



MAY 2021



HIGHLIGHTS

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COVID-19 response and other UN activities
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KEY DATES

MAY

- **11** UNODC participated in a Rule of Law Donor coordination meeting to discuss possible cooperation and to familiarize relevant stakeholders with the activities of the UNODC Regional Programme activities for South-Eastern Europe in the country
- **11** UNODC participated in the first hybrid general assembly meeting "Police Cooperation in Fighting Transnational Organized Crime in the Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Cooperation (SEPCA) Region"
- **21-22** HERA is conducting the fourth series of trainings for specialist service providers for survivors of violence against women. The trainings are part of the regional (EU funded) UN Women project "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds"
- **25** Regional dialogue "[Policy and governance issues to transform food systems in Europe and Central Asia](#)" organized by the [UN Issue-based Coalition](#) on Sustainable Food Systems for Europe and Central Asia, chaired by FAO, UNICEF and WHO, in anticipation of the September 2021 UN Food Systems Summit
- **27-28** Healthy Options Project Skopje, in partnership with Coalition Margins and the National Network Against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, is conducting online trainings for media workers outside of Skopje on gender-based violence against women and girls, regional (EU funded) UN Women project "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds"

EDITORIAL by the UN Resident Coordinator

The past year reminded us of the importance of health, but also raised the environmental consciousness of our societies and of the complex relationship between our environmental impact and our health.

Trying to steer away from the overcrowded surroundings, the curfews, and the limitations of city life during the pandemic, many – especially young families – replaced the urban life of Skopje, Bitola, Kumanovo and other cities with the peace and tranquillity of remote villages, where often their grandparents used to live. Many sought natural remedies to boost their health and immunity, especially in bee products, herbs and herbal potions and some have turned to the benefits of purely natural dairy products. Others simply wanted to escape the stress of the pandemic, breathe without a mask, safely hidden and protected by an army of trees and bushes.

We turn to nature whenever we are in distress, but do we do enough to preserve it?

While the situation has improved, Skopje remains at the top of the air pollution list in the winter among the cities in the region. The pollution of Vardar and other rivers and lakes by irresponsible industries and individuals remains a constant. Vodno, Skopje's greatest weekend getaway, continues to suffer due to poor urban planning and thousands of 'hikers' who do not care where they will dispose the plastic water bottle after it soothed their thirst. And Ohrid lake, one of the landmarks of this beautiful country, is drowning in the urban chaos of illegal construction of the past decades, threatening to put a dent on the centuries of culture and history.

Climate action and environmental awareness have drastically increased in the past decade, locally and globally, but palpable change reflecting its positive impact on the planet is yet to arrive. There are many reasons for that and no easy solutions, but there is a lack of understanding of the impact of our individual

actions. This needs to be urgently addressed.

First, we need to keep reminding everyone how important our environment is for our communities' health and quality of life. **Second**, we need to instil the understanding that environmental action is an opportunity and investment in ourselves, a tool that can help us fight poverty and inequality, boosting employment and power the economy. **Third**, EVERYONE's action matters and everyone can take action.

In fact, if supported with proper investments and the necessary infrastructure, the increased focus on rural areas and livelihoods can significantly contribute to a better, more equitable, sustainable development. Action to help heal and preserve the planet, can be a simple individual action, whether through embracing a plant-rich diet, starting an urban garden, planting a tree, or cleaning nature around us. Cutting consumption of single-use products or reducing food waste is a simple but impactful contribution.

From those empowered to adopt or impose laws to protect the environment, to those implementing and controlling the policies and infrastructural projects, and those that rarely think about the impact that small insects – like bees – have on our health or are too tired to carry a plastic bottle once it is emptied. We ALL need to act, for the sake of all of us.

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.

The pandemic has been characterized by incidents of breach of workers' rights. The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** recognized the efforts of the Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia (SSM) to protect and act on behalf of these workers, and supported SSM in developing a mobile application for reporting any type of labour rights violation. ILO also supported the creation of a mechanism for official referral of the cases from SSM to the State Labour Inspectorate for further proceeding. The application SSM – Moi robotnicki prava is available for [Android](#) and [iOS](#).

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** and ILO prepared the interim guidance on COVID-19 occupational health and safety for health workers (EN [link](#)) that was translated into [Macedonian](#). In addition to the occupational health and safety measures for health workers and occupational health services in the context of the pandemic, the guidance also outlines the rights and responsibilities for health and safety at work for health workers according to the ILO standards. The document is intended for employers and health-facility managers, health workers and their representatives, occupational health and safety experts, infection prevention and control experts in public and private health facilities and policy-makers.

UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) started the implementation of the World Bank-funded project North Macedonia Emergency COVID-19 Response (€4.3 million). By September 2021, the project will support the enhancement of the operational capacity of the Ministry of Health through the provision of specific medical equipment and training of end-users, and through this contribute to the strengthening of the national public health preparedness system.

In May, **North Macedonia received the second COVAX second shipment of COVID-19 vaccines**, bringing the total number of COVAX-provided vaccines to 62,400. North Macedonia is one of the self-financing countries and economies participating in COVAX facility that uses the **UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)** global supply and logistics network to support the vaccine procurement and delivery.

UNICEF and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy **joined efforts to highlight the importance of supporting families to provide the ultimate care and support children** need to thrive and flourish throughout life. This is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic as families struggle to keep children learning and their families functioning. The partners renewed their commitment to continue working together to protect every child's right to grow up in a nurturing family environment. This includes ensuring that the best interests of every child is met by guarding against the unnecessary separation from families; preventing family separation through programmes for the most vulnerable families to catch any problems before they escalate, and the development of community-based services to help families stay together. It also includes working to increase the quality of family-based or family-like alternative care, for children who are already in care, and getting children back to their families or finding other permanent family-based solutions.

WHO organized a training of trainers for COVID-19 contact tracing for 20 epidemiologists on 19 May. Contact tracing is a key element to control the spread of COVID-19 by breaking the chain of human-to-human transmission.

On 26 May, together with the Ministry of Health, WHO organized a policy-dialogue "Health inequity and COVID-19 in North Macedonia: Investing in health and well-being for a fairer and more equitable future for all". The policy dialogue was organized as a concluding event of 2021 World Health Day campaign on health inequities (Building a fairer, healthier world).

In May, WHO donated personal protective equipment and diagnostics to the Ministry of Health/Institute of Public Health to support North Macedonia's national response to COVID-19, including gowns, face shields, protective goggles and biohazard bags for frontline health workers. The donation, worth \$54,000, also included 15,000 sample collections kits, 12,000 manual PCR tests, a purification system and a real-time PCR system that will strengthen national testing capacities.

To respond to the need to support the functionality of the newly developed immunization modules, as part of the Multi Partner Trust Fund project, the hardware system capacities of the E-health directorate were upgraded. Having in mind that one of the strategic priorities of the Government of North Macedonia for maintaining Essential Health Services is establishing a functional electronic immunization system and increasing its capacities in accordance with newly developed COVID-19 needs, WHO North Macedonia has procured a storage worth \$11,700.

WHO, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF partnered to observe the European Immunization Week in North Macedonia, highlighting the importance of maintaining routine vaccination and gaining the public's confidence about the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines. WHO and partners highlighted the many ways in which vaccines enable us to live healthy, productive lives by preventing the spread of vaccine preventable diseases.

On 10 May, Dr Jihane Tawilah, WHO Representative in North Macedonia, visited the Specialized Hospital for

Geriatric and Palliative Medicine "13th November" in Skopje. During the field visit, together with the hospital team they discussed the importance of multidisciplinary care for the elderly who are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19.

OTHER UN ACTIVITIES

During a "[Teach for the Planet](#)" initiative, organized to mark the Earth Day by the Bureau for Development of Education and supported by UNICEF, 1,160 teachers and 34,304 students participated in learning activities on climate change and climate action.

UNICEF promoted [series](#) of videos featuring operators of the parenting helpline, providing short advice for parents on positive parenting techniques. The topics range from positive parenting practical methods, consequences when using physical disciplining, parenting of adolescent, socio-emotional development, to how to deal with stress during crisis, and mental hygiene of parents and caregivers.

UNICEF launched a renewed partnership with the Fund for Innovation and Technological Development (FITD) to continue support for youth social entrepreneurship – through the UPSHIFT programme – an initiative to engage young people aged 13 to 19 years to design innovative solutions to a social problems they have identified in their community. Over the next three years partners will be working with young people to develop eco-solutions to challenges in environment and climate change.

Thanks to partnership between UNICEF and Open the Windows On-line Platform, eighty professionals from the day care centers, kindergartens, and centers for social work and local self-governments were trained on how to use the Open the Windows On-line Platform in providing children with disabilities with individualized support. These professionals will ensure scalability and sustainability in providing the on-line service, in support to the families and children with disabilities who do not have the opportunity to receive services from a special educator and rehabilitator in their place of residence.

