



JAN 2021



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EDITORIAL by the UN Resident Coordinator

As we enter the new year, let me reflect on how global priorities of the UN Development System remain directly relevant for UN in North Macedonia in 2021.

January 1st marked the start of the new programming cycle of the 2021-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF), the UN's key strategic planning document for the country. Through 2020 we dedicated considerable attention and resources to consult with a wide range of stakeholders to identify key priorities that will guide the UN's collective efforts and resources in the SDG areas of prosperity and people, planet and peace, with distinct focus on the most vulnerable groups and those at risk to be left behind.

As we continue to transform plans into action and sound policy development in 2021 and beyond, the UN's focus will remain on ensuring that our work is fully evidence-based, and anchored in the most current analysis and reliable data, paired with support for improved coordination and information sharing at all levels. A nation-wide census is key for this and would have a long-term impact on the development policies of the country. Every effort should continue to be made by all stakeholders to support and seek consensus on this important statistical operation and prevent it from being politicised.

In 2021, the UN in North Macedonia will continue to provide analytical, policy and operational support for COVID-19 response and recovery. While much has been done to analyse its socio-economic impact almost a year into the crisis, it is key to continue assessing the pandemic's impact, the existing and new vulnerabilities in real-time, focusing on the most affected groups, and use this knowledge to support faster and better recovery.

are just some of the opportunities coming with COVID-19 that we can jointly deliver and that we will continue to invest our resources and efforts in in 2021.



This will come on top of the continued support for front-line activities in the joint fight against the pandemic. One such immediate priority is the support to the Government on the efficient roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines secured through COVAX facility and other channels. Logistical difficulties, limited supply and vaccine hesitancy are just a few of the challenges that must be addressed quickly and efficiently to overturn the direction of the global pandemic.

In 2020, the UN Development System provided a significant push for the pandemic response. We were better positioned to do so also due to the ongoing UN Development System reform, which has aimed to ensure a more efficient and coherent UN that acts and speaks as one.

As we embark on the second year of the Decade of Action towards the Sustainable Development Goals – our shared vision to end poverty, protect our fragile planet and build a peaceful world – the UN Resident Coordinators globally have been asked to learn from and build on the experiences from the COVID-19 crisis and work towards accelerating our joint work geared towards climate and environmental action.

In 2021 we will jointly leverage our resources and strengths to accelerate support for the climate agenda, a key sustainable development priority for North Macedonia.

Rossana Dudziak
UN Resident Coordinator in North Macedonia

KEY DATES

DECEMBER

- 11 Public consultation event for GEF supported project on the Sixth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- 16 Closing event for three GEF5 project activities: development of first forest vegetation maps for Maleshevo region; new National erosion and drought sensitivity map; and development of a database on soil sealing rate and loss of organic matter on three pilot regions - in Strumica, Prilep and Ohrid region.
- 18 Interactive climate change needs assessment workshop organized by FAO and the Cabinet of the Deputy President of the Government in charge of Economic Affairs, as National Designated Authority (NDA) to the Green Climate Fund (GCF)
- 18 FAO and the NDA to the GCF launched an online survey to collect data on the knowledge, interest and appetite of the private sector for climate financing; and help the Government engage with the private sector.
- 23 Consultation with stakeholders on the draft Re-Valorisation Study for the Monument of Nature – Lake Ohrid.
- 28 Inception workshop of the FAO project "Supporting Development of Agriculture Land Markets to Bring Abandoned Land into Production" planning processes.

COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

UN entities continue to support COVID-19 response in the country with specific and detailed analysis focused on issues within their respective fields of expertise.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s socio-economic analysis performed in 2020 provided three types of analysis – macroeconomic, sector-based and municipality-based. The macroeconomic analysis highlighted COVID-19 disruptions to the national economy that have put intense pressure on unemployment and poverty rates and have reversed the pre-crisis development gains and results. The pandemic is likely to cause an annual 4% GDP reduction, with the economy not expected to get “back to normal” before end-2023. The unemployment was projected to surpass 20% by the end of 2020, leading to 21% increase in poverty rate. The budget revenues have declined by some €400 million across all categories, which is likely to lead to increased debt and deficits beyond those recorded during the 2009 global financial crisis. This will affect the general value added tax (VAT) grants to municipalities in 2021, which is expected to be reduced by 7.8%.

