



APR 2021



HIGHLIGHTS

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EDITORIAL by the UN Resident Coordinator

KEY DATES

MARCH

- 28** First batch of COVAX-procured vaccines received.

APRIL

- 7** World Health Day and start of the WHO campaign about health equity.
- 8** International Roma day
- 8** North Macedonia celebrates 28 years of full membership in the United Nations.
- 21** North Macedonia, supported by UNDP, submits new and increased national climate pledge to UNFCCC under Paris agreement (82% reduction of emissions by 2030; 8,000 new green jobs and €47 million generated for economy through circular approaches).
- 19-23** Start of the ILO Green Week gathering innovators, business leaders, policy experts and environmental practitioners to explore how the green future of the world would look like and how we can get there.
- 21-28** UN Women and Healthy Options Project Skopje, in partnership with Coalition Margins and the National Network Against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, conducts online trainings for media workers on gender-based violence against women and girls.

The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us that life on Earth is about shared interests and needs, and about joint commitments and action. We must be able to put individual, corporate, institutional and political party interests aside to help others and through that help ourselves. In our interconnected world the virus has swiftly spread, defying borders and continents and without discrimination between poor and rich. By analogy, the only universal protection – the vaccines – can only be effective if they reach everyone.

But the health and socio-economic impact was expectedly less devastating in richer societies, and in those less polarized and more ready to collaborate, with functional institutions that practice responsible governance and enjoy people's confidence. We have seen many examples of swift and collaborative actions globally and locally, from voluntary services organized in the communities to assist the elderly and the most vulnerable, to green lanes that resolved supply chains disruptions; local and regional donations that assisted with medical response and, finally, global cooperation that enabled vaccine development and deployment in an extraordinarily short period of time. Unfortunately, we have also seen many examples of limited collaboration, insufficient or irresponsible collective action. Globally, despite the best efforts to the contrary, global disparities have ultimately been reflected in the vaccine rollout: by end-April, more than 900 million vaccine doses have been administered globally, but over 81% have gone to high- or upper middle-income countries, while low-income countries have received just 0.3%.

Massive self-sacrifice of medical staff and volunteers has sometimes been matched by pictures of clubs and gatherings without mask-wearing or physical distancing, of political statements full of mutual accusation instead of joint, decisive and collaborative action. We have seen institutions paralyzed and unable to deliver on their mandate because of lack of political consensus, leading to a shortfall in socio-economic support for the those who need it most.

Lack of accurate statistical data about the impact of the pandemic, particularly on the most vulnerable groups, remains an important hurdle for impactful action, also often hampered by corruption and diversion of scarce recovery resources. Paired with the global and local rise in disinformation and fake news, this further negatively impacts the mental health and increases fear among the population.

It is thus crucial to continue emphasizing and demonstrate through practice that for our planet, for our countries and for our communities we have to act together, responsibly and selflessly. Now more than ever, we need to put aside our differences and work on issues that connect us, seek consensus, overcome blockage. After we have overcome our shared enemy, the virus, we can continue competing with the best ideas and solutions for sustainable development and living in a world in which humankind and the rest of nature co-exist in cohesion and thrive.

In North Macedonia, we now have a unique opportunity to jointly agree on a joint vision for the future, by formulating a National Development Strategy for the next 20 years and supporting its implementation. The key is that we build a nationally-owned perspective that reflects an inter-generational, inter-party, inter-ethnic, inter-sectoral, gender and social consensus on issues that we think are the most important for future generations. We need to be innovative, open-minded, resourceful and collaborative. When we have this vision agreed and shared by all, the competition can start on how to best implement it. The UN will continue to provide full support.



Rossana Dudziak
UN Resident Coordinator in North Macedonia

COVID-19 RESPONSE and OTHER UN ACTIVITIES

UN entities continue to support COVID-19 response in the country with specific and detailed analysis focused on issues within their respective fields of expertise.

North Macedonia received the [first batch of Government-financed COVID-19 vaccines](#) via the [COVAX facility](#) at the end of March. COVAX, the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the Vaccine Alliance Gavi, and the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, working in partnership with **UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)** as a key implementing partner, as well as civil society organisations, vaccine manufacturers, the **World Bank** and others.

