



**SCTM**

**DRAFT**

**STRATEGIC PLAN of the  
STANDING CONFERENCE OF TOWNS AND  
MUNICIPALITIES – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN SERBIA**

**FOR THE PERIOD  
2026 – 2030**

# 1. VISION AND MISSION

The vision of SCTM is a modern, professional and efficient local self-government that provides quality public services to citizens and businesses.

The mission of the SCTM is to represent the interests of local self-government, provide quality services to local self-government and support the development and improvement of local self-government, through joint engagement of its members. The SCTM creates, encourages and supports systemic changes in the political and administrative system, working both on improving the legal and institutional framework for local self-government, as well as on supporting the implementation of local self-government.

The vision of SCTM as an organization is an institutionally strong and sustainable national association of towns and municipalities that contributes to accountable and efficient local self-government.

# 2. OVERALL OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of the SCTM Strategic Plan is ***a system of local self-government that enables the full exercise of citizens' rights to local self-government and efficient, effective and sustainable provision of local self-government services to citizens and businesses.*** Defined in this way, it aligns with the overall objective of the Programme for the Reform of the Local Self-Government System in the Republic of Serbia, as a key reform document for the local self-government system, in the development of which the SCTM also participated. The implementation of the subject Programme takes place within the broader framework of the Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia until 2030, whereas the SCTM Strategic Plan is likewise aligned with timeline of the national reform framework.

# 3. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

## PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE 1. REFORMED POSITION AND ORGANIZATION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

### Planned result 1.1. Intensified reform of the local self-government systemic setup

Just as the full implementation of the Programme for the Reform of the Local Self-Government System 2021-2025 was important for the previous SCTM Strategic Plan, the full implementation of the new Programme for the Reform of the Local Self-Government System, which is being prepared for the period from 2026 to 2030, will be of the utmost importance in the next five years. In this regard, the SCTM will continue to advocate for the decentralization and strengthening of local self-government in accordance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ECLSG). The SCTM will advocate for the full ratification of this Charter and its full implementation in Serbia, and will advocate for the performance of public affairs and services at the territorial level closest to citizens and local communities.

It is also necessary to continue working on improving the systemic legal framework of local self-government. The previous work of the MPALSG and SCTM on amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government should be finalized, in order to improve the system of local self-government that further efficiently and sustainably develops the exercise of citizens' rights to local self-government with the vision of creating a modern, professional, efficient and accountable local self-government. The following aspects of the Law on Local Self-Government as the essential and systemic legal piece regulating local self-government functioning should be particularly improved: enhancing the supervisory function of the Assembly and strengthening the position of its working bodies; improving the transparency and electronic availability of regulations from the original competencies; developing new models for managing the process of entrusting or transferring competencies to local self-governments; improving the position of the local ombudsman; improvement of the decision-making process in administrative procedure in the application of the original competencies of local self-government (considering the introduction of an inter-municipal professional second-instance body), etc. Upon the adoption of the amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government, the priority will be to provide full support to the implementation of the new legal solutions in practice and the harmonization of proceeding according to them, in cooperation with the line ministry. Likewise, this type of support will continue for the implementation of the legal framework concerning referendums and people's initiatives in the local community, where the priority is to improve the capacities of the local administration to implement procedures in practice.

The continuation of the development of inter-municipal cooperation (IMC) will remain one of the key prerequisites for the reform of the existing system of local self-government. For the systemic reform of the existing local self-government, an intensive development of inter-municipal cooperation is needed in order to make local services more efficient, affordable and, most importantly, more accessible to all citizens to a similar extent and quality. The SCTM will work on expanding the scope and forms of inter-municipal cooperation, through the establishment of joint services, bodies, organizations and projects, the exchange of knowledge and resources, which will contribute to a more rational use of budget resources and more efficient solving of problems that exceed the borders of one local community. In this regard, it is necessary to consider further reform of the Law on Local Self-Government in this area, as well as amendments to sectoral laws that would ensure that the IMC is functional in specific areas of local self-government work and that new inter-municipal services are established. The SCTM's commitment to the continuous improvement of the legal framework and practice for the IMC will be accompanied by an active advocacy of the need to provide continuous national financial support to the inter-municipal organization of local self-government services, and the SCTM itself will provide professional and technical support to local authorities in establishing inter-municipal cooperation.

### **Planned result 1.2. Improved human resource management function in local government**

Strengthening the functional and personnel capacities of local self-government is a fundamental strategic priority in order to ensure the efficient, accountable and transparent implementation of its competencies. A significant step in this direction was the introduction of a competence-based system into the function of human resource management in the previous period. As the integration of the competence system into the function of human resource

management in local self-government is completed, the greatest emphasis in the coming period should be placed on the standardization of procedures in the field of human resource management, as well as on the sustainability of the system after the full integration of the competency system.

In this regard, support should be intensified to improve the capacity to perform the function of human resource management and competence-based professional development, which should be accompanied by the introduction of quality standards in this area, as well as the analysis of possible models of inter-municipal cooperation in these areas.

A particular priority in the coming period should be the regulation of the salary system in local self-government bodies. After the repeal of all regulations regarding salaries in LSGs in March 2025, there are even greater expectations to resolve this important issue for the functioning of the administration as soon as possible. In this regard, in the coming period, the SCTM will advocate for the resolution of this systemic issue and will provide support to LSGs for the implementation of the new normative framework for wages, once it is adopted.

### **Planned result 1.3. Improved implementation of the good governance principles in local self-government**

The SCTM will continue to work on improving the implementation of the principles of good governance in local self-government, as the application of these principles is a key prerequisite for its essential development. Increasing transparency in work, active involvement of citizens and the local community, development and implementation of measures to prevent corruption, as well as the continuous strengthening of the responsibility, efficiency and effectiveness of the authorities, are essential for building a quality local government system.

Efficient provision and availability of local administrative services adapted to the needs of citizens and businesses is one of the priorities for the development of good governance in local self-government. Standardization of administrative procedures, as well as further development of e-government, accompanied by publicly available and easily understandable services on which users are timely and adequately informed, is a key part of the process of reforming the administrative procedures of local self-government. In accordance with the trend of digitalization of the work of public administration bodies, it is necessary to continue and intensify the digitalization of local public services, as well as the linking of a larger number of administrative procedures in order to provide an efficient and accessible service for every citizen or business. In this way, administrative processes will be simplified, accelerated and made more accessible to all citizens. The use of modern technologies will enable better communication between citizens and the administration, as well as greater availability of information and services. The institute of a single administrative point is one of the most important reform steps towards simplifying procedures for services related to a unique life event or circumstances in which citizens as potential beneficiaries of services find themselves. The idea of "multiple services in one place (one-stop-shops)," i.e. the SCTM support for the introduction and improvement of single administrative points, is a priority in the new strategic period as well. Also, the SCTM will continue to support its members in the implementation of the Law on the Register of Administrative Procedures (entry of original administrative procedures in the Register), which will increase transparency in the work of LSGs, while simultaneously enabling systematic monitoring of procedures, their justifiability/validity and the need for further optimization.

The implementation of the good governance principles implies the adoption and full implementation of local anti-corruption policies and full publicity and public oversight over the implementation of anti-corruption measures. In this sense, the priority for the SCTM is further building of knowledge, exchange of experiences and promotion of good examples in this area in order to achieve the most optimal and effective anti-corruption measures and activities and sufficiently stable and consistent actions of LSGs. In terms of corruption prevention and especially for the development of ethical performance of public office, one of the key documents in local self-government is the Code of Ethics for Local Government Officials, which was adopted by the SCTM. The SCTM will continue to provide support to cities and municipalities in the processes of adopting and implementing the Code of Ethics and in the formation and operation of local councils to monitor its implementation, as an independent control mechanism. Independent control of the implementation of the Code of Ethics is very important for improving transparency and trust in good governance at the local level, as well as for affirming accountability as a principle of work.

The key aspects of good governance are also the transparency of the work of local self-government and the full participation of citizens in local decision-making. The SCTM will actively advocate and support transparency and openness of local authorities in their actions, as these principles represent an important aspect of the development of trust in local self-government and are the basis for the direct involvement of citizens in the work of local authorities. For SCTM, the citizens' participation is particularly important in the processes of budget preparation, defining key local decisions (related to issues such as the quality of public services, urban development, the environment, the amount of local tax and other obligations for citizens and the economy, etc.) or the preparation of key development local public policies. Therefore, the SCTM will promote and strive to provide support to LSGs for building knowledge and capacity for the implementation of crucial milestones in the process of civic participation (informing the community, undertaking consultations, ensuring involvement and partnership, implementation and organization of various forms of direct decision-making by citizens). It is necessary to improve control and reporting mechanisms, so that citizens have a clear insight into the way decisions are made and public funds spent. In this process, it will be particularly important to further develop the capacities of local authorities to cooperate with key partners in the local community, such as local communities in the narrow sense (*mesne zajednice*), citizens' associations and the business community, in the process of proposing, making and controlling the implementation of local government decisions, as well as in joint initiatives and projects.

