



# UNDP RESPONSES TO C19

APRIL 2020



## Responding to COVID-19, together!

We would like to thank our core partners and donors for their generous funding in rapidly responding to the COVID-19 emergency. Thanks to their support and flexibility, UNDP is able to effectively assist North Macedonia in responding to and recovering from the pandemic while ensuring that the most vulnerable people and communities are not left behind.

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UNDP is already working to understand the social, economic and political impacts of the crisis and finding ways to mitigate them with sustainable, resilient, and rights-based solutions crafted with the public and private sector at country level while analyzing them to generate regional and global insights.

UNDP's response strategy in North Macedonia takes into consideration the social, economic and political aspects of the crisis and aims at assisting the country to prepare and protect people from the pandemic and its impacts, to formulate and implement responses during the outbreak, and to recover from the economic and social impacts.

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**“Even as the global response to COVID-19 focuses on immediate health needs and stopping the spread of the virus, it must also address the socio-economic fallout of the crisis, especially for the most vulnerable”**

*Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator*

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## **Rationale for UNDP involvement**

UNDP is streamlining policies and procedures for greater agility, increasing our flexibility to address the emerging needs of businesses and households that are part of the value chains, and taking steps to ensure our partners and engaged persons on the field are well supported to help the country through this crisis.

UNDP's response to the crisis has been in line with WHO's "COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan" and aligned with country specific UN responses. Respective adjustments to the project activities and the budget have been made. The focus of the activities has been to support national and municipal capacities for planning, financing, coordination and crisis management, to protect the vulnerable, to mobilise the CSO sector and consolidate community engagement for prevention, response and social cohesion. Discussions and coordination of activities with the Government are ongoing in all these areas.

Building on the robust reputation, well-established network of partners and presence in the field, UNDP was fast to provide advisory service, policy-formulation support and response measures at national and sub-national level. UNDP developed e-platforms and e-learning tools are being offered to municipalities for outreach, communication and information-sharing purposes. Series of

activities were initiated to aid the elderly, provide psychological and psychosocial assistance, online tutorials for children that are involved in online schooling, supplies of personal protection items for project beneficiaries and essential food packages for socially excluded. In coordination with other UN agencies, UNDP is supporting the Government with procurement of most urgent medical equipment and PPE. A package of activities has been put together for outreach to the Roma communities on COVID-19 prevention. 17 programmes developed for primary education for adults were made available on an e-platform that can be reached through [www.npv.mk](http://www.npv.mk).

