



# FEB 2021



## HIGHLIGHTS

- RC editorial:** Of digitalisation [page 1](#)
- COVID-19** response and other UN Activities [page 2](#)
- UN SDCF Funding Framework** [page 3](#)
- In focus:** COVID-19 vaccination series: addressing vaccination hesitancy [page 4](#)

## KEY DATES

### JAN - FEB

- 26** - UNODC held a [meeting](#) with the new Director of Customs Administration and a meeting with the Director of Bureau for Public Security of North Macedonia following the signing of the Letter of Agreement establishing cooperation on border control in the country within the EU-UNODC joint action, funded by the European Union.
- 28-11** - UNHCR North Macedonia held 3 capacity building sessions to support the implementation of the Communication Strategy for Social Change, delivered by professors from the University of Kentucky. They were attended by communication specialists from UN and other organizations and institutions, as well as other UNHCR and partner staff.

### FEBRUARY

- 17-19** - A Round Table with Border Police and judiciary was organized in Gevgelija on Access to asylum, the principle of non-penalization and detention of asylum seekers, as a follow up to the event organized by UNHCR and the Border Police in September 2020.
- 18-19** - 13 CSO members of the Gender Equality Platform attended a training on monitoring the National Action Plan 2018-2023 for implementation of the Istanbul Convention, organized by the Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, within the UN Women/EU regional EVAW programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds".
- 24** - Online workshop on the new Law on Balanced Regional Development and the Programme on Sustainable Local Development and Decentralization for 2021-2023 (part of the UNDP-MLSP event "Innovative Solutions for Better Access to Local Services").

## EDITORIAL by the UN Resident Coordinator

As the tragic loss of lives and the wide-reaching negative health and socio-economic impact of COVID-19 remain difficult to fully comprehend, the opportunities for better recovery have been emerging. One opportunity is the potential of digital transformation for the economy and the society, which will require investments to benefit all segments of society and in particular those that tend to be left behind.

Digital tools – work from home modalities, online procurement of services and goods, online public services etc. – were key for minimising the risk of COVID-19 spread. If some businesses had difficulties at the beginning of the pandemic due to decreased foot traffic, they may be thriving now because of their ability to adjust and switch operations online, swiftly and efficiently. Some, however, continue to struggle due to a lag in their digital transformation.

Digitalisation is key for building back better as it offers options and contributes to process efficiencies, improves accessibility – especially for public services – and lowers costs in the mid- and long-run.

North Macedonia has recorded significant progress in this respect and is increasingly reaping the benefits of the investments made and institutional adjustments, including the establishment of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Council, the Open Data Strategy, the investments in enhancing digital skills, inclusion of ICT training in all education modalities etc.

But there are some challenges that require enhanced efforts:

1. Inequalities persist, and it is our joint duty to address them and to devote increased efforts to fully integrate every member of our society in the digital world. Addressing inequalities is key for fully attaining the digitalisation potential for sustainable development. For example, access to online education is still an issue for some children. Similar inequalities

persist with the ability to access health services.

2. Broadband accessibility and adequate ICT infrastructure are prerequisites to ensure digitalisation of processes and services in all sectors of the society. For instance, in rural areas, digital solutions can be used in agricultural processes, but in North Macedonia there are still geographic areas which do not have adequate access to the ICT infrastructure.

3. Online security and cybersecurity – we need to create a safe environment for everyone to thrive. From online bullying to protection of vital data and systems, security is crucial for increased and improved utilisation of digital tools and services.

4. The role of the education system in the digitalisation process: today's students need to be prepared for tomorrow's world. To do that, we must ensure that ICT infrastructure is available to everyone and that they have the proper skills to use them to their own benefit. Some 80% of households in North Macedonia have access to Internet, but this still leaves one-fifth of families and their children behind. The Government has made important steps by increasing inclusion of ICT training in all segments of the education, but we need to make sure that the development of digital skills is readily available and prioritized, for everyone.

