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EDITORIAL by the UN Resident Coordinator

Elections mark times of new promises. Political parties in power summarize their successes, while their opponents focus on the weaknesses. And they all make promises - in the next period, if given a chance, they will do better and more for the citizens.

Elections are also an opportunity for reflection. Ahead of local elections in particular, the citizens think of their community's benefits and measure promises and results against their everyday needs. Am I safe in my neighbourhood? Is it too loud? Is my waste collected timely? Do I have a park nearby? Are the violations sanctioned equally? Where can I safely ride my bike?

Listening to the new promises, citizens and communities reflect upon their experience with past governments and make their choices based on two key questions: What is in it for me? Can I trust any of the candidates to deliver? Distrust, resulting in a decision not to vote is the worst possible outcome. The more the citizens abstain, the less likely local authorities are to represent their needs and have their accountability compromised. Responsibility is thus shared: citizens should firmly and vocally stand for their rights and choices; and politicians should listen, deliver, and inform.

North Macedonia has signed the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in 2015 and reaffirmed commitment to its implementation many times since. But Agenda 2030 is primarily a commitment towards the people, and it can only be fostered if implemented at local level. Local development is the venue where Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) become personal and practical. For example, among other things, SDG 3 (Health) translates into keeping community levels of pollution and noise within limits, SDG 5 (Gender equality) means there is a fully functional kindergarten nearby so parents can return to work earlier; SDG 11 (Sustainable cities) means safe and fast commuting to work, SDG 16 (Good governance) translates into effective protection from fires/floods/earthquakes.

Sustainable development is not a simple sum of 17 SDGs, but a complete puzzle and a tool that guides the development path of the country, bottom-up. The

factors that mostly influence sustainable development at local level are institutional capacity and an environment that enables active engagement of community networks and champions from the public and private sector, and civil society.



Hence elections also present an opportunity, a unique chance to build partnership between the local authorities and the citizens to jointly pursue sustainable goals that we all share. After a few years in the country, it is clear that the needs of people in North Macedonia are no different than anywhere in the world – they want law and order and they want safe, clean, and green environment. It seems simple, but it requires a wide and integrated approach, strong partnerships and full transparency.

So use this chance – vote for sustainable development! Start by translating sustainable development goals into party manifestos, choose those who you think will deliver the best and help them to do it. As always, the UN family stands firmly at your side to support you in this process.

Rossana Dudziak
UN Resident Coordinator in North Macedonia

KEY DATES

AUGUST

- 12 International Youth Day was marked by several UN agencies.
- 19 World Humanitarian Day was celebrated under the theme #TheHumanRace and focusing on climate action.
- 23-26 Center for Refugee Law and Migration at the Iustinianus Primus Law Faculty, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, in partnership with the UNHCR Representation in North Macedonia, and in collaboration with the International Institute of Humanitarian Law – Sanremo, Italy, will be hosting the second edition of the [Summer School on Refugees and Migration](#)

SEPTEMBER

- 7 UNHCR held an online training on Integration and Socio-Economic inclusion for key partners working on local integration.

COVID-19 RESPONSE AND OTHER UN ACTIVITIES

UN entities continue to support interventions for effective recovery from COVID-19 on issues within their respective fields of expertise.

UNICEF continues to advocate that [reopening schools cannot wait](#) and is working with partners to ensure all children can go back to classrooms safely from the beginning and throughout the school year. North Macedonia recorded the longest school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, with students enrolled in online learning for a total of 54 weeks.

In preparations for schools reopening, fifteen schools identified by Institute for Public Health and State Education Inspectorate received mobile handwashing stations to improve their capacities for water, sanitation and hygiene, donated by UNICEF and USAID.

UNICEF supported the creation of the first national platform for digital interactive textbooks. Titled E-Library, this platform is part of the continuous expansion and upgrade of the Eduino initiative. E-Library currently offers digital interactive textbooks for 4th grade students in 5 local languages. The Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for the Development of Education are the owners of the platform and hold the rights to all textbooks currently available. The long-term vision is for E-Library to become a central hub for all digital teaching material including textbooks, workbooks, audio narrations, etc. and have them all available to students free of charge. The online application of the platform is supplemented with an Android and Windows applications which allow students to access the digital interactive textbooks even in communities with low connectivity. The Ministry has further supported this initiative by procuring 30,000 Android tablets for children without a computer and/or internet connection at home.

