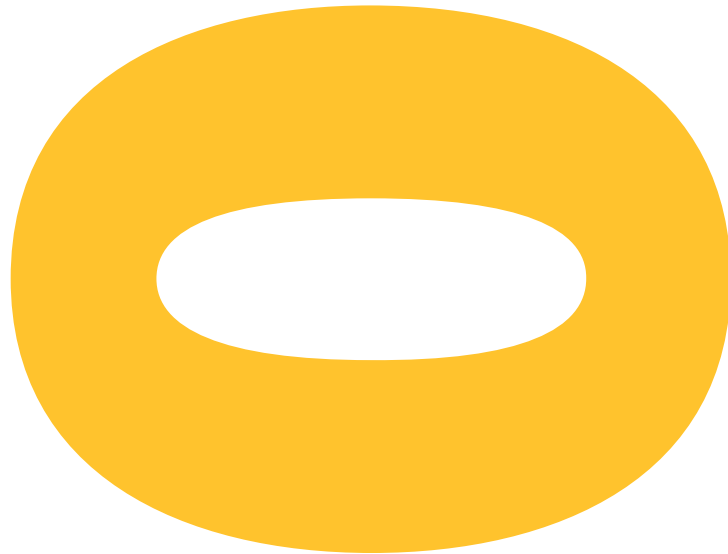




# A LOOK BACK

United Nations Annual Results Report 2013





# ABOUT THE REPORT

This report provides a snapshot of the work that United Nations (UN) agencies undertook in the country throughout 2013.

In partnership with Government, local government institutions, other national stakeholders, civil society, academia and the private sector, results were achieved across a wide range of areas, including enhancing human capital and promoting employment, empowering local government to provide quality social services, and promoting environmentally sustainable development together with a strengthened response to climate change.


The UN family in the country provided technical and financial support that multiplied the impact of Government and civil society efforts aimed at improving the lives of all, especially the most vulnerable, and working towards a prosperous and rewarding future for all citizens.



# Social inclusion



LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND



Addressing social exclusion and inequalities is an important goal for the country. The United Nations works to enable socially excluded women and men, girls and boys to improve their lives by helping to expand their opportunities and increase their access to quality services.

The focus is on empowering and developing the capabilities of excluded people and supporting the Government to promote employment, provide quality social services and make evidence based social policy decisions.

## UNEMPLOYMENT – A CHALLENGE THAT CALLS FOR ACTION

Despite decreasing from 30.6% in 2012 to 28.8% in 2013, unemployment is still extremely high and remains the most pressing challenge facing the country.

Young people are particularly at risk. One in every two young people in the national labour force is unemployed.

High levels of unemployment have a major negative impact on society, leading to migration, higher social costs, a reduced tax base, and a waste of investment in education and training.

### What is the United Nations doing about it?



## SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURS TO FULFILL THEIR DREAMS

In 2013, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) support contributed to the establishment of 930 micro companies, which is almost 10% of the total number of newly created businesses in the country. Building on seven years of work in this area, this pushed the total number of businesses established under the program to 6,000.

UNDP remained the Government's strategic partner in designing and implementing the National Programme on Active Labour Market Measures.

The programme tackled some of the most significant challenges of the labour market i.e., the high level of unemployment amongst women and youth.

Given that only 6% of businesses in the country are owned by women, the participation of 33% of women and 29% of young in the newly established businesses is a significant achievement and an important milestone in promoting entrepreneurship and motivating the unemployed from these two vulnerable groups to take action and improve their livelihoods.



## Where there's a skill, **THERE'S A WAY**

"I started applying for jobs as soon as I completed my dentistry studies," says 30-year old Arta Alija. "But I had no luck with any of the state clinics."

A harsh lesson that many young people are learning in these difficult economic times is that educational qualifications, training and skills are not enough to guarantee employment after graduation.

A key aim of the Government and UNDP's Self-Employment Programme is to encourage unemployed graduates and others to consider different ways of making use of their skills. The programme provides basic business training, coaching, mentoring and one-off small grants to purchase equipment.

Arta worked for two years in private dentistry practices in two villages near Tetovo. What she really wanted, however, was to open her own business. "I had the technical skills," she says. "I just didn't have the business knowledge or the funds to start up on my own."





Arta's friends and family knew about her ambitions and encouraged her to apply for the self-employment programme.

"The grant was obviously a big incentive for applying," says Arta. "Because there's just no way I could find that backing otherwise. But that isn't the full story—apart from the difficulty of raising funds it's the fear of the large amount of paperwork involved that stops people taking the leap. Something I'd strongly encourage other candidates to do is to stop thinking of all the reasons not to try. Because whatever the risks they should realize that the results come fast—and so does the satisfaction."

As well as direct help in developing their business plans, the workshop provides participants with fundamental advice on marketing and strategy. For Arta, this proved a surprising benefit of the programme. "I hadn't thought about marketing realistically before," she says. "Now I realize my business depends on getting known."

## **Arta now runs her own dental practice in Tetovo.**

"There's a lot of local competition, but I'm confident about the future because I've managed to attract regular patients and the clinic is getting a name in Tetovo. The grant made a big difference because dental equipment is very expensive, but the workshop and the help of the consultant made an even bigger difference."

Already employing one nurse in her dental practice, Arta has plans to expand the clinic, buying her own x-ray machine and hiring another dentist and nurse—again demonstrating the power of the self-employment programme to generate work not only for participants but for those they employ in turn.

Once a new business is up and running like Arta's, the employment programme offers further support by helping coordinate assistance to finance the recruitment of additional employees. In 2013, the Government and UNDP launched a website [[samovrabotuvanje.com.mk](http://samovrabotuvanje.com.mk)], where, for the first time, candidates wishing to apply for the self-employment programme can find all the information and help they need in one place. The portal also acts as a business-to-business platform, providing up-to-date information on all 6,000 businesses established through this programme and a map of their locations.

## OPENING THE MARKET FOR PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING TO PRIVATE SECTOR PROVIDERS



Tackling the supply dimensions of the labour market was also in the focus of the employment programme.

One of the major breakthroughs achieved in this area in 2013 was the opening of the market for the provision of vocational training to private sector providers.

Following the development of procedures and standards for the licensing of training providers and the certification of training programmes recognized by relevant national institutions, introduced with UNDP support, five private providers were licensed and seventeen new vocational training programmes were certified in 2013.

Moreover, vocational training in demanded skills was provided to 250 unemployed people, of which 230 successfully completed the training and 20% were employed within 3 months.

New and innovative IT solutions were promoted in order to make the implementation of active labor market measures more efficient.

## Building communities, **CHANGING LIVES**

In 2013, over 2,200 people in 14 pilot municipalities have benefited from the services provided through a community works programme managed by UNDP. The approach gives long-term unemployed people an opportunity to gain work experience while at the same time meeting local demand for needed social services. Each participating municipality hired jobless residents to perform services including care for the elderly, service for people with disabilities and early childhood development.

The success of this pilot initiative was recognized by the Government as a good model for the gradual integration of the long-term unemployed and recipients of social assistance into the labour market.

Building on the experience from the pilot initiative, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies has scaled up and embedded the community works programme as one of the regular active labour market measure of the National Employment Plan in 2014.



## CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISES



Sustainable enterprises do not and cannot exist in a vacuum. All enterprises operate within a political, social and economic context and are subject to regulatory and institutional constraints.

Without addressing the issues related to the overall business environment, interventions at the enterprise level alone do not produce optimal results to achieve sustainable development.

In 2013, the International Labour Organization (ILO) used its project—Enabling Environment for Sustainable Enterprise—to raise the profile of the National Organization of Employers and Business Macedonia as policy actors in the country. These two organizations developed a Strategic Policy Framework for Improved Business Climate for Sustainable Enterprises, with recommendations based on the following key principles:

- Companies deserve quality regulation and the fair implementation of such regulation
- Business needs a strong rule of law and a tough fight against corruption
- Growth depends on access to external finance

- Companies must invest, innovate and globalize to be competitive
- Countries need to develop and make optimum use of domestic entrepreneurial potential

“We hope that this Strategic Policy Framework will serve as a medium-term tool for employers’ organizations to enhance their contribution to government reform efforts through advocacy and dialogue,” says Angel Dimitrov, President of the National Organization of Employers. “We also hope that this will encourage entrepreneurs to innovate, generate employment and invest in human resources over the long term, thereby boosting economic growth and rising living standards.”

# Improving WORKERS’ RIGHTS

High levels of unemployment and a large informal economy, combined with slow economic growth, significantly increased the vulnerability of workers and the risk of their rights being neglected.

The guarantee of principles and rights at work is of particular significance in that it enables the persons concerned to claim freely and on the basis of equality of opportunity their fair share of the wealth which they have helped to generate, and to achieve fully their human potential.

International labour standards are legal instruments drawn up by the ILO’s constituents (governments, employers and workers) and setting out basic principles and rights at work.