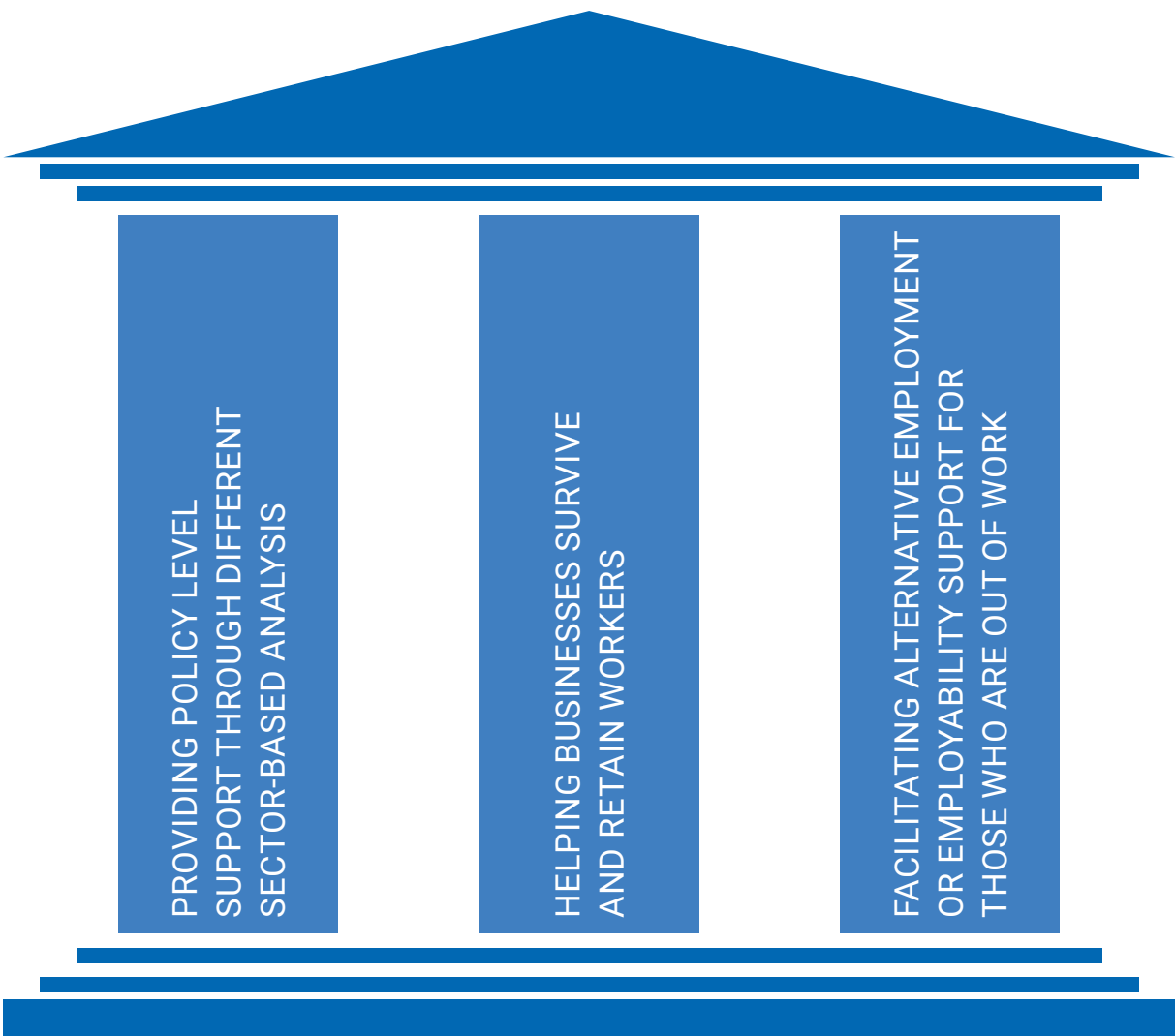
In cooperation with UNDP and other partners from the donor community, the Fund for Innovation and Technology Development announced a call for designing digital tools and solutions for mitigating the impact of COVID-19. Over 500 applications were received, and the evaluation process is ongoing. This will create a roster of projects that can be implemented as money becomes available. The collaboration with the Fund will secure sustainability of innovative/technology-related project deliverables.

**ECONOMIC RESPONSE  
AND RECOVERY:  
PROTECTING JOBS,  
SMALL AND MEDIUM-  
SIZED ENTERPRISES,  
AND VULNERABLE  
WORKERS IN THE  
INFORMAL ECONOMY**



# Policy responses around 3 pillars

UNDP focus on interrelated policies aimed at:

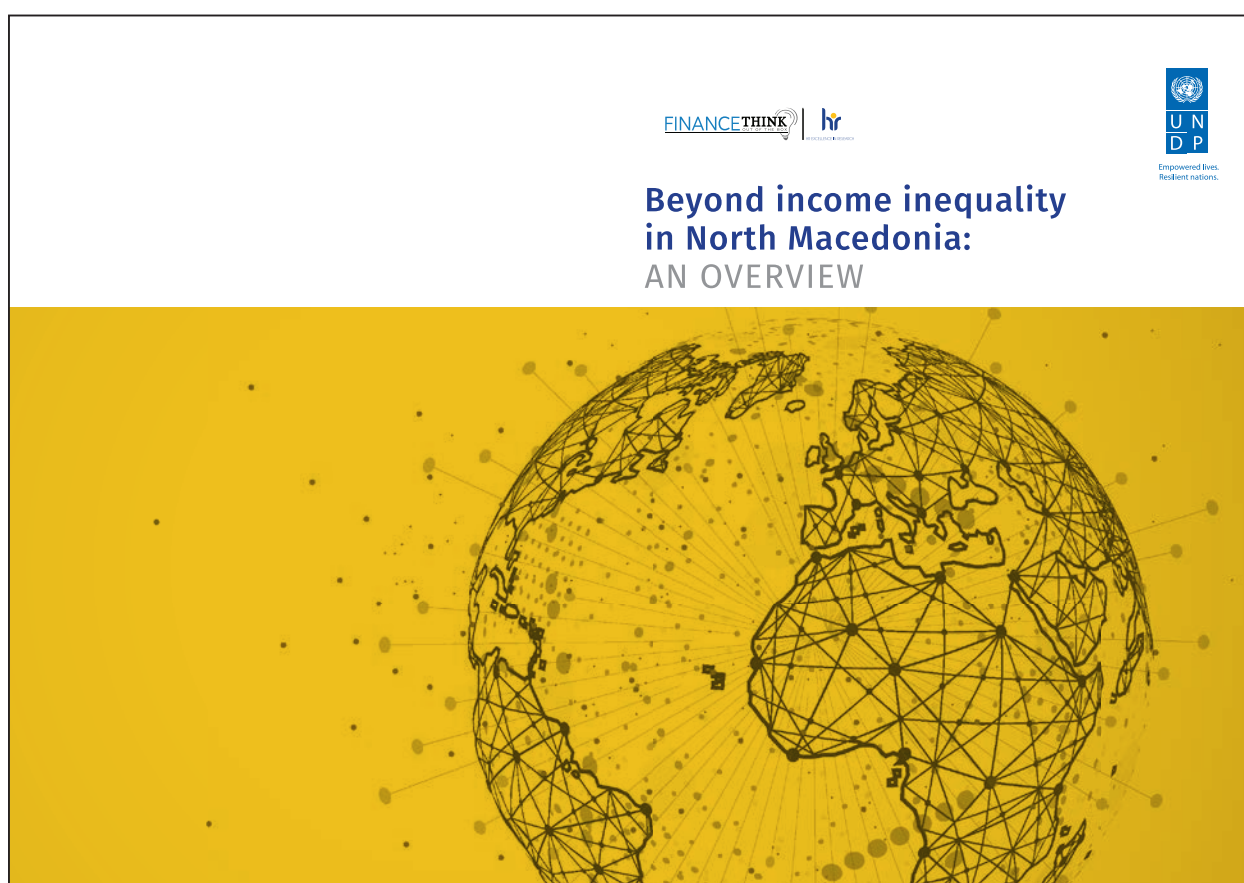


# I. Policy level assessments

## 1.1 Report on inequalities

Based on the thematic scope of the latest Human Development Report, UNDP, in partnership with Finance Think, published a study titled “Beyond Income Inequality in North Macedonia”, which gives an overview of different dimensions of inequality in the country. Though the report was prepared before the acceleration of the

coronavirus pandemic, its findings are more relevant than ever in a crisis that only exacerbates issues stemming from preexisting inequalities, especially in terms of access to healthcare services and the impact on economically vulnerable groups. The report is available at [www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Beyond-income-inequality-in-NM\\_EN.pdf](http://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Beyond-income-inequality-in-NM_EN.pdf)





## 1.2 Socio-economic impact assessment to support COVID-19 response

by estimating the overall economic impact, providing disaggregated data about specific vulnerable social groups and identifying opportunities for better recovery at sectoral and municipal level has been initiated. The socio-economic impact assessment will provide the needed intelligence for the policy makers to support the most affected segments of the society. At the same time, digging deeper in vulnerabilities of the two of the largest sectors of the economy (agriculture and textile industry) will provide the needed know-how to make local SMEs more resilient to future shocks and will expand the knowledge base of some of the ongoing UNDP CO programmes designing ALMMs. Lastly, rapid innovation and crisis management and programming will be directed towards improving service delivery in the most affected municipalities. All of these interventions has a significant scaling-up potential throughout the country.

## 1.3 Assessment of skills needed in two industries

Textile and construction industry are expected to be heavily affected by the COVID-19, so analyzing situation and possibility for introduction of more advance technological IT solution in processes opens a possibility for maintaining all workers in employment. Two consultants will map the exiting gaps, and based on the new trends emerging globally, propose future jobs in the most affect sectors such as textile and construction. Further, possibility of flexible working hours and working arrangement will be discussed and looked upon to enable better business performances in the current period.