In collaboration with the Macedonian Association of Nurses and Midwives, UNICEF conducted 15 trainings on basic psycho-social counselling in March-April 2021, for capacity development of 200 home visiting (patronage) nurses in basic psycho-social support for families with pregnant women and mothers with new-borns.

As part of the national roll-out of the social and emotional learning programme in preschools, in the course of May and June, UNICEF is supporting a series of capacity-building trainings for 280 new preschool teachers. The trainings will familiarize preschool teachers with the neuroscience that underpins social and emotional learning, the effects of stress and adversity on children, and various strategies to build social and emotional

LATEST EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DATA (9 June 2021)

155,418 CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES
270,135 VACCINE DOSES ADMINISTERED

5,458 COVID-19-RELATED FATALITIES

Weekly new cases reported



Weekly deaths reported



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

OTHER UN ACTIVITIES (continued)

skills both in children and teachers. Social and emotional learning is especially relevant during the Covid-19 pandemic as it supports children's mental health and well-being by helping students cope with uncertainty, regulate their emotions and deal with unexpected and difficult circumstances.

UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is supporting the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in the development of the bylaws for the new Law on Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The law came into force on 6 May 2021.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) has started the implementation of a regional project aimed at creating enabling environments for enhanced climate resilience in agriculture through strengthening the country's seed system and promoting quality seeds of climate tolerant varieties. In partnership with the Institute of Agriculture in Skopje, FAO is currently organizing demonstration trials for multiplication of seed material from selected varieties of vegetable crops, to assess the impact of climate change on production under different conditions, as well as the effects of applying various agro-technical measures to increase the resistance of cultivated species to climate change. The ultimate goal of these activities is to obtain quality seed material, which will be further available for distribution to farmers.

Under the EU-FAO funded **MAINLAND** project, land consolidation has been advancing in nine project areas. The first majority-based land consolidation project in the country – **the village of Egri** (Bitola Municipality) – was officially registered in the Real Estate Cadastre. This will result in 214 landowners in Egri to receive new ownership titles and will start the agricultural season on their newly consolidated land parcels that allow for better and more efficient farming practices. With land consolidation, the number of land parcels in Egri was reduced by **almost fourfold**, from 874 parcels to 260, with an average size of 1.30 ha (from 0.38 ha before). Land consolidation in Egri also includes investments in agricultural infrastructure improvements such as construction of drainage channels, extension of the existing irrigation network and construction of gravel roads that are expected to be finalized by the end of 2021.

As part of FAO's Technical Cooperation project "Support to Integrated Local Community Development", FAO has been implementing community-based actions in several pilot areas. One of them is the ongoing refurbishment of the multi-purpose cultural home in the village of Spancevo, which aims to serve social, cultural and governance needs of the villages of Spancevo, Sokolarci and Cesinovo (Kocani Municipality). Simultaneously, the municipal school located in Sokolarci village will receive modern lighting equipment, putting the school yard and football field in extended use for the children and the entire community. Similar pilot actions will be initiated in the coming months in the second pilot community of Bitola, comprised of the villages of Egri, Zhabeni and Optichari. These actions are in synergy with FAO's ongoing work on land consolidation in the same areas, where FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy work together to expand support to local community development beyond the agricultural land reforms.

In May, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE) announced that 250 women agricultural producers will receive financial support for strengthening their businesses, through the Measure 115 for support of women agricultural producers under the National programme for agriculture and rural development (2018-2022). With **UN Women** support under the gender-responsive budgeting project, the working group on gender equality within the MAFWE supported the development of this measure, which is the first measure that provides financial support to all women-registered agricultural producers in North Macedonia.

Under the UN Women gender-responsive budgeting project, UN Women and the State Audit Office (SAO) in North Macedonia will sign a Memorandum of Understanding for supporting SAO on strengthening its capacities on gender equality, gender-responsive budgeting, as well as in the development of tools and methodologies for conducting gender audits.

Ten new municipalities will be supported within the UN Women project "Promoting Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets: Towards Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Republic of North Macedonia", funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The project will now include 31 municipalities.

Health Education and Research Association (HERA) organized the third series of trainings for strengthening the capacities of CSOs for providing specialized services to survivors of violence outside of Skopje (7-8 May). HERA is a partner organization to UN Women within the regional project "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds", funded by the EU.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), its partners and the staff of Reception Centre Vizbegovo marked the religious holidays together with the asylum-seekers accommodated in the centre, discussing and learning about local traditions during the **Easter** and **Ramadan**.