The crisis has had a severe impact on the industry: a 14.6% decline in industrial production, 33.3% decline in the wholesale trade turnover and 8.9% in retail trade was recorded during the first half of 2020. The hardest-hit industries were tourism and hospitality, where the overnight stays fell by 66% and 97.8%, respectively, for foreign and domestic tourists during the first five months of 2020. Several sectors of the industry have proven resilient to the crisis and achieved growth – pharmaceuticals, computer and electronics, construction), but other industrial branches that make up to 86% of the industrial production were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic is far more than a health crisis and it has disproportionately impacted society's most vulnerable groups. Child poverty and gender disparities have risen. For the first time in a decade, the number of unemployed women surpassed the

number of unemployed men in the country. The Government's economic measures have proven to be successful and prevented the decline in industrial production and its direct translation into increased unemployment. Roughly one in four citizens in the North Macedonia have been at risk of poverty and social exclusion as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Socio-economic data will be regularly updated to follow the dynamics of economic recovery, with details available at the UNDP supported platform www.impact-covid19.mk

International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted renovation of the water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) blocks in the temporary transit center “Vinojug” in Gevgelija, in line with the COVID-19 protection protocols. Through this intervention, IOM has renovated WASH blocks and installed handwashing stations in front of the individual accommodation units. This renovation is part of the European Union-funded regional project “Addressing COVID-19 Challenges within the Migrant and Refugee Response in the Western Balkans” that supports the main migration and asylum management actors in the region to address the challenges caused by the pandemic and maintain all the necessary services.

International Labour Organization (ILO) and the National Economic and Social Council started the implementation of the web-based awareness-raising campaign. The web-platform My Labour, My Rights! www.mojtrudmoiprava.mk enables real-time access to information for workers and employers; it contains information on the rights and obligations that arise from labour relations in the following categories: employment contract, salary, working hours, leave, occupational safety and health, discrimination, mobbing, social security and dispute settlement. For more information see

Website www.mojtrudmoiprava.mk

Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/mojtrudmoiprava>

Videos https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCU2Ua19qJcH_E5_6_rpyuwQ

transparency of the process. The content and discussions from the training will be used to prepare a Media Reporting Manual on the EU Negotiation Process. UNOPS also worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in conducting a training for diplomats in the area of Chapter 27 on environment to familiarize professional diplomats with the current trends in green diplomacy and support them in preparing to address challenges in implementation of EU environmental policies.

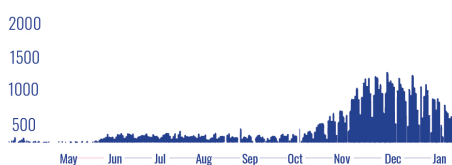
Within the scope of North Macedonia's second Green Climate Fund (GCF) Readiness project, the **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)** aims to support the Government in strengthening national capacities for climate action and the finalization of the Country Work Programme for the GCF. As a first step in this process, FAO has been conducting activities to identify and assess capacity needs linked to climate action and financing to support the achievement of the country's Nationally Determined Contributions and engagement with the GCF. Moreover, FAO has been working with the Government to map the private sector actors in North Macedonia and help them fully tap into opportunities for transformative investments in resilient and low-carbon economic development that could also lead to efficiency and profitability gains. To facilitate the interaction with the private sector in the context of climate finance, FAO and the National Designated Authority (NDA) have initiated activities aiming at fostering and strengthening private sector interest and engagement in climate finance, including from sources such as the GCF.

With the objective to facilitate direct access to GCF resources, an Open Call for expressions of interest of potential GCF Direct Access Entities in North Macedonia was launched in November 2020 and ended on 31 December 2020. Several applications have been submitted by public and private institutions interested in being considered for accreditation with GCF. During the first quarter of 2021, FAO will, in close cooperation with the NDA, assess the applicants according to an agreed scoring system to facilitate a transparent selection process of potential entities to undergo the GCF accreditation process.

LATEST EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DATA (8 Feb 2021)

94,798 CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES	2,924 COVID-19-RELATED FATALITIES
45,502 CONFIRMED CASES PER 1,000,000 PEOPLE	1,403 FATALITIES PER 1,000,000 PEOPLE

Daily new cases reported



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

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Fifteen journalists from different national and local news media attended a four-day training on the “Media coverage of the EU integration process”. The training, organized by the **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** in coordination with the Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA), intends to strengthen the capacity of the media for creating content about the negotiation process with the EU and through this contributing to enhanced

UN JOINT PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

Why joint programmes?