COVID-19 will have impact on the employers'

operation and organization, making the digitalization of the processes even more needed than expected. New post-secondary concept is envisaged to utilize new learning paths as per the needs of the businesses, embracing the possibilities offered by e-learning platforms. Possibilities for provision of post-secondary education will be examined, by development of training programs that will be adapted to adult learning needs, adjusted to the work of the private sector and beneficial for workers who need to upgrade their skills and move into higher quality jobs.

## 1.4 On-line services of ESA

The online servicing of the unemployed and the employers shall ease their access to services and shall eliminate the necessity of visiting the Employment Centres. This intervention is aligned with the strategic ESA goal to permanently modernize its labour market services that implies i.a. online provision of all services for which there are no related legal limitations. It is also in line with the recommendations of ESA functional assessment previously done by UNDP for modernisation of the ICT department and its services. The introduction of a Document Management System would substantially upgrade the ESA functioning.

## II. Facilitating alternative employment or employability support for those who are out of work

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### 2.1 Community engagement

Direct support to unemployed people through last resort measures is one of the most secure ways to provide additional cash and support vulnerable households. UNDP expanded the [community engagement measure](#) to over 180 trained unemployed people previously engaged through Community Works Programme for provision of services to elderly and persons with disability. Services have been initially limited to provision of necessary products, medicines, but also could be extended to some other 'safe' services, as per the needs of families but previously approved by the local coordination unit (within the municipality, in cooperation with MLSP). Safety training has been organized to all participants before this activity start in order to gain knowledge on how to deal with C19, as well as how to educate the end beneficiaries to protect themselves and stay safe. Personal protection equipment will be provided to all engaged person. Simple mobile app and a platform has been designed ([pomagame.mk](#)) for easy communication with end-beneficiaries and local coordinators.

**2.2 Generating temporary jobs through public works programs,** plays important role in helping the government addressing temporary unemployment. Those registered as unemployed could participate in the program for up to two months; more than 50 temporary jobs were created in April, covering the immediate needs of 12 municipalities to deal with the C19 crisis.

# III. Helping businesses and households in the informal sector survive and retain workers

## Boosting the employment and employability in the time of emergency

Active Labor market policies can also support business continuity. Immediate response allows businesses and services to continue operating safely and serve the population, including:

- Supporting small businesses to develop e-commerce so they can continue trading and serving customers at a distance – to be piloted in the Polog region
- Improving safety standards for preparation, handling and local delivery of food – to be piloted in the Strumica region;
- Online training for unemployed and laid off workers – digital on-line trainings offered primarily to youth, as per the rapid assessment done with BSOs and SMEs.
- Special platform will have to be drafted to enable continuous support to the SMEs – promotional videos, short messages

### 3.1 Collection and distribution of fruit and vegetable products in Strumica region

The reality of COVID-19 pandemic in the south-east region, which is the biggest region for supply with early fruit and vegetable products, brings a new constraint for small farmers and producers. They are struggling on how to organize their crop in a situation where open/greenmarkets are closed and cannot find market for their products. Support will be provided to enable contractual farming as a tool for small farmers and producers, provide possibility for drying facility, provide instruction and material for packaging and/or organize the packaging under a controlled

protocol in the drying facility they possess. Finally, they will provide an organized transport to the supermarkets, with whom they already have a regular contract and have an increased demand for certain vegetable products. The contract-farming has a good prospect for developments not only in crisis and emergency but is a sustainable way of developing relationships between the small farmers and producers, the agribusiness companies, and agro-industry in general.

### 3.2 Youth Resource Center Gostivar

In cooperation with SEE University different online trainings for youth in Polog region

will be organized. Three main pillars of courses can be organized: soft skill training, entrepreneurship and business knowledge for young entrepreneurs and hard skill training for specific need of companies, especially IT companies that are already engaged in Technology park and other companies in Polog region.

In terms of new situation with C19, youth will be engaged to support SMEs in developing online sales and promotion of the product and services. It is considered that SMEs in general are not so sophisticated and have not developed online trade and sales of the product and services. Young developers will support them in development of web pages and/or tools for online trading and promotion, to help companies shift to online marketing and sale.

### **3.3 Employment package**

Video packages will be produced to support the unemployed, and in particular the vulnerable segments, in enhancing their employability and accessing the labour market. They will be tailored to the specific needs of the target group. In that regard, video lecturing and digital materials on Acceder methodology for supporting employment of Roma and other persons at risk of social exclusion will be produced to enhance the skills of NGOs and other actors assisting these population segments.