UNHCR partner Iustinianus Primus Law Faculty and the Refugee Law and Migration Center successfully accredited and launched the module on Refugee Law. The module is comprised of four different courses: Refugees and migrants, International Refugee Law, EU Asylum and Refugee Law, Clinical program - Refugee Law Clinic and will be implemented in the third semester within the International Public Law section as part of the master program International Public Law, International Private Law, International Relations and EU Law.

On May 12, **UN Development Programme (UNDP)** and the City of Skopje opened the new green roof on the "Koco Racin" House of Culture, built as part of priority climate change resilience measures identified through UNDP's Resilient Skopje project. The green roof covers a total area of 390 m², including irrigated green areas, paved walkways, urban equipment, lighting, etc. The roof is home to 3,676 seedlings, including trees, shrubs, and grass. It has more than 30 different plants that provide a safe home for different species (birds, insects, etc). This unique space will lower the temperature in the city

centre, increase the resilience of the city and will improve the quality of urban living.

UNDP has completed the selection process for the Second Call for financial support of Lisice households to replace their firewood, charcoal, crude oil or waste heaters with cleaner heating systems for the purpose of reducing air pollution in Skopje. 81 households were identified as eligible. The selected households will be subject to energy efficient interventions in the summer and autumn of 2021. The selection criteria model was developed in consultation with experts in the field, and it primarily targeted the vulnerable categories of citizens. Hence, no co-financing options were foreseen. In addition, the call defines only two sets of measures which shall be financially supported: replacement of old inefficient heating devices with new ones and replacement of wooden windows and doors with more energy efficient options.

UNDP announced the implementation of the first text-to-speech app for Macedonian and Albanian languages designed as a tool for the visually impaired. The newly introduced e-product is being developed for desktop and mobile devices through a partnership between the UNDP, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the National Association of People with Visual Impairment. It will help blind persons and persons with visual impairment to process written information successfully and to navigate digital spaces more easily. The final version of the product is expected to launch this summer.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) North Macedonia supported two youth-led initiatives, the refurbishment of the bridge in Runica and the opening of the youth cultural centre in Slupchane. Both initiatives were implemented by the youth of Lipkovo through the Support to Youth project funded by the Government of the United Kingdom. The lives of the students and teachers in the rural village of Runica have been transformed by a new bridge that straddles the village divided by a river. They are grateful they can now move safely and quickly across the river which posed numerous challenges and risks in the past. The youth cultural centre will hopefully increase employment opportunities for youth by learning resume writing and interview skills; youth will get involved in the community, which will, in turn, foster and promote civic engagement. But the utmost goal is to have them spend time with other youth in a non-judgmental space where they feel safe, thereby help them develop their leadership skills.

“Building diverse society - Equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities through systemic reform” “Building diverse society - Equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities through systemic reform”

In the pursuit of a transformative change with real impact on people's lives, the United Nations family in North Macedonia has been working with national partners to build a more inclusive and sustainable society: a society where the richness and diversity are fully respected, and where everyone, including persons with disabilities, enjoy equal rights and opportunities to prosper. The [Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) calls to accelerate progress and efforts to deliver on the ambitious, universal and inclusive 2030 Agenda. Social, economic and political inclusion of all, and eradication of multiple and intersecting inequalities that often affect people with disabilities are integral to that goal.

In that spirit, the UN Country Team (UNCT) launched a new joint programme, funded by the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Multi-Partner Trust Fund (UNPRPD MPTF), which aims at advancing the implementation of the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) and disability inclusive SDGs in the country. Anchored on the rights-based approach to disability, it strives to deepen the partnership between the UN entities, government, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), national human rights institutions, and broader civil society to deliver on the collective promise to leave no one behind.

Guided by the [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy \(UNDIS\)](#), the UN has been crafting systemic and sustainable interventions responsive to the national context and priorities, aligned to the CRPD and international standards. The programme will focus on empowering people with disabilities and their representative organisations as rights holders and agents for change, and on enhancing the government capacity to remove barriers that restrict their full participation in the society.

Through a multi-stakeholder and inter-sectoral approach, the UN will translate structural preconditions for disability inclusion into policies, systems and services. These preconditions encompass equality and non-discrimination, twin track services, accessibility, effective participation of persons with disabilities, disability comprehensive budgeting and management, and accountability and governance. In addition, the rights and inclusion of marginalized and underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities, gender inequality, and the rights of women and girls with disabilities, likely to be left furthest behind, will be addressed.