A joint programme is a modality of project implementation that allows multiple UN entities to work together on a specific issue or theme. Through joint programmes, the country and its population benefits from the combined expertise of the UN system on a certain topic, bringing a multidimensional and comprehensive solution to complex problems. Joint projects also enable entities to work and deliver as one UN, putting the UN Development System Reform into practice. Furthermore, joint programmes also enhance resource mobilization opportunities as they allow access to multiple specialized global financing facilities and expertise.

Since 2020, the UN Country Team North Macedonia has put an increased focus on widening the portfolio of joint programmes. New concepts and solutions that have attracted new funding were developed, with additional programmes expecting funding decisions in the first quarter of 2021.

“Evidence-based migration policy planning and discourse in North Macedonia”

This [joint programme](#), which started at the end of 2020, aims to support national institutions in improving the management of the country's demographic and migration dynamics. It provides support in three key areas of migration: in the development of a forward-looking and evidence-based migration policy, strengthened access to

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Duration: October 2020 - April 2023
Budget: \$1,500,000

Key national partners: Ministry of Interior, State Statistical Office, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Information Society and Public Administration, National Bank of the Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Secretariat for European Affairs, Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, Macedonian Anti-Poverty Platform and the European Policy Institute.

Key beneficiaries: general public, media representatives, policy makers, institutional stakeholders, migrants.

Financed by: 

Implemented by:



data on migration, and influencing the narrative on migrants and refugees as positive development actors in the society. The programme will provide a robust support in data collection, through strengthening of the inter-institutional exchange of data on migration; the development of a Country Migration Profile, Migration Governance Index, introduction of migration module in the Labour Force Survey, and generation of new migration data based on innovative data collection methods, including piloting big data analysis. A strong aspect of the project is its whole-of-government, whole-of-society

approach, with several ministries, state institutions and civil-society organizations (CSOs) involved in its design and implementation. The UN is bringing together the expertise of three UN entities – IOM, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). The programme is financed by the [Start-up Fund for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#); its current top contributors include Denmark, Germany, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK).

“Working bottom up – building a local model for deinstitutionalization”

This [joint programme](#), implemented between June 2018 and December 2020, focused on piloting models for services and smooth deinstitutionalization, with specific geographical focus on the residents of the Banja BANSKO institution in Strumica region. The

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Duration: June 2018 – December 2020
Budget: \$400,000

Key national partners: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health, Local Self Government, Institute of Social Activities, State Education Inspectorate, Center for Social Work, regional Employment Centers, CSOs, academia, Ombudsman.

Key beneficiaries: children and adults with disabilities, public institutions, civil society organizations, disabled persons' organizations, schools, state education inspectors, foster care parents, families, prospective foster parents.

Financed by:



Implemented by:



work of the participating UN entities – UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNDP, UN Women and UNFPA – made a significant contribution in supporting the implementation of the national deinstitutionalization agenda through the multi-sectoral efforts. By building a community-level model, the UN team demonstrated how to build bridges to employment for people with disabilities; ensure inclusive education for children with disabilities; strengthen models of alternative, community-based social care and family support; and provide sexual and reproductive health services for women with disabilities. The full participation of people with disabilities throughout the entire process of the project helped pinpoint the bottlenecks and empower individuals to play an active role. Through this action, the UN team proved that community-based options are a feasible and affordable way to facilitate independent living for people with disabilities and developed models of services for wider replication. This programme was financed by the [Multi-donor Trust Fund \(MPTF\)](#) of the [UN Partnership to promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UN-PRPD\)](#); its current top contributors include Australia, Finland, Norway, Sweden and UK.

“Safe and Innovative Health Services in Times of COVID-19 in North Macedonia”

The provision of sexual and reproductive health, immunization and gender-based violence support services have dramatically decreased since the outbreak of COVID-19. The objective of this joint project – implemented by UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) – is to improve

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Duration: January 2021 – March 2022
Budget: \$850,000

Key national partners: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, E-Health Directorate, Association of Gynecologists and Obstetricians, Committee on Safe Motherhood and Healthy Newborn, Macedonian Medical Association, Macedonian Association of Nurses and Midwives, University Clinic of Psychiatry and civil society organizations.

Key beneficiaries: women and children in remote areas, health care workers, whole population.