In 2013, the national Parliament ratified three ILO Conventions:

- Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150)
- Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No. 151)
- Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154)

This brings to seven the number of ILO conventions that have been ratified in the past four years. "It is significant that the Parliament continues with the process of ratification of ILO conventions, as International Labour Standards are first and foremost about the development of people as human beings," says Emil Krstanovski, ILO National Coordinator. "The implementation of all the ratified conventions aims at promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity."



## Drafting the first ever national action plan on **YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

The many negative consequences of youth unemployment include large-scale migration to find work abroad, serious financial problems for young people and their families on whom they depend, and a high risk of young unemployed people becoming socio-economically excluded.

To help address this problem in an innovative and inclusive way, the ILO has provided extensive technical assistance to the Government in drafting the country's first-ever National Action Plan on Youth



Employment 2015. The ILO has since continued to provide support for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Action Plan.

According to the latest Review of progress of the Action Plan, “there was a general, albeit small, improvement in the youth labour market in 2013 compared to 2012. The employment-to-population ratio of young people (15-29) increased (from 26.1% in 2012 to 26.8% in 2013) and the unemployment rate decreased (from 47% to 45.5%).”

Demographic factors, but also job creation, are responsible for the changes in youth employment prospects, especially for the group between 15 and 24 years old. Progress has also been made in terms of quality of jobs for youth, albeit still at a very slow pace.

The overall implementation of the Action Plan on Youth Employment is broadly on track.

However, the outcomes related to the improvement of the innovation capacity of enterprises, overall competitiveness and job creation are lagging behind.

The challenge ahead is to ensure that enterprises become increasingly capable to absorb larger numbers of highly skilled youth entering in the labour market; otherwise, there is a threat that youth unemployment will worsen. And improved job prospects are vital to reverse high rates of brain drain and dissuade educated youth from leaving the country to seek employment abroad.

# SCHOOL TO WORK transition

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“It’s a tough time being young in this society with the labour market so hard to break into,” says 21 year-old Filip Peovski. “We face serious obstacles in moving from school to work. The competition for jobs is fierce when one in two young people are out of work. You can easily lose hope of ever getting a decent job. Many people my age end up leaving the country or taking up work for a low wage in a low-skilled job with no prospects. Others can end up isolated and impoverished—all the education and skills they acquired gone to waste. On top of that, being unemployed for a long period of time makes it even more difficult to get a job in the future.”

Roughly one in every two young people in the national labour force is unemployed. Aside from the highly negative personal consequences for young people unable to find employment, high levels of youth unemployment also have a major negative impact on society, leading to migration, higher social costs, a reduced tax base, and a waste of investment in education and training. At the same time, long periods of unemployment in the early stages of life affect job prospects across the working-life span of young people



To help tackle this problem of the transition from school to work, the ILO has been working closely with the Government in recent years to develop policies to promote youth employment. The main policies are elaborated in the National Employment Strategy 2011-2015 and its National Employment Action Plan, as well as in the special National Action Plan on Youth Employment 2013-2015, aimed at youth aged 15-29.

As part of this assistance, the ILO and the National Statistical Office elaborated and conducted a school-to-work transition survey of young people aged 15-29.

“The findings of this survey will support policy-makers in designing adequate instruments to support the transition of young people to employment,” explains Sara Elder, ILO Youth Employment Programme.

“The 2012 survey of the transition from school to work, together with the future dataset for 2014, can make a significant contribution to providing policy-makers with information to initiate, monitor and evaluate the numerous policies and programmes outlined in the National Action Plan on Youth Employment,” explains Emil Krstanovski, ILO National Coordinator.

“Establishing an enabling environment for the successful implementation of employment and labour market interventions for young people requires cooperation between the Government, employers’ organizations and trade unions. All of these have a role to play by fulfilling their own specific mandates and through concerted and joint efforts for the promotion of decent work for youth.”





## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ILO SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION SURVEY

- Almost a third of the country's youth have been unemployed for long periods, with negative consequences in terms of maintaining their skills, financial losses and damaged self-esteem.
- It is essential to target these long-term unemployed people through a combination of services, including improved career counselling, motivational training, skills and job-readiness training.
- It is vital to encourage enterprises to take on long-term job-seekers through targeted employment subsidies, including temporary tax rebates and/or waivers to employers of social security contributions.
- The survey shows that young people continue to suffer disproportionately from the limited availability of decent jobs, often resorting to low-quality jobs. Many are trapped in irregular employment, often in the informal economy.
- It is essential, therefore, to continue strengthening existing efforts to regularize informal businesses through awareness-raising activities, business development services, self-employment grants and credit lines and labour inspection.
- Developing a system of incentives to invest in improving the conditions of work of young people can help facilitate the transition from temporary to stable jobs and from the informal to the formal economy.
- It is essential to continue motivating all young people to stay in education and gain qualifications that will improve their competitiveness and increase their employment opportunities, raising the productive potential of the country.
- Although education by itself cannot solve the country's employment problems, as can be seen in the high number of young people working in jobs for which they are over-qualified, a higher level of education still improves the chances that a young person will eventually obtain stable and satisfactory employment.



## HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH

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To harness the potential of youth, UNDP in partnership with the Agency for Youth and Sports and a number of municipalities supported the establishment in 2013 of Youth Councils in six municipalities and the development of youth strategies.

UNDP also assisted the Deputy Prime Minister for EU Affairs to kick-off his “Youth for Europe” initiative, mobilizing its established network of youth organizations to bring young people into EU-related debates.



## FINDING WORK JUST GOT A WHOLE LOT EASIER WITH A NEW APP THAT BRINGS ALL THE LATEST JOB OPENINGS DIRECTLY TO YOUR MOBILE

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It's official! The country's first one-stop app for job-seekers—Prv.mk—has been launched together with a brand new website. The app can be downloaded free at Google Play. And while you're downloading the app, check out the new accompanying site at [www.prv.mk](http://www.prv.mk).

With Prv.mk, young people can find out about all the latest job openings across the country, including internships, volunteer positions and entry-level job placements.

The app was developed by UNDP, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the National Employment Agency and the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering at the Social Innovation Hub, as an innovative solution in the country's efforts to tackle unemployment.

Young people were involved in every step of the app's development—even coming up with the name—to make sure that the app fully matches their job-hunting needs.

"It's a really simple app," explained Dimitar Trajanov, Dean of the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering, "It's easy to install and gives all sorts of useful information about jobs. What's more, it was developed by students who understand the needs of their peers."

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## SUPPORTING HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT of refugees and potential migrants

In 2013, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Skopje financially assisted in the reconstruction of ten houses for persons of concern. A total of 85 persons benefited from this activity: 31 people of concern and 54 family members. Yet by the end of 2013, out of the 199 families who applied for integration, only 16 families managed to obtain a durable housing solution.

At the beginning of 2013, it was estimated that some 80% of persons of concern to UNHCR had access to primary healthcare. UNHCR's persistent interventions led to an increased percentage of 90% by the end of the year.

Significant results were achieved in promoting education and increasing school enrolment and retention rates. In collaboration with the Ministry



of Labour and Social Policy, the Red Cross in Skopje, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, UNHCR continued to support the education of refugee children by providing scholarships at all education levels.

In order to assist the Government in the eradication of illiteracy, UNHCR provided assistance through the Regional Enterprise Support Centre by covering tuition fees and transportation costs for 23 adults (persons of concern) enabling them to attend adult literacy classes. All beneficiaries successfully completed the courses and obtained valid certificates.

Progress continued in the area of self-reliance in 2013. By the end of the year, 5% of eligible persons of concern were directly supported by UNHCR with income generation and vocational training

projects. For the first time, 9 persons were officially employed in existing private companies. The interest of young girls and boys in participating in self-reliance activities has increased.

A campaign was launched in 2013 to raise awareness about the importance of birth/name registration among marginalized communities, including the design and dissemination of flyers and posters. The campaign was supported by the Directorate for Managing Civil Registry Records and the promotional materials were placed in the regional offices of the Directorate throughout the country. In addition, the Directorate organized open days across the country to meet with citizens and explain the importance of birth and personal name registration as prerequisites for gaining access to rights.

## BETTER PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES



**The UN agencies strive to enhance social service provision by helping eliminate disparities in access and improve the quality of services for the socially vulnerable. What have we helped achieve in 2013?**

## GOVERNMENT AND UNICEF RENEWED COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS REMAINING DISPARITIES AND EQUITY GAPS



UNICEF and partners jointly took stock of the progress achieved for children since the beginning of the Country Programme 2010-2015 at the Mid-Term Review and agreed on the future programme directions.

The Mid-Term Review assessed positively the relevance and effectiveness of the programme in addressing bottlenecks preventing the realization of the rights of the most marginalised children, including Roma and children with disabilities. UNICEF contributed to creating an enabling environment for systemic changes leading to improved conditions for children in priority areas.