Respect for human and minority rights at the local level is one of the key parts of the corpus of good governance principles. It is very important for the SCTM to sustain and support the capacity building of local self-government for the provision of local public services that are adapted to the needs of different groups of the population, while ensuring the same level of quality and availability of these services. In the previous period, the SCTM has made particularly significant efforts in supporting local self-government in the implementation of the gender equality policy. The issue of developing full gender equality in local public policies will continue to be one of the key priorities of the SCTM. Support will be provided for LSGs in the implementation of the legal framework and gender equality policy (gender-responsive budget, functioning of the local institutional framework, local gender-sensitive measures, etc.) and the implementation of the principles of the European Charter on Gender Equality at the local level. The SCTM will also prioritise other important issues, including the full realization of the rights of ethnic and national minorities in local self-government.

In addition to establishing stimulating local policies and measures to promote the realization of human rights in local self-government, the SCTM believes that it is very important to establish an adequate institutional framework for the protection of citizens' rights before local self-government bodies. In this regard, one of the key steps is the establishment of the function of the local ombudsman pursuant to the Law on Local Self-Government. The expansion of the network of ombudspersons in local self-government will be one of the priorities of the SCTM, both through support to the establishment of local ombudspersons in individual cities and municipalities, and even more so through the expansion and encouragement of inter-municipal cooperation in this area.

**In particular, Objective 1 contributes to the achievement of the following Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the obligations of the Republic of Serbia within the following negotiating chapters for EU accession negotiations**



## **PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE 2. IMPROVED FINANCING SYSTEM AND ACCOUNTABLE DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT**

### **Planned result 2.1. Improved financing system towards fiscal sustainability and financial autonomy of the LSG**

The system of LSG financing should ensure sufficiency, stability and predictability of revenues in local self-governments, as well as ensure the transparency of the system of transfers to local budgets, applying the principle of equalization with the aim of strengthening local self-government revenues and fiscal decentralization in the Republic of Serbia. The Law on Financing of Local Self-Government, which regulates the provision of funds for the performance of original and entrusted tasks, has not been significantly changed since 2011, although the context has changed significantly. Although LSG's revenues have been growing steadily in nominal terms, their share in total public revenues has been decreasing from year to year. While in the period from 2017 to 2021 this share averaged 14.6%, since then it has been steadily declining to reach a low of 13.3% in 2024. Also, the structure of local self-government revenues has changed significantly, primarily through a significant increase in the share of income tax revenues, which is a positive result, as well as through a decrease in the share of other types of income, primarily the share of general

non-purpose transfer, the nominal amount of which has not changed for 12 years. The freezing of general non-purpose transfer has a negative impact on the revenue volume for a significant number, primarily less developed LSGs, which are largely dependent on this type of transfer. This has disrupted the equalization and horizontal balance between the LSGs, which should be one of the most important features of this transfer.

That is why it is necessary to insist on a dialogue on directions for improving the system of LSG financing, primarily through resuming and continuous work of the Commission for Financing Local Self-Government. The first necessary step is to "unfreeze," i.e. increase the amount of unconditional transfer. In the next step, a comprehensive analysis should follow concerning the legal framework and its application in practice through the prism of the state of revenues and receipts, and expenditures and outlays on the basis of their planning and realization, i.e. execution in LSGs, as well as their compliance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Finance, etc. Based on the conclusions of this analysis, a consensus should be reached among local authorities and a proposal formulated that would enable the reform of the LSG financing system that would ensure that LSGs have adequate resources for the provision of public services and infrastructure works, as well as to meet the needs of their population, regardless of their geographical location or economic circumstances. It should also be ensured that with such resources, where it is optimal, LSG are free to dispose pursuant to their authority. It is likewise necessary to initiate the process of reforming the legal and methodological framework that determines the level of development of cities and municipalities, as this is essential for the improvement of the existing financing system, as well as for the policies of balanced regional development and other areas of support to local self-government.

## **Planned result 2.2. Improved development planning and execution of the local budget**

Bearing in mind that in the period from 2021 to 2025, the vast majority of LSG units (84%) adopted Development Plans, which are the hierarchically highest and mandatory planning document for each LSG unit, in the coming period, the priority is the continuous process of their implementation, monitoring and reporting. For further progress in the improvement of development planning, a particularly important aspect is the elaboration of performance reports on the implementation of development plans, the adoption of which by local assemblies is a legal obligation for all LSG units, due upon three years from the adoption of the development plan. The SCTM will continue to advocate for better integration of the Sustainable Development Goals through local planning documents, and in working with cities and municipalities on reporting processes - will pursue a clearer outlining of the contributions to the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030. Particularly important and demanding is the process of medium-term planning, entailing a necessary link with the process of (programme) budgeting, as well as the process of capital planning and budgeting, given the complexity of capital projects. Deficiencies in the planning process are largely the cause of relatively modest execution of expenditures, especially capital expenditures, as well as for frequent budget rebalances in many LSGs, which highlights the need to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of planning and budgeting.

In the coming period, the SCTM will also be devoted to supporting the introduction and implementation of territorial strategies as instruments of EU Cohesion Policy in the sphere of



planning at the local and inter-municipal level. Cities and municipalities and regional development agencies will be supported in creating links between local planning documents and territorial development strategies in order to increase the readiness of local governments to access EU funds.

The experience of direct support to cities and municipalities from previous years, as well as models, guidelines and recommendations for the improvement and adaptation of regulations, are a good basis and guideline for action in the horizon until 2030, and the improvement of knowledge, on the budget process and on the application of budget classifications, is of great importance for positive developments in this area. SCTM will continue to build the capacities of LSGs and support for strengthening the gender perspective in local budgets, while attention will also be paid to new requirements in terms of green budgeting and for considering the sustainable development aspects in the management of capital investments. Efficient execution of local budgets, enabling local governments to procure goods, services and works of the required quality under the most favourable terms, most directly depends on the functioning of the public procurement system in local self-government, so this area of LSG operations will be given due attention and support as well.

An exceptionally important priority for local self-government and for the SCTM in the coming period is the further development of the capacities of LSGs for the administration of local own-source revenues, since this is a prerequisite for increasing local budgets, especially bearing in mind that analyses and assessments indicate that such space exists, primarily through additional expansion of the scope of taxable property and by increasing the level of collection. It is also necessary to improve forced collection, reduce the statute of limitations of tax debt, as well as use the new functionalities of the unique Local Tax Administration (LTA) information system through the provision of various e-services. Through the networking of LTA professionals, LTA will be supported in the further development of technical and human capacities for the administration of local public revenues, a forum for the exchange of good practices and knowledge will be enabled, and the necessary improvements to the regulatory framework will be initiated.

### **Planned result 2.3. Improvement of accountable and transparent use of public funds of LSGs**

Public Internal Financial Control (PIFC) is a cross-cutting aspect of public financial management and includes closely related functions of financial management and control (FMC), internal audit (IA), and managerial accountability. In previous years, important progress has been made in these areas, so 58% of LSG units have the FMC system in place, and internal audit exists in some form in 51% of LSG units. New legislative solutions regarding the organizational positioning of IA in LSGs, as well as the implementation of the new set of international standards as of 2025, have significantly marked the context of IA development in the recent period. Accordingly, the SCTM will pay special attention to supporting LSGs in establishing or further developing the PIFC system, as well as to fostering the awareness of local authorities on the importance of the PIFC as an integral part of local strategic and operational processes.

Transparency of public finances and enabling public participation in decision-making on the allocation of public resources, is of great importance for their accountable usage. Existing good



practices concerning informing the public on the state and implementation of the budget, realized investments, creditworthiness and indebtedness, audits of final accounts or public participation in defining local priorities for financing, should be extended to as many LSGs as possible. SCTM will award special attention to support cities and municipalities in applying the tools for transparent and inclusive preparation of the budget (such as quality public debates) and for continuous monitoring of budget implementation (such as the usage of simple solutions that are easily accessible and understandable to citizens, such as citizens' guides through the budget and final annual accounts of LSGs, etc.).

**In particular, Objective 2 contributes to the achievement of the following Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the obligations of the Republic of Serbia within the following negotiating chapters for EU accession negotiations**



### **OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVING THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL POLICIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Planned result 3.1. Improved capacities of local self-government to incentivise the economic development of the local community**

Local Economic Development (LED) is one of the key priorities in the activities of the SCTM. LED is the basis of the overall development of local self-government and local community, as it generates new jobs and the growth of income and economic strength of both citizens and local self-government. It is particularly important that in the forthcoming period, EU Cohesion Policy instruments are recognized as an important part of supporting local and regional development.

That is why the SCTM will support local self-governments in raising capacities for the successful implementation of integrated projects that encourage socio-economic development. SCTM will continue to support the development and implementation of various sectoral support programs for LED (LED Programme, Employment Programme) and the development of specific services to the economy. The priority is to support the establishment of the basic framework for LED (development of local policies, preparation of programmes and measures to support the local economy, building the capacity of the administration for the implementation and monitoring of private investors, etc.), the development of women's entrepreneurship, the economic empowerment of young people and the development of social entrepreneurship.