To support the Ministry of Health (MoH) in addressing vaccine hesitancy and building public trust, **UNICEF** developed and launched a [multi-media communication campaign](#) to build trust in vaccines with a focus on COVID-19 vaccines. The campaign running on television and social media, complements other outreach activities led by the Government. The aim is to build trust in vaccines in general and COVID-19 vaccines by addressing the barriers to vaccine acceptance and by actively taking steps to provide accurate information to restore confidence. The campaign is part of the joint UN activities funded by the [COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund](#). Under the same project, **WHO** shared a number of immunization related videos in [Macedonian](#) and [Albanian](#) languages through social media channels; and **UN Population Fund (UNFPA)** launched preparatory activities for the provision of sexual and reproductive health services through mobile clinics. The clinics target vulnerable women and girls in the areas that have poor availability and access to services further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These preparations entail the development of a sustainable model of mobile services that will be integrated into the e-health system.

In cooperation with MoH and with the support from USAID, **UNICEF** and the **WHO** launched the [HealthBuddy+ mobile application](#) providing access to up-to-date and verified information on COVID-19 and feedback mechanism for public to engage in ensuring

access to trusted information. The application was promoted at the panel-discussion "Disinformation and the COVID-19 pandemics" that brought together thought leaders to discuss the COVID-19 'infodemia' and attended by 135 participants including young people.

WHO and the MoH have implemented the first cycle of the Professional Development Programme covering around 430 primary care nurses and midwives who acquired new knowledge and skills for better-quality health care services. The Programme has been developed to support the implementation of the country's new model of primary health care launched early in 2019 and adapted to the challenges and needs brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) issued an ["Assessment of the Social Security Responses to COVID-19: Lessons from the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe during the first stage of the pandemic"](#) which comparatively reviews national social security measures in response to COVID-19 in seven countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine), analyses their effectiveness and long-term consequences, and discusses future challenges in improving social security systems. The report looks primarily at cash benefits and concludes that fiscal measures of the seven countries under review were generally lower than in Western Europe or EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe, and – with some exceptions – predominantly focused on direct additional spending for enterprises and households. According to ILO estimates, the value of fiscal stimulus during the first three quarters of 2020 was equivalent to 23% of lost working hours for Southern Europe and 54% percent for Eastern Europe.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) has launched a five-module [e-learning course on COVID-19 at Points of Entry](#) designed for officials who are in direct contact with people on the move. In line with WHO guidance the course will familiarize officials with the history, main symptoms, transmission, and prevention methods of COVID-19, as well with the basics of psychological first aid. In addition the course will advance the understanding of the international legal framework guiding COVID-19 response at points of entry and key steps to detect and manage ill travellers, highlighting the importance of protecting the rights of migrants in the context of COVID-19. The course is available in English on IOM's [e-learning platform E-Campus](#), and it will soon be translated into the main local languages of the Western Balkans.

establish companies and 140 unemployed people to be trained for professions in high demand. Support grants of MKD307,000 each have also been awarded to 18 unemployed persons country-wide. Through the Nordic Support for Progress of North Macedonia project, UNOPS trained around 600 civil servants from relevant government institutions in different aspects of the EU accession process in close cooperation with the Secretariat for European Affairs.

UNFPA provided experts support to the State Statistical Office, in communication efforts related to Census 2021.

UN Women launched a social media campaign "How to become an active citizen?" that aims to raise awareness on the importance of women's participation in public decision-making processes at the local level, together with Akcija Zdruzenska, a partner in the gender-responsive budgeting project. UN Women partner Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South Eastern Europe (SEE) co-hosted the Second Forum of Women Mayors in SEE: Inclusive Local Economic Development, together with the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM). The event brought together over 180 participants, including mayors, presidents of municipal councils, local officials and representatives from international organizations and provided the opportunity to exchange best practices for gender responsive local interventions in SEE, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Health Education and Research Association (HERA) organized the second series of trainings for strengthening the capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) for providing psycho-social counseling specialized services to survivors of violence outside of Skopje.

With **UN Development Programme's (UNDP)** support through the EU-funded Climate Promise initiative, North Macedonia submitted a new climate action pledge under the Paris Framework Agreement in April. The country has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 82% compared to 1990 levels, to create 8,000 new green jobs and to adopt a circular approach which is projected to generate €47 million for the economy. The climate actions and policies under the enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution were promoted and discussed with national stakeholders over the course of three virtual events held in April under the hashtag #ItsPossible.