## IMPROVING THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

The period from 2005-2012 saw a decrease of 27% in the number of children cared for in the country's eight institutions, from 825 to 597. Some 64% of these are children with disabilities. However, the de-institutionalization process is currently limited to only three institutions and has not yet been developed into a comprehensive reform of the child protection system.

The provision of outreach prevention and protection services for children identified as being most-at-risk also remains limited. This is mainly due to a lack of qualified human and financial resources in the Centres for Social Work and lack of clear regulations determining authority, responsibility and accountability at all levels of the country's social services.

To address these gaps in the quality of child protection services, UNICEF has supported the formulation of various bylaws and the introduction of a new curriculum for the staff of Centres for Social Work. Standards and procedures for case management and an electronic data collection system have been developed.

## SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



The country has achieved significant progress in Early Childhood Development (ECD). The proportion of children enrolled in ECD programmes increased from 26% in 2012 to 34% in 2013. But equity gaps persist for children from the most marginalized ethnic communities and for children with disabilities.

For example, while 37% of ethnic Macedonian children attend pre-school services, only 3% of Albanian children, 4% of Roma children and 0.5 % of children with disabilities are enrolled in preschool facilities.

A new Law on Early Childhood Development and 27 new bylaws were developed and adopted by the Government in 2013, with support from UNICEF. The new law enables more diversified provision of quality ECD services, especially for the most vulnerable children. Amongst these measures is the introduction of Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS). The standards will serve as a reference for ensuring and monitoring quality, licensing, professional development, inspection, and recordkeeping.

A 2013 assessment confirmed that child development outcomes have improved in kindergartens and ECD centres where teachers have been trained in the implementation of Early Learning and Development Standards. Following the implementation of the early literacy teacher education

programme, an improvement of 6% in student outcomes was noted in reading in early grades. New modules based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY) were introduced in ten pilot primary schools throughout the country.

This provides a strong basis for advocacy for quality early learning based on Early Learning and Development Standards. While ECD has become a national priority and increased commitments have been made to expand ECD services, state funding remains very limited and public awareness about the importance of enrolling young children in ECD services remains low. To address these limitations UNICEF helped launch an awareness-raising campaign called The First Five Years are the Most Important in partnership with the T-Mobile Foundation.

This campaign, implemented with UNICEF's support throughout 2013, promotes the importance of early childhood development and mobilizing support to open new ECD centres. The corporate alliance established with the T-Mobile Foundation in 2012 to increase supply and demand for quality ECD services has already resulted in the mobilization of funds for new ECD Centres in poor communities.

Six additional private sector partners and multiple media partners have since joined the initiative. Two mobile operators have established donation hotlines to support the campaign and 26 media partners—including television, radio, print and online portals—have provided free media space.



## EQUAL ACCESS

### for all to child healthcare

The country continued to make progress on key indicators of child health in 2013. But significant disparities persist in access to child healthcare primarily amongst different ethnic groups. Infant mortality rates are some 25% higher in the country's Roma and Albanian communities than among the rest of the population. And 18% of Roma children suffer from stunted growth, six times the national average. Ethnicity and place of residence are also key factors restricting access to quality health services providing early detection and intervention for children with disabilities.

To address these disparities and ensure equal access for all children to sufficient healthcare services, UNICEF has been working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the National Association of Nurses on the development of pre- and in-service training programmes for nurses to improve their skills in the early detection and referral of children with developmental risks.

Coordination between patronage nurses and Roma Health Mediators at community level has also been enhanced.

## INCLUSION OF ALL CHILDREN IN QUALITY LEARNING



98% of the country's children are enrolled in primary education and 83% are enrolled in secondary education. Gains in secondary education were also made among the poorest children, where the rate of enrolment has almost doubled from 34% in 2005 to 62% in 2011.

Outcomes in early numeracy, measured among students in Grade 4, showed improvements from 38% in 2009 to 58% in 2012. However only 15% of children with disabilities are enrolled in education, and most of these attend special schools.

In 2013, the Government supported the expansion of the Thinking Mathematics programme introduced with UNICEF support in upper primary education. The Ministry of Education and Science has also endorsed the modules for in-service training on inclusive education based on ICF-CY. The Ministry further participated in a multi-country evaluation of the Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda called "Inclusion of All Out-of-School Children in Quality Learning in CEE/CIS". The preliminary findings of this evaluation stress the importance of building capacities at all levels for the implementation of a broad definition of inclusive education.

## CALL FOR A STRONGER SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN



The country's population continues to suffer high levels of poverty in spite of recent positive macro-economic trends.

Data from the State Statistical Office from 2011 shows that some 27% of the total population are at risk of by poverty, and 36% of children are at risk—and this situation has remained largely unchanged.

The Government has continued to implement additional poverty alleviation measures, such as public work programmes for the unemployed and conditional cash transfers for poor families with children enrolled in secondary school.

UNICEF published a study in April 2013 entitled *Strengthening the Social Protection of Children*. This study has proved crucial in generating information on the coverage and adequacy of benefits, particularly for the most vulnerable communities, including the poorest children and Roma.

It identified weaknesses in the system of social protection for children related to the coverage of the most vulnerable children by the existing child benefits schemes, as well as their adequacy. It showed that only a fifth of the poorest children benefited from a child allowance, and that the amount was insufficient to ensure adequate living standards.

The findings were used by UNICEF to partner with the World Bank in supporting the Government to conduct reforms of the social protection system as a whole.



## Putting a stop to CHILD ABUSE

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been providing assistance to the Government in developing the National Action Plan for the Prevention of and Protection from Child Abuse and Neglect for 2013-2015.

The main objectives of the Action Plan are to provide safety and wellbeing for children and to ensure effective prevention, detection, treatment, rehabilitation and protection of children from any form of abuse and neglect.

Decisive action was needed to fill the significant gaps in data on child abuse and effective measures were needed to secure the safety and wellbeing of children. There has also been a strong need to stimulate a national policy dialogue on how to address the problem of child maltreatment.

In 2013, WHO provided continuous support to the government in the development of national mechanisms to enable a coordinated multi-se-



toral response to ensure child safety. These mechanisms include the development of a unified protocol for improving the national system for prevention of and protection from any form of child abuse and neglect.

These efforts, following a multi-sectoral approach at both national and local levels, have laid the foundations for a system-wide response to child abuse.

## WORKING TOWARDS ENSURING BETTER CARE FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



Official statistics on the number of children with disabilities are incomplete, with information only available for children who are registered as receiving some kind of service from the state.

In 2013, UNICEF supported a reform of the current process for the categorization of children with disabilities, which was still based on a medical model. The new model of classification of disabilities will be based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY). This means that the assessment process will focus on abilities and on what a child can achieve if appropriate services and support are provided. The reform will be completed in 2014.

## INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO SCREENING OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



Vangelina Mojanoska is a teacher in the “Lazo Angelovski” elementary school in Skopje and a passionate supporter of inclusive education.

“From my own experience as a teacher I can say that inclusion of children with special educational needs is possible and has positive impact on the whole school. It is not a threat, just the opposite. It leads to better learning outcomes for children with disabilities and for all other children,” says Vangelina.

Together with other teachers and professors from teachers' training faculties, she participated in a training of trainers on inclusive education, focusing on screening and identification of learning needs.

Participants discussed strategies to make a shift in the way children's learning needs are assessed - from a 'defectology' approach towards a system that builds on children's abilities and focuses on overcoming barriers to learning.

"There are two things to know about inclusive education," says Vangelina. "The first one is to recognize that children have different learning styles. And the second one is to adapt our teaching methodology to the learning needs of children. There are many different patterns of learning and all are good."

Vangelina Mojanoska has a lot to share because her school, "Lazo Angelovski," is one of the first schools successfully applying inclusive education practices to children with special needs.

"When our school first introduced inclusion of children with special needs the teachers - including myself - experienced lack of confidence, skills and resources. UNICEF provided a series of workshops that greatly helped us. Our first step was to assess the professional needs of teachers. Based on the results of this survey we developed our school plan for inclusive education and are now enjoying the process of making it work," says Vangelina.

"Inclusive education is not a marginal issue," says Bertrand Desmoulins, UNICEF Representative. "It is central to the attainment of a high-quality education ensuring that all children are able to reach their full potential."

## KEEPING THE PROMISE: GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY REFLECT ON THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities sets out international standards for the human rights of all persons with disabilities, affirming their legal rights and protecting them from discrimination.

Signed by this country in 2007 and ratified in 2011, the Convention requires governments, the private sector and others to take on the responsibility of respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of persons with disabilities.

The UN has been supporting national efforts to ratify and implement the Convention since 2008 and has been further assisting in the government's reporting and follow-up processes.

The country's first State Report under the Convention is due in January 2014. In 2013, the UN supported Government efforts to prepare the Report by organizing consultations with people with disabilities.

