

# SITUATION REPORT #6

## COVID-19



UNITED NATIONS  
NORTH MACEDONIA

15 APRIL 2020

# 974

total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the country.

# 4

months is the age of the youngest patient infected.

# 98

patients fully recovered and released from hospital.

# 45

is the number of deaths associated with COVID-19.

## KEY GOVERNMENT MEASURES AND RESPONSE



### TRAVEL

- State of emergency is in force across the entire territory of the country (18 March to 17 April).
- All movement is prohibited between 16:00 and 05:00hrs during weekdays across the entire territory of the country, with further restrictions for elderly people and youth up to age 18. During weekends, movement is prohibited between 16:00 on Friday until 05:00hrs on Monday. (Tuesday on Easter)
- Restaurants, bars, clubs and casinos remain closed for business. Gathering of groups of more than two people in public spaces is prohibited, excluding for parents of children up to age 14.
- All public transport to and inside the city of Kumanovo has been stopped.
- The quarantine of Debar and Centar Zhupa municipalities has been lifted.
- International travel to and from country is severely limited due to imposed measures within North Macedonia and in other countries.
- Travelers returning from COVID-19 affected areas, regardless of their residence status, are subject to mandatory 21-day quarantine.



### HEALTH

- The whole-of-government response to the impact of COVID-19 is coordinated by a dedicated high-level governmental mechanism, while the Ministry of Health (MoH) is in charge of the health components of response through the dedicated expert committees (Infectious Diseases Commission, Operational MoH Task Force for COVID-19 and Crisis Management Committee).
- MoH has initiated systematic testing and set up COVID-19 screening and testing points countrywide with the support of the private doctors' association. Laboratory capacities for testing have been gradually increasing. Mobile testing teams, designated primarily for elderly and high-risk communities, have been deployed.
- Treatment algorithms for primary care and general practitioners are being distributed via "Moj Termin" with a short info-list for classification and management of suspected COVID-19 cases.
- MoH and Institute of Public Health are, together with national and international partners, implementing a vigorous risk communication campaign on social media, TV, radio and other channels, with measures and action adjustment based on daily developments.
- Every evening, the Institute of Public Health publishes a detailed epidemiological report at [www.iph.mk](http://www.iph.mk)
- The capacity of the University Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile States (Skopje) has been increased with the construction of a temporary field hospital, adjacent to the existing one. MoH is working to further increase the capacity and

personnel throughout the country.

- Two new COVID-19 treatment centers have been established, in 8th September hospital in Skopje and the hospital in Bitola, increasing the hospitalization capacity.
- North Macedonia has joined the global WHO Solidarity Study for COVID-19 case management to generate robust data needed to determine treatment effectiveness.
- The gaps and needs related to the public health response, identified by the Government with the assistance of WHO and based on the rapid assessment of the relevant country mechanisms and response structures, have been estimated at approximately \$31 million over the period of three months.
- A draft Country Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP) has been developed through collaboration between the UN Country Team (UNCT), the Government of North Macedonia and international partners.

For more information on the health response and epidemiological situation see WHO Flash Updates available at: <https://un.mk/reports/>



### ECONOMY

The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a disbursement of about €176.53 million, which is 100% of North Macedonia's quota under the Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI). This financial support will help finance the health and macroeconomic stabilization measures, meet the urgent balance of payments needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and catalyze support from the international community.

By 9 April the Government adopted further measures to mitigate the socio-economic impact:

Mobilization and rationalization of resources:

- Agreed centralized management of all donations under the mandate of DPM for EU Affairs Osmani as the National Aid Coordinator;
- Reallocation of budget funds (€106.4 million) for COVID-19 response;
- Banned additional salary allowances for employees in public sector and rearranged use of annual leaves to facilitate the response to COVID-19;
- Ministry of Information Society and Administration signed an agreement with the Macedonian Telecom AD for a donation of 18,400 cards with 10 GB mobile internet for socially deprived families to enable access to education platforms.

Stimulus to companies to preserve liquidity and jobs:

- The rule-book defining the stimulus package to private sectors is extended to cover the company owners (to support micro and small entrepreneurs) and sport workers, while excluding jobs already subsidized under the

## KEY GOVERNMENT MEASURES AND RESPONSE

“Macedonian Employs” project;

- MLSP and the Unions advised the workers not to accept mutually agreed termination of contracts, which makes them ineligible for unemployment insurance. However, this is posing additional burden to companies with financial difficulties who are obliged to pay remuneration packages in case of lay-offs.
- Government authorized the Development Bank of North Macedonia to sign agreements with eligible 136 companies who applied for loan, out of which 96% employ between 10 and 50 people (micro and small companies). The total amount of interest free loans is €1,262,079, covering 1,737 employees.

