



SEP 2020



HIGHLIGHTS

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EDITORIAL by the UN Resident Coordinator

In difficult and challenging times of COVID-19 pandemic the inequalities and socio-economic gaps have grown and became blatantly evident across countries, regions and continents. Structural shortcomings and fragility of our economies have been exposed with full force, posing a challenge in itself and profoundly influencing lingering social issues such as gender inequality, domestic and gender-based violence. It sometimes seems that within weeks the results of hard work from that past have crumbled, giving space to the reign of social inequality and discrimination.

that will make the journey more bearable as we reach hurdles and have to take difficult decisions along the way – for example, how to spend limited resources.



We need to plan better, at all levels, with foresight and based on evidence. Only by diligently collecting and fully utilizing data, assessing risks and considering all options on the table – particularly those that involve innovation and go beyond day-to-day solutions. Planning is key for preparedness and resilience, which are required to mitigate global challenges. One can, however, only plan well if the vision and the goals that we want to achieve are clear. And these goals need to take into consideration the wellbeing of all citizens, regardless of who has been entrusted to form, lead or take part in a government. The future is owned and shared by the entire society.

The shock has demonstrated that we are – locally, regionally and globally – less well prepared than we thought to deal with global and interconnected threats, despite the progress, growth and positive changes of the recent past. It has also shown that what is considered as given – growth, prosperity, stability, access to services, commodities and access to the rest of the world – can quickly slip away or at least become severely restricted.

But difficult situations, although uncomfortable, are a good opportunity to grow stronger, if only we can capitalize on lessons learned. Here are two from the last few months:

Getting priorities straight – as a team, community or society – is key. This requires consensus-building, which, in itself, is a process that can unlock opportunities and potentials. As we look forward, discuss, rebuild, restart or continue – as individuals and organizations – we need to strive towards consensus about our future priorities.

I cannot overstate how important this is for achieving sustainable development goals at municipal, regional and national level. Emphasizing the importance of that consensus and making sure that individuals' or groups' voices are heard and their rights fully respected and considered is a fundamental step

This is why I am encouraged by the emerging consensus for the need to discuss and formulate a long term vision of North Macedonia that goes across party lines and involves all parts of Macedonian society. UN in North Macedonia is, together with its international partners, eager to support an inclusive and consultative nation-wide process in the coming months that would result in a national sustainable development strategy. The time is ripe, maybe more than ever, that we rally around our joint objectives and accelerate the delivery of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Rossana Dudziak
UN Resident Coordinator in North Macedonia

KEY DATES

SEPTEMBER

1 UNEP and partners [launched a public campaign to promote Sharr Mountain \(Шар Планина\) as a national park](#) and submitted the [consolidated version of the corresponding valorisation study](#) to the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP);

24 UNHCR supported a [classic jazz music concert by the string chamber orchestra ARKO](#) at the Museum of Macedonian Struggle to raise solidarity with Syrian and other refugees;

25 UNHCR started a participatory assessment with persons of concern to initiate dialogue with asylum seekers and refugees to shape future interventions;

29 Launch of the UN Women project Transformative financing for gender equality towards a more transparent, inclusive and accountable governance in the Western Balkans, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

OCTOBER

7 FAO will present its holistic COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme and its region-tailored actions at a virtual Regional Dialogue for Europe and Central Asia.

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COVID-19 RESPONSE CRF, impact assessments, ongoing response

COVID-19 Response Framework (CRF)

The [North Macedonia CRF](#) is supported by a number of thematic impact assessments and analyses that UN continues to undertake to assist with evidence-based policy interventions focused on the needs of the most vulnerable groups. In addition, a fully elaborated and costed policy proposals for priority interventions suggested in the CRF, aimed to inform the country's budgetary process, will be made available in October.

Impact assessments and analyses

[International Labour Organization's \(ILO\)](#), recently published a [legal analysis of North Macedonia's regulative framework for implementation of 'telework'](#), broadly defined as 'use of information and communication devices (ICT) to perform work from outside the employer's premises'. The analysis explains the legal status and existing dilemmas, draws conclusions and provides recommendations on the way forward.

The existing legal framework regulates the work outside of business premises and covers only the 'traditional work from home' regulated in the Law on Labour Relations. ILO has considered measures and conclusions of the technical Government during the state of emergency earlier in 2020, as well as general collective agreements (GCA) for the private and public sector in North Macedonia to address three key dilemmas:

- the timing and flexibility between the contracting parties in agreeing the 'telework' models;
- the legal basis for making change in work organization; and
- the legal consequences for the employees if refusing to work from other than office premises.