The consultation sessions enabled a valuable exchange of information and analysis between the Government and civil society organizations involved in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and the implementation of the UN Convention in national legislation and practice.

Activists noted that legislation aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities was often only partially implemented or even disregarded, without any sanctions.

The UN Convention and the committee of experts overseeing its implementation strongly advise states to encourage and facilitate the involvement of non-governmental organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities, in the preparation of reports. Such constructive engagement not only enhances the quality of reports but itself promotes the enjoyment by all of the rights protected by the Convention.

## **INVESTING IN YOUTH:** Youth participation in policy making

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Damjan is an activist for the Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER)—a groundbreaking global and comprehensive youth-to-youth initiative pioneered by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Y-PEER promotes youth participation in issues particularly relevant to young people, such as reproductive health, HIV/AIDS awareness and healthy lifestyles.

Damjan spoke to us about his involvement in a major opportunity facilitated by UNFPA in 2013 for young people to meet with key decision-makers. The meeting was held as part of the UNFPA-assisted process of revising the national Strategy for Population and Development.



“Our participation in the revision of the Strategy for Population and Development was a valuable and important experience,” says Damjan. “It was important not only because it gave us the chance to help tailor policies that directly affect our lives and added value to the process of revision and the final document, but also it was a great opportunity for young people to gain experience and broaden their knowledge and understanding of the concepts of development by fully collaborating with people with years of experience in the area.”

The main idea is that youth perspectives should be incorporated in all key recommendations for future Government policies. To do this, additional efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity of youth-led organizations and their engagement in advocacy. This is an area where the UNFPA has been providing important support.

Asked about progress made in the country and the region since the Cairo Declaration on Population and Development in 1994, Damjan says: “Population dynamics and people’s levels of well-being aren’t things that change overnight, but a lot has been done in the past two decades. People are living longer lives with better health, and there is greater gender equality and increased access to information and education.”

“Young people have become powerful interconnected agents of change and it’s easier than ever to travel and move across countries. But still we can see a widening gap between the rich and the poor, a struggling pension system and youth unemployment levels of around 50%.”

“Young people are frustrated by their situation and many have lost hope in the system. In our desire for more education we have created systems focused on quantity—pushing people for more and more qualifications while instead we should be more focused on quality and the development

of an effective strategy for incorporating young educated people into the labour market.”

“We’re still lacking comprehensive reproductive health education in the formal educational system, which in my opinion is crucial to encourage responsible behaviour and family planning. Reproductive health education has significant consequences for the future wellbeing and socio-economic status of young people—and so for society as a whole. All in all, a lot of positive steps have been taken, though many more lie ahead. Creating a truly inclusive society that meets all of our needs is no easy task; but with dedication and joint efforts from institutions, CSOs, adults and young people, as well as with the support of UNFPA, we can ensure constant progress towards our goal.”

## OPEN FORUM THEATRE PLAYS PROVIDE YOUNG REFUGEES WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOWCASE THEIR CREATIVITY



Two open theatre plays were staged with assistance from UNHCR Skopje in 2013 with refugees playing the main roles in real-life dramas showing the harmful consequences of some traditional social roles and inherited traditional practices, including violence in families and relationships.



UNHCR helped to produce the plays in partnership with the Office of the Red Cross in Skopje and with funding from the Youth Initiative Fund.

The project provided a number of young refugees with an opportunity to showcase their creativity and assert their self-esteem and confidence. The young refugees were given the chance to communicate their views to the audience—including family, friends, peers and the local community—about certain practices and traditions they see as harmful.

## NEW PROMISING RESULTS in the field of statelessness

Like other western Balkans nations, the country continues to struggle with the consequences of the dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Amongst these consequences is the problem of statelessness, mostly due to shortcomings in civil registration procedures and lack of documentation.

At the beginning of 2013, 905 persons were identified with undocumented civil status. During the year, the UNHCR office in Skopje assisted 110 persons in obtaining the required personal documentation.



In 2013, UNHCR focused its activities on subsequent birth and personal name registration. The majority of these cases involve Roma, many of whom are children of citizens who lack documentation.

A regional conference was held in Podgorica in October 2013 to review the progress achieved in civil documentation and registration in South-Eastern Europe since the 2011 Zagreb Declaration.

The conference was supported by UNHCR, the European Commission, and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. The authorities endorsed the findings of the review and agreed upon a list of further steps that need to be taken to solve the issue of undocumented people in the region.

Many Roma and other marginalized groups are either unaware of the significance of civil registration or are wary of approaching the authorities for support due to fear of discrimination or penalties due to late registration. Despite ongoing efforts by the Government to address the existing gap in documentation and civil registration, there are sufficient financial and human resources available for the systematic identification of cases.

Therefore, UNHCR continued to extend support for covering the costs of documentation for a limited number of cases, as well as the provision of free legal aid through a national NGO.

A campaign was launched in 2013 to raise awareness about the importance of birth/name registration among marginalized communities, including the design and dissemination of flyers and posters. The campaign was supported by the Directorate for Managing Civil Registry Records and the promotional materials were placed in the regional offices of the Directorate throughout the country.

## **REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR TACKLING ASYLUM AND MIGRATION CHALLENGES**

In April 2013, a Regional Conference organized by UNHCR, with the support of EU TAIEX, brought together judges from Western Balkan countries to undertake a juridical review of asylum cases and to exchange knowledge about national and international law and practice.

A Roundtable on Asylum and Migration Regional Challenges and NGO Good Practices was organized in Skopje, bringing together nine NGOs from the Western Balkans. The roundtable resulted in a declaration of cooperation and a number of recommendations for strengthening cooperation amongst NGOs, diversifying their activities and improving their relationships with governments.

A Strategic Litigation Initiative was presented in partnership with the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association. This initiative gathered prominent attorneys working in the areas of human rights, asylum and discrimination, all with extensive experience in successfully representing cases before the European Court of Human Rights. The selected attorneys will represent the core team of the Strategic Litigation Asylum Group.

Also, in cooperation with UNHCR Pristina and with support from the UNHCR Bureau for Europe, UNHCR Skopje organised the first Joint Workshop for Macedonian and Kosovo Border Officials, "Border monitoring, mixed migration management and protection-sensitive entry systems."

## Better integration of refugees and foreigners

In 2013, UNHCR assisted the Government during the implementation of the Integration Strategy for Refugees and Foreigners and in the implementation of the procedures and policies on asylum and migration. The latter become more important

in view of the recent increased mixed migration movements that included asylum seekers from Syria.

With the support of UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the country drafted a National Action Plan on Refugee Protection and International Migration aiming at operationalization of the migration and asylum system.

UNHCR and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy facilitated the safe return of 72 persons and the naturalization process of 23. A total of 20 apartments were constructed for the most vulnerable families.





## INTEGRATION HAS GREATER POTENTIAL AS A DURABLE SOLUTION

Significant progress was achieved in 2013 in the social aspects of local integration, though progress was slow in the legal aspect of integration.

In January 2013 the country hosted 1,593 people of concern to UNHCR, of whom 1,087 were refugees from Kosovo in a protracted situation. This number decreased to 642 by the end of 2013.

The Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA), a partner of UNHCR Skopje, continued to provide free legal assistance to all persons of concern regardless of their status. A total of 601 peo-

ple of concern who approached the MYLA in 2013 were provided with direct free legal assistance to obtain various personal documents, paternity recognition and to apply for citizenship.

Twenty social apartments were constructed by the end of 2013. UNHCR Skopje donated beds, mattresses, blankets, kitchen sets, heat panels and basic furniture for the apartments. The apartments are expected to be inhabited in 2014. Some 90% of the people of concern are insured with the state's health fund. Some 5% of people of concern were supported with self-reliance activities.





## A 15-year journey ends with a joyful return to Kosovo

“When I left my house in Kacanik in Kosovo in 1999, I, Sheribane Krueziu, a Roma from Kosovo, at that time only 26 years old, did not have any doubts that will be returning home soon, as soon as the conflict in Kosovo is over. Arriving in Skopje, I never thought it will be the start of my 15-year-long journey which ended just few days ago.”



“I was one of the almost 360,000 refugees who arrived in the country in 1999 fleeing from Kosovo and seeking safe haven. Whilst most of these refugees were accommodated in the camps set up at that time, I managed to accommodate myself in a rented room in the suburbs of Skopje in an area known as Topaana. There, in a room of no more than 15 m<sup>2</sup>, I have created a home for my 5 children Nebahate, Albert, Dzenifer, Benita and Mejdi.”

“Living with the assistance provided by UNHCR and the government, trying to overcome extreme poverty in which myself and my five children have since lived, I have never allowed my children to miss a single day at school.”