Regulatory easing:

- Abolished previous export ban for protective masks and allowed export of up to 80% of the produced quantity;
- Extended the deadlines for accreditation certificates, notary, pension and disability insurance, as well as for the contractual obligations under the IPARD programme for the period of emergency;
- Extended medical insurance to people who are not covered with any insurance and those who failed to pay medical contributions for more than 60 days;
- Facilitating the mandates of the ministries, predominantly MoH, to use online platforms.

The Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia, following the example of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), started a campaign on announcing workers-friendly company of the week in times of crisis to discourage practices such as dismissing employees, imposing compulsory leave, salary reductions, amicable termination of labour relations and other. Farmers have been exempted from the ban on movement, exclusively for performing field work agricultural activities. Farmers whose land or farms are located in the area of their village can move without movement permits, while others who must travel outside their village can perform field work with special permission obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE)

To support farmers and agro-businesses in using the right to apply for financial support to the public calls under the National Support Programs and IPARD 2, the Government adopted a decree suspending all deadlines for the open public calls, which expire during the state of emergency. After the state of emergency is lifted, new deadlines will be determined to allow all interested applicants to prepare quality projects and submit necessary documentation to the National Paying Agency.



## EDUCATION

- All educational institutions remain closed until further notice.
- One parent of children under the age of 10, and a parent of children with disabilities (regardless of age) allowed to stay at home for childcare during the school closure
- Parents of children with disabilities (regardless of age) also allowed to stay at home for childcare during the school closure;
- Ministry of Education and Science promoting online learning opportunities and education programmes through the national broadcaster and other means.
- UNICEF supported [National Digital Platform](#) which is one-stop-shop for sharing online lessons, currently offers 500 lessons for primary school

children. The platform is expanding to also include video lessons prepared by teachers for children in pre-primary, secondary and vocational education.

## KEY GAPS IDENTIFIED AND EMERGING NEEDS

### HEALTH

The most important immediate priority is to ensure that the health system can cope with the increasing numbers of cases that require intensive management and to protect the health work-force.

**Technical needs at the health front:**

- Assess the socioeconomic impact on Health system during the crisis and after the crisis;
- Determine the level of immunity to the virus in the population;
- Review of the testing algorithms in consideration of the strategy to increase testing;
- Increase use of eHealth and telemedicine to improve and facilitate population preventive interventions;
- Strengthen epidemiological capacity.

**Critical needs:**

- Laboratory Kits and reagents; Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); Mechanical Ventilators/Respirators (respirators from operating rooms are not adapted to need of respiratory diseases and cannot be used for the ICU) ;
- intensifying risk communication;
- socioeconomic relief for vulnerable groups and employment protection.
- Maintaining Essential health and social services
- Protecting health care workers whether those working in the COVID-19 designated facilities or elsewhere countrywide because of the community transmission.
- Mental Health Support to health workers and the public especially the vulnerable ones.

The list of critical needs is compiled, consolidated and regularly updated by the Government with the assistance of the United Nations.

**Challenges:**

- Protecting health care workers, whether those working at COVID-19 designated facilities or elsewhere country-wide due to community transmission; and coping with potential shortage of health workers;
- Procurement: hampered access to local or international markets for supplies and equipment, in particular ventilators, due to shortages and logistical constraints;
- Limited community support and outreach activities for the most vulnerable;
- Ensuring continuity of treatment and access to regular health care for all citizens, including vulnerable groups with other diseases and pathologies;
- Isolation and mental health support for the elderly and disabled;
- Ensuring full compliance of the public with the instructions to self-isolate.

## SOCIO - ECONOMIC IMPACT

According to the World Bank's Europe and Central Asia Spring 2020 Outlook, the economy of “North Macedonia is facing a recession with negative growth for

## KEY GAPS IDENTIFIED AND EMERGING NEEDS

2020 projected at -0.4 % under the optimistic assumption that the crisis will end by end-June and the economy will be returning back to normal. Personal consumption is expected to slow down significantly compared to 2019, while exports and investments will decline. On the other hand government consumption would ramp-up in an attempt to boost the economy and to counter the adverse crisis impact. Increased government spending will result in higher deficit and debt levels at a time when financing conditions (both domestic and external) may tighten."

The World Bank suggests that the Government reprioritize spending and concludes that poverty reduction gains will be lost due to likely lay-offs in the most affected sectors (tourism, and manufacturing that contributed the most to poverty reduction in the past). Under this scenario, the NATO accession and the launch of the EU accession negotiations, should accelerate recovery post crisis. In case the crisis is prolonged in the second semester 2020, the economy might further deteriorate with of more than -2%, with faster increase of unemployment and poverty, requiring stronger fiscal and monetary response beyond 2020.

