



# COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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**PREPARED BY:**

Kimberly A. Parker, PhD

Bobi Ivanov, PhD

Erin B. Hester, MA



Migration  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*“It’s also the push in the heart of those who welcome: the desire to encounter, meet, dialogue...hope is the push to share the journey.”*  
— Pope Francis

Historically, the route from Southeast Europe through North Macedonia has brought trade, culture, and prosperity to western Europe. However, in recent years, it has been used as a passageway for displaced individuals to enter the European Union (Martin, 2016). As more people travel north along the Balkan route, a tension has been created for the people of North Macedonia. Residents struggle to resolve their concerns and fears, provide safe passage for the refugees, harbor those that need temporary refuge, and welcome individuals who wish to stay long-term.

This proposal aims to counter negative and distorted perceptions of refugees in North Macedonia by generating empathy and compassion. The following communication strategy focuses on building connections between the residents of North Macedonia and refugees by:

- Supporting professionals as they shift the public narrative
- Providing opportunities for residents of North Macedonia to have positive, personal encounters with refugees
- Encouraging the public to see the humanity behind the displacement crisis
- Laying the foundation for positioning refugees and migrants as development agents who can offer meaningful contributions to society

The strategy featured in this proposal was inspired and guided by multiple reports provided by UNHCR, including the reports of previous primary research studies (Babunski et al., 2018), the current *Stakeholder Mapping Report* (UNHCR North Macedonia, 2020), as well as the promotional efforts undertaken by UNHCR in the past. Our proactive recommendations leverage the reputation of UNHCR as a credible organization trusted by the residents of North Macedonia and build upon, rather than duplicate, existing efforts.

The *Communication Strategy for Social Change* is intended to be used during UNHCR North Macedonia normal business operations. In times of crisis, normal activities may be hindered, and planned communication may be disrupted. As such, a parallel document—the *Crisis Communication Plan*—is developed as a companion to this strategy that complements and may supersede, this communication document during times of crisis.

## Audience

Through further audience analysis, we were able to discern that negative sentiment is primarily tied to concerns regarding residents' physical safety (e.g., terrorist attacks or unrests), economic stability (e.g., perceived job competition), or fears of ethnic/religious differences. While Albanian/Turkish and Macedonian/Serb residents express different attitudes (the former has more positive sentiment than the latter) (Babunski et al., 2018), the strategy we present is equally applicable to both groups. Furthermore, the younger generations in both groups (less than 30 years of age followed by 30-39) show more pronounced (i.e. greater extremity of scale scores) positive sentiment toward the refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless individuals (e.g., Babunski et al., 2018), leading us to put greater emphasis on younger people.<sup>1</sup>

## Recommended Interventions

To reach a wide audience using zero-cost/low-cost strategies, it is pivotal that UNHCR builds capacity. Therefore, the first step in our proposed strategy focused on strengthening partnerships and providing professional development through trainings. By expanding the network of influence and sharpening the skills of the workforce, UNHCR can better assess the feasibility of proposed recommendations; identify additional cross-cutting solutions with mutual benefits; coordinate resources and expertise; and enhance brand recognition.

While capacity building drives the activities and channels through which messages will be shared, the heart of the strategy focuses on creating opportunities for positive exchanges between Macedonian citizens and refugees. Our proposal outlines several suggestions that, in combination, will foster a safe, friendly community wherein residents and refugees alike lookout for one another. Opportunities such as the Scholarship Program, Friendship Exchange, and Essay Contest provide an opportunity for UNHCR and community partners to publicize and normalize the positive encounters with refugees that fellow residents of Macedonia experience. Each of these suggestions works synergistically to achieve the goals while bearing in mind the many limitations and barriers faced by UNHCR.

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<sup>1</sup>For example, on the question of whether refugee and migrant children, regardless of status, should be included in the regular education system, 20.5% of citizens 18-29 years of age fully agreed compared to 17.5% of those age 30-39, 9.2% for age 40-49, 13.5% for age 50-65, and 8.9% of those older than 65 years of age, Babunski et al., 2018.



## Next Steps

The next step is to identify the umbrella message that will unify all of the different strategic executions. While a few ideas were provided in this proposal, it is up to UNHCR to decide what that slogan will be (e.g., “we are one community”). Once selected, it should be pretested with members of the public. With the slogan and insight selected, messages will be designed to share with the media and public. Based on the data provided from UNHCR as well as theory and empirical findings drawn from academia and practice, we suggest the use of emotional appeals favoring moral conviction, compassion, and empathy without eliciting pity, condescending, or saviorism. To do so, messages will be presented as narrative stories that encourage perspective-taking. We suggest a variety of channels (e.g., traditional broadcast, print, and social media) and messengers (e.g., refugees, local/regional celebrities, UNHCR) to amplify the voices of refugees and lean on organizational credibility.

While these are guiding principles for message development, the success of the capacity building phase will have a direct influence on the message selection and strategy. This communication strategy for social change is not intended as a final set document. Rather, its intention is to serve as a “living” document; a platform to build on, augment, and adjust.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>This report and strategy represent a collaborative effort co-created with the Executive Advisory Board, the Communicators Hub, the UNHCR North Macedonia leadership and staff, and other individuals and entities committed to the mission and vision of UNHCR.

# BACKGROUND

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*“No act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted.”*  
— Aesop

North Macedonia is a country in the Balkan Peninsula in Southeast Europe, which borders Kosovo<sup>3</sup>, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania. The capital and largest city, Skopje, is home to roughly a quarter of the country's 2.02 million inhabitants, according to the last census in 2002. The majority of the residents are ethnic Macedonians. Albanians form a significant minority at around 25%, followed by Turks, Romani, Serbs, Bosniaks, and Aromanians/Vlachs.

Overall, the primary research noted the perception in North Macedonia is that the economic conditions are poor, with less than just one tenth of the respondents evaluating the living conditions in their families as “good.” Many respondents noted that their family living conditions are “unbearable” or “hardly bearable.”

## **A Note on Terminology**

While the UNHCR mandate covers different groups of people (e.g., refugees, asylum seekers, stateless individuals, and internally forcibly displaced people), no single word adequately captures such a diverse population. Indeed, the aforementioned groups likely have different needs unique to the circumstances of their journeys.

Nevertheless, the strategy we advance is designed to improve overall sentiment towards all of these groups either directly (e.g., scholarship opportunities for asylum seekers or stateless individuals) or indirectly (e.g., compassion for asylum seekers or stateless individuals inevitably extending to incoming refugees).

We leave it to UNHCR to decide which groups would be the intended beneficiaries of the specific strategies proposed, and if the implementation will be limited to certain groups. In general, this strategy is positioned to be broad enough to be applicable to multiple audiences simultaneously (e.g., refugees and stateless people), while leaving room for more precise targeting of specific groups as the implemented strategy adjusts and expands in the future.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

<sup>4</sup>Next step includes a more deliberate focus on stateless individuals via formative research and strategy building.

In 2015, a record number of asylum seekers and migrants reached Europe in search of security and a better future. Displaced individuals and families from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq arrived via the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Although many entered through Greece, few planned to stay in southeast Europe; the vast majority crossed into northern and western Europe to join their families or access services in places known to welcome refugees (UNHCR, 2015). However, to do so, they traveled along the Balkan route, a notoriously long and often dangerous journey.

Previously, refugees traveling through North Macedonia were forbidden from using public transportation. With no other option, people walked along railway tracks and in the emergency lane of highways, resulting in tragic accidents. Subsequently, North Macedonia changed its asylum law, allowing refugees and migrants to safely transit through the country for 72 hours upon registering and receiving proper documentation (UNHCR, 2015).

On January 2, 2020, North Macedonia acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. A total of 75 state parties that have joined the UNHCR have made this commitment towards the goal of ending statelessness.