In July 2014, UNHCR visited Sheribane at her rented home in Topaana in Skopje as she was getting ready to end her long journey and return to Kosovo. While trying to pack her modest belongings, overwhelmed by mixed feelings upon leaving the neighborhood in which she was living for about 15 years, she could hardly speak:

“I was dreaming for this day to come, but today my heart is in pain as I have to leave the people and the state that have taken care of my family for more than 15 years,” Sheribane told UNHCR staff members who joined her in order to assist the voluntary repatriation. Her small house in Topaana was packed as all her Macedonian friends and neighbors stopped in to say good-bye.

“My children were not happy to leave at all. Their Macedonian home, schoolmates and friends are the only ones that they knew all their lives. We have not seen our new house in Gadimlje. All these years we have never been there.” During the ride provided by UNHCR to Kosovo, the children cried.

At the same time, from the other side of the border, UNHCR colleagues from Kosovo and the local municipal authorities were hectically finalizing the preparations for the arrival of Sheribane’s family.

On a piece of land purchased by Shribane's family members in Kosovo, a house was constructed as part of a project funded by UNHCR and the EU to find durable solutions for refugees.

"As the UNHCR vehicle approached the Gadimlje village, couple of beautiful, white painted new houses caught my children's attention and raised their long lost hope of having a home of their own. When the assembled representatives from the local community and authorities welcomed us and escorted to our new house, a contagious joy and excitement spread among all."

"Young Benita was running up and down the house stairs and was preparing coffee, little Dzenifer was hugging the bottles with vegetable oil just delivered together with big 50 kg sacks of white flour and other basic food supplies. I remained speechless when I saw the beautiful wooden furniture that was just delivered from a local furniture factory."

"During all that time, Benita, one of my three daughters was looking around and asking: 'Where is my new school?' The representatives from the local community explained to her that the school is located within walking distance of their new home."

"I finally arrived home – the long, 15-year journey ended on 9 July 2014. However, it will not be easy for me and my children to embrace the environment which some of us had never knew."

"Currently the country still hosts around 936 refugees from Kosovo," says Mohammad Arif, UNHCR Representative in Skopje. "UNHCR Skopje continues to assist the Government in finding durable solutions for these refugees."

## SUPPORT FOR ELDERLY ROMA

The Roma are amongst the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in the country's population, with the lowest average level of income, the highest mortality rate and the lowest percentage of literacy. An estimated two-thirds of Roma households live below the poverty line, and life expectancy for Roma is ten years less than the national average.

Deprivations are especially acute amongst elderly Roma. And this applies even more to Roma who lived through the Second World War and suffered the terrible consequences of the holocaust.

To address the needs of elderly Roma, IOM has launched a project that provided support with humanitarian assistance (including the provision of basics such as food, hygienic items and winter assistance), as well as medical assistance, home care visits, social activities and assistance in completing documentation.

"I live in poverty and I've had severe health problems since 2004," says a project beneficiary. "So I'm very grateful for the assistance I've received in food and hygienic products through this project, and especially for the medical and home visits from the project team."

Mr. Ismail is one of some 2,377 elderly survivors of the Roma Holocaust in the country who have already benefited from the project's humanitarian, legal, medical and social services.

"Given the atrocities we endured in the Second World War, and given the difficult conditions and material insecurity we still suffer, it is a very positive thing that this project is directed specifically to us and our needs," says a project beneficiary. "The practical help is hugely welcome and needed by survivors like myself, but one of the most important benefits of the project is that it has helped build up the self-esteem of Roma survivors and acknowledged their contribution to the community."

Supported by professionals from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health, the Health Insurance Fund and the Pension Fund, the project has helped ensure that elderly Roma are continuously informed about the social protection system and are supported in their efforts to access social services.

"Now I have my own center—a second home, where I can go every day to play backgammon and socialise with friends over a cup of tea or coffee," says a project beneficiary. "It's a place where I've met a lot of new people and learnt many new things," he adds. "For this I'm really thankful to the provided support."





## CRISIS PREPAREDNESS PLANNING FOR THE HEALTH SYSTEM

**In 2013, UNFPA and its partners agreed on the need to incorporate a component on sexual and reproductive health into the Crisis Preparedness Planning for the Health System (CPRHS). As a result, the Ministry of Health is expected to make a Minimal Initial Service Package (a core package of reproductive health interventions needed in emergency settings) part of the CPRHS in 2014.**

In the second half of the year, UNFPA strengthened the national capacities by engaging a strong team of consultants to conduct an Emergency Obstetrics and Neonatal Care needs assessment. The assessment was conducted through a broad consultative process, by engaging key experts and decision makers. 33% of all maternity facilities offering different levels of obstetric care were assessed. The recommendations of the assessment provide guidance on improving maternal care for all citizens.

## MAKING MOTHERHOOD SAFER

UNFPA became a member of the National Committee for Safe Motherhood in 2013. The Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister's Office and is responsible for the implementation of the National Action Plan to reduce maternal, perinatal and infant mortality 2013-2014.

According to data from the Institute for Mother and Child Health Protection, the maternal mortality rate decreased slightly from 4.4 per 100,000 live births in 2011 to 4.2 in 2012, while perinatal mortality increased slightly from 12.3 to 12.8 per 1,000 births.

**Worryingly, the infant mortality rate surged from 9.7 per 1,000 live births in 2012 to 10.2 in 2013.**

## PREVENTING AND MONITORING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Following the adoption of the National Domestic Violence Strategy for 2012-2015, prepared with support from UNDP, a National Coordination Body (NCB) for preventing and monitoring domestic violence was established and formally endorsed by the Government.

The NCB brings together representatives from ministries and institutions – at both political and technical level – as well as civil society organizations engaged in the prevention of domestic violence and the protection of victims. For the first time, rules and procedures were prepared and adopted for the functioning of the NCB, together with an annual work programme for 2013 and training modules for all NCB members, to closely monitor the implementation of the upgraded Domestic Violence Strategy 2012-2015.

In order to promote the national response system and the set of protection and support services that victims of domestic violence can obtain either through governmental or non-governmental organizations, awareness-raising events were organized involving the media, government institutions, civil society and the public to encourage victims to come forward and report domestic violence, but also to help increase communication and cooperation amongst the many stakeholders working to reduce domestic violence – especially between those at local level and national level.

## FIRST NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ADOPTED TO IMPLEMENT UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325



The first National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was adopted in January 2013, with support from UN Women through efforts aimed at raising public awareness, advocacy and institutional capacity development.

UN Women partnered with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the following aims: (i) to enhance governmental capacity for the implementation of the National Action Plan; (ii) to elaborate an operational plan to implement identified priorities of the National Action Plan; and (iii) to develop and implement a training curriculum for public officials from relevant ministries and the Army to develop their capacity in the area of women's equality, peace and security.

To promote gender equality in the defence and security sector, UN Women supported the development and delivery of a comprehensive and tailored training module on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and Gender Equality. This led to the training of more than 70 senior and mid-level officials from the Army and the Ministry of Defence.



## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

in society as a whole is the only effective  
way to root out domestic violence

Violence against women and girls is the most pervasive and widespread human rights violation in the world. Globally, roughly one in three women will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. Combatting domestic violence is therefore a top priority for the United Nations.

In 2013, UN Women and the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research produced the country's first assessment of court proceedings in cases of domestic violence from a gender perspective.

“This is the first study of its kind in Southeast Europe and we believe the approach adopted and the findings of the study will prove relevant for other countries in the region,” UN Resident Coordinator Louisa Vinton says. “It is worth underlining here that the first recommendation of this report emphasizes the need to promote gender equality in society as a whole, as this is ultimately the only effective way to root out domestic violence. This is crucial because our experience has taught us that success in the fight against domestic violence depends not simply on the efficient prosecution of perpetrators but also on sweeping changes in social attitudes and preconceptions, particularly concerning the behaviours society assigns to men and women.”

The focus of the report is on access to justice for women victims of domestic violence and the response of the key legal institutions to the needs of women who have suffered this crime. The report provides clear recommendations for increasing the capacity of the judiciary and the justice system as a whole to meet these needs more equitably and effectively.

“Any effective response to domestic violence rests on a coordinated and gender-sensitive approach by an entire chain of institutions and organizations,” UN Women Head of Office Dominika Stojanoska says, “including the police, the centers for social work, the judiciary, and finally the specialized service providers. The courts and judges have a special, central role to play here—in giving a voice to women, in ensuring that perpetrators are punished, and in seeing that justice is fulfilled.”

With UN assistance, the country made significant progress in raising public awareness of domestic violence and introducing measures to help protect victims. In particular, the country’s signing of the Council of Europe Convention for Combating

and Preventing Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) is a major milestone, though ratification still awaits.

However, the report concludes that many women victims of domestic violence seek justice in vain, owing to a lack of information, limited finances, fear, intimidation, dependency and gender prejudices.

The study is meant to serve as a tool to help ensure that all victims receive the “voice for justice” to which they are unquestionably entitled.