The analysis led to four key conclusions:

- (I) The labour legislation and collective agreements in North Macedonia do not regulate 'telework';
- (II) There are no legal obstacles for introduction of 'telework' as a form of work arrangement;
- (III) Under normal conditions and circumstances, 'telework' may be introduced only with an annex to the employment contract based on mutual consent between the employer and the employee;
- (IV) In case of extraordinary and exceptional circumstances, such as natural and other disasters, the legal framework provides for temporary introduction of telework by unilateral decision of the employer.

On a **short-term basis** it is recommended that 'telework' is regulated as an annex to an employment contract (or exceptionally, as unilateral employer's decision for temporary remote work assignment) which will include provisions on applying ICT's, organizing and limiting working hours and breaks; ensuring occupational safety and health standards, as well as data and privacy protection of both parties. This should be also supported with amendments to a GCA at company level, aligned with European Framework Agreement on Telework, and "telework" adjusted internal acts (rulebooks, decisions).

On a **medium-term basis**, the Government should implement the European Framework Agreement on Telework through GCAs in the public and private sectors and by amending the labour legislation accordingly.

Direct response support (September)

UN continues to provide direct support for COVID-19 response in North Macedonia at various levels. Here are just some examples from September:

The [United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\)](#), in cooperation with the youth network Y-PEER, launched a series of workshops, discussions and campaigns as part of the youth response to COVID-19, assisting young people, especially those from vulnerable groups. Some of the key themes discussed included youth and mental health, sexual and reproductive health services and pregnancy among

Roma girls, domestic violence among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) youth, intercultural dialogue and employability skills.

In cooperation with the Ministries of Labour and Social Policy, Health and Interior, and supported by the British Embassy in Skopje, UNFPA also held several online workshops and trainings as part of the multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence and ensuring safe spaces for gender-based violence survivors during COVID-19 and beyond.

[UN Women](#), the local branch of Wikipedia – Shared Knowledge and the Swedish Embassy in Skopje are organizing the third edition of the WikiGap initiative, starting on 30 September and followed by a competition week for editing articles on Wikipedia (1-7 October). The online WikiGap event ([registration](#)) aims to increase the representation of women on the online encyclopaedia, where currently some 90% of content is created by men. Volunteers create new texts or translate existing texts in Macedonian, profiling women from North Macedonia and worldwide who have made and are making a significant contribution in different fields in medicine, science and research and give recognition to their hard work in the fight against COVID-19.

The [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#) is prioritizing theory of change in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) within its comparative sub-regional analysis of SDG 4 (Quality Education)-related interdisciplinary issues. A series of similar comparative have been launched: to revive synergies for youth and their intersection with education, gender and decent jobs (e.g. the pathways of girls and young women from education to work before and in the context of COVID-19); and on mainstreaming the implementation of education for sustainable development (SDG-4.7) in SEE before and during COVID-19. The studies will fill in the need for accurate disaggregated data and lay foundation future capacity-development activities.

The [United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#) supported responsible ministries in both safety and pedagogical aspects needed for the reopening of schools and kindergartens, including in the process of development of the respective protocols. UNICEF Volunteer Young Reporters are also joining efforts to rethink education in light of announcements to continue online learning for students in grades above grade three, working on content that captures the views of youth about building education back better and the important role of teachers.

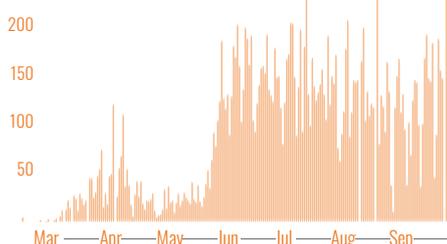
See the [UN COVID-19 tracker](#) for a complete list of UN activities in response to COVID-19 in North Macedonia.

LATEST EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DATA (30 Sep 2020)

17,786 CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES
8,537 CONFIRMED CASES PER 1,000,000 PEOPLE

737 COVID-19-RELATED FATALITIES
354 FATALITIES PER 1,000,000 PEOPLE

Daily new cases reported



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

Leaving no one behind

Leaving no one behind (LNOB) is a principle that places people in the centre of development efforts and is core to UN work across the globe and in North Macedonia. Thus, one of the first steps in designing UN support to the country is to identify the most vulnerable groups and drivers of their exclusion – moving beyond income and averages, and looking into all types of inequalities, which are often multiple and intersecting, is central to such approach.