In 2020, there have been approximately 10,000 arrivals in North Macedonia, largely men from Afghanistan, with only 2% seeking asylum, but for a small country this still equates to a significant number of individuals. Overall, the sentiment in North Macedonia is conflicted, with a few residents feeling warm and welcoming to refugees and asylum seekers making a permanent home in North Macedonia. A significant number of individuals do signal empathy and compassion for the refugees. However, overwhelmingly, residents indicate they do not wish to welcome refugees as permanent residents, believing it will have negative effects on the economy. Even more so, they feel fear and trepidation from security and crime threats as refugees transit through the country.

# SITUATION ANALYSIS

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## Internal Capacity (reported data are based on a representative sample, Babunski et al. 2018; *Survey of Public Opinion*) **Organizational Resources, Expertise, Management Support, Issue Priority, Partnerships, and Past Performance**

Strengths to Maximize	Weaknesses to Minimize
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ High level of trust for experts (academics and professors), followed by UNHCR staff (Babunski et al., 2018).</li><li>▪ Overall trust in UNHCR to lead and coordinate strategies that protect refugees and resolve issues of displacement. Albanians trusted UNHCR the most preferring it over government or EU agencies (Babunski et al., 2018).</li><li>▪ UNHCR North Macedonia has a committed and knowledgeable local staff. Its staff has specialized knowledge and experience with issues, policy, and programs related to protecting refugees, asylum seekers, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people.</li><li>▪ UNHCR has had strong past performance with empathy-driven, solidarity campaigns, #WithRefugees (generated global support with over 1.5 million people signing the petition) and #iBelong (over 360 States, civil organizations issued concrete pledges to end statelessness).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Ethnic Macedonians trust UNHCR less than government agencies and about the same as EU agencies (Babunski et al., 2018).</li><li>▪ UNHCR website is difficult to navigate and identify how individuals can get involved on a personal level, beyond donating.</li><li>▪ UNHCR resources, staff, and budgets are limited.</li></ul>



## External Environment (reported data are based on a representative sample, Babunski et al. 2018; *Survey of Public Opinion*)

**Cultural, Technological, Demographic, Natural, Economic, Political or Legal**

Opportunities to Leverage	Threats to Prevent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citizens lack a basic understanding of the protections and rights afforded under international humanitarian law (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ There is a sentiment that North Macedonia should take care of refugees, although residents do not want refugees to stay permanently (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Albanian and Turkish minorities are more accepting of refugees (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Direct experiences with refugees provokes compassion towards them (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Younger people and Albanians are more in tune with campaigns regarding refugees (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Those who support the refugees indicate they feel compassion towards the refugees (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Over 80% suggested a moral and legal obligation to help refugees (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Only a small percentage of the population believes that violent attacks in North Macedonia are likely (14%).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economy is the relevant issue for residents of North Macedonia, which is tied to sentiment regarding refugees as they fear job loss to refugees; fewer than 10% of residents of North Macedonia believe that if refugees stay they could contribute to a better quality work force (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ 68% of residents have negative attitudes towards accepting any future waves of refugees (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Less than 10% believe that refugees will increase tolerance and decrease racism and nationalism (Babunski et al., 2018 – Appendix 3 [based on 2016 data]).</li> <li>▪ Ethnic Macedonians perceive refugees to have received better treatment in North Macedonia compared to the perception of Albanians (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ While ethnic Albanians are more accepting of refugees, they become less accepting when perceived economic realities are mentioned (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Poor refugee perception is due largely to fear of terrorism, religious differences, and desire that refugees do not remain in North Macedonia (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> <li>▪ Fear of violence from refugees is heightened among older ethnic Macedonians and Serbs (Babunski et al., 2018).</li> </ul>

## CONTINUED

Opportunities to Leverage	Threats to Prevent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Global protests surrounding the treatment of marginalized groups (i.e., Black Lives Matter in US, Maori in New Zealand; e.g., Perrigo, 2020; Vladislavljivic, 2020).</li><li>▪ North Macedonia could be a leader in the Balkans in embracing refugees; the Balkans receive a great deal of negative press for the treatment of refugees; this might be a way to situate this with politicians.</li><li>▪ COVID-19 pandemic also represents a “shared crisis” in which refugees and residents of North Macedonia alike can find commonalities in their experience (e.g., quarantine).</li><li>▪ The business sector in North Macedonia has indicated willingness and support for the employment of refugees (UNHCR North Macedonia, 2020).</li><li>▪ Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) — longstanding partners with legal aid expertise, can help establish new programs for protecting persons of concern.</li><li>▪ Radio MOF or Youth Educational Forum — Interested in school cooperation and partnership; MOF has teaching programs for young people including a curriculum on human rights and youth activism; open to the idea of having such curricula on refugee rights and other areas of interest to the UNHCR.</li><li>▪ International Republican Institute (IRI) — polling of concerns to citizens of North Macedonia.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Nearly half are against the opening of a refugee center near their homes.</li><li>▪ To some extent with ethnic Albanians and especially with ethnic Macedonians, low acceptance of having a refugee colleague or friend.</li><li>▪ One-third of respondents believe that the biggest problem facing North Macedonia is unemployment.</li><li>▪ COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected refugees, stateless people, and asylum seekers and significantly complicated the management of border restrictions (UNHCR, 2020).</li><li>▪ Generally, the rhetoric used to describe the unprecedented migration flow through the country has been characterized by national leaders and media institutions as a “refugee problem,” focusing on border policing and national security rather than the human faces that deserve safety and shelter (e.g., European Parliament, 2016).</li><li>▪ Community-service volunteering is not a popular form of engagement in North Macedonia (UNV, 2018).</li></ul>

## CONTINUED

Opportunities to Leverage	Threats to Prevent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Smart UP — dedicated to innovative ideas and projects, have worked on cyber bullying and violence among youth, and they would be a good partner on strategies to fight fake news, xenophobia, and create innovative solutions.</li><li>▪ Association for Research, Communications and Development — Publisher of the street paper magazine “Face to Face” that engages vulnerable people as vendors of the magazine and raises awareness on numerous important social themes. The magazine may be a key place for messages about solidarity and support for refugees. Also developed a social mentoring program. There is potential to collaborate and potentially work together on photo essays.</li><li>▪ Yunus Social Business Centre at the Faculty of Economy Skopje — potential partner for co-creating solutions centering on social business that involve refugees.</li><li>▪ Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM) — Network of regional and local media with a history of training journalists and working on issues such as media literacy, misinformation, and hate speech.</li></ul>	

## CONTINUED

Opportunities to Leverage	Threats to Prevent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Additional opportunities are presented for further collaboration with current or future partners such as the:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ City Red Cross Skopje</li><li>○ Iustiniaus Primus Law faculty – Ss. Cyril and Methodius University</li><li>○ Ombudsman</li><li>○ Other UN Agencies</li><li>○ Ministry of Labor and Social Policy</li><li>○ Ministry of Interior</li></ul></li></ul>	

# AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

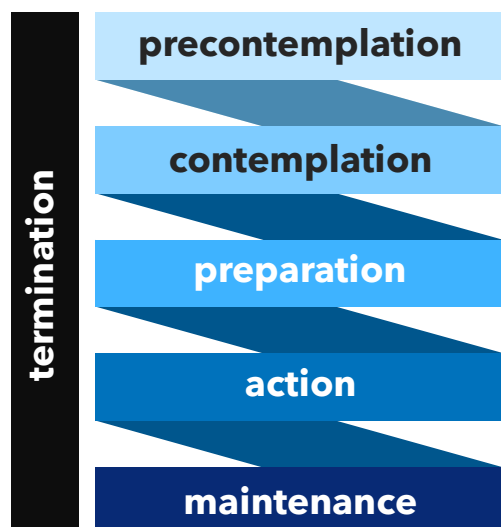
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*“I cannot do all the good that the world needs, but the world needs all the good that I can do.”*

— Jana Stanfield

## Target Audience Segmentation

Audience segmentation is justified when clear market differences emerge among groups on critical points of interest (Malhotra, 2012). Therefore, it should be strategically applied only if such segments can be clearly identified.