The World Bank also stressed that crisis mitigation measures, should not distract the authorities from long-term policy priorities to address structural problems within the economy (declining human capital, insufficient competition and Rule of Law, declining productivity, rising migration).

The IMF has estimated a 4% decline for North Macedonia for 2020 due to a fall in both domestic and external demand. "The authorities quickly responded with targeted and temporary fiscal policy support to limit the social and economic impact of the health emergency by protecting the liquidity of companies, preserving jobs and providing social care for the jobless and vulnerable households. Meanwhile, the National Bank of the Republic of North Macedonia cut its monetary policy rate and implemented regulatory changes to encourage banks to restructure debts of high-quality borrowers affected by the pandemic."

IMF has also requested and received assurances from the authorities to rebuild the fiscal buffers and implement structural reforms to help preserve debt sustainability and speed up income convergence to EU, once the crisis is over.

## UN SUPPORT FOR RESPONSE

**United Nations in North Macedonia** is collectively supporting the Government and international partners with the overview of needs and procurement of urgent medical and protective supplies and equipment for immediate response. The UN agencies, funds and programmes present in North Macedonia are – in close coordination with its Government counterparts – are conducting the following activities or adjusting their work to support response:

**The World Health Organization (WHO)** has been at the forefront of response since January. WHO is supporting North Macedonia for Sero-epidemiological studies investigate the extent of infection in the general population, as determined by seropositivity. A standardized WHO master protocol is available that is being now tailored to country needs in terms of public health, laboratory and clinical systems, capacity, availability of resources and cultural appropriateness. Using this standardized protocol allows for comparability of data across different countries and helps to determine important epidemiological parameters (e.g. the proportion of the population that remains susceptible to infection, proportion of asymptomatic infections etc.) which inform public health action. The protocol can be accessed [here](#).

WHO donated 5000 COVID tests to the Virology Lab of the Institute of Public Health

on 8 April 2020. With WHO/USAID support, the Health emergency operations room at MOH is now equipped and functional with new premises, refurbishing and IT equipment. WHO also held a training meeting on Solidarity trial to all those involved in the scheme from COVID19 treating hospitals.

**UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** supported the Government initiative for distance learning by providing tablets and laptops to asylum seeking school-age children and persons under international protection who follow language programs to support them to engage in online learning. Also, UNHCR is working with persons under its mandate, the authorities and local school to assess any other education-related needs resulting from the COVID-19 situation. To identify urgent and other needs resulting from the COVID-19 situation, UNHCR has developed an online assessment tool which persons under the mandate of UNHCR have been requested to fill.

In addition to Reception and Transit Centres and other institutions/organizations visited by persons under its mandate, UNHCR continues to display WHO COVID-19 information materials in different languages in places where there is movement of refugees and migrants.

To continue to maintain direct contact with persons under its mandate, in view of the COVID-19 situation, UNHCR North Macedonia operates a [hotline](#) administered by professional UNHCR staff.

New guidelines for businesses, to help them support working families during the COVID-19 pandemic, have been issued by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** and the **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**. The preliminary guidance urges employers to consider the impact of business decisions on workers' families, and to support greater social protection wherever possible. They say that extra support, particularly for those on low incomes, is essential to minimize the negative consequences of the outbreak for workers, employers, their families and children. Finding safe childcare, juggling work and care responsibilities at home, and coping with a loss of income, are among the challenges facing families. The entire list of general and specific recommendations can be found at the following links [English](#) and [Macedonian](#).

ILO has provided access to its database of country policy responses to the crisis (link [HERE](#)). ILO advises the Government to take integrated policy measures focusing on four pillars: supporting enterprises, employment and incomes; stimulating the economy and jobs; protecting workers in the workplace; and, using social dialogue between government, workers and employers to find solutions.

ILO has published updated Monitor on the COVID-19 and the world of work. Employment contraction has already begun on a large (often unprecedented) scale in many countries. In the absence of other data, changes in working hours, which reflect both layoffs and other temporary reductions in working time, give a better picture about the dire reality of the current labour market situation. Access to report in English [here](#) and in Macedonian [here](#).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is providing medical assistance to the migrants, as well as provision of hygienic kits for the migrants and PPEs for the personnel in the reception sites for migrants. Moreover, IOM works on education and awareness raising of the migrants on COVID-19 prevention and protection.

UNICEF established new partnership with the Voice against Violence CSO Network

## UN SUPPORT FOR RESPONSE

to operate a helpline for positive parenting, knowing that tensions, stress and potential for abuse and neglect is significantly higher during lockdown.