WHO North Macedonia started with implementation of community-based outreach activities for raising awareness for COVID-19 vaccination and protective measures targeting health care workers, the elderly and Roma population. Activities to promote safe behaviours were particularly focused on the following areas: travel and tourism, life outdoors (social gatherings, festivals, weddings) and schools reopening. Dr Jihane Tawilah, WHO Representative to North Macedonia delivered keynote speech at the "Post-Pandemic Sustainability in Europe" Sixteenth Annual International Conference on European Integration - AICEI2021 held virtually on 16 September 2021, organized by the University American College Skopje. Dr Tawilah highlighted the importance of building back better and placing health at the heart of society.

Within the **UN Women** gender-responsive budgeting project, Finance Think, produced 5 gender budget assessments that give an overview on the gender-responsive initiatives undertaken by the Municipalities of Gyorche Petrov, Kochani, Strumica, Sveti Nikole and Veles in mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on women and men. The [assessments](#) include policy and budget recommendations to municipalities in engendering local programmes and budgets to better respond to the COVID-19 post-emergency needs.

OTHER UN ACTIVITIES

United Nations Population Fund – UNFPA started with the implementation of the project "Prevention and Protection against Gender Based Violence in North Macedonia", funded by the British Embassy in Skopje. The project will support the Government of North Macedonia to embed and implement state-wide integrated policies on gender-based violence

(GBV), in line with the principles of the Istanbul Convention (IC). It will support implementation of the IC through a robust legal and policy framework that is multi-sectoral and with strengthened data which addresses perpetrator engagement and leverages the media, so that women and girls are free from all forms of violence and the threat of such violence.

UNFPA continues to support national efforts in the field of improving maternal and new-born health outcomes. In close cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Safe Motherhood Committee, as envisaged within the 2020

arts at the "Zdravo Mladi" music festival.

UNICEF, supports development of a National Strategy on Justice for Children in the Republic of North Macedonia [2022-2026] and Action Plan [2022-2023]. The Strategy is being developed in close collaboration with the State Council for Prevention of Child Delinquency, with support from international expert, through series of workshops and consultation, and will be adopted by end of 2021. Activities are part of the EU funded and UNICEF co-funded project "Justice for Children – EU for juvenile and child-friendly justice". The



ECO programme on CINEDAYS film festival was organised to promote activities on the importance of protecting our environment

National Perinatal Care Master Plan and the accompanying Implementation Plan, UNFPA organized the first round of trainings for gynecologists/obstetricians and midwives in the field of Effective Perinatal Care, for Level 1 facilities. 35 participants from the general hospitals in Gostivar, Prilep, Struga, Ohrid and Kichevo attended the trainings delivered by certified trainers from the University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics, also trained by UNFPA.

In the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) Region, Cervical Cancer is one of the leading causes of mortality among women of reproductive age. In response, and as part of a regional UNFPA intervention in EECA, UNFPA North Macedonia conducted a national assessment of the country's capacities and readiness to implement WHO Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer released in 2020. Based on the assessment, the country's priorities will be identified in the coming period, as well as the future support from UNFPA North Macedonia in this field.

UNICEF launched [U-Report](#) as a platform to empower youth to share their opinion on matters they care about and become positive agents of change in their communities. The report was launched at a consultation event in the city park in Skopje, together with youth, decision-makers, international organizations and experts.

At an online [design thinking workshop](#) five teams of 13-19-year-old young people were granted 120,000 denars each to realize their innovative solution for reducing the harmful effects of climate change and protecting the environment.

For the first time in the 20 years of CINEDAYS film festival, UNICEF and partners together with the Youth Cultural Center designed an [ECO programme](#) to promote activities on the importance of protecting the natural environment and responding to climate change. This included screening of "I am Greta" documentary film at Makedox film festival, as well as raising environmental awareness among youth via music and

aim is to facilitate access to a (child) justice system that is child-sensitive, gender-sensitive and well-equipped, while based on a comprehensive national legal framework and intersectoral collaboration between child justice, social welfare, health and/or education agencies,

On 24-25 July 2021, **IOM** North Macedonia organized a workshop in Skopje for strengthening the networks of parents from nine different communities in the country. IOM will work with local actors in ensuring these groups become formal and able to act as one of the frontline practitioners in building resilience among parents and youth.

Also, during the month of July a media literacy workshop was organized in Plasnica. Through these workshops, youth are educated to become critical consumers of media, news and information. The focus of these workshops will continue to be on principles of objective journalism, source criticism, and media manipulation strategies capacitating participants to consume and share information critically, consciously and responsibly.

With support from the [UK Government, UNICEF, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and partners opened the first two Support Centres for Foster Families](#) in the country to promote family-based care for children without parental care and to provide support to new and existing foster families. 7 UNICEF contributed to the foster care system through technical assistance for foster care standards, procedures, toolkits, training materials and specialized modules for professionals, as well as renovation of premises and equipment procurement for the Skopje.