The Common Country Analysis (CCA), conducted in North Macedonia during the first half of 2020, serves as a basis for its five-year strategic document, the 2021-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF). CCA provides an independent analysis of country political, socio-economic and environmental context, examining the progress, gaps and opportunities vis-à-vis commitments to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including a comprehensive and detailed LNOB analysis.

North Macedonia context

North Macedonia is an upper-middle income country with high Human Development Index; it made significant gains in reducing poverty and inequality before COVID-19. But several population groups continue to be excluded and face discrimination due to interlinked drivers of inequalities such as insufficient structure and performance of the economy, weak institutions and ineffective rule of law that has driven down public confidence.

Other drivers include limited social infrastructure and limited quality basic services and increased vulnerability to natural hazards that affects the vulnerable groups disproportionately. This is further reinforced by social prejudices and negative stereotypes that at times even influence policy making.

Based on five grounds of exclusion – sex, age, or disability; geographical isolation; vulnerability to shocks; governance impact; and socio-economic status – CCA identified nine groups that have been left behind or that are at risk of being left behind in North Macedonia:

- (I) youth not in education, employment or training (NEET);
- (II) women and girls, especially those from ethnic minorities and rural areas;
- (III) Roma community;
- (IV) children, especially those from certain ethnic communities;
- (V) people with disabilities;
- (VI) refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and

stateless;

- (VII) LGBTI persons;
- (VIII) people in rural areas and small farmers;
- (IX) older persons.

Government obligation to protect

Most of the vulnerable and marginalized people and groups are not fully aware of their fundamental rights and they are by far less capable of seeking legal and other remedies for human rights violations. At the same time the capacity of organizations that represent them, except for trade unions, is generally weak and they lack resources. In this context, the Government has an obligation to proactively empower and enable them to exercise and claim their rights.

The starting point in these efforts is to recognize the problem, which can only be done if disaggregated statistical data is collected and published. This may not fully address the problem, but it adds to its understanding and quantification. Next, it is key to understand the drivers and root causes of inequality to be able to design responsive policies that will both address these factors and ameliorate their effects. It is key to challenge the prejudices and stereotypes in the society through persistent awareness building and fight against disinformation, as well as introducing human rights-based education early on.

The Government is obliged to establish and strengthen all channels and mechanisms that can assist the vulnerable people in exercising their rights. The legal and institutional framework for free legal aid, which remains fragmented and not fully functional in North Macedonia, can be strengthened in cooperation with the civil society and should be considered among top priorities. The national human rights accountability mechanisms that include the judiciary, the Ombudsman, Commission for Protection against Discrimination, Parliamentary Standing Human Rights Committee and the Government's 'Inter-Sectorial Body on Human Rights' need to be strengthened.

As a member of the UN and the Council of Europe and the party to multiple international human rights conventions, North Macedonia needs to remain responsive and actively engaged in the work of the international human rights accountability mechanisms and institutions such as the Human Rights Council and other treaty bodies, and regional courts with jurisdiction such as the European Court of Human Rights.

The role of UN in 2021-2025

The 2021-2025 SDCF is a key strategic document guiding the work of the UN System in North Macedonia, developed in close partnership with

the Government of North Macedonia and other stakeholders.

SDCF has identified **three strategic priorities** that will guide the work of UN in North Macedonia over the next five years, with the overall objective to accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the country:

- (I) sustained and inclusive economic and social development;
- (II) climate action, natural resources and disaster risk management; and
- (III) transparent and accountable democratic governance.

UN will continue to support joint values and its engagement in the country will remain guided by the overarching LNOB principle; by human rights-based approach; gender equality and women's empowerment; resilience; sustainability and accountability.

The most vulnerable groups will remain at the forefront of UN response that will be based on evidence and shared vision of prosperous, inclusive and resilient North Macedonia by 2030.