In the field of employment, the SCTM will continue to support the harmonization of local planning documents with the Law on Planning System and the incorporation of measures backing-up various initiatives such as social entrepreneurship, youth guarantees, dual education, etc.

Tourism, as an extremely potent economic activity, requires intensive and continuous work with LSGs in the coming period, both in development and entrusted affairs. In development – it is necessary to support the elaboration of tourism development programmes, programmes of promotional activities (and their harmonization with the Law on Planning System) and the development of tourism products. As concerns the entrusted ones – it is necessary to continue building the capacities of LSGs in the field of hospitality: categorization, eTourist and tourist inspection. Also, the topics that require greater attention in the coming period are: categorization of tourist places, possibilities and limitations of declaring a tourist area, changes in the minimum technical requirements in the field of hospitality, improvement of the legal framework for spa tourism, the beginning of the establishment of destination management organizations, etc.

### **Planned result 3.2. Improved performance of LSGs in the field of agriculture and rural development and in benefiting the IPARD Programme funds**

In the next strategic period, one of the most complex areas with specific challenges, but also great potentials for the development of LSGs, will be the field of agriculture and rural development. Following the years-long advocacy by the SCTM, it is expected that the Managing Authority of the IPARD Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture will accredit measures 5 and 6, which are very important for LSGs. In measure 5 (LEADER), which contributes to the development of local communities through the active engagement of local action groups, LSGs can be founders or members of these groups in addition to the public and private sector representatives. Through these local groups, a framework is being created for the comprehensive cooperation of local actors and for the use of important national and EU funds intended for agriculture and rural development. Measure 6, whose only beneficiaries are LSGs, concerns investments in rural public infrastructure, and is one of the most important measures of the IPARD Programme for improving the quality of life in the countryside and for reducing urban-rural discrepancies. Given the great potential that these measures of the IPARD Programme bear for the development of the local community, the SCTM will intensify the work with LSGs in all those segments and via available support mechanisms, through cooperation with the line ministry and the Managing Authority of the IPARD Programme.

In addition to supporting the usage of IPARD funds, the SCTM will continue to assist its members in capacity development and implementation of the legal framework and policies in the field of agriculture and rural development. The SCTM will organize timely information provision and support to its members regarding the new electronic systems whose introduction is planned or is underway, such as the LPIS (Land Parcel Identification System) and the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS), which is one of the most important elements and one of the conditions for the closure of the negotiating Chapter 11. The SCTM will likewise continue to provide support to its members in capacity building for the implementation of the E-Agrar system as well as for the transfer of knowledge to the users of this system in the local community.

The SCTM will provide support for the elaboration and implementation of the two most important programmes through which LSGs influence the improvement and development of agriculture and rural development at the local level: 1) the Programme for the Protection, development and usage of agricultural land and 2) the Programme of support measures in the field of agriculture and rural development. A particularly important issue for the SCTM will be the necessity of incorporating measures for adaptation and increasing resilience to changed climate conditions and more prominent formulation and implementation in local policies of measures that are in line with the implementation of the Green Agenda. In addition, attention will be paid to the competencies of LSGs in the field of water management, forestry, conversion of agricultural land into construction land, land consolidation (*komasacija*) and to other pertinent topics and issues for the operation of LSGs in the field of agriculture and rural development.

### **Planned result 3.3. Improved accessibility, quality and efficiency of local health services, social protection and social inclusion services at the local level**

A high-quality planning, programming, financial and institutional framework in the areas of social care for health and of public health at the local level, is extremely important for the further development of local self-government. Support to local self-government as a public health actor, in the development of public health plans, programming and financing of public health and health care in accordance with the legal framework, will be a priority of the SCTM. It is likewise very important for the SCTM to intensify the process of reforming emergency medical care. It is necessary to adopt regulations that will specify this competence of local self-government and define national and local measures that will ensure that the availability and quality of emergency medical care are more consistent throughout the country. For further development of LSG functions in the field of public health and the health system, it is necessary to systematically and continuously support the strengthening of LSG capacities, including in particular the increase in staff and better organising of these tasks in local administration.

Improving the role of LSGs in the field of social protection is a strategic priority of the SCTM. The SCTM will continue to support the strengthening of the capacity of LSGs to independently plan, organize and monitor services in accordance with the needs of the population and within their competencies. The basis for this will be significant experience and developed models and practices from the previous strategic period through cooperation with the relevant ministry and the European Union. A special focus will be on improving the strategic, institutional and financial framework as a basis for efficient and sustainable management of the local social protection system. Improving services does not only mean the development of planning documents, but also their consistent implementation, based on real resources, field data and the needs of beneficiaries. The sustainability of existing services, as well as the development of new, tailored and innovative forms of support, is particularly challenging in smaller and underdeveloped municipalities. Therefore, it is important to continue supporting the creation of sustainable organizational solutions, including examples of inter-municipal cooperation and the development of partnerships between LSGs, institutions, the civil sector and other actors. Improving cross-sectoral cooperation, especially in the health, education and employment sectors, is a key process for the development of local social services, particularly in cases of beneficiaries who are at multiple risks. In addition, it is necessary to improve the quality and territorial availability of services, but also to encourage greater orientation towards beneficiaries and their specific needs.

The availability, quality and efficiency of local social inclusion mechanisms is also one of the priorities of the SCTM. Establishing and improving a comprehensive sustainable strategic, normative, financial and institutional framework for the implementation of local social inclusion policies and measures is crucial for the development of a fair and inclusive local community. The SCTM will continue to work on improving accessibility, quality and efficiency of local social inclusion mechanisms, through strengthening institutional capacities, intersectoral cooperation and better linking of local measures with the national strategic framework. Of particular importance is the establishment and improvement of inclusive, cross-sectoral services at the local level, which include coordinated support in the areas of social protection, education, health, employment and housing. Local self-governments have a key role in this process, because it is at the local level that the fastest identification of needs and adaptation of measures to the specifics of the community can occur. Within this framework, the social inclusion of Roma remains one of the most important challenges and priorities, which is why support will continue to be provided to the development and improvement of local inclusion mechanisms, such as mobile teams, coordination bodies and coordinators for Roma issues. At the same time, the SCTM will support the process of harmonization of local planning documents with the national Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma (2022-2030) through elaboration and revision of local action and operational plans. Special emphasis will be placed on the coverage of all relevant areas – education, health, housing, employment and social protection – in accordance with the competencies of local self-government.

#### **Planned result 3.4. Improved performance of local self-government in the field of education and support to children and youth**

Improving education, supporting parenthood and implementing adequate youth policies are interrelated priorities that aim to create a stimulating environment for the development of children and young people at the local level. Through a comprehensive approach, which incorporates early childhood development, inclusive education and active participation of young people, local governments contribute to building a society of equal opportunities and resilient communities.

For further development of local self-government, it is extremely important to strengthen the capacity for management and improvement of services in the field of preschool education. For SCTM, the priority remains to support the planning and optimization of the network of educational institutions (in accordance with developmental and demographic trends), the expansion of the network of institutions and the increase in the coverage of children, especially at the earliest age and in less developed environments, as well as the improvement of conditions in existing facilities. The development and expansion of dual education is becoming an increasingly important part of the education process, within which LSG has its role. It is necessary to continue to harmonize educational profiles with the needs of the local labor market and to strengthen cooperation between schools and business entities. Local self-governments have an important role in supporting schools in the implementation of work-based teaching, as well as in providing conditions for the availability of this model of education to all students.

Inclusive education is also one of the strategic priorities of the SCTM, with inter-sectoral committees being a key mechanism for identifying needs and additional support for children with disabilities and other learning difficulties. Further development of the work of these committees,

professional support and better coordination with pre-school and school institutions, are necessary to ensure equal access to education for every child. Reducing drop-out from the education system, especially in socially and economically disadvantaged groups, requires a more active role of local governments in monitoring and intervention. This includes better cooperation with schools, social welfare centres and other institutions, as well as the implementation of support measures such as the provision of transport, school meals, scholarships and psychosocial services.

SCTM will continue to work on the development of local self-government support for parenthood in the first years of a child's development. Cities and municipalities have a key role to play in the development of public policies, measures and services related to the earliest period of adolescence, including improving funding, monitoring the quality of institutions and ensuring that support is available to all families. In this context, the development of early intervention services, which include timely and coordinated support to children and parents at risk, through the cooperation of the sectors of social protection, health, education and the local community, is of particular importance.

Strengthening local youth policies is a natural continuation of support for the early development of children and parenthood and an important part of efforts aimed at comprehensive social development. Young people represent a significant potential and a driver of change, and it is necessary for local self-governments to develop public policy documents that encourage their active participation, enable personal and professional development and improve the quality of life of young people. Many LSGs do not have viable or applicable strategies and programmes for young people, so the priority is the elaboration and implementation of new policy documents aligned with the national Youth Strategy. A special focus will be upon supporting the establishment and sustainable operation of youth offices, as well as on the development of local youth councils as mechanisms for involving young people in decision-making processes. Support to young people should include the development of youth spaces, services and programmes in the areas of employment, education, mental health and activism. In this process, SCTM will continue to provide permanent advisory support, organize trainings and develop tools intended for recognising the needs of young people and for more effective implementing youth policy measures at the local level.