UNHCR and **UNDP** are piloting a jointly developed SDG Tool for Forced displacement and Statelessness in North Macedonia. The tool can be instrumental in advancing strategic goals of both organizations. It provides a good and flexible/adaptable framework and structure to enhance agencies' collaboration and expand multi-stakeholder engagement on issues of common interest.

UN ACTIVITIES (continued)

With a kick-off session UNHCR introduced its newly formed External Foresight Team. The initiative brings together a team of artists, activists, intellectuals, and influencers to experiment, bring a fresh perspective to the operation and strengthen advocacy within areas of UNHCR mandate.

On August 26, UNDP and the German Government [donated computer equipment](#) to the Ministry of Interior for enabling more effective Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) control. The donation has been done as part of the "Improving National Practices for SALW Control and Building Resilient

UNDP [launched innovative pilot measures](#) within the Operational Plan of Active Labour Market Measures. Around 210 unemployed people that will undergo the training programme and become licensed service providers will be offered job placement within some of the existing CSOs / Service Providers willing to expand their scope or will be offered an opportunity to join forces and establish their own business entity.

UNDP launched the new annual cycle of the Community Works programme with the selection of 56 municipalities

responsive programmes and budgets through analyzing data and information from a gender perspective during a three-day workshop (15-17 September 2021) organized by UN Women.

Within the regional UN Women programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds", funded by the European Union, the Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights organized a closing on the topic "How to strengthen the role of civil society in implementing the Istanbul Convention"? (13 September). At the event held on 13 September, participants discussed the first draft shadow report to GREVIO produced by nine CSOs members of the Gender Equality Platform.



New Community Works Programme was launched in 56 municipalities engaging 500 unemployed people as social service providers

Communities" project, whose main objective is to reduce the Small Arms and Light Weapons misuse, as one of the most common causes of armed incidents in the country. The donation of this equipment represents only one segment of the overall project, which will upgrade the Ministry of Interior's information system, and shall furthermore, through the development and implementation of the Police Information System, provide digitalization and improvement of the operational processes and accelerate the institutional information exchange.

On September 20, UNDP's [ReLOaD2](#) was officially launched. This is the second phase of the project, whose main goal is strengthening the partnership between the municipalities and the civil society organizations through transparent allocation of the funds intended for project activities that will provide benefit to the local citizens. ReLOaD2 will be implemented in the period 2021 - 2024 in eight partner municipalities, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Bitola, Ohrid, Veles, Gevgelija, Kocani and Kriva Palanka. The project activities include trainings for the employees in the municipalities, support of public-interested projects applied by the civil society organizations, as well as trainings for the CSOs to strengthen their project preparation capacity. ReLOaD2 is financially supported by the European Union.

UNDP and the Ministry of Finance [announced](#) the joint combat against the informal economy in the country as part of the "Public Finance Management Reform" Project. The main activities will focus on recognizing and reducing the grey economy by precisely mapping out the sectors where it is most prevalent and identifying the main causes for its occurrence. UNDP's team is strongly committed to support the Government's efforts to transform the national public finance management system and create a favourable business environment that would lead to a decrease in the informal economy. The project is implemented with the financial and expert support of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic.

and the engagement of 500 unemployed people as providers of social services delivering social services for various vulnerable groups, such as Roma, people and children with disabilities and elderly people from local communities.

Within ongoing support for EU accession negotiations, **UNOPS** organised a training on "International cooperation in criminal matters" for the representatives of the Ministry of Justice and the Secretariat for European Affairs focused on the newly adopted Law on Cooperation in Criminal Matters and its implications to access to efficient and effective justice, as well as the impact of international documents and international courts to the justice system. In addition, another round of training was organised for the Ombudsman staff on principles and techniques of running investigations and conducting effective examinations in line with EU and international standards.

A Statement of support for Ohrid Lake Valorization Study was [signed](#) by Ohrid municipalities on 22 September, under the GEF/**UNEP** STAR5 project. The ceremony included also the official handover by MoEPP of the Ramsar site acceptance documents to the municipalities of Ohrid, Struga and Debrca.