UNDP has started the implementation of several regional projects in North Macedonia in close partnership with national institutions:

- regional EU-funded project that will work to support the labor market integration of Roma returnees in the Western Balkans and Turkey in the next three years. Regionally, the project partners are the UNDP, the World Bank, the Council of Europe (CoE), the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative

LATEST EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DATA (6 May 2021)

153,137 CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES
84,817 VACCINE DOSES ADMINISTERED
5,013 COVID-19-RELATED FATALITIES



For latest data see covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/mk

OTHER UN ACTIVITIES

Assisting the Employment Service Agency in the implementation of the Operational Plan for Employment, the **UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** supported 52 unemployed persons to

OTHER UN ACTIVITIES (continued)

(REDI) and the Roma Active Albania (RAA).

- The Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans 2 (ReLQaD2), to continue strengthening participatory democracies and the EU integration process in the Western Balkans. The programme will be implemented in seven partner municipalities, selected in the upcoming period through a competitive process, institutionalizing the mechanism for public funding for CSOs in a transparent and development-oriented manner, recognizing the local needs and embracing a project-based approach.
- Cross-Border Integrated Institutional Approach Towards Combating Illegal Arms Trafficking (IAT) and small arms and light weapons (SALW), as part of continuing efforts within the Roadmap for sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans. The project aims to improve the cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia and Kosovo* and lay the basis for an integrated institutional approach in combating illicit arms trafficking in the two jurisdictions.

In addition, BE SAFE, the mobile application for victims of gender-based violence, developed by **UNDP**, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and local partners, is now being utilized as part of a training of paralegal professionals of the Healthy Options Project Skopje.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) delivered two lectures for the students of the Refugee Law Clinic in Skopje and one lecture for the students of the Political Science of the University American College Skopje, on the UNHCR Mandate, fundamental principles in refugee protection, and UNHCR work in North Macedonia. These occasions were also an opportunity for UNHCR staff and students to exchange views on current migration trends, challenges in protecting people and the potential of North Macedonia as a country of asylum.

UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) supported national authorities to: improve firearms data collection through the use of UNODC Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ); enhance implementation of the Regional Anti-Corruption and Illicit Finance Roadmap (Regional Roadmap); discuss new Asset Recovery initiative, a regional Western Balkans project aimed to enhance the capacity of the addressed jurisdictions to recover the proceeds and instrumentalities of crime. Activities were also taken to advance UNODC-EU joint action on enhanced border control, with physical assessment of the Skopje International Airport in view of the establishment of a Joint Airport Interdiction Task Force (JAITF) to form part of the joint airport inter-agency group composed of a JAITF and an Air Cargo Control Unit (ACCU).

WHO organized roundtable discussion, bringing together representatives of the government,

international and UN partners, professional associations, patients and civil society organizations to discuss the findings on the report on **Older people and access to health care in North Macedonia**. The report highlights information available at national level the demography of this population group, their vulnerability and specific health conditions, as well as the need to achieve universal health coverage and transform health services, working towards more focused, integrated and person-centred care.

Building back better: UN 2020 results

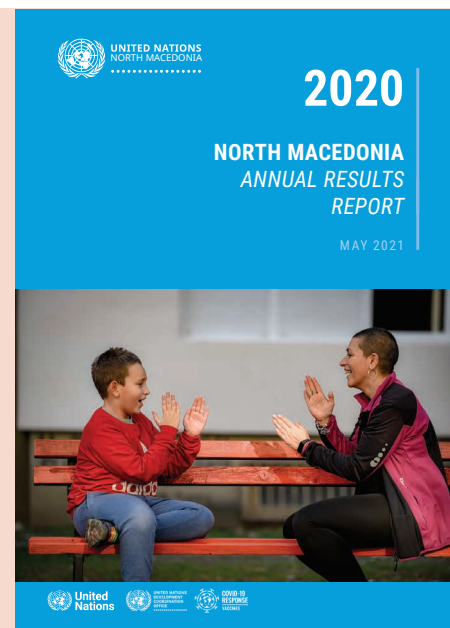
2020 UN Annual Results Report highlights UN North Macedonia's contribution to and results from working across five substantive areas and response to the health and socio-economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, **24 UN entities** were engaged in development activities in the country, through direct implementation and by providing technical assistance, capacity development, leveraging partnerships and resources, social mobilisation, brokering knowledge, and piloting and scaling up innovations with more than 200 partners in the country. UN activities with a budget of \$40.1 million of which \$35.8 million was spent (89% delivery rate) were made possible due to generous contributions of international and local partners, and the Government of North Macedonia.

On top of ambitious 2020 plans – completion of the 2016-2020 Partnership for Sustainable Development (SPD) implementation cycle, acceleration of activities towards reaching Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and jointly planning with partners and people of North Macedonia for activities in the years ahead – UN work in the country was heavily impacted by COVID-19. UN decisively supported the Government with immediate COVID-19 response through reprogramming, coordination and logistics support, as well as with policy, long-term and recovery aspects of response, culminating in the COVID-19 Response Framework (CRF).