### **Planned result 3.5. Developed accessible, efficient and quality local policies in the field of sport and culture**

Development of local policies in the field of culture and sports is a key component of wider social development, relying on the role of LSGs as drivers of inclusivity, citizen participation and improvement of the quality of life in the community. Supporting the creation of systemic conditions for the development of culture and the promotion of tangible and intangible heritage, as a public good available to all citizens, regardless of their social, geographical or other status, is one of the priorities of local community development. Improving the role of LSGs in the creation and implementation of cultural policies is therefore an important priority of the SCTM in the new strategic period. The SCTM will support the creation of comprehensive and sustainable local strategic, institutional and financial framework, which will enable local communities to develop culture as an important resource of social and economic growth. A special focus will be on improving communication, cooperation and exchange of good practices, as well as encouraging strategic planning, more efficient use of existing and new sources of financing and fostering the



capacities of local cultural actors - employees of LSGs and in local cultural institutions founded by cities and municipalities.

In the coming period, the adoption of new national sports development strategy is expected, which will serve as a basis for the creation and harmonization of new local programmes and sports development plans. The SCTM will provide support in the preparation of local strategic documents, and local self-governments will be encouraged to integrate measures for equal participation, social inclusion and the development of sports infrastructure into their plans. SCTM will also work on supporting the improvement of sports recreation and school sports programmes as the main competencies of LSGs, in order to make sports facilities more accessible to all citizens, with priority inclusion of children and young people, as well as other target groups such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, women and marginalized communities. Also, in the work of the SCTM, special emphasis will be placed on the improvement of financing mechanisms and monitoring of budget allocations in the field of sports, especially sports recreation, in order to ensure greater transparency, efficiency and linking the financing with the achieved results and to measure the effects on the local community. Finally, in the coming period, in cooperation with the line ministry, it is necessary to improve the capacities of local LSGs for the establishment and improvement of the sports inspection function (inter-municipal cooperation, personnel strengthening and application of inspection supervision tools) and to support local governments in taking over this competence.

**In particular, Objective 3 contributes to the achievement of the following Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the obligations of the Republic of Serbia within the following negotiating chapters for EU accession negotiations**



**PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE 4: URBAN DEVELOPMENT BASED ON SUSTAINABILITY, INCLUSION AND EQUALITY, FOCUSED ON THE PROSPERITY OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND CARBON NEUTRALITY**

#### **Planned result 4.1. Improved implementation of competences in the field of environmental protection, disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change**

In the period 2026-2030, the SCTM will work with its members on the strategic alignment of local public policies with the European acquis and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Strengthening the capacity of local self-governments to solve complex challenges in the field of environmental protection and adaptation to changed climate conditions will take place through an integrated approach that includes field work on specific problems in specific local environments and the transfer of knowledge and experience to all LSGs through bodies, structures and mechanisms developed by the SCTM. The emphasis of the SCTM will be on the continuous development of the legal framework in the field of environmental protection, particularly the compliance of bylaws in the field of environmental protection with the Law on Planning System and improving the degree of their implementation at the local level - i.e. strengthening the influence of LSGs in the process of drafting and aligning of bylaws through consultation mechanisms and harmonization of regulations for the effective implementation of public environmental protection policies at the local level.

Better implementation of laws in the field of environmental protection and increasing administrative capacities at the local level will be an important aspect of the SCTM's activities. Improving the implementation of laws in the field of environmental protection at the local level implies the development and implementation of local plans and programmes, as well as fostering inspection supervision and human and technical capacities in LSGs. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen institutional cooperation and dialogue between local self-governments, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and citizens, in order to ensure flexibility in the implementation of regulations and sustainable management of resources in accordance with the requirements of the Green Deal and the EU accession process. The establishment of a more efficient system of financing environmental protection at the local level through improved coordination between the Ministry of Environmental Protection and LSGs, with an active role of the SCTM as an intermediary in creating two-way communication, will enable the aligning of financial incentives with real local needs, better planning of applications for public calls and more sustainable use of available funds for the local level.

The focus of SCTM will also be on creating long-term development visions that integrate the principles of sustainability in all sectors, with clear links between strategic goals and programming and budgeting processes. A key element of the strategic approach is the building of institutional capacities at the local level for effective planning and implementation of green projects, with special emphasis on access to finance and project readiness.

Within the framework of activities aimed at adapting to climate change and reducing the risk of disasters, priority is given to the energy transition, the conservation of natural resources and the improvement of green infrastructure in urban areas. Particular emphasis will be placed on strengthening the capacities of local civil protection services, i.e. for managing the prevention of natural disasters (floods, fires, etc.) and the response of the local community thereof, as well as on building the technical capacities of LSGs for timely and efficient response to climate challenges and emergencies.



In addition, the elements of this programme result include the improvement of the data collection system and the improvement of databases with elements in the field of environmental protection and climate risks, fostering partnerships with expert organizations, vulnerability analysis and the development of local technical capacities to respond to changed climate conditions and emergencies. This ambitious approach, which combines technical support with reinforcing of participatory mechanisms, aims to ensure not only compliance with European standards but also the creation of sustainable local development models based on the principles of climate justice and environmental responsibility.

#### **Planned result 4.2. Support to transparent and sustainable urban and spatial planning**

Strengthening the role of LSGs in spatial management and providing expert and advisory support in the implementation of legislative solutions, including the digitalization of planning processes and the introduction of the GIS format, is one of the priorities of the SCTM in the coming period. Activities will continue to improve participatory processes in urban planning, with the promotion of the application of a specially developed tool for measuring public participation (SCTM Participation Index). Support will also be directed towards preserving and improving the quality of the built environment and public spaces through initiatives such as the national awards for public spaces and accessibility, in cooperation with the relevant institutions.

In the field of sustainable urban mobility, as an increasingly important topic among local authorities, the SCTM will continue to promote the development of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) and will advocate for the legislative regulation of this area. It is necessary to establish stable institutional and financial support for the development of integrated and environmentally friendly transport systems at the local level. One of the priorities for advocacy will be reforms in the field of public passenger transport, i.e. creating conditions for the establishment of this service in as many LSGs as possible.

When it comes to housing, SCTM will continue to advocate for the adoption of a national strategic framework, as well as for changes to the legal framework that will enable more efficient management of buildings and the implementation of energy efficiency measures. Cooperation with the relevant ministries will continue to improve the financing models and operational support.

#### **Planned result 4.3. Development of the system of utilities and sustainable energy management**

SCTM will continue to systematically work to support local self-governments in the transformation and improvement of communal systems and communal infrastructure, in order to effectively ensure the high quality of these services for citizens, the public sector and the economy. The strategic approach will focus on supporting the preparation of programmes for the development and maintenance of communal infrastructure through creation of models and trainings for local government representatives. Special emphasis will be placed on inter-municipal cooperation through promoting the establishment of regional approaches to solving communal challenges, where such an approach is justified, as well as on the introduction of a transparent methodology for setting the prices of services, which balance economic sustainability and social acceptability.

In the energy sector, the strategic commitment promotes the transition to renewable energy sources through the development of local action plans (SECAPs), subsidies for the energy renovation of households (especially aimed at vulnerable groups) and the modernization of district heating systems with the aim of reducing losses and increasing the share of renewable sources. At the same time, cooperation with relevant stakeholders at the national, local and international levels will be pursued in order to provide conditions for the implementation of the energy transition at the local level, as well as measures to reduce energy poverty, including the introduction of innovative financing instruments, the promotion of obsolete furnace replacement programmes and educational campaigns. Financial mechanisms will include better planning and use of funds from local and national budgets intended for energy renovation programmes, combining different sources (e.g. social policy and energy), public-private partnership models, preparation of projects for international funds and capacity building in the energy management system at the local level. This comprehensive approach, which combines technical innovation with social inclusion and institutional capacity building, aims to ensure a sustainable transformation of the utilities and energy sectors in line with European standards, while improving the quality of life of citizens and reducing environmental impact.

**Objective 4 contributes in particular to the achievement of the following Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the obligations of the Republic of Serbia within the following negotiating chapters for EU accession negotiations**



## 4. IMPROVEMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE SCTM

### 4.1. Advocating for the interests of local authorities

Advocacy - representing the interests of local authorities is a traditional function of every association of cities and municipalities. The advocacy function for the interests of local authorities before national authorities performed by a national association of local authorities, such as the SCTM, plays a key role in ensuring that local authorities are involved in the decision-making process at the national level. Through this function, the national association of local authorities seeks to ensure that towns and municipalities are enrolled in the process of drafting public policy

documents and regulations. This is very important as the local authorities need to put these documents into practice.