Strategies for social change generally target market segments according to the *transtheoretical model of change* (Andreassen, 2006). This model suggests a differential readiness for change, recognizing that people occupy different stages on the behavioral change continuum. The stages are outlined below:

- The *precontemplation* stage includes individuals having no awareness of the desired behavior or no intention for change.
- Other individuals may be in the *contemplation* stage where awareness of, and the recognition of the need for, the desired behavior is present, but no commitment to change has been indicated.
- The *preparation* stage is occupied by individuals who have committed to the idea of making a change, are preparing for the change in behavior, but have not yet engaged in the performance of the desired behavior.
- The *action* stage is occupied by individuals who have engaged in the desired behavior.
- The *maintenance* stage of the transtheoretical model is filled with individuals who have adopted the desired behavior but are under threat to seize the desired activity. As such, the strategic focus in this stage is on maintaining and reinforcing the new behavior.
- The final stage of the model, *termination*, is highlighted by individuals who have failed to maintain the behavior change and have reverted back to their old behaviors. At any point in time, an individual can move bi-directionally along the continuum.



The strategic objective is to move individuals on the continuum from precontemplation to action and maintenance starting with the groups that are easier to move. For example, it is easier to move individuals from *contemplation* to *action* than from *precontemplation* to *action* as the initial group has shown awareness and interest in performing the desired behavior, whereas the latter group has not. Thus, the more positive and ready individuals are to initiate change, the easier the task, effort, and investment in creating the desired movement (Andreassen, 2006).

Given the above, the objective is to identify audience segments with greater positive beliefs of, and attitudes toward, refugees, asylum seekers, forcibly displaced people, and stateless individuals as these segments would be better prepared to embrace and positively engage with forcibly displaced individuals. This is not to suggest that certain segments would be ignored or excluded from the strategic approach taken. Rather, that first priority should be given to the audience segments that are most prepared for change as they are most likely to yield positive results in the shortest amount of time, sometimes referred to as the “low hanging fruit.” The discovery of whether an audience segmentation strategy would be appropriate in the present context, necessitated a closer examination of the primary data collected (or commissioned) over several years by the UNHCR.

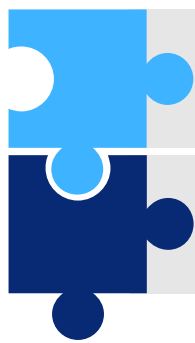
## Potential for Segmentation

A common approach in marketing research is to explore the potential for dividing an audience into segments based on demographic characteristics, such as ethnicity/religion, education, and socio-economic characteristics. At first look, no clear consistent patterns emerged across issues. A deeper dive into the data suggested potential geographic, or more precisely regional, differences across the population. More specifically, the Polog, Southwestern, and part of Skopje regions seemed to produce a more positive sentiment toward refugees, asylum seekers, forcibly displaced people, and stateless individuals (Babunski et al., 2018).

However, further analysis of the characteristics shared by these residents—when coupled with the findings from the focus groups and quantitative studies (Babunski et al., 2018)—revealed that regional differences in sentiment that appear based on geography seem to be explained by the ethnic and religious composition of the population within those regions. As the results of the aforementioned studies show, ethnic Albanians and Turks seem to nurture more positive sentiment toward refugees as compared to ethnic Macedonians and Serbs, with Roma people showing greatest neutrality among the groups. What seems to underline the sentiment pairings is religious beliefs, with ethnic Albanians and Turks guided by their Islamic faith and ethnic Macedonians and Serbs being guided by their Orthodox Christian beliefs.

The above-identified religious differences may, at least in part, have an influence on the sentiment held by the different ethnic groups. Given that the majority of the forcibly displaced people transiting through, or seeking asylum in, North Macedonia are Muslim (e.g., Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Kosovo, etc.), there seems to be greater solidarity and positive sentiment toward these groups expressed by religiously consistent ethnic resident groups (ethnic Albanian and Turks) than religiously inconsistent resident groups (ethnic Macedonian and Serbs). The differential sentiment may be driven by the fears from the

less supportive groups of potential changes in the ethnic and religious composition and balance in the country (Babunski et al., 2018). Greater safety concerns (e.g., fear of terrorist attack) expressed by ethnic Macedonians and Serbs also may be exacerbated by the perceived dissimilarity to forcibly displaced individuals. Importantly, the difference in the positive sentiment toward forcibly displaced individuals narrows once the threat of potential job loss to these individuals is made salient. Nevertheless, the data show an overall trend of two clear audience segments emerging with differing sentiment toward the forcibly displaced individuals: (1) ethnic Albanian/Turk segment and (2) ethnic Macedonian/Serb segment.



#### **Ethnic Albanians and Turks (Islamic faith)**

religious consistency with refugees • more positive sentiment

#### **Ethnic Macedonians and Serbs (Orthodox Christian beliefs)**

religious inconsistency with refugees • more negative sentiment

A further analysis of the demographic and socio-economic factors did not highlight additional major differences. There is, however, a slightly greater positive sentiment towards forcibly displaced individuals displayed by younger audiences (under 30 years of age; and then 30-39 years of age). For example, younger audience members are more receptive to accepting a proximal refugee center (Babunski et al., 2018). They also subscribe less to the idea that EU will face an increase in terrorist attacks in the future (Babunski et al., 2018). Although the differences are not consistent enough to warrant further audience segmentation, the findings do suggest that a careful strategic planning should intentionally focus on younger audiences for multiple reasons. Aside from showing greater tendencies to be receptive of forcibly displaced individuals, they are also less likely to have firmly established attitudes on complex issues (Krosnick & Alvin, 1989), such as treatment and acceptance of refugees, asylum seekers, forcibly displaced individuals, and stateless people. The empirically confirmed “impressionable years” hypothesis suggests young people are highly susceptible to attitude change in late adolescence and early adulthood, and that their susceptibility drops sharply after this period remaining low for the rest of their lives. Thus, it is important to influence the attitudes of young people early in their lives as the attitudes and behaviors established in their youth will likely guide their behavior in adulthood (Krosnick & Alvin, 1989). Therefore, it may be important to reach this audience early to create lasting allies in the cause.

The target audience of 30-39 year old participants showed similar characteristics as the youngest audience in the sample, just a bit less pronounced. In the segment that includes citizens over the age of 40, older individuals who are over 65 years of age showed stronger sentiment than citizens ages 50-65 (Babunski et al., 2018). As a result of the above findings, the strategy should include two main components. First, it should develop and execute an approach that is directly targeting younger individuals using strategic targeted approaches detailed in this plan. Second, it should develop

messages that are equally applicable (or relevant) to multiple audiences (ages under 30, 30-39, 65+). Generally, emotion-based messages featuring compassion and empathy are well suited to be directly applicable to these audiences. Thus, the proposed strategy is designed to intently focus on the younger audiences (under 30), while still targeting two additional important segments i.e. individuals 30-49 and older than 65.

The mode of message delivery would need to ensure a proper match with the right target audience. Although a traditional media should be used to reach older audiences (e.g., 65+ years), younger audiences (e.g., less than 30 years of age) prefer internet and social media (Babunski et al., 2018). As such, a message campaign should be designed that uses both traditional and digital/social media to deliver its content to multiple audiences using preferred modality.

When ethnic/religious background is controlled for, no *clear* (although some differences can emerge on individual questions, no consistent patterns are clearly observable) geographic, educational, occupational, or gender differences emerged that suggested additional segmentation based on these variables. However, ethnicity/religious background is a relevant variable that should be considered during segmentation and targeting.

