parties came together in a 'cordon sanitaire' to ensure that the Serbian Radical Party (Srbije Radikalna Stranka: SRS) was kept out of power despite winning the most votes in that year's legislative polls." [1c]

The FCO also noted:

"On 12 March 2003, Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was assassinated outside a government building in Belgrade. In the immediate aftermath of the assassination the Serbian Government imposed a 42-day State of Emergency, during which time a nation-wide crackdown on organised crime ('Operation Sword') enabled the Government to make great progress in eradicating the influence of organised crime in Serbia. It resulted in the arrest of 4000 people from different organised crime gangs in connection with the assassination (for which the Government had blamed, in particular, a group known as the 'Zemun clan'); 14 other murders; 3 kidnapping cases, and 200 drug related crimes. ...

"Six months after the assassination: 'the DOS lost its parliamentary majority. Early Parliamentary Elections took place on 28 December 2003. Overall turnout was 58.8%, with the Serbian Radical Party winning most votes and gaining 82 of the 250 seats in government...' On 3 March 2004, the Serbian Assembly voted in the new minority government comprising the DSS, G17 Plus and SPO-NS, with support in the Assembly from the SPS. Former Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica was appointed Serbian Prime Minister." [3a]

The US State Department (USSD) Background Note, Serbia, updated June 2009, observed:

"On May 21, 2006, the Republic of Montenegro held a successful referendum on independence and declared independence on June 3 [2006]. Thereafter, the parliament of Serbia stated that the Republic of Serbia was the continuity of the state union, changing the name of the country from Serbia and Montenegro to the Republic of Serbia, with Serbia retaining Serbia and Montenegro's membership in all international organizations and bodies." [2c]

The FCO further reported:

"On 30 September 2006, the Serbian Parliament unanimously endorsed a new Constitution for Serbia. This text was then put to a referendum on 28/29 October 2006. The electorate approved the new Constitution with 53.04% voting in favour and the Parliament promulgated the new Constitution on 9 November 2006. Following the endorsement of the Constitution by the Serbian Parliament on 09 November, President Tadic called parliamentary elections on 21 January 2007." (FCO Country Profile, dated 11 December 2008) [3a]

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The FCO reported that:

On 3 February 2008 Boris Tadic was re-elected as President following the final round of elections. The results were as follows:

Candidates	Nominating parties	%
Boris Tadic	Democratic Party	50.31
Tomislav Nikolic	Serbian Radical Party	47.97

(FCO Country Profile, dated 11 December 2008) [3a]

The FCO noted that between the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2008 "Kosovo declared independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008." The Serbian Government responded by stating that it would not recognise Kosovo's independence. (FCO Country Profile, dated 11 December 2008) [3a]

The FCO further reported:

"Serbia held parliamentary and local elections on 11 May 2008 ... Following the elections the major parties were engaged in lengthy coalition talks before a coalition government was finally formed on 7 July 2008. The coalition government is made up of the Democratic Party, under the leadership of Tadic, the Socialist Party of Serbia, led by Dacic, and G17 PLUS under Dinkic. Mirko Cvetkovis (DS) is the new Prime Minister in this coalition government, while the other ministries have been shared out between the coalition parties.

"The results of the parliamentary election were as follows:

Party/Coalition	Party Leader	Parliament Seats	% of Votes Cast
Democratic Party (DS)	Coalition*	Boris Tadic	102 38.44
Serbian Radical Party (SRS)	Tomislav Nikolic	78	29.36

Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)/New Serbia Vojislav Kostunica 30 11.59
Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)* Ivica Dacic 20 7.6
LDP Alliance Cedomir Jovanovic 13 5.24
Hungarian Coalition Istvan Pastor 4 1.81
Bosniak Ticket for a European Sandzak Dr. Sulejman Ugljanin 2 0.92
Coalition of Albanians of Presevo Valley 1 0.41

"The Parties that make up the Democratic Party Coalition are: DS, G17PLUS, SPO, SDP and LSV. The parties that participate jointly with SPS are: PUPS (Party of United Pensioner of Serbia) and JS (United Serbia)." (FCO Country Profile, dated 11 December 2008) [3a]

Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments, Executive Summary, last updated 26 October 2009, noted that:

"However, the Democratic Party of Serbia (Demokratska Stranka Srbije: DSS) of then prime minister Vojislav Kostunica seemed increasingly to reflect a resurgent nationalism against a background of Montenegrin secession and final status talks on Kosovo. Following inconclusive elections in January 2007, a continuation of the coalition between the Democratic Party (Demokratska Stranka: DS) of President Boris Tadic and Kostunica's DSS was eventually agreed, but there remained serious differences between the positions of the two governing parties and the SRS remained in the wings. Presidential elections in early 2008 saw the SRS candidate Tomislav Nikolic beat Tadic in the first round before being defeated in the second round in polls that saw the highest turnout since the late Slobodan Milosevic lost power. Kosovo's proclamation of independence on 17 February 2008 resulted in the dissolution of government once again and the calling of general elections for 11 May 2008. Despite real fears that the SRS could win, the DS collected the most votes, eventually forming an unlikely but so far stable alliance with Milosevic's former Socialists Party of Serbia (Socijalisticka Partija Srbije: SPS) to form a government. At the end of July, indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic, a fugitive from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), was arrested in Belgrade by Serbian secret police units and transferred to The Hague." [1c]

BBC News reported on 22 July 2008 that: "Bosnian Serb war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic, one of the world's most wanted men, has been arrested in Serbia after more than a decade on the run. ... The appointment of a new, pro-European government in Belgrade last month appears to have cleared the way for his arrest... The arrest of Mr Karadzic and other indicted war criminals is one of the main conditions of Serbian progress towards European Union membership." [6c]

BBC News also reported on 23 December 2009 that: "Serbia has formally submitted its application to join the 27-nation EU ..." [6f]

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ECONOMY

GDP (billions): US\$ 45 (2008 est.)

GDP real growth rate: 5.4% (2008 est.)

GDP per capita: US \$6,782 (2008 est.)

Inflation: 6.8% (The US State Department (USSD) Background Note, Serbia, updated June 2009) [2c]

Population: In 2007, 7.38%

Unemployment rate: 18%

Official Currency: Serbian Dinar (RSD) (The World Bank, Serbia Country Brief 2009, last reviewed April 2009) [25a]

Major industries: Agriculture, machine building, metallurgy, mining, consumer goods, automotive, pharmaceuticals, petroleum products and chemicals.

Major trading partners: Russia, Italy, Germany, France, the former Yugoslav Republics and neighbouring EU states (Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania).

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile: Serbia, last reviewed 11 December 2008 [3a]

The World Bank, Serbia Country Brief 2009, updated April 2009 noted that: "Serbia is a middle-income country with a population of around 7.5 million and great potential for fast economic development, as the country is endowed with natural and mineral resources and fertile and arable agricultural land. Serbia is also well positioned for development of a transportation hub, given its strategic location at the crossroads of major road and rail routes in Southeastern Europe." [25a]

The report continued:

"After the turmoil of the 1990s, Serbia has made significant progress with a wide ranging program of democratic and economic reforms which started in 2001. Macroeconomic stability has been restored which provided basis for fast growth of the economy, and incomes have risen strongly. GDP per capita, estimated at \$2,100 in 2002, has reached \$5,400 in 2007. During the same time period, poverty has fallen from 14 percent of the population to about 6.6 percent (according to last year's Living Standards Measurement Survey)." [25a]

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HUMAN RIGHTS

The US State Department Report on Human Rights Practices 2008 (USSD 2008), Serbia, released 25 February 2009, stated in its introduction that:

"The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, the following human rights problems were reported:

- police brutality;
- corruption in the police and the judiciary;
- inefficient and lengthy trials;
- government inability to apprehend the two remaining fugitive war crimes suspects [Goran Hadzoic and Ratko Mladic] under indictment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY);
- harassment of journalists;
- human rights advocates, and others critical of the government;
- limitations on freedom of speech and religion;
- societal intolerance and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Roma;
- large numbers of internally displaced persons;
- violence against women and children;
- trafficking in persons

During the year the government arrested and extradited Stojan Zupljanin and Radovan Karadzic, two of the final four indictees sought by the ICTY for war crimes.” [2a] (Introduction)

The Amnesty International (AI) Report 2009, Serbia, covering events in 2008, highlighted a number of human rights areas of concern. These were:

- “47 war crimes were under investigation; few prosecutions were completed
- Discrimination against minorities
- Inter-ethnic violence in the Suva Reka/Suhareke Municipality
- Violence against women and girls.” [10a]

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile: Serbia, last reviewed 11 December 2008, reported:

“Following the fall of the Milosevic regime, the human rights situation in Serbia has greatly improved. Problems still remain, although many are typical of countries political and economic transition. Serbia has ratified the majority of human rights-related international conventions and since the separation from Montenegro, Serbia remains bound by these agreements. Full and practical implementation of these legal provisions is now important. The authorities have made some progress. For example, 'Minority Councils' for most of the major ethnic groups in Serbia have been established, which provide a more effective means for minorities to raise issues of concern with authorities. A Serbian Government strategy for tackling discrimination and better integration of the Roma community is also a positive development. The Serbian Government has also taken positive steps to address the inter-ethnic related problems in Southern Serbia.” [3a]

The Human Rights Watch, World Report 2009: Serbia, covering events in 2008, released January 2009, noted that:

“In Serbia the formation in June [2008] of a new coalition government produced dramatic results on war crimes, with the arrest of Radovan Karadzic and his transfer to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). But the government failed to arrest Ratko Mladic. There was a wave of attacks against ethnic Albanian businesses and homes following Kosovo's independence declaration. The Roma minority remains vulnerable. Human rights defenders and journalists came under renewed pressure.” [4a]

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ETHNIC MINORITIES

Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments, Demography Section, last updated 23 October 2009, noted that:

“The regular census in Serbia, which was postponed from 2001, was held in April 2002. The Republic Statistical Office notes in the final census results, 'When using census results, it is necessary to point out that definitions of permanent population in 2002 cannot be compatible to the permanent population in 1991.' Updated population breakdown according to ethnicity still has not been released. Previous data suggests the following:

Ethnic Groups (Serbia)	Per Cent
Serbs	82.86
Hungarians	3.91
Bosniaks	1.82
Romanies	1.44
Yugoslavs	1.08
Montenegrins	0.92
Albanians	0.82
Other	7.15

From 2002 census, excluding the figures from Kosovo.” [1e]

The USSD 2008 Report stated that:

“European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) report on the country noted the existence of a climate of hostility toward national and ethnic minorities, who constituted 25 to 30 percent of the country’s population and included ethnic Hungarians, Bosniaks, Roma, Slovaks, Romanians, Vlachs, Bulgarians, Croats, Albanians, and others.

“Roma, who constituted 1.4 percent of the population, continued to be the most vulnerable minority community. Roma were targets of verbal and physical harassment from ordinary citizens, police violence, and societal discrimination.” [2a] (Section 5)

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LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS

The USSD 2008 Report stated that:

“Violence and discrimination against homosexuals was a problem. A comprehensive survey of societal perceptions of homosexuality and attitudes towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population, conducted in February and March, showed that the dominant opinion was that homosexuality is a disease and represents a threat to society. Several Serbia-based Neo-Nazi web sites and Facebook pages hosted anti-LGBT forums and groups. [2a] (Section 5)

The USSD 2008 Report went on to note: “... representatives of the NGO Queer Life released a statement calling for the government to respond to anti-gay placards posted throughout Belgrade on December 10 2008. ... the NGO Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) issued a statement welcoming the first-ever court decision punishing threats against members of the gay community.” [2a] (Section 5)

A BBC News report titled ‘Serbian gay parade is called off’, dated 19 September 2009, noted that: “A Gay Pride march in Serbia has been called off after police told organisers they could not guarantee its safety.” [6d]

The 2009 edition of Spartacus International Gay Guide, stated:

“Two new laws prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation have been passed. Another step forward is the introduction and equalization of an age of consent for hetero- and homosexuals (14 years). But the new legal situation has so far failed to reduce the violence and discrimination daily experienced by people with same-sex preferences. Any public display of homosexual desire or behaviour on the street, in parks or non-gay clubs can still be risky.” [18a]

The Spartacus Gay Guide provided details of gay and lesbian websites with information on groups, bars and general gay Information. [18a]

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WOMEN

The USSD 2008 Report stated: “The constitution and law prohibit discrimination ... against women and ... trafficking ... and violence against women ...” [2a] (Section 5)

The same report added:

“Rape, including spousal rape, is punishable by up to 40 years in prison. Advocates suspect that only a small percentage of rape victims reported their attacks, fearing reprisals from their attackers or humiliation in court. Few spousal rape victims filed complaints with authorities. Women’s groups reported that sentences were often too lenient.