One of the main directions of action of the SCTM in relation to strengthening its function as a representative of local authorities, is advocating for amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government (LLSG) or other normative solutions, which will additionally regulate the participation of LSGs, independently or through their association, in the preparation of regulations of special importance for the realization and development of LSG, and in the implementation of processes that are important for the LSG functioning and development. With the new Programme for the Reform of the Local Self-Government System from 2026 to 2030, which is being prepared, work is planned concerning the amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government aimed at prescribing the obligation of consulting local authorities and/or their association in the process of preparing public policies and regulations important for local self-government.

The SCTM advocates the active involvement of LSG in the process of negotiations on European integration and cooperates with national authorities in order to ensure the implementation of an adequate mechanism for consulting the local level of government. It is very important that cities and municipalities are involved in the process of drafting public policy documents and regulations stemming from the process of accession to the European Union, because they will also be implementing them. The SCTM particularly advocates for the enrolment of local authorities in cluster negotiations covering important chapters for local self-government (such as, for example, Negotiating Groups for Chapters 11 and 22 – Cluster 5: Resources, Agriculture and Cohesion, for Chapter 27 – Cluster 4: Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity). Therefore, the SCTM will continue to advocate and represent the interests of local self-government in these processes and, in cooperation with national authorities, to support the implementation of an adequate mechanism for consulting the local level of government, which will be in accordance with the methodology for EU membership negotiations and the institutional structure harmonized with it.

For further development of the advocacy function, it is necessary to intensify the involvement of SCTM members in the process of monitoring the situation in the cities and municipalities and in defining and advocating measures for the improvement of the LSG system. In this regard, the line committees of the SCTM and thematic networks of LSG professionals are extremely important. Therefore, one of the main priorities remains the intensification of the exchange of experiences between cities and municipalities and the identification of priorities and positions of the local self-government, especially within the SCTM committees and networks. In the previous strategic period, several new networks were established (such as the network of secretaries of LSG Assemblies, or the network of local attorneys-at-law). Further networking in order to exchange experiences and knowledge within the local self-government system will be one of the key priorities of the SCTM.

A particularly important priority for the SCTM is the adequate representation of the interests of local authorities, as well as the policies and positions of the organization, in key national forums and processes in which the SCTM participates. The SCTM represents the interests of local authorities in key national forums and processes, such as: the Public Administration Reform Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Republic Emergency Situations Headquarters, the Council for Professional Development of Employees in LSGs, The Commission for Financing Local Self-Government, the Council for Monitoring the Implementation of UN

Human Rights Recommendations, the process of preparing and monitoring the implementation of the Special Collective Agreement for employees of LSGs, or the process of implementing the Public Administration Reform Strategy 2020-2030 or the Local Self-Government System Reform Programme 2026-2030. For these reasons, special attention will continue to be paid to the permanent capacity building of the SCTM Secretariat to adequately represent the SCTM membership within these bodies. A quality process of representing the interests of local authorities requires continuous development of the capacities of the SCTM Secretariat. The priorities will be in particular the further development of the analytical basis for work (databases, analytical services and software, etc.), the improvement of the expertise of employees for advocating the interests of local authorities (knowledge in the areas of drafting analytical documents and practical policy documents, communication and presentation of the organization's positions, etc.) and networking of the SCTM with partner organizations that monitor the work and results of the work of LSG at the national, regional and international level.

In addition to representing the interests of local authorities, the SCTM will analyze the practice of local self-government, identify challenges and create concrete positions, messages and measures through which it will advocate with its members for the improvement of LSG management, with a special focus on increasing accountability, transparency and efficiency in work. SCTM will actively advocate for the establishment of modern, open and responsible local self-government that actively involves citizens in decision-making processes.

## **4.2. Support to cities and municipalities in the development of capacities for the implementation of LSG competencies and affairs**

Improving the capacities of local self-government, as well as representing the interests of local authorities, is one of the two basic functions of every association of local authorities, including the SCTM. The development of local government capacities is crucial for the efficient and responsible performance of local self-government functions, which directly affects the quality of life of citizens in local communities. That is why the SCTM will continue to implement and improve the existing, but also develop various forms of support to cities and municipalities, as one of the key functional directions of the SCTM.

The SCTM will continue with the development of instructional materials and guidelines, i.e. models of acts, manuals and guides that will accompany the changes in the strategic and legislative framework and the introduction of new requirements placed upon the local self-government. The development of instructional materials, and especially their combination with trainings/workshops and/or direct technical support for their adoption and implementation in individual LSGs, is a significant form of support for which there is a clearly expressed need and interest by LSGs. In this regard, one of the priorities will be the continuous implementation of trainings, primarily accredited trainings from the Sectoral Continuous Professional Development Programme for LSG employees. In addition, SCTM will continue to create and implement other types of trainings and workshops that are necessary for the development of LSG. The main types of training will be regional trainings/seminars, webinars, e-trainings and hybrid forms (live trainings in combination with webinars or e-training), as well as training and mentoring support to be provided directly to the cities and municipalities that are beneficiaries of support packages. In order to foster the internal capacities for the implementation of trainings, the SCTM plans

elaboration of an analysis on the possibilities for improving the existing portal for e-trainings and, based on that, to implement a visual and functional improvement of this internet platform as well. In addition, in order to upgrade the established system of professional development of LSG employees, the SCTM will advocate the broadening of the scope of participants in accredited trainings - to organizations, institutions and companies founded by LSGs, and will strive to strengthen the system of human resources management and professional development in LSGs.

SCTM will provide information and advisory support to the membership, especially through e-Question and regular updating of the Questions and Answers Database and through the Law Alert service (which provides SCTM members with information on newly adopted regulations). SCTM will continue to develop these services primarily by strengthening the capacities of employees in the SCTM Secretariat for providing answers to questions and for preparation of analytical materials to be delivered to cities and municipalities, and further by intensifying communication with national institutions competent for certain regulations (concerning interpretation of their content) and by upgrading the visibility of this type of support to members. In the new strategic period, the use of artificial intelligence will be especially considered and implemented to improve the E-question service and the database of questions and answers of the SCTM.

New knowledge and software opportunities will also be used to improve the performance evaluation system. SCTM will develop a new portal for performance evaluation and will revise the entire work methodology and content of all special indices that are part of the performance evaluation system. Particular emphasis will be placed on simplifying the user experience, i.e. on strengthening the usability of data from conducted self-assessments or independent external assessments, both for the needs of the SCTM and for the needs of individual members.

In the past few years, support packages to cities and municipalities have been one of the most important and useful direct forms of support to the membership. That is why SCTM will continue to program and implement them intensively, primarily through projects supported by development partners. In addition to the need to expand this form of support to as many different topics and competencies of LSG as possible, the priority will continue to be the profiling of the methodology for the implementation of the support package so that it responds even more to specific situations in local communities, but also to establish standards for improving activities at the level of the entire LSG in the specific areas within which the support package is implemented.

One of the key prerequisites for developing the capacity of local authorities, is the existence of adequately trained officials within the local administration. Among the preconditions in this respect - are the availability and ability of LSG professionals to transfer knowledge, both in terms of training provision for their local administration and through the SCTM network for other cities and municipalities. Taking this into account, the SCTM will organize periodic (annual or biennial, as per need) training programmes for trainers from the local administration, which would transfer practical knowledge and experience to other colleagues in the LSG system in various fields. Another prerequisite is to train employees in local administrations for mentoring support to young staff and attracting young experts to the LSG system. The SCTM will thus also implement a periodic training programme for local officials for mentoring support to new employees in local administration and an annual training programme for final year students (in the form of a one-week or two-week course) for gaining knowledge of the LSG system.

### **4.3 . Support to local self-governments in the implementation of development projects**

Development of local self-government capacities for the use of available domestic and international funds and programmes, especially those of the European Union, is one of the key functions of the SCTM. In the previous strategic period, this function was part of the support to the overall development of LSG capacities, while in the new strategic period it stands out as a separate and prioritised function of support to cities and municipalities. The importance of dedicated national funds and funds and programmes of the European Union for the development of the local community and for the improvement of public services and infrastructure, can be recognized in numerous local projects in the Republic of Serbia that have been implemented with the aforementioned financial support. The significance of EU funds for local development is particularly visible in the countries that have recently joined the European Union, and where the expansion of opportunities for the use of European funds has led to a very large part of local investments being the result of cities and municipalities applying for financing from cohesion and other EU funds and programmes.

Recognizing the need of cities and municipalities to intensify the development of their capacities for the preparation of local projects pursuant to the principles and instruments of the EU Cohesion Policy, was exactly the reason for the SCTM to set the support to members in this process as a priority function in the new strategic period. One of the priorities of the SCTM will be further participation in the process of programming, usage and monitoring of the implementation of EU funds and programmes, paired with fostering of cooperation with supervisory bodies and proactive informing of LSGs on open calls. In particular, the SCTM will actively advocate for the necessity of establishing of a much-needed mechanism of financial support at the national level for pre-financing and co-financing of LSGs EU-funded projects.