Returning to the transtheoretical model of change, the ethnic Albanian/Turk segment is positioned further along the behavior change continuum (i.e., more positive sentiment) in comparison to the ethnic Macedonian/Serb segment (i.e., more negative sentiment). Traditionally, this would indicate that Albanians/Turks should be the primary target of the message strategy (i.e., a lower hanging fruit) and Macedonians/Serbs should be the secondary target for the early stages of the campaign. However, the latter segment represents nearly three-quarters of the total market. As such, it cannot be ignored. Therefore, our recommendation is to choose strategies that would benefit change in *both* segments simultaneously with particular emphasis on younger audiences within each subgroup in order to maximize reach and effectiveness. Still, to ensure effectiveness and strategic consistency, efforts should be evaluated for their impact on the two identified audience segments separately.

### Key Audience Insights

(reported data are based on a representative sample, Babunski et al. 2018; *Survey of Public Opinion*)

- North Macedonia's readiness to receive any future wave of refugees is perceived as negative by more than two-thirds of the respondents.
- Overall, younger citizens, students, and unemployed adult women more open to refugee settling in North Macedonia. Smaller communities are against it. The biggest difference is ethnic with ethnic Macedonians/Serbs primarily against it and ethnic Albanians/Turks for it.
- There are also ethnic differences, with ethnic Macedonians and Serbs believing in the most negative impact. Roma are most tempered (less than 30% suggest negative impact), while ethnic Turks and Albanians are most positive (less than 29% are negative with over 11% positive).
- There are also ethnic difference regarding asylum seekers. Thirty-nine percent of ethnic Albanians are for equal rights for asylum seekers with 38% neutral and less than 24% are against. Ethnic Macedonians are the opposite with less than 12% supportive, just over 20% neutral, and about 65% against.
- To a degree, younger individuals were more supportive of the refugees.
- Over 80% of participants suggested a moral/legal obligation to help refugees.
- From focus groups, it comes through that to move people from being sympathetic to empathetic, contact with refugees is necessary (may be mediated) – “When you have contact with some and when you see, and how much you do not want to get involved in something, you have to interfere.”
- Younger participants prefer internet and social media over television.
- Just over 30% positive effect of public campaigns claimed, although percentage change of opinion is not noted. The impact was again based on ethnic background with 15% of Macedonians claiming positive effect and nearly 60% of Albanians. For 10% of participants, campaigns have a negative effect
- Nearly 70% suggest the country needs a refugee integration strategy, but unaware of such strategy being considered or in place.

# OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

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*“In order to carry a positive action, we must develop here a positive vision.”*  
— Dalai Lama

The purpose of this communication plan is to increase support for asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people in North Macedonia. The plan focuses on creating a compassionate environment and providing positive experiences for forcibly displaced people and local residents and leaders.

The plan includes behavior, knowledge, and belief objectives. Behavior objectives include activities in which you want the target audience to engage, in other words, something you want to influence them to do. Knowledge objectives include information or facts you want the audience to be more aware of to perform the desired behavior. Belief objectives include feelings and attitudes.

## Objectives

**Residents of North Macedonia will act with compassion by:**

<b>Objective 1.1</b>	Engaging in positive personal encounters with asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people.
<b>Objective 1.2</b>	Showing solidarity through positive sentiment in the media.
<b>Objective 1.3</b>	Increasing the amount of time spent volunteering on behalf of asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people.
<b>Objective 1.4</b>	Introducing or supporting policies that are consistent with integration and humane treatment of asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people.
<b>Objective 1.5</b>	Creating and/or supporting educational opportunities for asylum seekers, refugees and stateless people.



## Residents of North Macedonia will understand the:

<b>Objective 2.1</b>	Basic protections and rights of asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people under international humanitarian laws.
<b>Objective 2.2</b>	Services and resources available to asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people through UNHCR and partner organizations.
<b>Objective 2.3</b>	Mission and vision of UNHCR and how to get involved.

## Residents of North Macedonia will believe that:

<b>TIER 1</b>	<b>Objective 3.1</b>	UNHCR is a credible source on issues related to asylum seekers, refugees, and statelessness.
<b>TIER 2</b>	<b>Objective 3.2.1</b>	Forcibly displaced people need and deserve safety and support while in North Macedonia.
	<b>Objective 3.2.2</b>	Asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless individuals are not a threat to the public's safety.
<b>TIER 3</b>	<b>Objective 3.3.1</b>	Their commonalities with asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless individuals outweigh their differences, such as the desire for safety, desire to protect loved ones and hope for the future.
	<b>Objective 3.3.2</b>	Asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless individuals can make a positive contribution to society.
	<b>Objective 3.3.3</b>	Everyone can make a difference in the broken lives of people forced to flee.

## Capacity Building Goals

In order to achieve the above objectives, the surrounding community, policy makers, and media institutions that play a role in shaping public narrative, need to come together as partners and promote a consistent message.

GOAL 1	<p>Establish an <u>Executive Advisory Board</u> with subgroups (media, education, religious leaders, local constituencies) and a <u>Communicators Hub</u> to decrease the unilateral relationships between individual partners, coordinate existing efforts, and improve communication with the public.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 1.1, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2.1, 3.2.2</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 0, 0</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 10-15 members (3-5 each subgroup)</p> <p>Communicators Hub: 15-30</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> February 2021</p> <p>December 2021</p>
GOAL 2	<p>Train <u>UNHCR staff</u> and <u>media professionals</u> regarding best practices for communicating with the public about asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 1</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 2</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> Annually</p>
GOAL 3	<p>Increase the number of <u>stories</u> and <u>social media mentions</u> that reference the UNHCR's mission, vision, services/resources available to refugees, and involvement opportunities.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 2.2, 2.3, 3.1</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 10 stories; 250 for UNHCR generated posts</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 12 stories; 330 (300 UNHCR generated; 30 re-posts)</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> Annually</p>
GOAL 4	<p>Provide diversity and unconscious bias training at <u>universities</u> and <u>schools</u>.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 1.1, 3.2.2, 3.3.1</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 1</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 2</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> Annually</p>

## Public Outreach Goals

Although it is difficult to quantify small gestures of kindness and acts of compassion, the following goals will serve as indicators of progress towards the above behavior, knowledge, and belief objectives for the target audience.

GOAL 5	<p>Organize (or co-organize) <u>community events</u> that bring North Macedonia residents and refugees together.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 1.1, 1.3, 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.3.2, 3.3.3</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 2 annual events</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 4 events</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> Annually</p>
GOAL 6	<p>Increase the number of <u>positive media stories</u> and <u>positive social media mentions</u> regarding asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless individuals.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.3.2, 3.3.3</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 10 stories; 250 for UNHCR generated posts</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 12 stories; 330 (300 UNHCR generated; 30 re-posts)</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> Annually</p>
GOAL 7	<p>Increase the number of <u>stories</u> and <u>social media mentions</u> referencing asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people's rights and protections under international law.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 1.2, 2.1</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 10 stories; 250 for UNHCR generated posts</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 12 stories; 330 (300 UNHCR generated; 30 re-posts)</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> Annually</p>
GOAL 8	<p>Increase the number of <u>North Macedonia friends</u> (informal volunteers) committed to the Friendship Exchange program.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 1.1, 1.3, 2.3, 3.3.1, 3.3.3</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 0</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 5 friends</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> Implemented 2023</p>
GOAL 9	<p>Increase the number of <u>friendship gestures</u> (e.g., notes, signs) distributed to asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people.</p> <p><b>Addresses Objectives 1.1, 1.3, 2.3, 3.3.1, 3.3.3</b></p>	<p><b>BASELINE:</b> 0</p> <p><b>TARGET:</b> 5 gestures</p> <p><b>DATE:</b> Implemented 2023</p>

# Fundraising and Development Goals

In order to achieve the above objectives, it is critical to increase funding for programming related to refugees and displaced persons. The following goals will serve as indicators of success for the objectives.