Another new partnership was established with Open the Windows to deliver support to children with disabilities remotely. The support aims to develop interactions, help re-establish routines, normalcy and opportunities for learning, growth and coping with new challenges, facilitate positive relationships with caregivers to enhance children's sense of inclusion, supporting their optimal development. Foster families caring for children with disabilities are also targeted with this programme.

Aimed at reducing the fear and anxiety caused by this situation and improving the quality of life and communicating with family members, encouraging mutual support and understanding, recorded Q&A sessions and messages in local languages are being prepared, featuring distinguished psychologists and child psychiatrists, to be delivered through different online communication platforms, and soon through TV stations broadcasting program aimed for children.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Health works on establishing safety protocols in the facilities with children (group homes, correctional facilities) that will both minimize the chance of a child being infected by the virus, but will also aim to prevent the secondary negative impacts of the COVID19 pandemic and potential isolation/quarantine.

Child-friendly risk communication material "How to fight coronavirus" has been printed in Macedonian, Albanian and Romani languages and will be distributed to vulnerable families together with hygiene kits.

UNICEF is in process of procuring 10 respirators in response to the urgent inquiry from the Government and the shipment is expected to arrive at the end of May.

The Government has introduced horizontal expansion of its social protection system due to COVID-19. UNICEF is working with partners from Government and Academia to help implement these changes in practices through technical assistance.

**UN Development Programme (UNDP)** provided food & PPE packages to support over 130 families from vulnerable categories in Gostivar, Kumanovo and Kavadarci. UNDP is also working on improving the operations of the municipal councils in 9 municipalities through the use of IT for communication, coordination and service delivery.

The Public Works Programme will start at the end of April, engaging 50 unemployed people from vulnerable group in period of one month in 12 municipalities. The idea is to increase the employability mostly among Roma – receivers of guarantee minimal income, and the activities will be designated as a field response on the ongoing COVID 19 situation on a local level.

**The World Bank** is finalizing a program of activities to help North Macedonia manage and mitigate the impact of the crisis, including a new fast-track project to respond to urgent health sector priorities and protect the income of households and a restructuring of already approved projects to mobilize funds in support of SMEs. Collectively these programs are expected to amount to about €140 million.

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)** initiated a Rapid Survey of Food Supply Chains in Europe and Central Asia, with the objective to find out directly from food supply operators (farmers, wholesalers, traders, processors) interviewed at country level, whether agricultural supply chains are working, from input suppliers to sellers, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey will be conducted every week with selected respondents, and the results will help inform policy responses and measures to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and agricultural systems. FAO's [dedicated website](#) to COVID-19 is constantly updated with policy tools, key messages, new [policy briefs](#) and [publications](#) on the pandemic's impact on food value chains, social protection in rural areas, migrant workers, healthy diets, humanitarian and food crisis contexts, agri-food markets and trade. Analyses and solutions for keeping food and agricultural systems alive in a period of COVID-19 pandemic have been regularly updated [here](#).

**The UN Population Fund (UNFPA)** donated 2800 hygiene items to the Public Health Institutions in Skopje – the University Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions, the University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics and the Special Hospital for Gynecology and Obstetrics - Chair. These items are intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in these institutions, especially for women, pregnant women, and the elderly. Link: <https://bit.ly/2USPXiS> Additionally, UNFPA through its Implementing Partner HERA delivered hygiene packages to persons with disabilities in Debar and Skopje.

## HEALTH RESPONSE

# \$6.8 million

Grants or in-kind assistance

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESPONSE

# \$192.8 million

Grants or secured/pipeline loans

## MAIN LINKS

### Government

<https://koronavirus.gov.mk/>

### Institute of public health

[www.iph.mk](http://www.iph.mk)

### Ministry of health

<http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/korona-virus/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/zdravstvomk/>

### WHO North Macedonia

<https://www.facebook.com/WHOMKD>  
<https://twitter.com/WHOMKD>

## IMPORTANT NUMBERS

If symptoms (fever, tiredness, dry cough) occur, individuals should contact health care provider or the designated epidemiological contact telephones service and inform about their travel history and symptoms; they should not visit the health facility unless told to do so.

### In case of symptoms and asymptomatic travelers

CPH Bitola	071 261 330	CPH Skopje	071 289 614
CPH Veles	071 219 278	CPH Strumica	072 235 543
CPH Gevgelija	078 545 444	CPH Tetovo	075 240 464
CPH Kochani	071 373 913	RU Gostivar	076 365 161
CPH Kumanovo	070 215 851	CPH Shtip	078 365 613
CPH Ohrid	070 723 029	IPH Skopje	078 387 194
CPH Prilep	076 475 747		

### Psychological support

Parents of (pre)school children	072 912 676
Self-isolated adults	072 919 009
Citizens of Debar and Center Zhupa	070 241 807

### General information

"Alo Doctor" Call Center	02 15 123
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