

Green cities transformation – smart, sustainable and low-carbon urban solutions in triangular metropolitan area

Country: Serbia

Implementing Agency: UNDP

Executing Entity: Ministry of Environmental Protection, UNDP



Project Overview

Piloting green, digital and nature-positive urban transformation in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Zrenjanin

2.12 million people · 32% of Serbia

 **Main Objective:** Pilot integrated green, digital, and nature-positive transformations across the triangular metropolitan area — creating a replicable model for other Serbian cities and the Western Balkans region

Key components

Enabling framework

Creating a supportive policy and planning environment for integrated green urban development.

- Urban development plans revised
- Green city roadmaps per city
- Digital data management systems set or enhanced
- Livelihood Action Plans
- Sustainable Cities Platform (SSCP)

Integrated Investments

Unlocking and scaling investments in citizen-centered sustainable infrastructure, natural capital, and nature-based solutions through the Innovation Challenge Call mechanism.

- Challenge Calls for urban infrastructure
- Challenge Calls for NbS and ecosystems
- Acceleration
- Financial Mechanisms (performance-based payment agreements, innovation awards)
- Smart City Information System

Knowledge Management

Sharing lessons learned and replicating successful pilot projects nationally and internationally through the GPSC and the Serbian Sustainable Cities Platform.

- Lessons learned and toolkits
- Serbian Sustainable City Partnership Initiative
- GPSC knowledge exchange
- Replication to other Serbian cities

Budget and Co-financing

GEF Grant	UNDP	Private sector	City of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Zrenjanin
USD 7,065,603	USD 100,000	USD 108,219,632	USD 20,000,000

Implementation Status

Approval/effectiveness status

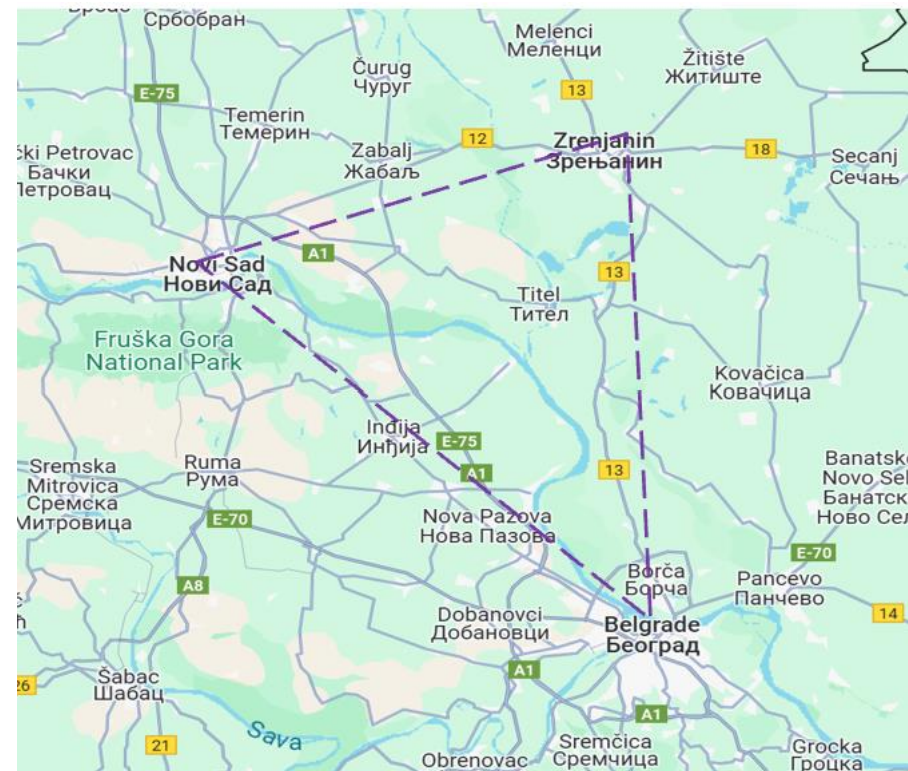
- Project officially started on 15 December 2025
- Project Board is fully operational (NPD and members)
- Inception workshop took place in April 2026

Technical studies/consultations

- Bilateral consultations with representatives of three cities and the government to design Challenge calls is ongoing

Activities started/completed/key milestones

- Analysis of local sectoral plans
- Communication plan (under preparation)
- Gender analysis (under preparation)
- First Challenge Call on Green Infrastructure (launched in August)
- Development of the project's website
- Cooperation with ESA on Belgrade's GIS on green infrastructure



Immediate priorities (next 6 – 12 months)

Outcome 1

Integrated and participatory cross-sectoral green city planning methods, mechanisms and practices effectively applied for the development of the triangular metropolitan area

Analysis of local sectoral plans related to smart climate resilient green city development, including also gender aspects
December 2026

Socio-economic impact and livelihood analysis and a Livelihood Action Plan
Initial analyses – December 2026
Final Analysis and Livelihood Action Plan – June 2027

Inputs for designing integrated and inclusive green cross-sectoral development plan for the triangular metropolitan area
December 2026

Training of key national and local stakeholders to strengthen human capacities and resources for data management, participatory planning and project preparation
October 2026 – September 2027

Outcome 2

New innovative and sustainable green city investments implemented with reported results

The First Challenge Call to source and support solutions that maintain natural capital and ecosystem services and promote nature-based solutions in peri-urban triangular metropolitan area
(September 2026)

The First Challenge Call to source and support the implementation of innovative, digital and other types of solutions that provide low-carbon, energy-efficient and circular economy based communal infrastructure and services
(November 2026)

Project Accelerator - technical support and advisory services on financial structuring and de-risking
October 2026 – February 2027

Implementation of projects selected under first Challenge Calls
October 2026 – December 2027

Outcome 3

Comprehensive analysis, reporting and sharing of the project results and lessons learnt nationally and internationally

Preparing video materials
October 2027

Publications
June 2027

Cities' participation at GPSC events, forums and conferences
2026/2027

Participation at Specialized Exhibition EXPO 2027

Key challenges

Challenge	Support Needed
Institutional coordination	UNDP providing institutional coordination
Technical capacity	Developing digital tools, including tools for collecting and processing data for different sectors
Financing / co-financing	Expert support to develop financial models for nature-based solutions, ecosystem services, and urban biodiversity systems in urban and peri-urban areas

Key challenges / Where GPSC & Partners Can Add Value

Select up to 3 areas and specify the support needed:

- ☐ Technical assistance
- ☐ Peer-to-peer learning
- ☐ Knowledge products / toolkits

X Training / capacity building on digital twin infrastructure

- ☐ Expert advisory support
- ☐ South-South exchange

X Financing / private sector engagement, especially related to private sector financing green infrastructure, nature – based solutions and ecosystem services

- ☐ Monitoring & evaluation
- ☐ Communications & visibility
- ☐ Other

Key challenge: How to engage the private sector to invest in green infrastructure? Private sector actors in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Zrenjanin have limited incentive to invest in green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, as these interventions typically generate public benefits (cooling, flood mitigation, biodiversity) rather than direct, bankable revenue streams that align with conventional investment criteria.