The SCTM will pay special attention to strengthening the role of LSG in the process of introducing and implementing the instruments of the European Union's Cohesion Policy in Serbia. As part of this, the SCTM will continuously organize training programmes for LSGs to understand the principles and instruments of the EU Cohesion Policy and to prepare and implement projects for EU funds and programmes. During this strategic period, a special programme of direct support will be organized through support packages to a significant number of LSGs to increase capacities for the implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy instruments, as well as for the preparation of projects.

In order to provide support to members in applying for funds from international donor organizations, as well as republic and provincial funds, SCTM will further strengthen advisory support to members for project preparation. SCTM will work intensively on gathering information on the opportunities for financing inter-municipal and/or local projects from the funds of pre-accession funds of the European Union and multilateral and bilateral development support (donors, funds, loans) and inform their members thereof. A tool to be used for communication in this respect, will be the electronic portal of the SCTM, where public calls for local authorities to apply for financial support to local projects will be published.

Finally, the key priority of the SCTM in boosting the function of support to local development projects, will be further positioning of the association as the organizer of the process of financial

support to local projects through international projects, primarily projects funded by the European Union and implemented by the SCTM. To this end, in cooperation with partners from national authorities and line ministries, the SCTM plans to provide support to cities and municipalities for financing local projects through the use of EU funds, especially for projects concerning development of local social services, as also in the field of territorial development (for the implementation of strategic documents for the development of urban areas), as well as for the development of infrastructure in rural areas (for the usage of funds from measure 6 of the IPARD Programme after that measure is accredited). In the scope of this function, the SCTM will provide direct support to the development, financing and implementation of inter-municipal and/or local projects by cities and municipalities, their institutions, organizations and regional development agencies and other partners within local communities. Part of this support will be the provision of professional and technical assistance to cities and municipalities in project management, especially in the field of project procurement, financial reporting and application of project monitoring and evaluation methodology. Also, within the funds allocated to it for management (grant schemes, etc.), SCTM will carry out the procedure of selection and contracting of projects, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of contracted projects, regular monitoring and control of the execution of contractual obligations and operational and financial procedures and reports, as well as ensuring the execution of recommendations and corrective measures intended for efficient and correct implementation of projects financed by LSGs in cooperation with SCTM. In this context, the SCTM, in cooperation primarily with the line ministries in charge of European integration, finance and local self-government, as well as other national institutions, will actively participate in the development and implementation of EU Cohesion Policy instruments in the coming period, as well as in the appropriate profiling of the potential role of the SCTM in the future implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy in Serbia.

#### **4.4. International Cooperation**

International cooperation enables local governments to learn from others, to connect and to work together to solve problems and improve their communities. International cooperation is of great importance for LSG associations as it provides conditions for the exchange of experiences, knowledge and capacities in order to develop LSG and for the establishment of partnerships on common needs and priorities. Through international forums, the priorities, needs and interests of local authorities are presented and efforts are made to ensure that the broader integration processes recognise and respect the needs of local authorities in a given country. For these and other reasons, the SCTM has developed international cooperation both within regional and European forums and organizations, as well as with specific associations from other countries. In this process, special priorities will be the establishment of partnership cooperation between associations and the cities and municipalities themselves, the exchange of experiences and knowledge: 1) on decentralization and reforms of LSG and public administration in individual countries; 2) on the dialogue between local and national authorities; 3) on the role and needs of local authorities in the process of European integration; 4) and opportunities for local development through the use of European funds and partnerships with associations and local authorities from other countries in the use of available funds.

In the coming period, the SCTM will pay special attention to intensifying the cooperation of the organization and its members with European and regional organizations of local authorities (Council of European Municipalities and Regions - CEMR and the Network of Associations of



Local Authorities of South East Europe - NALAS), networks, platforms and initiatives, as well as with sister associations of local authorities, especially from the region of South East Europe. In this process, the SCTM will strive to be an indispensable factor, and even a driver, of regional cooperation between local authorities and networking and cooperation of Serbian LSGs with cities and municipalities and local political leaders and experts from the European Union and especially from the region of Southeast Europe.

The SCTM will continue to provide support for capacity building and the work of its member representatives in these European organisations involving local authorities, such as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, or in forums that are part of the European integration process, such as the Joint Consultative Committee with the Committee of the Regions.

The development of partnerships with cities and municipalities from other countries and networking, will continue to be one of the priorities of the SCTM. The SCTM will endeavour to provide the necessary support to its members in the implementation of the process of establishing cooperation with local authorities from other countries (through networking and communication, providing legal and other advice in regulating the form and content of cooperation, etc.).

The SCTM will continue to support and organise European events at the local level (such as the European Week of Local Democracy, the European Urban Mobility Week, the European Green Week).

Bearing in mind the process of European integration the Republic of Serbia is undergoing, and the need for local authorities and their associations to better understand the obligations and potentials that this process brings for local authorities, improving the representation of the interests of local authorities in the institutions of the European Union will be one of the priorities of the SCTM in the next five-year period. Looking into the best experiences of other national associations of local and regional authorities, the SCTM will initiate the process of analysis and defining of a roadmap for the opening and functioning of the representative office of the association that would operate within the institutions of the European Union. In this regard, the SCTM will initiate a dialogue with national authorities, with other domestic partners who will have or have similar needs, as well as with partner European and national associations that operate or have a need for direct cooperation with the institutions of the EU (especially associations from other countries that are in the process of accession) - on possible cooperation, i.e. the use or integration of existing resources or the joint creation of new resources through which this strategic priority of the SCTM would be ensured.

## **4.5. Information and communication**

Timely and adequate communication with the public is crucial for the realization of all functions of the SCTM, especially representing the interests of local authorities and supporting the development of capacities of cities and municipalities. Associations of cities and municipalities, such as SCTM, play a key role in ensuring that local authorities are involved in the decision-making process at the national level. Through communication with the public, associations effectively represent the interests of local authorities towards national authorities and ensure that cities and municipalities are involved in the development of public policy documents and

regulations. Communication with the public allows associations to provide information and advisory support to their members. Through cooperation with the media and the use of social networks, they promote good practices of local authorities and inform the public on topics of importance for local self-government. For these reasons, the SCTM has been paying special attention to better recognition and more effective communication with LSGs, media, state institutions and international partners for many years.

SCTM will continue to improve communication mechanisms, introducing innovative services that will enable faster flow of information to LSGs, media, state institutions and international partners. Cooperation with the media will continue in accordance with the current practice, and in addition to the traditional ways of communication (press releases and press conferences, i.e. media participation in gatherings organized by the SCTM), special attention will be paid to information through social networks (Facebook, X, Instagram), as well as YouTube - a platform for sharing video content. Since modern circumstances require more and more digital communication and the use of digital platforms, communication with users, individuals and organizations will be further improved (more intensive use of video content, infographics, etc.).

The SCTM plans to create and present a visually and functionally more modern internet portal, which is an important tool for informing the public and especially the members of the SCTM. The distribution of electronic information and eNewspapers to cities and municipalities and the specialized public - will continue, and the target group of recipients of this information will be continuously increased.

Bearing in mind that the process of European integration is extremely important for local authorities, informing the membership on various topics in the field of European integration will continue to be one of the important activities. In addition to continuous informing the members on the impact of the European integration process, i.e. how the harmonization of the domestic legal system with the European *acquis* – affects the LSG system, special attention will be paid to informing cities and municipalities on the available EU funds for local projects. The SCTM will inform local self-governments on domestic and foreign best practices in establishing project partnerships, about experiences in the process of preparation and implementation of local projects, as well as on the needs for further improvement of the capacities of local authorities for the adequate use of EU funds available to local authorities in the Republic of Serbia.

## **5. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE SCTM**

The adoption of the Strategic Plan does not mark the end the planning process for SCTM. For each year of its implementation, an Annual Action Plan (AAP) will be prepared, which will be considered and adopted by the SCTM Presidency. The annual planning will be based on different information and wider participation of SCTM members through the work of the Presidency, SCTM boards and networks and other forms of direct communication with cities and municipalities. SCTM will also conduct various types of concrete analyses of LSG needs and the situation in the in certain areas. The basis for the annual planning will be the activities from the national planning

documents in which the SCTM is recognized as a partner, and above all the programmes and projects implemented by the SCTM, as well as their timelines and financial frameworks. In order to develop the AAP, the SCTM will also observe information on the plans of the Government and line ministries, especially in terms of new regulations and public policies, as well as information on the plans of international, domestic and other partners (e.g. projects and programmes of other organizations).

During the year, the plan of activities will be implemented by the structures, bodies and the SCTM Secretariat. The SCTM Presidency will monitor the implementation of the annual plan (by considering regular reports at Presidency sessions), and the SCTM Secretariat will conduct continuous supervision and periodic internal evaluation of the achievement of the planned activities and results (in order to adapt the existing plan to possible contextual changes and possible needs for different prioritization of the planned activities). Annual reports will be prepared, as well as the final report on the implementation of the SCTM Strategic Plan for the period 2026-2030, which will be considered by the Presidency at the end of the last calendar year of the Strategic Plan. In this way, an institutional mechanism for annual planning, monitoring and reporting on the achievement of strategic objectives and annual activities will be provided.