GOAL 10	Secure funding for scholarships for displaced students to attend schools in North Macedonia.  Addresses Objective 1.5	BASELINE: 0
		TARGET: 1 scholarship
		DATE: Implemented 2024

# PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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## Barriers

### Security of Basic Needs

Maslow (1943, 1954) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behavior. It is not that love and belonging, esteem, and actualization are unimportant for citizens of North Macedonia, but they find it difficult to ignore their basic physiological and safety needs. Thus, it is no surprise that their desire to help others and show compassion for refugees is subsumed by their own need for food, shelter (physiological needs tied to employment and economic prosperity of the country) and safety (fear of terrorist acts or identity loss due to religious differences). The three basic needs identified by the primary data include: job stability/economic prosperity, community safety, and fear of differences.

#### **Job Stability and Economic Prosperity**

The citizens of North Macedonia are concerned about satisfying basic needs for themselves and their families. North Macedonia citizens described the biggest challenge for the country as the economic state and the unemployment, while the refugee flow is in the last position on the list (below 1%). Hence, a significant barrier will be motivating the residents of the country to care for the needs of others when so many of their own needs remain unmet.

#### **Community Safety**

Residents of North Macedonia shared that they associated refugees with war, fear for life, and endangerment. Approximately half of the respondents indicated if refugees are allowed to settle in North Macedonia it will negatively affect the lives of residents. Most citizens consider that more refugees in North Macedonia would also mean increased unemployment and poverty, but it would also mean an increase in crime and violence as a result of non-compliance with the laws and the state. Specifically, fear of attacks is regionally concentrated alongside the refugee route in the Vardar and Skopje regions. Thus, the perception is that an influx of refugees will decrease the overall safety and increase violence in the country; this will be a substantial barrier to overcome in motivating residents to support refugee initiatives.

#### **Fear of Differences**

North Macedonia citizens list inter-ethnic relations as the third biggest problem in the country, with 7% citing it as a major problem. The infusion of refugees will increase the diversity in the country and has the potential to increase this concern.



## Limited Experience with Forced Displacement

The majority of Macedonians have not had the direct experience of being forced to flee their homes.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to grasp the desperation refugees must have felt to knowingly accept the risky journey in order to reach safety and seek asylum. It is understandable that residents of North Macedonia have a hard time identifying with the thoughts and feelings about being separated from family and friends and feeling unwelcome in a strange, unfamiliar country. As such, this is a barrier that can be addressed through opportunities to encounter refugees and communication that encourages perspective-taking.

Some support for this approach may be inferred from the conflicts taking place in nearby Kosovo (1998-1999) and North Macedonia (2001). With a portion of the Albanian population being disproportionately affected either through, at least temporary, internal displacement (2001) or welcoming of Kosovar refugees (1998-1999) one would expect that this population would have a better ability to engage in perspective-taking and consequently display more positive sentiment toward refugees in general. The target audience assessment conducted above suggests such a possibility, thus reiterating the import of encouraging perspective-taking as a strategic execution of the communication strategy.

## Pseudoinefficacy

Many citizens of North Macedonia also indicated that their personal actions were unlikely to make a difference in the overall displacement crisis, negatively impacting their willingness to provide aid to refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people. This is referred to as *pseudoinefficacy*, or the false belief that small actions do not make an appreciable contribution to solving the overall problem (Slovic & Slovic, 2015). Of course, this feeling of inefficacy is false—or pseudo—because we understand that “even partial solutions save whole lives” (Arithmetic of Compassion, 2020, para. 4).

This is a common belief among residents of host countries, most of which are poor and developing nations (UN Global Communications Strategy). Although North Macedonia has significantly improved its economy over the past two decades, it remains one of Europe’s poorest countries. Tensions arise when residents become frustrated that the government has struggled to alleviate poverty and unemployment for their own citizens.

However, strategies can address this by highlighting the profound impact that small gestures have on the lives of those displaced, countering the myth that grand investments and humanitarian funding is the only solution. For example, a message can show a person at the end of his strength about to give up when a young girl gives him a bottle of water. Moved by the gesture and able to hydrate and survive

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<sup>5</sup>This is not to suggest that some residents of North Macedonia do not have such direct experiences. Even more likely, indirect experiences associated with the plight of refugees is certainly shared by descendants of the Greek Civil War refugees (Kurpiel, 2020).

he pushes forward. He makes it to his final destination and settles in the new community. Years later, he is a child advocate saving countless lives of children in local communities. The offering of the water was a seemingly small act, but it had a profound positive consequence. This approach is not only consistent with the current strategy of eliciting compassion and empathy, but it also lays the foundation for positioning refugees and migrants as development agents who can offer meaningful contributions to society.

## Benefits

### Collective Relationships

Multiple sources (Avramska, 2007; Hofstede Insights, n.d.; Nieuwenhuis, 2012) suggest that residents of North Macedonia score low on the dimension of individualism, which means that they maintain a view of high interdependence among members of the society. Collectivist cultures forge strong relationships and take care of one another.

As such, a strategy focused on friendship and community is well-situated for a culture that values the collective over the individual, as it is not in the nature of its people to look after only their loved ones or family members. A campaign focused on friendship and taking care of one another should be seen as beneficial to everyone.

## Motivators

### Moral Conviction

The data indicate that almost half of North Macedonia citizens believe they have a moral obligation to help refugees who are in North Macedonia. As such, there is the possibility they may be motivated by efforts that emphasize moral imperatives.

### Compassionate Concern

The formative research indicated that many North Macedonia citizens are aware of the plight refugees experience and are concerned for their suffering. While this emotional response shows us that North Macedonia residents care about the misfortune of others (i.e., sympathy, or feeling sorry for refugees), it is different from feeling compelled to alleviate their suffering (i.e., compassion; Lazarus, 1991). The intergroup dynamics that perpetuate perceptions of “us” versus “them,” allow the person to stop at sympathy. By holding himself or herself distant from the afflicted person, a person can regard the other as “reprehensible, inferior, or responsible for his or her own suffering” (Lazarus, 1991, p. 288). Rather, if North Macedonia residents can see what they have in common with refugees, they are more likely to be moved by their suffering. Strategies, should capitalize on resident’s base level of concern and aim to reduce the distance between “us” and “them.” By activating perspective-taking, employing “we” and “us” language, and highlighting shared emotional experiences, citizens will feel more motivated and willing to commit to helping.

# Competition

## Social and Family Obligations

Outside of their job responsibilities, residents of North Macedonia spend a great deal of their time with their families, friends, and attending to other social obligations (e.g., religious worship, children's activities). As such, they may prefer to spend their free time among loved ones honoring pre-existing commitments.

## Job Responsibilities

Although some of the influential community members asked to serve on the Executive Advisory Board (or other Advisory Boards) may be able to do so during work time, it is likely that the time spent working on UNHCR or shared initiative will detract from other projects.

## Involvement with Other, More Socially Acceptable Causes

Citizens of North Macedonia may already be invested in other critical issues or causes. For example, many Macedonians are concerned with pollution, emigration, and European integration. Individuals may not be able to dedicate the time or energy to more than one cause, regardless of the urgency of the cause or their interest in getting involved. Relatedly, the refugee crisis is still considered a contentious issue without widespread support. As such, people may be more likely to visibly engage with causes that have greater social acceptability (e.g., climate change, food insecurity).

# INTERVENTION

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The aim of this campaign is to counter negative and distorted perceptions of forcibly displaced people in North Macedonia by generating empathy and compassion. We want residents of North Macedonia to realize what they have in common with refugees and asylum seekers and compel them to commit to helping. We will support leaders and media professionals as they recalibrate the dominant narrative and encourage the public to see the humanity behind the displacement crisis. We will also provide opportunities for residents of North Macedonia to have positive, personal encounters with refugees, asylum seekers, forcibly displaced individuals, and stateless people, thereby reducing prejudice and strengthening community cohesion.