The interaction of the NGOs, including those managing Youth Info Clubs, with the vulnerable segments of the population can be used for educating the unemployed and the employers on the prevention measures against COVID19.

### **3.4 Self-employment measure**

Training on “Entrepreneurship and business skills development” will start with on-line training

with those candidates that fulfill the required preconditions for participation in on-line trainings (basic digital skills and computer literacy, computer, internet). By the end of 4-day training, the trainees will be able to develop their business idea and submit to the trainers for further evaluation;

### **3.5 Informational product**

Production of a series of simple and useful basic business tips & tricks focusing on small and medium enterprises via vivid and animated visuals. The goal is to support the SME by presenting quality information on how to manage the business in those circumstances and how to operate through emergency and disaster. The products will be placed online and shared by various social media platforms, but also by economic/business news info portals. The content will be written by experienced business consultants and practitioners.

### **3.6 Increase employability through on-line trainings.**

Increase the number of planned trainings while putting emphasis on subjects such as digital communication, e-commerce, digital marketing, remote working tools etc. Training young unemployed in a situation with restricted physical contact; support to creating workforce qualified to provide digital services to companies; addressing companies' digital illiteracy; counteracting the falling demand for workforce in many “traditional” industries.

# **PROTECTING PEOPLE: SOCIAL PROTECTION AND BASIC SERVICES**



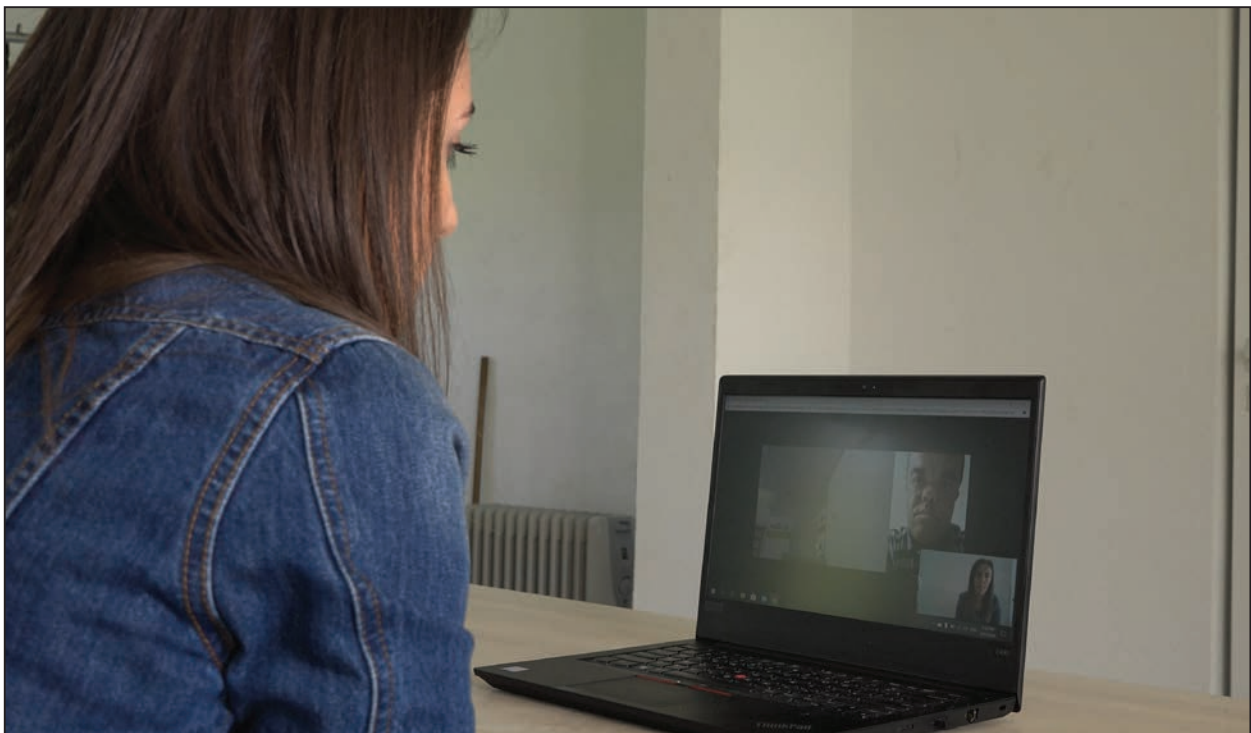
# Secure sustained learning and adolescents