A key aspect of UN work during this difficult year was to work closely with the Government and other partners and maintain focus on sustainable development and achieving SDGs. One of the important results of that was the preparation and presentation of the country's first Voluntary National Review (VNR), showcasing its renewed commitment to Agenda 2030, even during difficult times.

Under **enabling business environment and creating more and better jobs**, UN supported the Employment Support Agency's (ESA) extended capacity and services, while also directly supporting employment of 314 persons through different measures and secured jobs for 67% of the returnees; launched worker rights campaign and supported the development of the evidence-based National Employment Strategy; provided policy and practical support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and undertook skills assessment in several industries. To assess the impact of COVID-19, UN un-

A joint celebration of this year's World Health Day (7 April) was organised by **WHO** together with the Ministry of Health, **UN Resident Coordinator**, **UNICEF**, **UN Women** and **UNFPA**, under the theme "Building a fairer, healthier world". On this occasion, **WHO** launched a social media campaign with testimonials from around 30 recognized individuals for raising awareness about the importance of health inequities. The first leg of the campaign will last until end-May.



dertook rapid analyses of the impact on labour market and the SMEs, providing informed and evidence-based recommendations, including fully developed policy measures, for immediate response, followed by more comprehensive socio-economic assessment.

Throughout the year, UN also provided direct support to the most affected target groups of unemployed, by facilitating organized engagement of 613 unemployed in social services provision, developing one stop shop for SMEs, facilitating business opportunities that resulted with 126 new companies established by people who lost jobs due to the crisis and contract farming for 35 local farmers to overcome challenges of production, distribution and market placement. As result, the Government stimulus measures ensured that the overall impact on unemployment in 2020 remained limited, despite 13.8% of working hours lost annually, and reverted to declining trend after a more severe blow in the second quarter.

Under **accountable and transparent governance**, UN focused on supporting the development of the National Strategy for Balanced Regional Development 2020-2029; enabling direct citizens' participation in 70 (of 81) municipalities through 'citizens forums'; supported digital solutions at local level, including electronic payment of taxes, and e-learning platform accessible to all 1,347 municipal councils; strengthened capacities of law enforcement and social services with EU aligned migration-related procedures, hospital and facilities

renovations, and supported more effective response and cooperation in addressing illicit trafficking at ports and airports, corruption, illicit financial flows, and other forms of organized crimes. Technical support to EU NPAA process resulted in 60 pieces of EU aligned legislation: 600 civil servants trained and a publicly accessible NPAA portal.

Numerous activities were conducted under **ensuring better quality of life for all** with particular focus to vulnerable population. UN supported the immediate health response to the COVID-19; the secondary education, adult and life-long learning reform and continued quality education through national distance learning platform (Edulno) for all 300,000 students during COVID19. Basic services were provided to families with children, Persons with Disabilities (PwD), Roma and elderly in over 80% of municipalities: Three newly designed social services under the Women's empowerment programme; two new Centres for Work-oriented rehabilitation with 20 small enterprises opened by PwD; digitalized asylum services with 22.7% increase of first instance decisions in 2020 (4.2%, in 2019) and numerous other activities were undertaken.

Under **environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction** UN focused on strategic support to fulfilment of country's reporting requirements for multilateral environmental agreements (climate change, biodiversity and land degradation), greenhouse gas emissions reduction, improvement of protected areas management, promotion of sustainable agriculture, disaster risk reduction and tackling air pollution. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, activities on immediate crisis response were scaled up. UN supported the process of proclamation of a new national park (Shar Mountain); and 3,000 hectares of agricultural land in advanced phase of land consolidation. Sewerage system was constructed in one village and another wastewater treatment plant prepared for waste removal: 46 new or upgraded hydrological and meteorological stations added to the national network, totalling improved flood management capacities in 22 municipalities and additional 300,000 people.

Under **gender equality**, UN supported the new anti-discrimination legislation alignment with CEDAW and the CoE's Istanbul Convention; assisted in drafting of new Gender Equality Law and corresponding documents; the introduction of new incriminations against women and a state-funded compensation for victims of all forms of violent crimes, including gender based violence (GBV) and domestic violence; as well as the 2nd National Action Plan for the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Gender responsive principles were incorporated in the draft Organic Budget Law, and 14 ministries and 21 municipalities supported with "engendered" policies and budgets. Gender advocacy and capacity building for 263 women; 14 grassroots organizations; 2 local authorities association and over 50 CSO for gender budgeting and GBV.