By addressing these challenges, we will create the conditions for the digitalisation to catalyse system transformation and accelerate reforms, ultimately leading to better life for all.



**Rossana Dudziak**  
UN Resident Coordinator in North Macedonia

# COVID-19 RESPONSE AND OTHER 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.

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** supported an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the associated response measures on local self-government units' (LSGU) financing. The analysis shows that the situation at the local level has significantly deteriorated in the second quarter of 2020 when revenue growth, balanced against the same period in 2019, reached only 1.8%, compared to 11.8% in the first quarter. In contrast, in the same period, the urban municipalities saw a decline of 2.2% in revenues due to the more pronounced impact of COVID-19 response in urban areas.

This is a result of significant decrease of taxes collected at municipal level, predominantly the property tax, which fell by 19.14% in second quarter. The only revenue that continuously increased and counterbalanced the overall decline were the transfers from the central Government, with 27.48% rise in the first quarter and 20.25% rise in the second quarter in 2020 when compared to 2019. However, these targeted block transfers lack flexibility and undermine the level of fiscal decentralization, making municipalities continuously dependent on the central government and budget.

At the same time, municipal expenditures on average declined by 17.8%, with 28% decline in urban, compared to almost flat growth in the first quarter, suggesting that consolidation policies initiated by the municipalities have had a strong impact on the volume of services provided. One of the few categories of municipal expenditures that significantly increased were the public subsidies.

One of the key recommendations based on this research is ensuring advanced fiscal decentralization, by (1) securing sufficient funding for local competencies by reforming the system of fiscal transfers, (2) improving the public finance management (PFM) and administrative capacity at the local level, (3) increasing the fiscal transparency and

accountability, and (4) reinforcing the new fiscal rules with focus on fiscal discipline and fiscal sustainability in municipalities during economic/ social downturns.

The horizontal and vertical coordination and communication at municipal level, through the role of municipal crisis management bodies, was efficient, effective and transparent. It was however slightly less successful in sharing best practices and ensuring participation of local institutions such as schools, kindergartens, day-centres and culture institutions. The shortcomings of the crisis management system are mainly due to the legal gaps for establishment and functioning of municipal headquarters, absence of a resilient recovery framework from natural and human-made disasters, as well as the occasional overlap of competencies between the crisis management and protection and rescue systems.

In terms of municipal services, the communal services remained uninterrupted and volunteers managed to ensure excellent results by distribution of humanitarian packages, while the protocols for the work in nurseries, kindergartens and day centres were challenging. Municipalities are generally not involved in addressing increased incidences of domestic violence, leaving the issue to police stations and inter-municipal centres for social work. In the area of education, the municipalities followed state regulations for distant learning, with lack of internet, equipment and digital skills being the the key challenges for students, parents and teachers.

The full analysis and consequent recommendations for effective mitigation of the crisis impact at municipal level can be found [here](#).

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

Twenty-seven journalists from national and local news media attended three one-day trainings and strengthened their capacities on "Gender sensitive reporting and the role of journalists in eliminating gender-based violence." The training was organized by a **UN Women** partner organization, the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, as part of the regional UN Women-EU ending violence against women programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds".

UN Women continued the partnership with the Embassy of France in North Macedonia and discussed joint activities in the light of the Generation Equality Forum, a global gathering for gender equality, convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France (Mexico City, 29–31 March 2021). France and North Macedonia are part of the same Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