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The policy paper on assessment of current activities of personal and educational assistants was prepared providing ways forward on strengthening the support for children and adults with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools. UNDP programme has provided 2 types of services – provision of Personal Assistants and Educational Assistants, and the need and their consequent placement illustrates the necessity for a more synergetic effort to enforce the implementation of inclusive education – in alignment with EU standards

and in accordance with North Macedonia's and the EU's commitments towards the CRPD.

Emphasizing on solutions for overcoming situations when education cannot continue in schools as an answer to the newest global emergency – COVID 19 Pandemic, further rapid assessment was undertaken on the learning crisis that has been a persistent and recurring phenomenon, widening existing inequalities and creating new ones tackling upon conditions for distance learning and possibilities for bridging the Digital Divide.





## II. Maintain essential food and nutrition services

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### 2.1 Even thou there are still no reported cases of Covid19

infected patients among Roma families that live in biggest Roma settlements in the country, living conditions and habits of Roma population puts them among most vulnerable population in the country. Adding the fact that there are Roma families, returnees from EU countries enlisted

as high-risk countries, makes the situation even more alarming. Many of the most vulnerable Roma families have their basic source of income from the collection of scrap metal, plastic bottles (PET) or others that provide some daily income e.g. begging on the streets, is starting to generate a situation of helplessness and lack of food and basic means of protection. This situation is





especially affecting 37 families accommodated on two locations (Ranka Milanovic and Vizbegovo) and additionally 43 families registered as street children families enrolled in the Day Care Center for street children in Shuto Orizari. To respond to the immediate needs of over 80 families, UNDP provided food, hygienic materials, and info-sheets in Romani language to (413 people of Roma community), accommodated at two locations (Ranka Milanovic and Vizbegovo) and the Day Care Centre for Street Children in Shuto Orizari (enrolled families registered as street children families).

## **2.2 As direct and immediate response**

to the needs of the government for providing services for established Centre for isolation of returnees (citizens of North Macedonia), UNDP provided food services to the Centre for isolation of returnees in Demir Kapija.

## **2.3 Persons living in institutions face increased risks of abuse, neglect, health issues and mental distress.**

In a situation of coronavirus outbreak, people living in residential care settings are facing grater risk not only because some of these facilities are lacking staff due to the absence of funding, but they are also often the last to receive adequate medical equipment to protect both residents/ patients and social workers from COVID-19. In addition, usually these institutions are overcrowded and with poor hygienic conditions. People living in residential care institutions often suffer from pre-existing health conditions, mental distress and during the pandemic crisis usually are banned from family visits in the institution. To respond to the immediate needs of around 350 professionals and residents of the institutions for care of persons with disabilities (Institution for protection and rehabilitation Topansko Pole, Skopje; Banja Banskó - Strumica, Demir Kapija and small group homes for community-based living), UNDP procured protective masks, disinfection liquids, hygiene supplies in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

# III. Mobilize support to maintain essential health services and systems during and following the outbreak

**3.1 During emergency situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic,** the risk for mental health issues and psycho-social problems may be increased especially among people living in residential care settings. To provide appropriate response to the psychosocial needs of this particular target group, the professional teams from the Centers for professional

rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in Skopje and Strumica, will organize on-line psycho-social support sessions with residents with disabilities living in the institutions and in the community. The support will hopefully eliminate or reduce the risk of suffering psychosocial injury or at least reduce distress among the residential population.



### **3.2 Support the continuity of social services and access to shelters.**

Responding to the increase in domestic violence incidents due to circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP held a virtual meeting with representatives from 15 municipalities aimed at building their capacities to respond to this challenge locally. It was agreed that 1) the Project will help municipalities in sharing information on where domestic violence incidents can be reported and where victims can seek support; 2) the inter-stakeholder cooperation on this issue will be improved; and 3) where needed, the project will provide training for municipal staff on how to deal with cases of domestic and gender-based violence. The meeting was organized as a joint initiative with UN Women, ZELS, the Ministry of Labor and the National Network Against Domestic and Violence Against Women.