An important part of the SCTM is participation in the activities through which the *Local Self-Government System Reform Programme in the Republic of Serbia* (the Programme) and its Action Plan for the period 2026-2030 are being implemented. (These documents are currently under preparation). Therefore, the SCTM will closely cooperate with the line ministry in the implementation of the activities envisaged by this Programme and will coordinate its activities with the planned process of LSG system reform. Given that LSG reforms constitute integral part of PAR reforms and of the overall PAR Strategy itself, as well as that these processes are steered by the PAR Council, of which the SCTM is a member, reform activities concerning LSG will be coordinated at the level of this body as well.

Finally, a significant part of the AAP will entail the activities that the SCTM implements through international projects and programmes, so in their preparation and implementation, the SCTM Secretariat will closely cooperate with international partners supporting these projects and programmes, i.e. with whom they are jointly implemented. Cooperation will continue especially with long-term development partners, with whom the SCTM already has contracted cooperation projects, such as the European Union, the Government of the Swiss Confederation (Swiss Cooperation Office in Serbia – SDC and SECO), the Kingdom of Sweden (SIDA), the Council of Europe or UNICEF. The SCTM will continue to apply the approach of integrating the international projects it implements into the defined Strategic Plan, i.e., will strive to ensure that they directly contribute to the implementation of the established priorities of the LSG and to the achievement of the established goals of the organization. The coordination of cooperation with international partners will be further fostered by the organization of annual meetings of the international partners of the SCTM, which were initiated as a form of cooperation in the previous strategic period, at which the achieved results, key lessons learned, priorities and plans of the SCTM will be presented. Intensive cooperation with international and bilateral partners is extremely important for the work of the SCTM, and the continuation of their continuous support for programmes and projects implemented by the SCTM is one of the key preconditions for the achievement of measures and objectives of the SCTM Strategic Plan.

## 6. LOGICAL MATRIX OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

GENERAL OBJECTIVE – A SYSTEM OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT THAT ENABLES THE FULL EXERCISE OF CITIZENS' RIGHTS TO LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND THE EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE PROVISION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT SERVICES TO CITIZENS AND BUSINESSES					
PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE 1: REFORMED POSITION AND ORGANIZATION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT					
Planned results	Objectively verifiable indicators	Baseline value	Planned value (2030)	Sources of verification	Assumptions
<b>Intensified reform of the local self-government systemic setup</b>	Number of ECLSG provisions accepted by the Republic of Serbia	24 (2025)	27	Law on Ratification of the European Charter on LSG	Implementation of the Local Self-Government System Reform Programme
	Improved systemic legal framework (the Law on Local Self-Government)	No (2025)	Yes	Report of the SCTM Secretariat	Political Stability and commitment to continue reforms of the LSG system
<b>Improved Human Resource Management Function in Local Government</b>	Value of the SCTM Index for Human Resources Management in LSG	It will be determined by the end of 2025	+20% <sup>1</sup>	SCTM Index	Successfully conducted expert support for LSG by SCTM  Competence-based HRM system integrated into all areas and functions

<sup>1</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<b>Improved Implementation of the Good Governance Principles in Local Self-Government</b>	Value of the SCTM Good Governance Index	It will be determined by the end of 2025	+10% <sup>3</sup>	SCTM Index	Readiness of LSGs to fully implement the principles of good governance
	Number of LSGs that have a single administrative point	69 (2024) <sup>2</sup>	100	MPALSG data	Existence of adequate human capacities in LSGs for the application of the good governance principles in the implementation of their competences  Available financial support from national institutions and international development partners for the introduction of single administrative points and support for the inventory of administrative procedures
<b>PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVED FINANCING SYSTEM AND ACCOUNTABLE DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT</b>					
<b>Planned results</b>	<b>Objectively verifiable indicators</b>	<b>Baseline value</b>	<b>Planned value (2030)</b>	<b>Sources of verification</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
<b>Improved financing system towards fiscal sustainability and financial autonomy of the LSG</b>	Share of current revenues of LSG in total current revenues in the Republic of Serbia <sup>4</sup>	13.3 % (2024)	15%	Monthly Bulletin of the Ministry of Finance	Constructive dialogue and consensus on reforming the systemic legal framework for LSG financing and on implementing the policy of financial decentralization
	Horizontal balance of LSG finances (income per	It will be determined by the end of 2025	It will be determined by the end of 2025	SCTM Database of local budgets	

<sup>2</sup> The initial value of the indicator is based on the data of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government

<sup>3</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<sup>4</sup> The initial and planned value of the indicator refer to the existing level and the current system of distribution of public competencies and tasks between local self-government and other levels of public government.

	capita of LSGs before and after equalization)  The share of general budget revenues of the LSG in the total budget revenues of the LSG <sup>5</sup>	92% (2024)	94%	LSG Analytical Service	
<b>Improved development planning and execution of the local budget</b>	The level of execution of capital expenditures in the LSGs' budgets	68% (2024)	78%	SCTM Database of local budgets	Harmonization of the programme structure of the LSG budget with the framework of development and medium-term planning and enhanced engagement and cooperation of sectoral services and institutions of LSGs in planning and reporting on the budget performance  Adequacy of material and human resources for the quality performance of LTA competencies
	Value of the SCTM Local Finance Index (part concerning the budget)	It will be determined by the end of 2025	+10% <sup>6</sup>	SCTM Index	
	Value of the SCTM Local Finance Index (part concerning the Local Tax Administration/LTA)	It will be determined by the end of 2025	+10% <sup>7</sup>	SCTM Index	
<b>Improvement of accountable and transparent use of public funds of LSGs</b>	% of LSGs that have the FMC system in place <sup>8</sup>	58% (2024)	100%	SCTM Index of Good Governance	Adequate understanding of decision-makers in LSGs on the importance of internal financial control (and of carriers of FMC and IA processes) for different subsystems of governance and local public policies
	% of LSG units that have a functional internal audit	51%(2024)	70%	Ministry of Finance - Consolidated Report of the PIFC	

<sup>5</sup> The initial and planned value of the indicators implies the existing level and the current system of distribution of public competencies and tasks between local self-government and other levels of public government

<sup>6</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<sup>7</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<sup>8</sup> The indicator is measured on the basis of data from the SCTM Good Governance Index, which is conducted on a standardized sample of 60 LSGs

	Budget transparency of the LSG - increase in the average score	8,4 (2024)	10	Local Transparency Index (LTI) – budget segment of the index	
<b>PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVED PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL POLICIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT</b>					
<b>Planned results</b>	<b>Objectively verifiable indicators</b>	<b>Baseline value</b>	<b>Planned value (2030)</b>	<b>Sources of verification</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
<b>Improved capacities of local self-government to incentivise the economic development of the local community</b>	The value of the SCTM index for LED	It will be determined by the end of 2025	+10% <sup>10</sup>	SCTM Index for Local Economic Development	Commitment of LSGs to engage with the activities concerning LED and to implement policies that lead to attracting investments, supporting the economy, integrated planning and sustainable development of tourism and encouraging employment
	Ratio of the LSG budget execution and plan concerning budget programmes 3 and 4 (LED and Tourism)	75,44% <sup>9</sup> (2024)	85%	SCTM Database of local budgets	
<b>Improved performance of LSGs in the field of agriculture and rural development and in benefiting the IPARD</b>	Value of the SCTM Index for Agriculture and Rural Development	It will be determined by the end of 2025	+10% <sup>11</sup>	SCTM Index for Agriculture and Rural Development	Support for agriculture and rural development recognized as a priority at the local level
	Number of local rural development strategies (IPARD indicator)	0 (2025)	30	IPARD Managing Authority	Accredited measure 5 within the IPARD Programme (LEADER)

<sup>9</sup> The indicator refers to the average percentage of budget execution of LSGs in relation to the planned budget for Programme 3 - Local Economic Development (73.44%) and Programme 4 - Tourism Development (77.63%) and is based on data from the SCTM database of local budgets.