The full-fledged programme will be developed by the mid of July based on the gaps and opportunities identified during the induction workshop and situational analysis. The seven-day induction training held from 18 to 25 May contributed to levelling up the CRPD understanding and knowledge on disability inclusive SDGs among 50 participants representing organizations of persons with disabilities and other key stakeholders. The contextual analysis will be used to collect evidence and data, identify specific needs and inform the full programme. It will outline

the programme objectives, specific activities, outputs, and outcomes to be achieved, as well as the structure of the multi-stakeholder partnership that will steer the programme implementation in the next two years.

At all these stages of the joint programming and implementation, UN will continue to proactively engage with the wide range of stakeholders, including all branches and levels of government, independent human rights

institutions, OPDs, service providers, and civil society. To ensure a whole-of-society approach, additional stakeholders such as private sector, academia and international partners will be consulted as well. Foremost, persons with disabilities in their full diversity will continue to play an important role in sharing their lived experiences and needs essential for their independent and dignified lives and inclusion the programme seeks to promote in the country.

IN FOCUS Budget Choices and Gender Equality

Advancing Gender Equality or Holding It Back?

COVID-19 crisis has been unimagined in terms of its severity. What does it mean for gender equality?

The pandemic has impacted every segment of life, giving many lessons to humanity. One is how deeply embedded gender inequality remains in our societies, and how easily backsliding can occur, despite gains already made.

UN Women's [Rapid Gender Assessment \(RGA\)](#) for North Macedonia revealed that COVID-19 had disproportionate impact on women and men in the country. Specifically, women spent more hours in unpaid domestic and care activities and one in three women stated that they would struggle to pay for food, hygiene products, rent and utilities.

What was the impact for the women in the labour market?

The health crisis and measures to protect the people's health led to a decline in the economic activity in North Macedonia. By focusing on protecting health and preventing the spread of the virus, the Government, as many other governments, opted for some strict measures such as closing land borders, airports, restaurants and coffee bars, restricting public events, closing schools and restricting movement.

The sharp reductions in the economic activity impacted the labour market: with the overall unemployment reverting to a declining trend in the second half of the year, however followed with increased inactivity trends. The unemployment rate for women in 2020 dropped slightly below 16% compared to 18,4% in 2019, however the gender inactivity increased for 2,1% in 2020 compared to 1,8% for men.

The pandemic has brought a large change in the working mode, with employers and workers largely switching to teleworking. As per the RGA, this was the case with 35% of the employed women surveyed compared to 23% of men.

How the Government' COVID-19 response took into consideration the different needs of diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys?

The Government reallocated budgets to sustain the economic stability of the country. Until mid-December 2020, four anti-crisis packages containing 70 measures were adopted, amounting to around 10% of 2020 GDP.

Although the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men requires the application of gender-responsive policymaking and budgeting, there is no evidence that gender analysis and assessments were conducted prior to the design of the measures.

The pandemic hit jobs held by women harder, demonstrating their higher vulnerability, although the anti-crisis measures introduced subsidies prevented more potential job losses among women than men. On average, women used 47% of the total wage subsidies for employees over the period April-June (2020). The share of women receiving unemployment benefits increased from 52% to 56% in October 2020 due to higher job losses by women.

The share of women participants in active labour market programmes declined to 43.8% compared to 52.5% in 2019. Moreover, the share of women that received support for self-employment (support for start-up businesses) in 2020 decreased comparing to the year before (from 33.3% to 30.9%).

Even though the eligibility criteria for receiving Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) were changed to ensure larger coverage, the share of women receiving the benefit remained the same as in 2019 (35% of the total number of households), whereas the total number of GMI beneficiaries increased for 14%.

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed major vulnerabilities in governance systems and aggravated existing inequalities, impacting women and men differently. Given existing gender inequalities in the economy, there is a danger that the consequences of the pandemic will worsen the economic position of women, especially those in vulnerable groups.

In rebuilding the future there are opportunities to address the persisting gender inequalities. Mainstreaming gender into the policymaking and budgeting processes of the Government, especially in times of a pandemic, is key for achieving and advancing gender equality.

For more info, see the UN Women report <https://bit.ly/3sUNJ2F>. “The analysis Budget Choices in a Time of Pandemic: Advancing Gender Equality or Holding It Back?”

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