Health Center in Resen or the crisis management team in municipality of Kochani. Their knowledge of the situation on the field, their previous contacts and database of beneficiaries, are valuable to the local response teams to reach those most in need, leaving no one behind. In addition, the caregivers have modified their role to mitigate the situation and in coordination with the municipality are providing assistance to elderly in performing basic and instrumental elements for life such as: buying necessary products from groceries, medicine from pharmacies, paying bills etc.

**3.2 The integrated home-based (mobile) health and social protection services** in the municipalities of Kochani and Resen are provided by team of professionals consisted of medical nurses, social workers and caregivers for elderly. The main objective of this integrated service is to strengthen and expand the existing home-based health and social service provided in the local communities. The focus is especially to those with multiple co-morbidities who live in rural and remote areas or families who face greater social risks. As part of the integrated efforts at local level to respond more efficiently to the COVID-19 crises, the teams of Resen and Kochani promptly modified their originally designed services and provided extra help to medical workers in the municipality in coordination activities with the staff from the

## IV. Humanitarian assistance for vulnerable groups

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Through the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkan (ReLOaD), we work with local organizations, grantees of the Project, in providing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups of citizens affected by the COVID-19 crisis: people with disabilities and their families, elderly, families living in poverty (with low or no income)

and children from the Small Group Home in Kavadarci. So far, a total of 158 care packages were delivered in three partner Municipalities – Kumanovo, Strumica and Kavadarci. The packages included food and hygiene supplies.





- In the Municipality of Kumanovo, the Roma organization for women from Macedonia DAJA Kumanovo works on improving the quality of life of elderly Roma. DAJA delivered 33 packages of food and hygiene supplies to Roma families in Kumanovo affected by the crisis.
- In the Municipality of Strumica, the Association of persons with physical disability Mobilnost, the Association for exploring and protection of the birds, and the Community center Strumica delivered packages with food and hygiene supplies to 82 families with members with disabilities or other vulnerable groups of citizens. The members of “Mobilnost” also made protective face masks that were donated.
- In the Municipality of Kavadarci, the Women’s Organization Vizija Kavadarci together with the Association Afrodita Bella delivered 3 packages to the Small Group Home for children and 40 packages to vulnerable families. The members of “Vizija” also made protective face masks that were donated.
- Through a separate initiative, care packages were delivered to 80 low-income Roma families, temporarily housed in the “Ranka Milanovik” home, as well as families with children in the Daycare Centre for street children in Shuto Orizari. This aid was planned in response to the priority needs shared by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and was delivered in partnership with local CSO partners and the ministry’s Social Work Centers.

## V. Medical equipment donation to Skopje's Infectious Diseases Clinic

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UNDP procured and donated five intensive care monitors to Skopje's Infectious Diseases hospital in response to the government's priority needs in controlling the coronavirus outbreak. The nursing staff went through an on-site tutorial and the monitors were immediately put to use in improving the care of patients with severe COVID-19 symptoms.



**DEMOCRATIC  
GOVERNANCE:  
SUPPORTING  
SERVICE DELIVERY  
AND ADAPTATION**





# I. Supporting municipal level response to increase in domestic and gender-based violence

The home self-isolation measures introduced to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus have led to some unfortunate negative side effects, such as an increase in domestic and gender-based violence cases. To help municipalities respond efficiently and effectively, the Empowering Municipal Councils project organized an online training for municipal councilors on the prevention of the domestic violence and is supporting municipalities and municipal councils in promotion of the available mechanisms for support and protection of victims