Representatives of the State Audit Office, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy participated in the UN Women organized regional event for mainstreaming gender in Public Finance Management and the role of Integrated Financial Management Systems that took part in Tirana, Albania (7-8 September 2021). The progress in the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting in North Macedonia and the ongoing processes for the advancement of the legal and institutional framework for enhancing gender equality was presented during the event, financially supported by the Swedish International Development Agency - Sida and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Representatives of the municipalities Karposh, Makedonska Kamenica, Vinica, Chaska, Delchevo, Kavadarci, Makedonski Brod expanded their knowledge and skills on creating gender-

UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Director Alia El-Yassir and Head of Office, Vesna Ivanovikj-Castarede delivered speeches at the Women in Foreign Policy conference in Skopje (14-15 September) organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During her mission to North Macedonia, Regional Director Alia El-Yassir discussed strategic approaches for strengthening the accountability mechanisms and advancing gender equality with partner institutions of UN Women Skopje in the country. This included discussions on strengthening the role of State Audit Office in advancing the application of gender-responsive budgeting and the establishment of the first Resource Center on GRB in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

UNHCR, together with Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA), and the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) presented the [Journalistic Awards 2020](#) to the journalists who, during the previous year, contributed to the media landscape with professional stories and photos about the condition of refugees and stateless persons in North Macedonia. This activity is funded by the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund.

UNHCR started the Annual Participatory Assessment exercise with the persons of concern in collaboration with authorities and partner organizations. The exercise is consisting of set of discussions with refugees and asylum seekers with the purpose to jointly discuss the challenges they face, to understand their capacities and to hear their solutions for overcoming the challenges. The findings of the discussions will be used to shape further plans, strategies and interventions, thus ensuring that the views of refugees and asylum seekers are adequately reflected.

Consistent with the UNHCR priorities to invest in youth and education, UNHCR North Macedonia [signed](#) a Memorandum of Understanding with the University Goce Delchev from Shtip. The Memorandum builds on the already good relations established between the parties, including the participation on the [International Conference](#) on Outsourcing and Cooperation with Third Countries: Deconstructing the Formal and the Informal in the Migration and Asylum Policies (MAPS) project.

On 15-16 September 2021, IOM organized the first Regional Meeting on Alternatives to Immigration Detention in the Western Balkans in Belgrade. The regional meeting raised awareness on the benefits and best practices on Alternative to detention (ATD) among authorities in the Western Balkans, and initiated discussions for the development of ATD pilots in the region. Based on this initial meeting IOM will work with national authorities in the Western Balkans to develop sustainable ATD pilots in the future to ensure that migrants rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled, in line with the GCM Objective 13: Use Immigration Detention as a Measure of Last Resort and Work Towards Alternatives. Cervical Cancer - the Global Situation

IN FOCUS ACCELERATING THE ELIMINATION OF CERVICAL CANCER AS A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

Each year, more than 570,000 new cases of cervical cancer and 311,000 deaths from the disease occur globally and these numbers are predicted to increase to more than 700,000 new cases and 400,000 deaths per year by 2030. The vast majority of these new cases and deaths occur among disadvantaged women living in low-, lower-middle- and upper-middle-income countries, which generally lack the effective cervical cancer prevention programmes – HPV vaccination and cervical screening – that are common in high-income countries (see Figure 1).

Proven, cost-effective methods to eliminate cervical cancer exist but have not yet been widely implemented in the countries where the disease burden is highest. In May 2020, the World Health Assembly adopted the Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer as a Public Health Problem, with the goal of all countries reaching an incidence rate below 4 per 100,000 women. The strategy focuses on three main pillars of action:

- ◊ Prevention through vaccination
- ◊ Cervical screening and treatment of precancerous lesions
- ◊ Treatment and palliative care for invasive cervical cancer

A set of targets, known as the 90-70-90 targets, to be achieved by 2030, are also recommended:

- ◊ 90% of girls fully vaccinated for HPV by age 15;
- ◊ 70% of women screened with a high-performance test by age 35 and again by age 45;
- ◊ 90% of women identified to have cervical disease treated, including:
- ◊ 90% of women with pre-cancer treated.
- ◊ 90% of women with invasive cancer managed

Cervical Cancer in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Compared to Western Europe, the number of new cervical cancer cases and deaths is up to 10 times higher in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) where the disease is the second-most common cause of cancer death among women of reproductive age. There is a clear evidence that the higher incidence and mortality rates currently seen in the region are primarily due to the lack of:

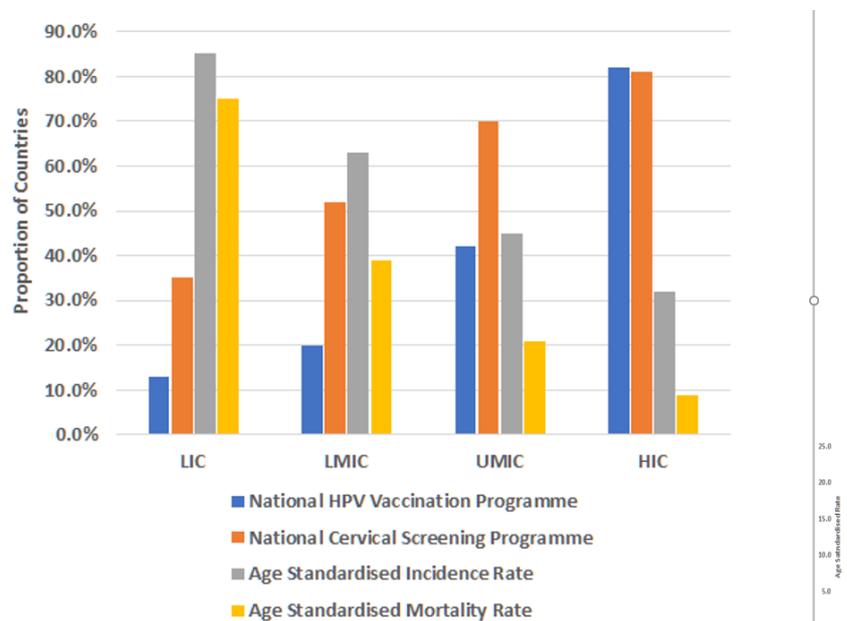
- ◊ Effective cervical screening programmes (including treatment of all clinically relevant precancerous lesions);
- ◊ Widespread HPV vaccination programmes; and
- ◊ Accessible, high-quality cervical cancer treatment

In North Macedonia, about 150 new cases have been recorded annually over the past few years, and about 60 patients die annually due to conditions associated with the disease.

Significant investments have been made in the past decade in the field of prevention through HPV screening and vaccination. The percentage of girls covered with two doses of vaccine, provided within the state budget was 57.8% in 2019 and 54.7% in 2018.

UNFPA North Macedonia supports the national counterparts in the development of guidelines, improving the screening

Figure 1: Comparison of national HPV vaccination and cervical screening programme implementation vs cervical cancer incidence and mortality



process and building the capacity of health professionals in line with the latest scientific evidence. Furthermore, it acts as convener and fosters knowledge exchange among health professionals, policy makers and professional associations.

Due to diversities and inequalities between EECA countries in terms of cancer control and care, a regional approach to share resources, facilitate south-south cooperation and increase coordinated action between countries is essential to address

this problem in a more effective manner. In recognition of this, initiative for establishment of an EECA Regional Cervical Cancer Prevention Alliance (the Alliance) was launched by the UNFPA EECA Regional Office, with support from 17 UNFPA country offices in EECA region, including North Macedonia. This presents a voluntary alliance of policy makers, technical institutions, experts and clinicians from all countries in the region.

IN FOCUS Youth4Climate

Almost 400 young people from 186 member countries of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) joined the 'Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition' meeting in Milan on 28-30 September to elaborate concrete proposals for the policy makers of the pre-COP26 event in Milan. These proposals will be taken forward at the COP26 in Glasgow in November. The meeting in Milan is part of the process to involve young people in the UN climate negotiation process.

North Macedonia was represented by two young delegates, Angela Busheska and Naser Velju who represent the views and positions of the youth from this country. UNICEF in North Macedonia, together with the Italian, British and Swedish Embassies supported Angela and Naser in their preparations and designed a consultation process, which included using the U-report and "Reimagine the future" youth consultation process to gather the views of hundreds of young people from North Macedonia.

The youth delegates engaged in dialogue to address the main urgencies and priorities of climate action by working around four themes: 1) Youth driving ambition; 2) Sustainable recovery; 3) Non-state actors' engagement; 4) Climate-conscious society. Each theme corresponds to a working group which was led by two people: a youth representative and a senior expert from international organizations. The main topics discussed under each theme were:

to take a stand and harness its collective voice to make a youth-centered climate policy at local, national and international level.

2. [Sustainable Recovery](#) – discussions focused on Energy transition and Green Jobs; Adaptation and Resilience; Nature-based solutions; Financial flows; and Tourism.
3. [Non-state Actors Engagement](#) - five key areas discussed include: Food; Entrepreneurship; Sports; Fashion; and the Arts.
4. [Climate Conscious Society](#) - Impactful storytelling: Education, Public mobilization, and the Media are the topics under these themes.

After the "Youth4Climate – Driving ambition" in Milan and ahead of the COP26 in Glasgow, UNICEF in North Macedonia together with the Italian, Swedish and British Embassies will be supporting a youth led national "Youth Climate Summit" in Skopje to engage youth in follow up to further develop the youth climate declaration and dialogue with national officials.

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 June 2021

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