2021-2025 SDCF KEY UPCOMING MILESTONES

- **October 2020** Government endorsement
- **2nd half October 2020** Signing (UN, Government)
- **October-December 2020** Finalization of supporting SDCF documents (funding framework, communications and advocacy, data and business operations strategy)
- **November 2020** Signing (UN, Government)
- **January 2021** Implementation commences
- **March 2021** Resource mobilization strategy finalized

IN FOCUS Disability inclusion: turning challenges into opportunities

Normative progress

Disability inclusive development in North Macedonia has gained traction with the ratification of the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) in 2011 that brought a shift from medical and charitable approaches to rights-based approach to disability. The country has made important strides in ensuring that persons with disabilities enjoy the same standards of equality, rights and dignity as every member of society. The number of laws, policies, and programs that target disability has increased. Disability has been included as a specific ground for discrimination, along other multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Institutional set-up and capacities have been strengthened, and [national mechanisms for CRPD implementation and monitoring](#) were established. Equality and inclusion of all are [high on the new Government's agenda](#).

UN work on disability inclusion

The UN has been supporting the development and implementation of disability inclusive policies, laws and programs in several areas. Through a multi-agency and cross-sectoral approach, the UN helped introduce substantive measures to improve access to key services, like [community based services](#), [accessible and inclusive education](#), [quality health care](#), [sexual and reproductive health](#) and [gender-based violence services](#), accessible transportation and [job market](#).

The [UN joint programme 'Working bottom up – building a local model for deinstitutionalization'](#) has been instrumental in giving effect to the [National Deinstitutionalization Strategy](#) that made a remarkable footprint – no child in institution. All 180 children, placed in different types of institutions, of which 20 with disabilities, now live in foster families or in small groups homes. Of 482 adults with disabilities that lived in institutions for prolonged time, 319 live independently today, some with support services.

The progress with deinstitutionalization revealed the complexity, gaps and opportunities for scaling up inclusive development. Persons with disabilities have remained largely invisible in the mainstream of society and are unable to enjoy the full range of rights. They continue to face multiple barriers in participation and experience adverse socioeconomic and health



Persons with disabilities benefiting from the UN joint programme "Working bottom up - building a local model for deinstitutionalization" in Strumica, North Macedonia

outcomes, lower levels of employment and higher poverty rates. Society attitude to impairment is slowly changing, but there is still evidence of discrimination, stigma and exclusion. Women and girls with disability often suffer violence, abuse or exploitation.

Challenges

There are significant challenges to realize SDGs by, for and with persons with disabilities in North Macedonia. To make a real shift, the social and human rights approach to disability inclusion needs to be systematically embraced. This calls for both disability-specific and disability-mainstreamed interventions by a broad partnership of state, non-state and international stakeholders.

It is essential to put in place coherent and evidence-based policies and legislation with clear benchmarks and budgetary allocations, compliant with international norms and accessible in different formats. The census announced for 2021 should close the data gap. Multiple actions at national and community level should continue to [empower persons with disabilities](#) to claim their rights and live independently, and their organizations to advocate for and shape decisions affecting them. They should actively participate in all consultative mechanisms for policy making like [regulatory impact assessment](#), monitoring, oversight, etc. Their participation in [political and public life](#) – also as holders of public offices – and in international cooperation should be effective.

The importance of accessibility, information and communication is central. The insufficient information in all accessible formats needs to be addressed with urgency. In the digital era, information and communication technologies and assistive technology play an important role in empowering and enabling participation, and [young people are our agents of change](#). Accessibility regulations and [reasonable accommodation standards](#), developed with organizations of persons with disabilities, have to be fully implemented in public and private sector, and universal design of services promoted.

The Government remains committed to complete the deinstitutionalization process, scale up [support services](#) for independent living, [involving also peers](#), and sustain the [process of inclusive education](#) that is age-, disability-, gender and cultural-sensitive, at all levels. Another challenge ahead is to effectively implement the new [anti-discrimination legislations](#) to prevent and counter [prevalence of discrimination against person with disabilities and ensure their substantive equality](#). An overwhelming 99.5% of persons with disabilities in North Macedonia perceive themselves as not being equal and being left behind. The situation of persons with intellectual disabilities, psychosocial disabilities and mental illness and their [right to legal capacity, access to justice and procedural accommodation](#), and addressing vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities require heightened action.

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The latest version of the Sustainable Development Bulletin is available on UN North Macedonia website. For additional information, please contact rco-northmacedonia@un.org.

Produced by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in North Macedonia | 30 September 2020.

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The United Nations is marking its 75th anniversary at a time of great challenge, the worst global health crisis in its history. Through the largest global discussion, we aim to define global priorities and the way forward. HAVE YOUR SAY AND JOIN THE CONVERSATION. TAKE THE SURVEY!

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