## Capacity Building Strategy

### Executive Advisory Board

The purpose of an Executive Advisory Board is to increase the number of partnering organizations, coordinate existing efforts, and improve communication with the public. This board will be instrumental in assessing the feasibility, offering additional suggestions, and coordinating the implementation strategy. The Executive Advisory Board will be key to implementing the activities outlined further in the report related to the product strategies including the Friendship Exchange, Scholarship Program, and Essay Competition. It will also facilitate partnerships and provide influence in support of UNHCR initiatives. The Executive Advisory Board should feature:

- Representatives from media, education, private businesses, local municipalities, media, public servants, and religious leaders. Although members will take ownership of all issues related to the UNHCR mission, they will also be invited to attend certain topical sessions as members of subgroups that focus on initiatives within a specific area of expertise: education (2-4 members), private businesses (2-4 members), local municipalities (2-4 members), media (2-4 members), religious leaders (2-4 members) and local community leadership (2-4 members).
- Influential individuals who are active, persistent, and get things done.
- Ideally, individuals who occupy highly influential positions (e.g., university rector, dean, or associate/assistant dean; school superintendent; chamber of commerce president/director; director of municipality; major media establishment editor; major corporation president or board director; artist; actor; influencer, etc.).
- Ensure proper ethnic diversity on the board to maximize its effectiveness, trust, and reach.

## Education Subgroup

As previously suggested, young people represent an important target group that should garner significant attention. As such, members of the Executive Advisory Board who are faculty and school administrators from all levels of education (i.e., public and private institutions, universities, secondary schools, and primary schools) will be instrumental in advising the implementation of the suggested activities related to educational opportunities and advancement, such as:

### **Sustainability of Training and Professional Development Strategies**

In the *Stakeholder Mapping Report*, it was clearly stated that academics are interested in partnering with UNHCR. However, at the time of the report, most connection has been limited to UNCHR trainings and information giving without significant follow up. Along the same line, a staff member from UNHCR also suggested that trainings and presentations in and of themselves, while important, fail to generate sustained change.

For partnership to have a sustainable impact, they need to be mutually beneficial. As the pedagogical experts, subgroups can be instrumental in conversations that shape the development and implementation of trainings.

### **Diversity and Unconscious Bias Trainings at Universities and Schools**

As a trusted source and credible organization, UNHCR could introduce *Diversity and Unconscious Bias Trainings* at schools and universities. In recent years, universities and schools across the U.S. have increasingly placed an emphasis on celebrating and including the unique contributions diverse students bring to the classroom. This approach stands in contrast to those that simply accommodate differences. Relatedly, unconscious bias infiltrates the classroom organization even with the best of intentions (Benson & Fiarman, 2019; Hammond, 2014).

These concerns are particularly relevant for instructors, administrators, and fellow students who need to increase their sensitivity in navigating diverse (and not just ethnically) environments and interacting with people from different backgrounds, convictions, and beliefs. As part of these presentations, embedded in the trainings, would be information on how to positively interact with forcibly displaced individuals. The expectation is that these type of trainings or seminars will not have only a positive effect on the educational experiences of students, but also that these practices will spill over into the students' and faculty everyday interactions outside of the place of learning. Universities and schools or other educational institutions with diverse populations are most likely to benefit (e.g., SEEU, UKiM, NOVA, etc.) from such trainings/seminars.



## Coursework Impact

Under the leadership of the board and subgroups, UNHCR can create partnership and collaboration with universities, schools, and organizations (Youth Educational Forum) to provide support for, or help develop, courses that focus on social change, not-for-profit leadership, sustainable development, etc. UNHCR staff can provide guest speakers for these courses and work on course projects with the students. This type of cooperation is advantageous for the schools and universities, as it allows students to enrich their professional networks, receive presentations from experts in this area of work, and seize the opportunity to work on real world projects. The benefit to the faculty is their ability to connect students with experts and have their students engaged in real world professional activities. The benefit for UNHCR is the opportunity to make connections with educational institutions and faculty, but also the ability to extend its credibility and cement its status as a leader on social issues. These courses may also represent opportunities to recruit students to join the UNHCR School Ambassadors program.

Partnerships with organizations such as the Youth Educational Forum (Radio MOF) could be especially beneficial in leveraging established relationships (e.g., good cooperation with schools), structures (e.g., 30 local youth clubs around the country), resources (e.g., media, PR, teaching programs for youth, curricula on human rights and youth activism) and experience (e.g., message design for youth audiences).

Finally, UNHCR has a partnership with Iustinianus Primus Faculty of Law and the Refugee Law Clinic, University American College Skopje, and University Goce Delchev in Shtip. The latter two include a current memorandum of understanding with the UNHCR.

## UNHCR School Ambassadors

Partnerships with schools, universities, and organizations (e.g. Youth Educational Forum, National Youth Council of Macedonia) may present opportunities to engage faculty and students in the formation and operations of university or school clubs organized around the performance of a social good related to UNHCR's noble cause. Participating students, or UNHCR School Ambassadors, could play an active role in the development of activities and events that are consistent with UNHCR's initiative. The following opportunities could be presented to UNHCR Student Ambassadors:

- Volunteer to staff booths at events (e.g. Refugee Day 10K Run; Human Rights Day), thus easing the strain on UNHCR (see limited staff resources under situation analysis).
- Friendly competitions could be staged across different institutions proposing initiatives that UNHCR could undertake with the winning initiative being selected by UNHCR for implementation.
- Share UNHCR messages via their personal social networks.
- University students could also consider establishing clubs (or chapters) and working with UNHCR through these clubs and/or through UNHCR internships.

## The Bad News Game

*The Bad News Game* is a real-world online fake news intervention approach designed by psychologists Roozenbeek and van der Linden (2018) in collaboration with the Dutch media platform DROG. The game is based on the theoretical and empirical findings of inoculation theory, which suggests that arming individuals with motivation and actionable skills can help combat negative influence attempts such as fake news (Ivanov, 2017). The game places the person or student in different roles associated with the production of fake news. The goal of the game is for the fake news creator to be as creative as possible in order to keep playing and ultimately win. To do so, the player quickly becomes attuned to the methods used to create fake news. As such, the player learns what things he or she should look for in order to identify fake news. It is an educational, fun, and interactive game that helps provide the motivation and skills necessary to combat fake news.

The game has reached significant popularity and is the most notable fake news tool used to combat this epidemic. Most importantly, it works (Maertens et al., in press). It has been translated in more than 15 languages around the world and has been played by over one million people (Roozenbeek, van der Linden, et al., 2020). It can be translated in any language including Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish. Presently, it is available in Serbian, as the closest Slavic language. While it relies on entertainment and humor, it does have an educational component to it. This game helps teach students media literacy, but most importantly, it helps prepare them to counter fake news. More specifically, it targets the six degrees of manipulation (i.e., discrediting opponents, appealing to emotion, polarizing audiences, impersonation, floating of conspiracy theories, and trolling).

With the help of subgroups, this game could be potentially brought into the school curriculum or introduced as an extracurricular school activity. An additional benefit would be designing activities that encourage students to play the game at their homes with their parents. This approach would improve not only the student skills in recognizing fake news, but also their parents, thus fulfilling an important initiative for UNHCR, which is lowering the spread of refugee fake news. The subgroups can play an important role in vetting *The Bad News Game* and proposing ways it could be made available to students.



## Media Subgroup

Members of the Executive Advisory Board who are representatives of the media will be instrumental in forging a mutually beneficial relationship between UNHCR and the media, in addition to shifting the narrative about refugees in North Macedonia. Below are some considerations:

### Training of the Media in Persuasive Communication and Strategy

If there is media interest, UNHCR could offer its media partners seminars/trainings in proper persuasive strategies, message design, narrative strategies, etc. as a sign of partnership, mutual respect, and goodwill. These trainings will build upon prior opportunities provided by staff at the University of Florida.

### Credibility Boost

The media can also benefit by increasing their credibility through working with UNHCR. By associating or partnering with UNHCR, the media partners can increase their credibility as UNHCR is a trusted source.

### Memorandum of Understanding

UNHCR could enter in formal partnership with media members where the media members obligate themselves to provide accurate and unbiased stories regarding refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people and UNHCR points individuals to these trusted (or “verified”) media sources for accurate coverage of these issues, consequently increasing exposure of these media partners as trusted sources for information on refugee issues, thus creating a win-win scenario.