“Violence against women was a problem, and high levels of domestic violence persisted. Domestic violence is a crime punishable by up to 10 years’ imprisonment. The law provides women the right to a restraining order against abusers. Such cases were difficult to prosecute due to lack of witnesses and evidence and unwillingness of witnesses or victims to testify. ... The few official agencies dedicated to coping with family violence had inadequate resources. The NGO community played an active role in combating violence against women. Osvit, a Nis-based NGO, continued to operate a Romani language telephone hotline for women who were victims of domestic violence or abuse.

“Women have the same legal rights as men, including under family law, property law, and in the judicial system, and these rights were generally enforced in practice. The government’s Council for Gender Equality worked during the year with NGOs to raise public awareness of gender equality problems.” [2a] (Section 5)

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CHILDREN

The USSD 2008 Report stated:

“The government was committed to the rights and welfare of children. In October, Rasim Ljajic, minister for labor and social policy, stated that 155,000 children lived in poverty, while approximately 161,000 children received some kind of social assistance. He added that children from the refugee community and Romani families were in the most difficult position with almost 60 percent of Romani children living in non-hygienic

settlements and 46 percent not having a meal every day. Ljajic also reported that in 2007 government institutions registered 1,640 cases of child neglect, emotional, and physical violence against children.

“Romani families experienced some difficulties registering the births of children, mostly due to a lack of permanent address or documentation of parents' identity.

“While the educational system provided nine years of free, mandatory schooling, including a year before elementary school, ethnic prejudice, cultural norms, and economic distress discouraged some children, particularly Roma, from attending school.

“Child marriage was a problem in some communities, particularly among Roma and in rural areas of southern and eastern Serbia. In the Romani community, boys and girls generally married between the ages of 14 and 18, with 16 as the average; boys generally married a few years later than girls. Child marriage was most common among Muslim Ashkali, most of whom were displaced from Kosovo.” [2a] (Section 5)

TRAFFICKING

The US State Department Report on Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2009, Serbia, released 16 June 2009, stated:

“Serbia is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and girls trafficked internationally and within the country for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Foreign victims are trafficked to Serbia from Eastern Europe and Central Asia through Kosovo and Macedonia. Serbia continued to serve as a transit country for victims trafficked from Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia and destined for Italy and other countries in Western Europe. Children, mostly Roma, continued to be trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced marriage, or forced street begging. The majority of identified victims in 2008 were Serbian women and girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation; over half were children. There was an increase in cases of trafficking for forced labor in 2008.” [1d]

The Report went on to state:

“The Government of Serbia does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government increased funding for protection of victims and appointed a new National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator in November 2008, though serious concerns remained about punishment of traffickers and prosecution of complicit officials. Moreover, law enforcement data provided was incomplete. The government also has not yet developed formal procedures to adequately identify and refer potential trafficking victims, seriously hampering its ability to provide assistance and protection to victims. ... The criminal code for Serbia prohibits sex and labor trafficking through its article 388, which prescribes penalties of two to 10 years' imprisonment; these are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other grave offenses, such as rape. In 2008, the government investigated and charged 94 persons with trafficking. The government did not provide comprehensive prosecution data, but reported that, in 2008, 18 trafficking offenders were convicted and sentenced to prison; 17 others were acquitted.” [1d]

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FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND THE MEDIA

The USSD 2008 stated:

"The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, there were reports that the government interfered with these freedoms. Generally, the press were not limited or prevented from criticizing the government publicly or privately.

"The print media were mostly independent and privately owned. The oldest nationwide daily, Politika, was co-owned by a German company and the government but operated by several shareholding companies. Politika's reporting and editorials continued to have a progovernment slant, particularly during the May parliamentary elections.

"Broadcast media were mostly independent and privately owned, although privatization of municipally owned media was not yet completed. Radio-Television Serbia (RTS), a public media outlet funded by mandatory subscription, was a major presence, operating two television channels as well as Radio Belgrade.