**UNDP** opened the ICan youth resource centre in Gostivar, established to encourage youth to engage in innovation and entrepreneurship, support ideas for

digitalization and greening, help young people develop the skills they need for the job market and to help them build a career in their community. The centre is managed by the South East European (SEE) University in partnership with the Municipality of Gostivar; the UNDP project is implemented with the support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The Steering Committee of the Joint Project "Evidence-based migration policy planning and discourse in North Macedonia", implemented by the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, **UN Population Fund (UNFPA)**, and the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** together with national partners, was held on 10 February 2021. During his opening remarks the representative of the Ministry of Interior emphasized that migration flows require a comprehensive approach to migration policymaking and that the lack of data is one of the main challenges preventing evidence-based action. He welcomed the project that will assist to overcoming challenges and support the development of an evidence-based migration policy. The UN Resident Coordinator welcomed the cooperation with the Government and reiterated that the project will support the development of an anticipatory evidence-based migration policy by strengthening the institutional capacities, creating a Migration Index, Migration Profile and introducing the migration module in the labour force survey and through the usage of an innovative data collection and analysis tools.

Humanity's accelerating progress over the past two decades has brought with it an increase in the speed, dynamics, and complexity of today's development challenges, resulting in a gap between existing development practice and the pace of change. In 2019, **UNDP** decided to bridge this gap by creating 60 Accelerator Labs at once. One year later, and thanks to the support of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany, the Qatar Fund for Development and UNDP Core partners, UNDP is opening 32 new Accelerator Labs. The largest and fastest learning network on development challenges now covers 116 countries. One of the latest additions to the network is the Accelerator Lab at UNDP's office in Skopje, North Macedonia. The new Accelerator Lab team will support UNDP's efforts to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals by creating actionable intelligence, mapping solutions, and developing a portfolio of experiments that will help tackle the country's development challenges in new and creative ways. In 2021, the North Macedonia UNDP Accelerator Lab will focus on initiatives designed to catalyse system transformation and accelerate reforms in the public sector advancing good governance practices based on a "whole of society" approach. The Lab will also be supporting the country to tackle the issue of the future of jobs and working with the City of Skopje, the country's capital, to develop a portfolio of interventions to address its core development challenges.

### LATEST EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DATA (8 Mar 2021)

106,832	CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES	3,185	COVID-19 RELATED FATALITIES
5,127	CONFIRMED CASES PER 100,000 PEOPLE	152	FATALITIES PER 100,000 PEOPLE

Daily new cases reported



For latest data see [covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/mk](https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/mk)

# SDCF 2021-2025 Resource availability and Funding Framework

## What is SDCF Funding Framework?

North Macedonia 2021-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (SDCF) is the key strategic document guiding the work of the UN System in the country. It is accompanied by the SDCF Funding Framework that outlines the overall cost of achieving the SDCF results as well as a snapshot of the SDCF funding situation. The Funding Framework provides detailed breakdowns per year, per outcome and output, per source of funding and funding modality, and per availability of funding.

The Funding Framework's main aim is to increase the transparency on financial information about the work of the UN in the country as well as serve as a tool for financial planning, management and resource mobilization. As a standardised single reference and overview of the SDCF funding situation, it also aims to provide a basis for dialogue on these issues between UN, governments and other development partners and as a frame to increasing coherence of the UN system and reduced overlap in mobilizing and managing resources. It also supports the UN with the coordinated and joint approach to mobilize resources and identify available instruments, by determining and monitoring the funding gap.

The North Macedonia Funding Framework was developed between November 2020 and February 2021 and was recently adopted by the Government-UN Joint Steering Committee. The cost estimates in the Funding Framework largely cover the five-year SDCF period, based on the financial data and estimates from all 18 UN entities, signatories of the SDCF.

## 2021-2025 overall resource availability

The estimated total funding requirement for SDCF achievement over five years is **\$178.2 million**, with a balanced mix of available and to-be-mobilized funds. For the full five years, 36% of required funding is available and 64% still needs to be mobilised. Looking at the first year of SDCF implementation (2021), most funding is already available, with only 28% or 13.8 million still needs to be mobilised.