### Presentation of Stories

The media partners could receive weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly stories from UNHCR on issues concerning stateless or forcibly displaced individuals that could be included in their coverage. In return, UNHCR would receive media access to the public.

### UNHCR Mandate

One of the takeaways from the *Stakeholder Mapping Report*, as well as the primary studies performed by UNHCR in the past, is that the UNHCR mandate is not well understood by the public. As such, subgroups could assist in clarifying the UNHCR mandate with media partners who would be tasked with making the UNHCR mandate clear to the public, its unbiased nature, and cementing UNHCR as the go-to source for refugee information.

### **Promotion of *The Bad News Game***

The media should be just as concerned with fake news and alternative news sources that are cutting into profits and their livelihood. It is in the media's best interest to promote strategies and games that may increase the public's media literacy. This subgroup can help inform the media partners of the game's existence, elicit engagement with the game, and promotion of it via its media outlets.

### **Media Appearances**

A designated UNHCR representative could provide a media appearance via interviews, press conferences, or commentary on media releases. These scripted appearances could be individual or as part of a series on topics related to refugees, social issues, etc. to which UNHCR could appear as a regular invited guest.

## ***Local Community Leadership Subgroup***

Members of the Executive Advisory Board who have experience with leadership roles in the local community will have positive effect in multiple areas of UNHCR interest, including:

### **Engagement of Local Communities**

A pivotal role in the Communication Strategy for Social Change is the engagement of the local community. Local Municipal leaders are perfectly positioned to provide settings and engagements that can bring local communities together. Events at community centers and gathering places have the potential of creating events that could be aligned with UNHCR's mission. These may be opportune spaces for friendship exchange programs to take place (further detailed below) or community events (international day fest, potlucks, food trucks, etc.).

### **Policy Influence**

Local municipalities may have influence on local policy. The board members can advocate for policies that are consistent with UNHCR's mission.

### **Refugee Entry Points**

Some of the local municipalities are located at refugee entry points, thus close communication and partnership with these municipalities may be of mutual benefit to the municipalities themselves and UNHCR. This topic will be revisited in greater detail during Phase 2, when a refugee crisis communication plan will be developed.

# Communicators Hub

The Communicators Hub represents a group of professionals highly skilled in communication arts and/or science. It is intended to function in a supportive role to Executive Advisory Board (and its subgroups), UNHCR North Macedonia leadership, and the implementation of the Communication Strategy for Social Change. As such, the Communicators Hub can play an indispensable role in the successful execution of the here-proposed strategy.

# Product Strategies



# Friendship Exchange

The center of this strategy is the development of an informal network of residents of North Macedonia who are committed to providing friendship to asylum seekers, refugees, and the stateless. Research reports that, in other host countries, people who report being friends with refugees are more likely to have more positive attitudes toward immigrants, indicating that direct and personal contact can positively influence acceptance of refugees (German Marshall Fund, 2014; Gozdzia & Marton, 2018). The Friendship Exchange will provide opportunities to bring locals and refugees together, so that they can experience positive encounters with those whom they may initially feel they have nothing in common.

Beyond asking residents to donate money or commit their time to volunteering in the field, encouraging friendship shows that small gestures of kindness and support can go a long way. Informal initiatives that encourage personal contact, such as multicultural events, activities (e.g., friendly sport games; joint park clean up days; building houses through Habitat for Humanity, etc.), and international picnics that allow migrants to share their heritage with locals, are a simple way to foster goodwill (Blom, 2010; Gozdzia & Marton, 2018). Through their conversations, citizens of North Macedonia will confront their own concerns about economic prosperity, community safety, and fear of differences, as they get to know one another and recognize their commonalities and shared values and experiences. Traditional and social media coverage of these exchanges should provide greater reach and recognition of the programs.

This effort is appropriate for the local community because refugees are in a foreign country, do not know anyone and it will provide immediate access to a to an informal support network. The three main reasons why this will be an effective endeavor include: (a) it starts small by relying on a core group of North Macedonia residents who do not need to be convinced of their support before diffusing through communities; (b) it is easily scaled-up and allows for individuals to participate to whatever extent they are comfortable with; and (c) it harnesses the power of conversations, stories, and personal encounters as a means to take the perspective of others and realize the many shared commonalities. Moreover, documenting and sharing the stories of these positive Macedonian-Refugee exchanges will highlight the benefits of the program and amplify the voices and experiences of similar others (normative influence; Cialdini, 1990). Established partners in the media can use this as an opportunity to boost positive news coverage (see Objective 1.2). In this sense, the early adopters will encourage those with mixed views to consider how small gestures of compassion towards refugees can make a big difference.

## ***Reciprocity and Goodwill***

Research shows that social capital built at the community level through a web of local relationships can significantly impact the experience of migrants (Blom, 2010). For refugees and Macedonians to forge these social connections, trust and reciprocity are critical (Strang & Quinn, 2019); in fact, “friendship is inconceivable without reciprocity” (Wiesner, 1970, p. 6). This implies that, in order to assuage the fears and mistrust of locals, refugees can be proactive in fostering goodwill. Based on this notion, we recommend the formation of an informal refugee-led group that allows the refugee community to participate and lead activities that are pivotal for cultural adjustment and social support (Almohamed, Vyas, & Zhang, 2017). This group could spearhead activities that benefit the local community, such as organizing food drives, volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, or working with homeless shelters. These displays of helping, sharing, and cooperating—initiated by refugees but intended to benefit the local Macedonian community—could strengthen goodwill and show a commitment to reciprocity. Not only will the visibility of refugee-led actions provide an opportunity for media partners to publish positive human-interest stories featuring refugees, such informal gatherings can serve as a recruitment tool for the Friendship Exchange.

## ***Tiered Participation***

The Friendship Exchange will offer tiered involvement (i.e., Pen Pal, Ally, and Friend). This structure meets residents where they are in terms of willingness to engage with refugees. We suggest that recruitment efforts initially turn to schools, and other community organizations and events, such as the American Corner, and World Refugee Day to identify interested residents. Second, the Executive Advisory Board and Education subgroup will be able to recruit through their networks, as interactions with refugees organically occur within the school setting. Likewise, community leaders and partner organizations will be integral to recruitment, particularly as this effort expands. This is also an opportunity for the integration of new programming that builds connections across the community, such as Habitat for Humanity programs, park clean-ups and pot lucks where residents of North Macedonia and refugees can volunteer and socialize side-by-side.

### **THREE TIERS OF PARTICIPATION IN FRIENDSHIP EXCHANGE**

**Pen Pal:** This level of involvement requires very little commitment and is even appropriate for individuals with mixed views. Residents of North Macedonia can do something as simple as writing a quick personal note to welcome a displaced family or individual or participating in a pen pal board where members can leave notes and respond to them. Refugees will reciprocate and be encouraged to send “thank you” notes. Not only does this facilitate the idea of an exchange, research shows that the absence of gratitude on the part of the recipient is one of the top reasons for burnout (Lazarus, 1991). By showing appreciation and reciprocation this can help prevent compassion fatigue.

**Ally:** Individuals, local businesses, and community organizations can display their solidarity for refugees by placing signs in their windows. This low-cost measure shows a public display of compassion. Seeing visible signs of support can be encouraging to refugees who may otherwise feel unsafe or unwelcome while walking around the community. Additionally, this simple act of solidarity can be contagious, wherein residents of North Macedonia realize that many others like themselves care about the well-being of forcibly displaced people.

**Friend:** At this highest level of involvement, North Macedonia citizens provide support and concern to an individual who has been separated from his or her home and friends. The arrangement is based on common interests and ideas. Aside from agreeing to serve as a contact person for a refugee, the commitment is flexible and together the friends decide how, when, and where they want to meet and get to know one another (Start with A Friend, n.d.).