<sup>10</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<sup>11</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value



<b>Programme funds</b>	Number of supported local rural infrastructure projects from IPARD programme funds	0 (2025)	15	IPARD Managing Authority	Accredited measure 6 within the IPARD Programme (rural public infrastructure)
<b>Improved accessibility, quality and efficiency of local health services, social protection and social inclusion services at the local level</b>	Reformed legal framework for emergency medical care	No (2025)	Yes	SCTM Report	Improving the strategic and normative framework for the development of social protection services in the community
	Number of LSGs providing at least four local social services	26 (2023)	+ 20% <sup>12</sup>	Data at the disposal of the Republic Institute for social protection, Provincial Institute for social protection, Ministry in charge of social affairs	
	Number of LSGs that have specific or integrated local policies (strategic and/or operational document) for the social inclusion of particularly vulnerable social groups and/or the Roma community	45 (2025)	60	Data of the Ministry in charge of human and minority rights and social dialogue	
<b>Improved performance of local self-government in the field of education and support to children and youth</b>	Number of LSGs with intersectoral support for early childhood development and parenting	35 (2024)	+50% <sup>13</sup>	SCTM Reports	Available support from international development partners
	Number of LSGs that have a local planning document for youth policy	41 (2024)	110	According to the National Association of Youth Offices	Readiness of LSGs for the adoption of new planning documents

<sup>12</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<sup>13</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<b>Developed accessible, efficient and quality local policies in the field of sport and culture</b>	Number of LSGts that have adopted a planning document in the field of sports aligned with the new Sports Development Strategy	3 (2025)	50	SCTM Reports/Survey Results Data of the Ministry in charge of sport and the data of Sports Association of Serbia	Adoption of the new strategy for the Development of Sports in the Republic of Serbia
	Number of LSGs that have a strategic or development document referring to or regulating the culture at the local level	60 (2025) <sup>14</sup>	110	SCTM Report and analyses	Adoption of the new National Strategy for the Development of Culture in the Republic of Serbia
<b>PROGRAMME OBJECTIVE 4: URBAN DEVELOPMENT BASED ON SUSTAINABILITY, INCLUSION AND EQUALITY, FOCUSED ON THE PROSPERITY OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND CARBON NEUTRALITY</b>					
<b>Planned results</b>	<b>Objectively verifiable indicators</b>	<b>Baseline value</b>	<b>Planned value (2030)</b>	<b>Sources of verification</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
<b>Improved implementation of competences in the field of environmental protection, disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change</b>	Value of the SCTM Environmental Protection Index	It will be determined by the end of 2025	+10% <sup>15</sup>	SCTM Environmental Protection Index	Improving the capacity of LSGs for implementing the regulations concerning environmental protection, participation. Adoption of bylaws and development of the strategic framework for environmental protection
	Total annual budget allocations for environmental protection and green infrastructure	It will be determined in 2025	+30% <sup>16</sup>	SCTM Database of local budgets	

<sup>14</sup> The baseline value is based on the 2025 SCTM survey

<sup>15</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<sup>16</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

	Total annual budget allocations for emergency management	It will be determined in 2025	+20% <sup>17</sup>	SCTM Database of local budgets	<p>Improving the financing system and developing green infrastructure.</p> <p>Development of strategic framework for emergencies, as well as in the domain of disaster risks</p>
<b>Support to transparent and sustainable urban and spatial planning</b>	Percentage of LSGs that allocate funds from the budget for non-refundable co-financing of works on investment maintenance of buildings <sup>18</sup>	25%	40%	SCTM Database of local budgets and LSGs' final annual accounts	Improvement of the local strategic framework for housing; Public calls by the Ministry in charge of energy for co-financing energy rehabilitation measures for residential buildings
	The value of the SCTM Participation Index in Urban Planning	6,25 (2023)	9	SCTM Index of Participation in Urban Planning	Development and promotion of mechanisms for early and continuous citizen participation, such as public debates, workshops and digital platforms. Strengthening the capacity of LSGs to implement transparent and inclusive procedures, and encouraging cooperation with civil society organizations.
	Number of local governments with adopted Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP)	5 (2025)	30 (2030)	SCTM annual survey	<p>Realization of the LIID project, introduction of SUMP into the legal framework as an obligation.</p>

<sup>17</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<sup>18</sup> Subject indicator includes also the urban/city municipalities

Development of the system of utilities and sustainable energy management	% of LSGs that have the Programme for construction and maintenance of communal infrastructure	0%	100%	Annual survey of SCTM	Adoption of a bylaw in the field of communal issues
	Total annual budget allocations for development and maintenance of communal infrastructure	It will be determined in 2025	+20% <sup>20</sup>	SCTM Database of local budgets and of LSGs’ final annual accounts; Register of licensed and appointed energy managers (with the Ministry in charge of energy)	Introduction of the methodology for establishing prices of communal services
	Percentage of LSGs that have implemented an energy management system <sup>19</sup>	75.8% (2024)	100%		Readiness and efficiency of LSGs in the process of preparation and adoption of programmes for the development and maintenance of communal infrastructure  Availability of training for licensing of energy managers and implementation of accredited trainings for LSG representatives on the topic of energy management
IMPROVEMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE SCTM					
Function	Objectively verifiable indicators	Baseline value (2025)	Planned value (2030)	Sources of verification	Assumptions
Advocating for the interests of local authorities	Number of new initiatives and proposals for amendments to public policies and regulations	It will be determined by the end of 2025 <sup>21</sup>	It will be determined by the end of 2025	SCTM Reports and Databases	Readiness of national authorities to adopt amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government, planned by the Programme

<sup>19</sup> The percentage refers to local self-governments that are bonded to the energy management system

<sup>20</sup> The planned value implies a percentage increase compared to the realized baseline value

<sup>21</sup> The baseline includes the initiatives and proposals launched by the SCTM during the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025

	Number of national public policy documents, laws or by-laws that have been improved through the SCTM engagement	It will be determined by the end of 2025 <sup>22</sup>	It will be determined by the end of 2025		<p>for the LSG System Reform (introduction of the obligation to consult LSGs or their national associations).</p> <p>Readiness of national authorities for decentralization and improvement of the position of local self-government in the public administration system</p> <p>Interest of SCTM members to directly support the formulation of initiatives and proposals of SCTM</p>
Support to cities and municipalities in the development of capacities for the implementation of LSG competencies and affairs	<p>Number of participants from the LSG enrolled in the SCTM trainings</p> <p>Number of implemented Municipal Support Packages (MSPs)</p> <p>Improved electronic system for assessing the LSG performance</p>	<p>20574<sup>23</sup></p> <p>147<sup>24</sup></p> <p>No (2025)</p>	<p>25000<sup>25</sup></p> <p>176<sup>26</sup></p> <p>Yes</p>	SCTM Reports and Databases	<p>Interest of employees in LSGs to attend trainings organized by SCTM</p> <p>Continuous support of international partners to the SCTM project activities</p> <p>Stable financial support of SCTM members to the work of the association (through membership fee)</p>

<sup>22</sup> The starting value refers to the period of implementation of the SCTM Strategic Plan 2022-2025

<sup>23</sup> The baseline includes the total number of participants in accredited trainings as well as other trainings and workshops implemented in the previous strategic period 2022-2025 (as of the end of May 2025, to be updated before the adoption of the SP)

<sup>24</sup> The baseline includes support packages for cities and municipalities implemented during the previous strategic period 2022-2025.

<sup>25</sup> The planned value includes the total number of participants in accredited trainings as well as other trainings and workshops in the strategic period 2026-2030

<sup>26</sup> The planned value includes support packages for cities and municipalities that will be implemented during the strategic period 2026-2030

	Improved electronic portal e-question and database of questions and answers	No (2025)	Yes		
Support to local self-governments in the implementation of development projects	<p>Percentage of LSGs supported by the SCTM in capacity building for the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy instruments<sup>27</sup></p> <p>Number of new integrated projects financially supported by international funds managed by the SCTM</p>	<p>21%(2025)</p> <p>0 (2025)</p>	<p>70% (2030)</p> <p>20 (2030)</p>	SCTM Reports and Databases	<p>Intensified process of European integration of the Republic of Serbia.</p> <p>Improved and further developed legal framework for the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy</p> <p>Interest of LSGs and employees in local administration for capacity development concerning preparation and implementation of integrated projects</p> <p>Availability of EU funds for integrated projects implemented by the SCTM</p>
International Cooperation	<p>SCTM actively participates in the work of NALAS and CEMR<sup>28</sup></p> <p>The SCTM regularly organizes activities within the framework of European events that</p>	<p>Yes (2025)</p> <p>Yes (2025)</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	SCTM Reports and Databases	<p>Intensified process of European integration of the Republic of Serbia</p> <p>Readiness of national authorities and/or partners to establish a common framework for action within</p>

<sup>27</sup> The indicator refers to the % of LSGs that have received expert and technical support via SCTM - through financial grants, support packages, trainings, workshops and other support mechanisms for capacity building

<sup>28</sup> Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS); The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

	<p>promote issues of interest to the LSG<sup>29</sup></p> <p>Elaborated roadmap for the establishment of the SCTM representative office to the institutions of the European Union</p>	No (2025)	Yes		<p>the institutions of the European Union</p> <p>Stable financial support of members of the SCTM (through membership fee)</p>
Information and communication	<p>Number of followers on social media</p> <p>Average number of annual publications on the SCTM website (cumulative – news, events, competitions, library, model acts, multimedia)</p> <p>Average number of media reports on the work of the SCTM during one year</p> <p>Internet portal of the SCTM upgraded</p> <p>Number of users of e-newspaper SCTM</p>	<p>12688 (2025)</p> <p>450 (2023/2024)</p> <p>1100 (2023/2024)</p> <p>No (2025)</p> <p>5000</p>	<p>14000</p> <p>500</p> <p>1150</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>5500</p>	<p>SCTM Reports and Databases</p>	<p>Continuous support of international partners to the SCTM project activities</p> <p>Media interest in the work of SCTM and of local authorities</p>

<sup>29</sup> The European events referred to herewith, include: the European Mobility Week, the European Week of Local Democracy and the European Green Week.