The overall budget of the UN five-year strategy closed at \$130 million (107% of planned). An additional \$30 million were mobilized and carried over into 2021 for SDCF implementation and to support national strategic priorities, reforms and country's EU accession process, with particular focus on ensuring that no one is left behind.

IN FOCUS Local governance

"All politics is local." Decades after this observation was made in the U.S. Congress, it remains a common saying among politicians and policymakers, recognizing that the success of policies is directly tied to how well they address the simple, mundane and everyday concerns of citizens, which are often limited to the local level. But does the statement still hold in an increasingly globalized world that faces planetary challenges such as pandemics and climate change? If we consider how local, regional, national and global issues are interconnected, there is a strong argument that local politics and local development are as important today as ever, if not more. Issues like inequality, poverty and climate change may affect the whole world, but they emerge out of a matrix of interconnected local and regional issues that cannot be overlooked in development efforts that seek to sustainably overcome the global challenges of the day. When done correctly, local economic development can be as important to mitigating the effects of climate change or to reducing poverty as international climate action and trade agreements.

Fittingly, new local and regional policies and strategies have become more context sensitive, with tendency to stimulate local communities' proactiveness towards sustainable development and their own economic, social and political future. These new approaches emphasize the qualitative versus quantitative dimensions, such as the choice between a lower number of higher quality jobs and a high number of new jobs. UNDP advocates for and supports forms of regional development that consider qualitative dimensions, arguing that greater social and financial equity and improved quality of life in the regions is equally important as increasing wealth and income levels, number of jobs, availability of goods and services.

The regional development policy aimed at synchronizing North Macedonia's development priorities with EU standards is facing multiple challenges in light of the new socioeconomic trends, prolonged public health crisis and the continuing debate on objectives-setting. Focus remains on balanced development, though with expanded definition of equity that encounters gender and intra-regional inequities. Going forward, regional development policy should put a greater emphasis on bridging the development gap between communities in a single region rather than mainly focusing resources on addressing inter-regional disparities. In Skopje, a single street divides Centar, the most developed municipality in the country as per UNDP's [Municipal Development Index](#), from Shuto Orizari, one of the least developed urban municipalities.

How policy responds to those challenges will define the trajectory of local and regional development in the country. The choice is between simple redistribution with financial support for less developed regions, wider solutions for efficiency, growth and competitiveness in all regions, independent from their level of development or a combination of both.

The newly adopted [Strategy on Regional Development](#)



All three indicators record a slight increase compared to the survey conducted in 2019.

Source: IPSOS, Public opinion survey report on citizens' satisfaction from local services, July 2020

[2021-2031](#) and the new [Law on Balanced Regional Development](#) demonstrate an evident effort to improve people's well-being and living standards in all types of communities, from cities to rural areas, and to increase their contribution to the nation's overall performance. The new policy emphasizes the importance of wider participation in development processes, introducing regional forums for defining regional development priorities and putting a special focus on regional competitiveness, promoting the unused potential of all regions, instead of the traditional focus on weaker regions. For the first time, the policy identifies urban areas as separate beneficiaries.

The new Programme on Decentralization and Sustainable Local Development 2021-2026 recognizes the importance of innovative and inclusive local economic development approaches along with the need for increased resilience and sustainable development of local self-government.

With UNDP advocacy efforts, these two national flagship documents for the first time consider the 2030 Agenda as framework to shape, improve and implement local and regional development policy and set basis for mainstreaming gender in decision-making and in regional development projects, in line with the EU development policies. Supported by donors (SDC, SIDA, EU, Slovakia), UNDP continues to support sustainable and equitable local and regional development through policy support, capacity building for improved service delivery and direct interventions in local infrastructure to improve the life of citizens. The [e-knowledge platform](#) has already extended digital learning to councilors in all 81 municipalities; and the Community Forums mechanism empowered some 7,000 citizens from 24 municipalities to engage local development planning, resulting with 33 local infrastructure interventions completed in accordance with community-set priorities.

To respond to these complex development priorities systemically, UN entities must combine their specialized expertise to enrich intersectoral dialogue and coordination among national institutions in support of sustainable, cross-sectoral government interventions.

The latest version of the Sustainable Development Bulletin is available on UN North Macedonia website. For additional information, please contact rc-northmacedonia@un.org. Produced by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in North Macedonia | 10 May 2021

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