## Similar Efforts with Demonstrated Success

### Start with A Friend, Germany

*Start with A Friend* brings together people from different countries and different experiences through a one to one tandem partnership. Their flexible and uncomplicated model (tandems are the decision makers and no prior training is required) has built friendships since 2014.



### Friendship Program, Australia

Baptist Care's *Friendship Program* in South Australia offers a more formalized exchange in which locals are paired with refugees. The program requires volunteers to receive training before, serve 6 hours per month helping refugees learn about life in Australia.

### Fruitful Friend, United States of America

Fruitful Friend in Charlotte, North Carolina builds relationships between refugees and Americans, so the refugees can thrive in their new communities. Individuals or families are paired for one year and asked to meet at least two hours per week. They are given opportunities to practice English, explore their new city together, talk about the new culture, and become part of the community.

## Scholarship Program

The core of this strategy is developing partnerships between educational institutions, residents of North Macedonia, and refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people. Displaced individuals have limited educational opportunities due to their statelessness and lack of financial resources. Residents, schools, and universities of North Macedonia have the potential to create hope for refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people by providing scholarships for forcibly displaced persons. In addition, this would further enhance opportunities for citizens to engage with refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people. In addition to providing opportunities for the students to attend school in North Macedonia, the Scholarship Program furthers the organic possibilities of refugees and residents having positive interactions. Further, the program will institutionalize educational partnerships for UNHCR.



The Scholarship Program will offer scholarships to elementary/high school students and university students:

### **Elementary/High School**

This scholarship should be developed in partnership with schools and donors to create opportunities for displaced students to attend private schools in North Macedonia: American High School Skopje, American School Macedonia, NOVA, QSI International School of Skopje, Yahya Kemal, and others.

### **University**

This scholarship should be developed in partnership with universities and donors to create opportunities for displaced students to attend a university in North Macedonia: UKIM, UACS, SEEU, Goce Delcev, University of Tetovo, the European University, among others.

## **Similar Efforts with Demonstrated Success**

**charterUP**



### **CharterUp National Scholarship for Immigrants and Refugees**

This \$10,000 scholarship is awarded to high school seniors or current undergraduate students for one year. The applicants must have been born outside of the USA and currently be enrolled at a U.S. university or have been accepted for the upcoming academic year.

## **Essay and Video Competition or Photovoice**

A core component of this strategy is highlighting compassion and friendship between residents of North Macedonia and displaced persons. Key to this strategy are opportunities to think about the experiences of refugees. The theme for the competition is compassion and empathy. The idea is to focus on putting oneself in the position of the refugee, which focuses on acceptance of refugees, understanding the experiences of displaced persons, and building a welcoming community for all.

The competition will take place at the elementary, high school, and university level. At each level, there will be three winners: first place (100 Euros), second place (75 Euros), and third place (50 Euros) (amounts are intended to be illustrative, rather than definitive). In addition, the first-place winner in each category will have his/her essay featured in the local newspaper and on UNHCR's social media accounts.

Alternately, students could participate in a photovoice project, or innovative application of photography, virtual reality, video games, social media (e.g. Tik Tok) or participatory action storytelling (Wang & Burris, 1997). Often, the strategy is used in community-based participatory research to give voice to marginalized groups and bring awareness to their challenges. In previous instances, scholars have adapted Photovoice to prompt perspective-taking (Reimers, 2016). Others have shown the usefulness of photovoice in communicating fears, desires, and experiences with adversity among Syrian refugee children in Lebanon (Karr, Sajadi, & Aronson-Ensign, 2020).

### Similar Efforts with Demonstrated Success



#### Anne Frank Essay and Video Competition

The Jesuit Refugee Service USA created the competition to provide a voice for individuals that are marginalized, specifically refugees and migrants. JRS/USA created the essay and video competition with the hope that young people would share their voice. As young Ann Frank did, the competition allows young people a venue for sharing their hopes and dreams for the future.

## Price Strategy

### Monetary Incentives

- Highlight that friendship, kindness, and compassion are free.
- Potentially offer compensation to denote individuals who are committed to being friends (t-shirts, gift cards for meals, canvas bags, journals, pens, etc.)

### Nonmonetary Incentives

- Emphasize that looking out for each other builds a sense of community and safety for all.
- If you want to feel safer, engage in friendships, which minimizes differences. If you are friends, you are not enemies.
- Recognize the generosity of North Macedonia residents by focusing on people and communities who welcome refugees (see “thank you” notes).
- Highlight the ways in which everyone’s lives are enriched when we stand together.

**NOTE:** At this stage, because of the perceived barriers we have identified, we do not recommend mentioning economic inclusion or opportunities that refugees can contribute to local economies at the initial stage of the strategy, which is focused on increasing positive sentiment toward refugees using compassion and empathy. Positioning refugees as development agents who can offer meaningful contributions to society, however, would be the follow-up logical step to build onto the current strategy.

## Place Strategy

An integral part of introducing the Friendship Exchange requires the organization of community events that bring together North Macedonia residents and refugees, asylum seekers, forcibly displaced individuals, and stateless people. Using the input from key partner organization, UNHCR can create opportunities for citizens and refugees to meet and converse. These happenings can, and should, be incorporated into existing community events that individuals and families already plan to attend.



Events at Elementary  
and High Schools



Community Centers,  
Neighborhoods & Parks



Universities

## Promotion Strategies

### Messages

It is important that UNHCR selects a campaign theme (an insight, a unifying idea, or a tagline) that would unify the campaign and nest all of the messages, communication, and branding under its umbrella. Below are some exemplars for UNHCR consideration.

Together: We are friends, neighbors, and family.

Every good friend was once a stranger.

Strangers are just friends waiting to meet.

You belong with us.

Our home is your home.

Your family is our family.

We are one community.

# Messengers

The most authentic approach will have real people narrate their own stories, humanizing statistics, and amplifying their voices.

Refugees	Influential Citizens	Influential Experts	UNHCR
amplify and empower <i>their</i> voices as an authority on their experiences	showcase other citizens' inspiring stories about the positive interactions	use researchers and experts from universities to improve communication	counter myths and bring credibility and name recognition (include logo)

# Creative Elements

	<b>UNHCR Branding</b> Incorporate UNHCR brand and messaging to bolster credibility and brand recognition.
	<b>Message Tailoring</b> Intentionally tailor materials for North Macedonia residents and refugees, asylum seekers, forcibly displaced individuals, and stateless people alike (i.e., language translations).
	<b>Activate Empathic Understanding</b> Use consistent production style to evoke empathy (Shen, 2010): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Vividness (concrete, visually appealing images with rich colors, saturation, brightness, and sharpness)</li><li>▪ Gaze (characters makes eye contact with viewer), realism (events/stories are plausible)</li><li>▪ Pain and suffering (loss of something dear, physical/emotional pain and suffering)</li><li>▪ Innocence of character (powerless or not in control of the events that take place in story)</li><li>▪ Social relationship (includes focus on family, friends, lovers)</li><li>▪ Emotional expression (character expresses their emotions explicitly and strongly)</li><li>▪ First person perspective (narration, personal testimony, how the character sees things)</li></ul>

**NOTE:** Avoid sensationalized emotive messages that border on eliciting pity or condescension, or saviorism. Instead focus on resilience and hope; this approach will counter compassion fatigue.

# Channels

DIGITAL	<b>Social Media</b> Promotion of community events, elevating #WithRefugees, #iBelong	<b>Associated Deliverables</b> Coordinate posts with UNHCR digital director
PRINT	<b>Outreach Materials</b> Promotion and use at various events	<b>Associated Deliverables</b> Coloring pages, flyers, guidance for writing notes, solidarity signs
IN-PERSON	<b>Trainings</b> UNHCR and media professionals <b>Community Events</b> In-person interactions with refugees	<b>Associated Deliverables</b> PowerPoints, handouts, guidance for communicating with public, sample stories

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