## Funding requirements per SDCF Outcome

Among the four SDCF Outcomes, **Healthy Environment (3) is the most resource intensive**, with about half (46% or \$83.8 million) of the overall funding required to achieve this outcome, followed by Good Governance (4), requiring about 24% (or \$43.6 million) of the overall funding, and Inclusive Prosperity (1) and Quality Services for All (3) requiring about 14% of the overall requirement each (or \$25.5 million and \$25.2 million, respectively). This is in line with the more resource-intensive nature of activities needed to address environmental challenges, such as

complex dangerous chemicals clean ups, significant infrastructure investments in flood management, sizable green finance instruments, etc. In terms of funding status, funding for Outcome 3 largely remains to be mobilized (69%), with a lower but still significant share of funding to be mobilized for Outcomes 1, 2 and 4 with 65%, 59% and 56%, respectively.

## Requirements per UN entity

Size of entity financial requirements differ significantly, in line with their diverse activities and mandates. **UNDP, UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)**–envisaged activities require funding over \$10 million per entity. **UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UN Environment (UNEP), UNHCR, IOM, World Health Organization (WHO), UN WOMEN and International Labour Organization (ILO)** forecast between \$5 and \$10 million of funding required. **UNFPA, UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UN HABITAT, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the Office of The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** forecast \$5 million or less required.

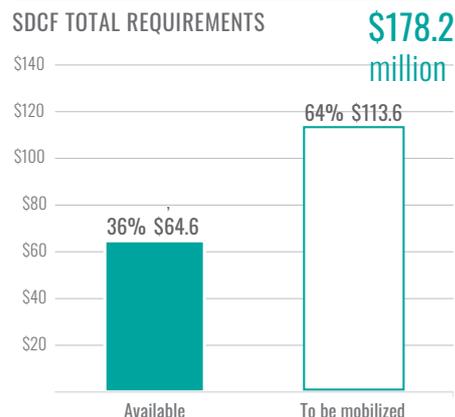
This is reflective of the diverse types and modalities of support provided by various entities, with most of them providing support through 'soft measures' i.e. policy advice, advocacy and capacity building, and fewer entities combining 'soft measures' with more resource intense investments and implementation.

## Modality of funding

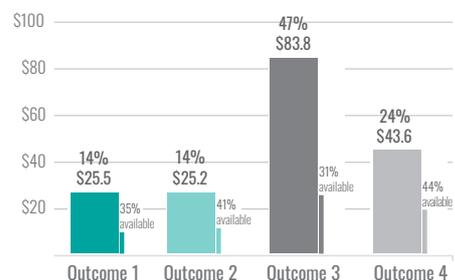
Options for moving towards more non-earmarked or pooled funding could be considered, to improve the funding modality mix. Among currently available funding, the funding modality mix is skewed towards project-based funding (\$34.9 million), followed by core (\$14.5 million) and pooled and vertical funding (\$10.9 million). The shares from other funding modalities are significantly smaller (government funding, \$2.9 million; thematic funds, \$1.4 million) or negligible (private sector funding, \$0.02 million). The high reliance on project-specific funding signals a suboptimal funding modality mix, containing a lot of tightly earmarked aid, which increases transaction cost and reduces the potential for UN team to provide broader and more coherent policy support to the government.

In line with its commitments to transparency and accountability, UN will regularly update the Funding Framework data during the SDCF implementation period. A more detailed information can be found at the UN North Macedonia website at <https://northmacedonia.un.org/>.

## 2021-2025 SDCF RESOURCE AVAILABILITY



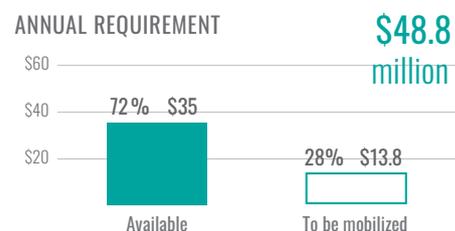
## REQUIREMENTS PER OUTCOME



## REQUIREMENTS PER ENTITY in US\$ million



## 2021 RESOURCE AVAILABILITY



# IN FOCUS Preparing for COVID-19 vaccine

North Macedonia launched the first phase of COVID-19 vaccination on 17 February 2021 in accordance with its national vaccination deployment plan, which prioritises vaccination for people whose occupation or health makes them particularly at risk of contracting COVID-19.