## FIRST GOVERNMENT STRATEGY FOR GENDER EQUALITY ADOPTED



UN Women provided direct technical expertise in support of the development of the Government’s first Strategy for Gender Equality. The Strategy, covering the 2013-2020 period, was adopted by the Parliament in 2013, together with the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2013–2016.

The development of the new strategy involved a transparent and participatory process to identify priorities for achieving gender equality. Representatives from all the country’s relevant institutions, academia and civil society organizations fully participated in the process.

An important novelty within the Strategy ensures that the Government will be accountable to the Parliament for reporting progress on implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality.



## OPENING UP ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES FOR THE SOCIALLY VULNERABLE

The most vulnerable group in society are the Roma. According to the most recent census, they make up at least 2.66% of the population, or 53,800 people. Roma have higher rates of poverty and their health status is worse than the general population. For example, the infant mortality rate in Roma settlements is estimated at 13 per 1,000 live births,

**compared to the national average of 10.2 in 2013.**

Precise data are scarce, but evidence indicates that Roma face significant inequalities not only in their health status but also in their access to the health system and to preventative health services.

“Barriers of many kinds reduce Roma access to health services,” explains Dr. Katerina Stavrikj from the University Clinic for Children’s Diseases. “And not least of these are the social prejudices that impede Roma in exercising their rights to receive the same level of health services as the rest of the population. There are also educational, administrative and economic problems that hinder equal access. These will not go away without concerted and targeted efforts.”

To help tackle these inequities, WHO has been providing technical assistance to the national authorities in reflecting Roma health needs in the development of the National Health Policy.

In 2013, in accordance with the priorities of the Decade for Roma Inclusion and as part of the WHO Biannual Collaborative Agreement 2012-2013 with the Ministry of Health, a multi-country training course was undertaken to help reorient the strategies, programmes and activities on Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 for greater health equity. This training had an explicit—though not exclusive—focus on the Roma population.





# ROMA HEALTH MEDIATORS

- link between  
the community  
and the health  
system

In a small one-room house with no number in a street with no name, Latife Selimovska talks to family members about the importance of child health care.

She is a health mediator supporting the most marginalized Roma families to overcome obstacles to access health and social services. She assists in filling out documentation, accompanies families to various state institutions, and makes basic health assessments. However the most important part of the health mediators' work is the assistance they provide to the patronage nursing service.

"Poor Roma families sometimes don't trust institutions or lack information about available health and social services. Often they only speak Roma," explains Latife. "People know me and rely on me so I assist the patronage nurse to reach Roma families with children, especially when they have babies born at home. I also alert them about children who are exposed to health and social risks and who have no documents, such as the ones I visited today."

UNICEF and the Government recognized the role that Roma health mediators can play in making a bridge between the most marginalized Roma families and the health and social welfare system. As of 2013, the programme is formally integrated in the work of the patronage nurses. To strengthen their coordination, communication and skills, UNICEF has supported capacity building workshops.

"It makes me happy to work closely with the nurse," says Latife. "We jointly educate the poorest families about hygiene, immunization, nutrition habits and environment, and above all about how important the early years are for the future development of their children."



## Strengthening the responsiveness of the health sector and the national legal and policy framework for **HELPING PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS**

The prevalence of HIV in the country is low and has remained concentrated mostly among those with high-risk behaviour. The number of new registered cases is increasing, however, and this rise in recorded cases is most probably due to earlier diagnosis of HIV as a result of the greater availability of Counselling and Testing services. Such services are essential to provide effective treatment to sufferers of HIV as soon as possible.

In 2013, WHO helped to provide an accredited training course for health professionals in Counselling and Testing for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. WHO also helped train 23 health professionals to provide quality health services for socially excluded and vulnerable people.

WHO is committed to helping the country develop laws and policies on HIV/AIDS that respond effectively and with gender sensitivity to the needs of socially excluded and vulnerable people. As part of efforts to ensure the responsiveness and equity of the country's legal, policy and health sector frameworks, WHO has actively participated in the drafting of the National Strategy for HIV/AIDS 2012-2016, the Action Plan for HIV/AIDS 2012-2013, and the National Drug Strategy 2013-2020.



# TAKING ON THE LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH— STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE TO NON- COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Non-communicable diseases such as cancer and circulatory problems are the leading causes of death in the country. Circulatory diseases alone account for 59.2% of the total number of deaths, while neoplasms account for 18.2% of deaths.

The main causes of non-communicable diseases are associated with unhealthy lifestyles, including alcohol and tobacco use, poor diet and insufficient physical exercise.

To help increase awareness and understanding of the burden of non-communicable diseases and improve the responsiveness of the health system to such diseases, WHO has been assisting the Government in preparing a more comprehensive National Strategy and Action Plan for tackling non-communicable diseases.

In addition to helping develop and implement key strategic documents at multi-sectoral level, WHO has been working with the main stakeholders to develop a national monitoring framework for non-communicable diseases. An initial assessment and situation analysis of non-communicable diseases has been undertaken with WHO assistance.





## ALIGNING SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICIES WITH EU FRAMEWORKS AND EU 2020 GOALS



In 2013, UNDP provided support in developing some of the country's strategic policy documents on employment, such as the National Plan on Employment, the Action Plan for the promotion of job opportunities among youth, and a Programme for strengthening dialogue between labour market institutions and the business community.

UNDP also provided policy advisory and expert support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to facilitate a broad consultative process which led to the adoption of the National Strategy for the Alleviation of Poverty and Social Inclusion.

A National Coordination Mechanism was put into place to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Strategy. The strategy's comprehensive system of tangible targets and indicators for monitoring social inclusion is aligned to a large extent with the EU 2020 targets calling for action and mobilization of local actors in fighting poverty and social exclusion of vulnerable groups.

During 2013, with UNDP's support, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy initiated a revision of the National Roma Inclusion Strategy. UNDP supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to carry out a stock-taking of the progress achieved in implementing the 2005-2015 National Strategy for Roma Integration and to define a framework of realistic and achievable indicators.

## STIMULATING NATIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE ON MENTAL HEALTH

The country's capacity to provide mental health-care treatment remains severely limited. Most treatment is still provided through institutional care, with only three specialized psychiatric hospitals and a total of some 1,000 beds. (Hospital placements are determined by region.)

Statistics from 2012 show that the rate of mental illness amongst adults in the country amounts to 337 men and 260 women per 100,000 inhabitants.





A cause of serious concern is that there are no data available on the number of children and youth treated for mental illness.

WHO is committed to strengthening national capacities and stimulating a national policy dialogue on mental health. In 2013, WHO helped to facilitate the development of a Strategy and Action Plan on Mental Health (2013-2020), adopting an integrated multi-sectorial approach. WHO has also helped develop Community Mental Health Guidelines to boost the capacity of mental health professionals.

The newly developed Strategy and Action Plan on Mental Health will serve to reorganize the financing mechanisms for mental health and to create the necessary conditions for assistance to be provided to patients within their own communities. Based on the principles of the European Mental Health Strategy, the new Strategy also includes a much-improved monitoring and evaluation framework.



## SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES



In 2013, IOM support the return and reintegration of 196 migrants as part of the organization's global assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes. Returning Macedonian nationals were provided with reception assistance, counselling and support in re-building social and economic ties.

Most of the migrants returned from European countries such as Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands to different parts of the country such as Skopje, Kumanovo, Kocani, Resen and Kratovo.

Reintegration assistance was tailored in close coordination with beneficiaries and aimed at meeting both pressing needs and the root causes of migration. Returnees received support for housing, education, income-generating activities and medical assistance. For most, such immediate and mid-term assistance was crucial to the success of their transition and reestablishment in the society.

"We were confused and disoriented when we returned, after seven years in Belgium," says one beneficiary, who with his wife and two daughters returned to Kratovo. "The guidance and counselling as well as the assistance provided to restore our family business has helped us a lot. Continuation of healthcare treatment until I was able to register under the state health insurance fund was also beneficial. For this I am very grateful to the Government of Belgium and IOM."

## REVISING THE NATIONAL STRATEGY for population and development

Population dynamics featured high on the Government's agenda in 2013, with a major revision undertaken of the country's National Strategy for Population and Development. UNFPA provided vital support for this revision through technical assistance in the analysis of key population trends.

UNFPA helped organize workshops on the three main population trends that were identified in this analysis: migration; family planning policies, reproductive health and the issue of low fertility; and the ageing of the population. The workshops served as a platform for national dialogue between policy-makers and decision-makers, academia, civil society organizations, experts and different institutions. The outcomes of the assess-

ments, analysis and discussions were taken into account in the process of drafting the new National Strategy of the Government in 2013.

The main recommendations from the nation-wide discussions point to the importance of good data collection, further need for good data analysis and the need to develop improved methodologies for forecasting population trends. Analysis of current legislation related to population issues showed the country has a relatively positive and supportive legislative framework. However, there remains a need to improve the implementation of this legislation and for greater coordination between different government sectors to ensure that quality services are available and equally accessible for all citizens.