"During the year, some reporters and media organizations were victims of vandalism, bomb threats, and intimidation for coverage and portrayal of views unpopular with the government and right-wing elements of society, such as the capture and extradition of war crimes fugitives. In July protesters attacked reporters from FoNet and B92 who were reporting on protests organized following the arrest of Radovan Karadzic. On July 24, Bosko Brankovic, a cameraman for B92, was attacked while filming a protest and suffered a broken shin. The incident reportedly took place in the immediate vicinity of police officers who did not react, although the police later arrested Milan Savatric, Nikola Lazic, and Stefan Milicevic in connection with the attack. Their trial began in the third district court in Belgrade in December and was ongoing at year's end.

"Several journalists and reporters were injured in February during Kosovo-related protests in Belgrade. According to the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM), protestors attacked Dirk Jan Viser, a Dutch reporter for Handelsblad, during protests at the U.S. Embassy. Protestors allegedly also beat two journalists from Russia Today, Andrei Fyodorov and Andrei Pavlov. The police prevented an attempted arson attack and assault on Radio Television B92.

"The government did not censor the media, but journalists sometimes practiced self-censorship due to possible libel suits and fear of offending the public, particularly on subjects relating to corruption. Human rights activists charged that they were subjects of smear campaigns in the majority of media for expressing views critical of the government or that challenged the popular narrative regarding the country's role in the wars of the 1990s.

"Libel is a criminal offense; those convicted of libel face imprisonment or fines of 40,000 to one million dinars (approximately \$720 to \$18,000)." [2a] (Section 2a)

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HEALTH CARE

Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments, Demography Section, last updated 23 October 2009 noted that:

"Health and medical services were severely hit by the wars of the 1990s associated with the breakup of Yugoslavia and the subsequent conflict over Kosovo. ... The [health and] pharmaceutical industry has since recovered strongly, and most facilities have been modernised ...

"Corruption remains endemic in Serbia's health service, as in much of the region, hindering the provision of health care to the poorer - and therefore often more needy - sections of society.

"The health services remain heavily dependent on foreign aid. Since October 2000, the EU has donated a total of almost EUR70 million (USD104 million) to support the health services in Serbia, notably through the delivery of large quantities of medicines and equipment.

"Assessments of physical infrastructure made by the European Agency for Reconstruction suggest that out of 1,656 buildings just 25 per cent were in good condition, while a further 27 per cent needed repairs, 16 per cent needed alteration, 25 per cent needed reconstruction, five per cent needed additional space built, and two per cent remained incomplete. Of equipment in health institutions, only 24 per cent was 10-years-old or less, while 27 per cent was more than 21-years-old. Related to this, 20 major hospitals were chosen by the Ministry of Health for repair, equipment and training. A rehabilitation plan was drawn up for each hospital, and the European Investment Bank is expected to provide EUR50 million (USD75 million). The programme began in November 2003.

"EU funding has put in place several other projects: a year-long project to develop and set up a Medicines Agency, which was realised in July 2003; and a project to develop national guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of four major groups of diseases most prevalent in the country and an action plan on focusing resources towards the treatment of these illnesses. Further emphasis on preventative treatments has followed this funding including the financing of 25 'wellness centres' by the European Agency of Reconstruction in 2006 and beyond.

"The World Health Organisation, World Bank, and others have also assisted the government in developing a strategy of health care reform which studied the system between 2003 and 2006 and begin implementing reforms slowly following these recommendations, including a new health insurance policy which would try to bring in line inputs and expenditures. Overall health care spending was registered at roughly eight per cent of gross domestic product, more or less similar to regional ratios; however overall care is still considered to be in need of improvement." [1e]

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) noted in 'Information on Return and Reintegration in Countries of Origin (IRRiCO) for, The Republic of Serbia', last updated 31 March 2009, that:

"The National Health System is organized on three levels¹. The primary healthcare are provided through 161 healthcare centers (Domovi zdravlja) and smaller primary health stations (Zdravstvene stanice) responsible for general medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, occupational medicine, dentistry, home care, preventive care and laboratory services. The secondary and tertiary care is provided in 42 general hospitals, 15 specialist clinics, 23 independent institution and clinics, 5 hospital centers and clinics, 4 clinics centers and 59 other institutions.

“Private health care is developed but is not incorporated into the national health system.” [26a]

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