Administration of the vaccine depends on the epidemiological situation, COVID-19 vaccines availability and global production capacity of the manufacturers. The vaccination of frontline health workers is now underway and will be followed by older people as first priority groups.

Not everyone can be vaccinated at once as securing sufficient vaccines is difficult due to production and supply shortages. **Strategic prioritization is crucial to make sure that the first deliveries of vaccine doses have the greatest possible impact on reducing severe disease and deaths.** This means prioritizing the individuals most at risk, such as health care workers who treat COVID-19 patients, and older adults, who are at higher risk of severe disease outcomes.

As the population groups at high risk are prioritized first many will need to wait to receive their COVID-19 jab.

The national vaccination deployment plan will continue to evolve in the coming weeks and months as more and different COVID-19 vaccines become available in the country. The ultimate aim is to cover all people above older than 18 years.

It will take time to vaccinate everyone against COVID-19, in the meantime, we must continue to follow the tried and tested measures that keep everyone safe: physical distancing, proper mask use and hand hygiene.

The hopeful launch of vaccination raises new questions, some of which are addressed below.

## Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

To be approved for use, COVID-19 vaccines must meet the highest safety and efficacy standards. The global community has come together in a remarkable way, through unprecedented financial investments and scientific collaborations, to develop COVID-19 vaccines in record time, and more are still underway. Speeding up the process has not made the systems for testing, assessing results and approving a vaccine any less rigorous. WHO is carefully monitoring the rollout of all COVID-19 vaccines, including monitoring of safety events.

## Can I return to life as normal after I have been vaccinated?

A key development in the pandemic response is the availability of safe and effective vaccines. The potential impact of vaccines to help us end this pandemic will take time and can only be realized if



Vaccine preparation. Photo credit @UNICEF/2020/Georgiev

the vast majority of people join the effort and are vaccinated. Getting back to normal will depend on our ability not to eliminate the disease in some areas, but to suppress transmission across all of our borders. We are only safe when everyone is safe.

COVID-19 vaccines significantly improve the measures we already have to fight this disease but they are, on their own, not enough to suppress transmission. Therefore they will not replace the use of masks, distancing and hand hygiene in the immediate future. The vaccination progresses, we must not let our guard down as that could open the door for wider community spread of the virus.

## COVID-19 myths versus science

There is a lot of misinformation and myths about COVID-19 virus and vaccines circulating on the Internet and through social media. Misinformation is, in fact, one of the biggest challenges in fighting COVID-19.

That is why it is important get your information and advice from trusted sources. One such source is [HealthBuddy+](#), a tool developed by UNICEF and WHO and available in Macedonian and Albanian languages thanks to financial support from the United States Agency for International Development. It gives access to up-to-date and evidence-based information on COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines. Download the app on [Apple](#) and [Google Play](#) to interact with the chatbot, report rumours, and participate in survey polls - all at your fingertips.

The WHO Collaborating Centre for Vaccine Safety recently published a COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination explained webpage providing videos and podcasts for health workers and the public to address common questions about COVID-19 vaccines (available [here](#)).

## QUICK LINKS



## COVID-19 vaccine myths vs science

“Science in 5” is a video and podcast series reflecting WHO’s conversations in science. WHO experts explain the science related to COVID-19 in each 5-minute episode. ([available here](#))

Check [HERE](#) WHO’s Chief Scientist explaining COVID-19 vaccine related questions in Science of 12 February 2021.

The latest version of the Sustainable Development Bulletin is available on UN North Macedonia website. For additional information, please contact [rc-northmacedonia@un.org](mailto:rc-northmacedonia@un.org). Produced by the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office in North Macedonia | 8 March 2021

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