During 2013, UNFPA, facilitated an assessment mission by the Division for Social Policy and Development in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs that provided technical support to enhance social policies to address the issues of demographic ageing and older persons in the country.

The national delegation led by the Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Policy took active part in on the UN European Region Conference: Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century. The Conference was a key regional consultation of UN member states on the follow-up to the International Conference for Population and Development (ICPD), and its consequent Plan of Action.

The goal of the Conference was to review the progress that has been made towards achieving the goals and objectives of the Plan of Action in the European region, identify neglected areas, and pinpoint what needs to be done to address emerging population issues.



# Good governance



DELIVERING BETTER SERVICES TO ALL



Good governance is an essential ingredient of effective democracy. In 2013, the UN family worked closely with Government and institutions at all levels is to increase skills and capacities to design more responsive and inclusive policies and to deliver services more effectively.



# Bringing municipalities CLOSER TO CITIZENS

With assistance from UNDP, research was conducted in 2013 in all of the country's municipalities to identify the main achievements of decentralization and the main challenges that lie ahead. The research involved extensive surveys of local state administration bodies and local government units, as well as interviews with mayors and round-table discussions with relevant stakeholders.

The key findings relate to five main areas of decentralization:

## 1. The Legal and Institutional Framework for the Transfer of Powers and Resources

The research shows that significant progress has been made in simplifying procedures for the legalization of illegally built structures, including buildings for agricultural purposes on farmland. The adoption of a new Law on Concessions and Public-Private



Partnerships has also helped to speed up this process. However, challenges remain due to complex legislation in the area of environmental protection and unclear provisions on municipal liability for damages from natural disasters.

## 2. Fiscal Decentralization

Total revenues of local government increased by 12% from 2011 to 2012. Higher revenues were realized in 70 municipalities through a 9.4% increase in grants and the share of local government in VAT increased to 4% in 2012, while the share of local revenues in GDP increased to 6.36% compared to 5.78% in 2011.

However, major challenges remain with regard to insufficient funds for education in block grants for heating and student transportation costs, the lack of a fully functional system of fiscal equalization, and the growing number of municipalities with blocked accounts.

## 3. Local Service Delivery

The research found that municipalities are satisfied with the cooperation between municipal councils, mayors and municipal administrations. Inter-municipal cooperation has been established in 85% of the 53 municipal councils surveyed. A significant number of new school buildings have been constructed and many existing school buildings have been renovated. Substantial investments in social welfare and the protection of children and elderly people have been realized in 12 of the municipalities surveyed. Five new technological and industrial development zones have been established.

The main challenges that remain in the area of local service delivery are related to problems with drinking water, which affect some 13 of the municipalities surveyed. Some 30% of the surveyed municipalities do not deliver appropriate services

for the collection and management of municipal waste. Only half of the surveyed municipalities provide full sanitation coverage. Only half of the municipalities provide organized local passenger transport. And two-thirds of the municipalities are not implementing measures to encourage energy efficiency at local level.

## 4. The Development of the Administrative Capacity of Local Self-Government Units

A series of training events have been held to build the capacities of municipal councilors, including training in gender equality, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, the prevention of human trafficking, and community relations.

The main challenges that remain concern the lack of adequate professional staff in rural municipalities. The issuing of B integrated environmental permits is the biggest single challenge, while additional training is needed in areas such as support for entrepreneurship, competitiveness and innovation, financial management, the preparation of urban planning documentation in rural areas, the electronic issuance of building permits, the promotion of rural tourism and the implementation of the Law on Waters.

## 5. Local Democratic Practice and Citizen Participation in Decision-making

The findings of the survey show a welcome increase in the number of civil initiatives submitted. All of the municipalities surveyed meet their legal obligation for holding open sessions of the council.

More than half of the 55 surveyed municipalities have developed institutional mechanisms for direct consultation with citizens. And most municipalities organize meetings with citizens through their urban and local communities. There remains a clear need, however, for an increased use of in-

novative mechanisms for direct citizen participation in decision-making on issues of local importance. A proactive approach further requires initiatives to strengthen social cohesion.

To help municipalities meet these responsibilities, UNDP has consistently supported greater cooperation among local actors and the creation of partnerships for local development and growth. It is therefore one of the most encouraging findings of the survey that almost two-thirds of the country's municipalities are now actively cooperating to share the costs and burden of local service provision.

## ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY AT LOCAL LEVEL



In an effort to combat corruption at the local level, UNDP worked in 2013 to analyze the integrity models that had been piloted in 10 municipalities in 2012 and transform them into systemic solutions. The result was a determination to make mandatory the introduction of integrity systems and whistleblower protection. As support to this, UNDP assisted the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) in undertaking legal and policy analysis of the integrity concept as a means for effective corruption prevention.

In parallel, UNDP and the SCPC worked together on upgrading and promoting the integrity systems in practice. Based on the results achieved in the first ten municipalities, 15 new municipalities expressed interest and became part of the integrity-related capacity development scheme.

The policy debate on integrity led to creating a cross-sectoral platform that included also a number of civil society partners. Civil society actors took the lead in implementing IT-based social accountability tools in 11 municipalities. One of the tools, developed with UNDP support, ranked among the first 40 among 500 in a global competition for social innovation. The tools are aimed to improve citizen-state interaction and service delivery. This is in line with the Government efforts for promoting e-government as a tool for improved transparency and prevention of petty corruption.

UNDP's support to improved governance and transparency at the local level was explicitly commended in the European Parliament's resolution on the country of May 2013 (2013/2866[RSP]).

## DEEPENING THE HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE

In line with the country's priority goal of EU accession, national institutions focused in 2013 on pre-screening of Chapters 23 and 24 of the acquis, and strengthening the inter-institutional platform. In the absence of formal negotiations, which remain blocked owing to the name dispute with Greece, the chief vehicle for progress was the High-Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) established in 2012.

The EU progress report for 2013 noted that in the area of judiciary and fundamental human rights (Chapter 23) the country has largely completed the main policy reforms, but improvements are still needed to ensure proper implementation of European standards relating to the independence and quality of justice. In the area of corruption, the legislative framework is in place and institutions have taken steps to consolidate the country's enforcement track record. 2013 saw progress in the areas of justice, freedom and security (Chapter 24).

UNDP aimed to contribute to progress towards EU standards by sharing lessons learned from Croatia and other new EU member states. Two study tours were organized to Croatia through a UNDP Regional Facility; these enabled officials in target institutions to acquire in-depth knowledge on the key issues of Chapters 23 and 24 directly from veterans of the accession process, including on human rights, anti-corruption measures, conflict of interest, justice and security, and asylum and immigration.

The exchanges with Croatia also helped in unpacking the issues of Chapters 23 and finalization of the pre-screening tables. The available (financial and human) resources and substantive in-house knowledge retained UNDP's positioning as a relevant and flexible strategic partner of the country for advancing the EU accession agenda. Through its partnership with the Secretariat for European Affairs, UNDP also managed to create an inter-institutional platform for key issues in Chapters 23 and 24, especially anti-corruption.

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Regional development policy remained one of the most complex and debated policy areas among development actors, in particular in relation to the country's discourse with the EU.

In November 2013 the Government requested the line ministries to distribute funds for capital investments by taking due account of the level of development of the regions. The Government also initiated legislative changes aiming to secure sustainable co-financing of the planning region centres.

As in previous years, UNDP helped monitor progress in this area and support needed measures. UNDP partnered with the Ministry of Finance to provide training in financial management for all municipalities aimed at facilitating evidence-based reporting on fiscal decentralization.



These efforts helped familiarize all 81 local government units with the latest trends and requirements for financial management at the local level. This directly contributed to increasing due diligence and securing funds for sub-national development predominantly related to capital investments.

## EU REGIONAL POLICY AND ABSORPTION OF EU FUNDS



In the context of EU regional policy and the absorption of EU funds, the national actors embarked on a systemic pre-screening of the structures and operations related to the EU acquis chapters relevant for more balanced development (Chapter 22 on regional development and Chapters 11 and 12 on agriculture and rural development).

These efforts were mainly aimed at showing political progress towards the EU benchmarks, but also improving the absorption of EU funds, currently at a level below 30%. This is a particularly important novelty as the country has not yet started membership negotiations with the EU despite its candidate country status since 2005. In this exercise, the country has taken advantage of the peer-to-peer approach, using fresh experiences from Croatia as the newest EU-member state through the UNDP Regional Facility in Croatia. UNDP's support brought together all the relevant institutions, pro-

duced the first participatory pre-screening reports and started customized capacity development, in accordance with the findings of the pre-screening exercises.

The complexity of the situation related to regional development policies and practices inspired a search for more innovative approaches to the mobilization of sub-national actors and boosting development at regional level.

As a result, in 2013 a major qualitative change took place in one of the eight planning regions—the Vardar Planning Region—with the introduction of two inclusive and partner-based entities, namely a Network for Inclusive Development and a Joint Administrative Unit for Energy Efficiency and regional Energy Efficiency Info Centre.