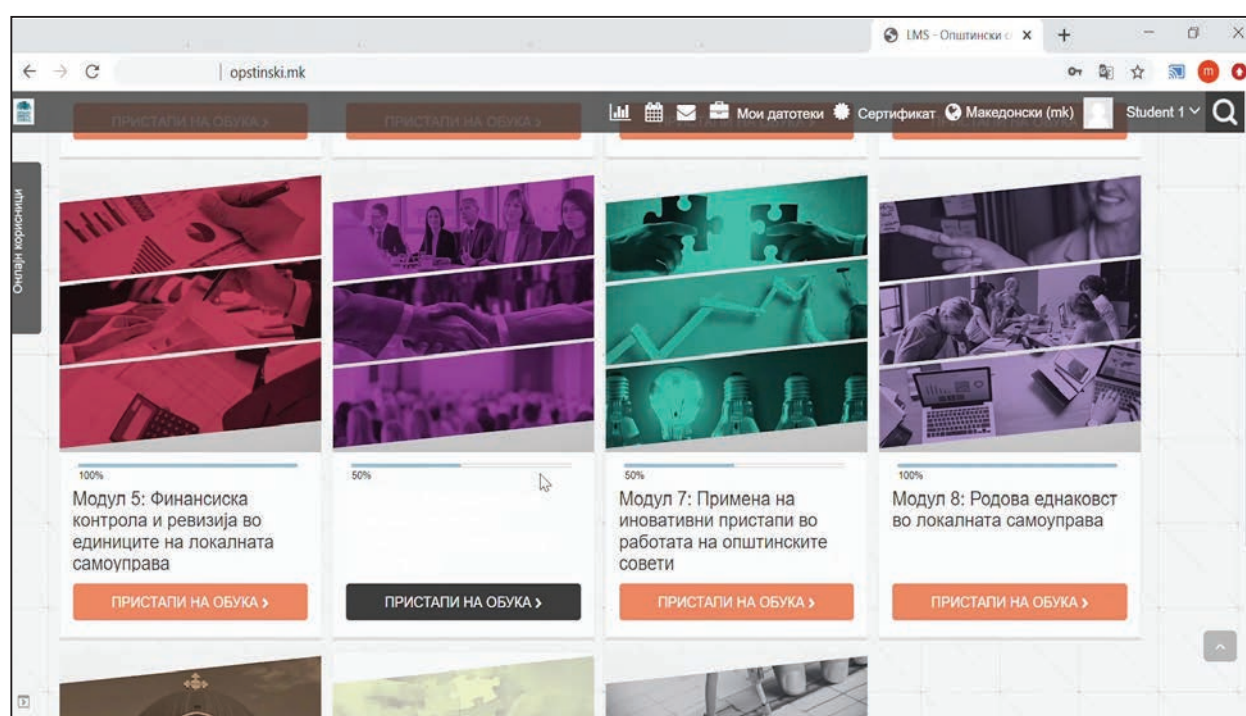
of the domestic violence. The project is also facilitating better coordination and cooperation among municipal councils with the national institutions, NGO sector and the international organizations in area of domestic violence and gender equality. The goal is to increase the population's awareness of the issue and encourage them to report such cases to the authorities, but also to ensure that victims of domestic and gender-based violence have access to the information they need to seek help, counseling and shelter.



## II. Ensuring continuity of key municipal functions through digitalization

Responding to the need for new modes of working brought on by the COVID-19 lockdown, the Empowering Municipal Councils project supported networking among presidents of municipal councils and successfully lobbied for adoption of a Decree by the government of the Republic of North Macedonia which permits conduction of online sessions of the municipal councils. This allowed the work of the municipal councils to continue unimpeded. As of time of writing, 4 municipal council sessions have been held online. The project also continued to update the municipal

councils e-learning platform with all government Decrees affecting municipalities and municipal councils, helping them stay up to date with the latest development in the rapidly changing circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak. Adapting its capacity building efforts to the newfound circumstances, the project delivery of an online training for municipal councilors and members of the council's committees for finance and budget on government changes/amendments of laws and regulations affecting financial/ budget/tax operations of the municipalities.



**ENVIRONMENT:  
BUILDING LONG-  
TERM RESILIENCE TO  
SHOCKS AND CRISIS**



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Though not directly addressing the immediate COVID-19 situation, UNDP's work to strengthen environmental protection systems and increase resilience to climate shocks and crisis will have a beneficial spillover effect on the country's long-term pandemic preparedness. As climate shocks are becoming more frequent, it is increasingly likely that they will coincide with future pandemics, compounding their negative impact on communities. In this broader sense, working to prepare for such shocks now will help

North Macedonia avoid stretching its emergency response capacities too thin during future crisis. Additionally, the work being done to lower air pollution and improve air quality will benefit public health by lower the incidence of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases caused or exacerbated by poor air quality. This should decrease the incidence of cases exhibiting severe symptoms that could occur during future pandemics of respiratory viruses, such as the novel coronavirus.