Financed by:

UN COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY MULTI-PARTNER TRUST FUND

Implemented by:



access to these services for women, adolescent girls and children, with a special focus on the most vulnerable population in remote and underserved areas. The project introduces innovative health services provided by medical teams in mobile gynaecological clinics aimed at improving access to gynaecological/obstetrics services and strengthening integrated gender-based violence referral and support in remote areas, improving immunization coverage and data collection via introduction of digitalized e-immunization registry; and risk communication to immunization-sceptic population. These improved services will address the significant decrease in their provision since the outbreak of COVID-19 and enable more efficient administration and policy relevant real time data on immunisation as well as greater public support for vaccination. The project is financed by the UN Secretary General's [COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund](#); its current top contributors include Austria, Denmark, Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

Beyond these three programmes, the UN North Macedonia is preparing a new joint programme on equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities through systemic reform, which is subject to the financing approval of the [UN-PRPD MPTF](#); and awaiting the final funding decision on the Joint SDG Fund joint programme on green finance that aims to significantly improve access to affordable financing for small and medium enterprises and individuals / households for investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions as well as foster innovation in these sectors. Results achieved through these and other joint UN initiatives will continue to be shared through this Bulletin and other channels.

IN FOCUS Preparing for COVID-19 vaccine

Getting ready for COVID-19 vaccines

Vaccines for COVID-19 are critical tools for helping bring the pandemic under control when combined with effective testing and existing prevention measures. There are several promising vaccine candidates in the pipeline, and some are under review for emergency use. The Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines are already approved for use by several stringent regional and national regulatory bodies, so the race for a safe and effective vaccine has entered a new phase. This update aims to provide answers to some of the pressing questions related to COVID-19 vaccine.

How are COVID-19 vaccines being developed?

Vaccines work by mimicking an infectious agent – viruses, bacteria or other microorganisms that can cause a disease. This ‘teaches’ our immune system to rapidly and effectively respond against these microorganisms.

Traditionally, vaccines have done this by introducing a weakened form of an infectious agent that allows our immune system to build a memory of it. This way, our immune system can quickly recognize and fight it before it makes us ill. That’s also how some current COVID-19 vaccine candidates are being designed.

Other potential vaccines being developed – usually referred to as DNA (for deoxyribonucleic acid) and RNA (for ribonucleic acid) vaccines – use new approaches. Instead of introducing antigens (a substance that causes our immune system to produce antibodies), RNA and DNA vaccines prompt our body to generate a protein that itself safely prompts an immune response. More information on the development of the COVID-19 vaccine can be found on these [WHO](#) and [Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations \(CEPI\)](#) websites.

What are the benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 is easily transmitted and can lead to serious illness and death, even for people who are young and healthy.

Vaccines against COVID-19 will only be approved for use in North Macedonia if large, rigorous and thorough scientific studies show that they safely reduce risks of getting COVID-19. They would do that by preparing our body’s natural defences – the immune system – to recognize and fight off the virus that causes COVID-19.

Scientists are studying whether people who get vaccinated for COVID-19 would also be less likely to pass the COVID-19 virus on to other people. If that is the case, getting vaccinated could be a powerful way to not only protect ourselves, but also our entire community.



Vaccine preparation. Photo credit @UNICEF/2020/Georgiev

Will COVID-19 vaccines provide long-term protection?

It is too early to know if COVID-19 vaccines will provide long-term protection and additional research will be needed to answer this question. However, it is encouraging that available data suggests that most people who recover from COVID-19 develop an immune response that provides at least some protection against reinfection – although we are still learning how strong this protection is, and how long it lasts.

How quickly could COVID-19 vaccines control the pandemic?

We do not know exactly how quickly COVID-19 vaccines could control the pandemic. That will depend on many factors, such as the level of vaccine effectiveness; how quickly they are approved and manufactured; how many people get vaccinated; and the continuation of measures such as physical distancing and mask use.

If I get a COVID-19 vaccine, will I still need to take other precautions such as physical distancing?

Yes. For the time being it is recommended that everyone – including those who have been vaccinated – continue using all available tools to help stop the spread of COVID-19, such as physical distancing and the use of masks. Using all these tools in combination will provide the best possible protection against getting and spreading COVID-19. This recommendation could change in the future once many people have been vaccinated, and as we learn more about the “real world” protection provided by COVID-19 vaccines.

Prepared by UNICEF

QUICK LINKS



COVID-19 vaccine myths vs science

WHO’s Dr Kate O’Brien busts some vaccine myths related to infertility, DNA and composition of vaccines in this week’s Science in 5.

Different types of COVID-19 vaccines

Why are there so many vaccines in development and what are the different types?

Source WHO

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 | 8 February 2021.

www.un.mk