These two innovative partnerships have for the first time brought together municipalities, national agencies, economic chambers and civil society around a joint action for development. It is expected that these concepts will directly contribute to improving the sustainability of the regional planning structures and their capacity to absorb the transferred funds.

UNDP's "branded" concept of inter-municipal cooperation (IMC) was applied in both cases. This tool enables the establishment of joint inter-municipal administration, merging financial resources of more municipalities, creation of joint enterprises, joint management and consultative bodies, and similar solutions, and it has proven effective in overcoming existing gaps in local service delivery, especially for a country that has only one layer of local government units and symmetrical decentralization.

## POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION WITH THE EU 2014-2020



2013 was a milestone year for developing a policy framework for the country that will define its strategic priorities and principal areas of cooperation with the EU in the period 2014-2020.

The value of the financial envelope to support the development priorities of the country through the second iteration of the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA II) is estimated at EUR 660 million. For this purpose, a broad consultation process was mobilized, involving representatives from central and local level institutions, civil society organizations and international development partners.

This process was facilitated through the programme working groups initially established with UNDP support, which became the main forum for cross-sectoral consultations and inter-institutional coordination. Moreover, with technical assistance provided through its aid-effectiveness project, UNDP has provided close support to the Secretariat for European Affairs in preparing sectoral strategy papers for the following policy areas: the Business Environment, Competitiveness and Innovation; Human Capital; Agriculture; Environment; Justice and Home Affairs; Public Administration Reform and Decentralization and the Local Self-Government System.



## INTRODUCING GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING AT CENTRAL LEVEL

Studies undertaken by UN Women have identified insufficient funding and limited human resources as major obstacles to the effective implementation of policies for advancing gender equality in the country. Another key challenge to promoting gender equality has been found in the absence of a holistic approach to mainstreaming gender in policy planning and budgeting at central and local levels.



In response to these challenges, UN Women has supported the Government in its efforts to introduce gender-responsive budgeting at the central level through a strategy for the 2012-2017 period. This support has included the development of institutional capacities and support of the institutionalisation of Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB).

As a result of these efforts, the Ministry of Finance amended the budget circular for 2014, requesting three pilot Ministries (the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health) and the Employment Agency to select a programme for gender analysis and to develop gender-sensitive output indicators to measure gender inequalities in these fields.

To facilitate this process, UN Women provided mentorship support to prepare public officials from the pilot institutions to respond to the budget circular requirements, and also to test the methodology for the application of gender-responsive budgeting and the GRB Toolkit for the public administration.

The 2014 budget requests of the pilot institutions are thus accompanied by the first gender budget statements produced in the country, covering basic gender analysis of the selected programmes and gender-sensitive output indicators in accordance with the draft methodology. The Government is expected to endorse the document formally in 2014; this would complete the institutionalisation of GRB in the policy and budget planning process.

## FIRST INTER-SECTORAL WORKING GROUP ON GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING ESTABLISHED



At local level, the Mayor of the City of Skopje has established the country's first inter-sectoral working group on Gender Equality and Gender-Responsive Budgeting.

The working group produced a gender checklist to support inter-sectoral coordination and the development of gender-responsive programmes and adopted a work plan for 2014 that foresees: 1) the application of gender-responsive budgeting to three programmes; 2) inter-sectoral coordination on gender mainstreaming; and 3) strengthened cooperation with elected officials, especially the Commission for Equal Opportunities.


"This is the first time that the City of Skopje has allocated financial resources from the administrative budget to increase the capacities of the newly elected officials in the city council on gender equality and gender-responsive budgeting," says Ermira Lubani, UN Women Regional Project Manager on Gender Responsive Budgeting. "So we are definitely headed in the right direction."

UN Women also produced a civil society organization (CSO) advocacy toolkit on gender-responsive budgeting, tailored to the national institutional context, to guide civil society and gender advocates on how to use GRB tools to hold both central and local governments accountable to their commitments to gender equality. The CSO Toolkit was used by selected CSOs in analysing local self-government programmes from a gender budget perspective, in scrutinizing their participatory processes, in assessing the implementation of national commitments to GRB and in advocating for the enhanced accountability of central and local level institutions to their legal GRB obligations.



# Environmental protection

ENSURING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES



The UN family has been supporting the country in its efforts to ensure better management of its valuable natural resources, combatting climate change and investing in disaster risk reduction to ensure sustainable futures for all.

# PROMOTING ENERGY EFFICIENCY

In 2013, the Government sustained its commitment to the adoption of policies and programmes promoting energy efficiency and the use of renewables, as well as investment in new energy sources.

A set of regulations was adopted concerning the energy efficiency of buildings, energy audits, and energy labelling. In this context, a legal obligation was introduced for regular monitoring of energy consumption by public buildings, and UNDP supported the drafting of a Rulebook that incorporates the key features of the ExCITE software developed previously with UNDP's support, making it a mandatory tool for the energy management of public buildings.

Moreover, support was provided to the Ministry of Environment in amending the Law on Environment with provisions regulating the national system of greenhouse gas emissions inventories. This breakthrough in improving the legal framework will facilitate the preparation of national inventories.

At the local level, UNDP worked with several municipalities to help make several schools and kindergartens energy efficient.

Energy costs currently eat up a large portion of municipal budgets. Just by introducing simple energy efficiency measures, however, the energy costs of any public building can be reduced by at least 20%. The savings made can then be invested in other activities to improve the wellbeing of ordinary citizens.



## SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The Third National Report on Climate Change, supported by UNDP, has produced updated evidence and policy recommendations for national action on climate change. The document includes a revised inventory of greenhouse gas emissions for the 1990-2009 period, and a respective mitigation action plan, as well as vulnerability assessments of the key sectors and a respective adaptation action plan.

The level of data accuracy in the inventory has significantly improved and for the first time many new sectors or sub-sectors have been included.

Aviation is one of these new sectors included, with data on emissions at a level of detail and accuracy achieved by only a few developed countries.

With regard to vulnerabilities and adaptation, beside the updated assessments for other sectors, the impact of climate change on tourism and cultural heritage was assessed for the first time in the country and in the broader region. Also specific indicators of climate change vulnerability were developed for the first time in eight sectors, enabling better assessment of the most direct influence of climate change on various sectors.

In 2013, particular attention was given to raising awareness about climate change issues and the promotion of innovative tools for disseminating information. The first ever documentary film on climate change by a national director, "After the Rain-Climate Change Testimonials," was produced with UNDP's technical and financial support and was promoted as part of two international cinema festivals. The film tells the stories of four female farmers and their struggle to adapt to climate change.





## AFTER THE RAIN: HOW WOMEN FARMERS ARE COPING WITH CLIMATE CHANGE



“It isn’t the strongest species that survives, nor even the most intelligent, but the species most adaptable to change.” Charles Darwin

So begins *After the Rain*, the first ever documentary film made by a Macedonian director about climate change, produced with the technical and financial support of UNDP, the Global Environment Facility, and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning.

The documentary portrays four women, aged between 40 and 80, who work as farmers in the country. The women are from diverse backgrounds—Macedonian, Turkish and Albanian—and each has a very different attitude towards her work on the land.

At 72 years old, Gjurgja Rizova sees the fields as her ‘medicine’ and she farms the land with love. “We can barely feed ourselves these days,” she says, many of her crops are dying, and the hybrid seeds she now has to buy are causing unprecedented problems with weeds. “We’ve been through everything,” she says, but never has she known it to rain so much nor seen so many crops fail. The only solution, she feels, is to switch to farming only corn and keeping bees.

For Sacie Aliova, meanwhile, farming seems like a prison sentence and she dreams of escape and going to school. Asie Pairi has been working the tobacco fields since she was only ten years old. “We didn’t have schools back then,” she says. “Now

I’d prefer not to work in the fields – I’d go to school instead.” But while more frequent hailstorms of late have ruined her tobacco crops and left her family destitute, she still experiments with different crops in a desperate attempt to adapt to the changing conditions.

Biology teacher Biljana Ilieva refuses to be defeated by climate change. “I’m interested in all plants,” she tells us. “It’s beautiful to watch them grow from seedlings to the moment they bear fruit.” She is highly aware of climate change and strives to use alternative sources of energy and water to help the environment. And in the face of hailstorms, she has invested in effective ways of protecting her crops. But her ‘hobby,’ as she calls it, is trying out different breeds of tomato. “We hope we’re on our way to success with this hobby of ours,” she says.

Despite their many differences in attitude, the four women all share the same sky and all of them are experiencing the same fears and challenges that come with climate change. Agriculture is the sector most vulnerable to climate change. The future will bring warmer summers and ever less rain and sudden storms and hail will be more frequent. Traditional ideas about the kinds of weather typical of each season will need to be revised.

Rain is a key motif throughout the film and creates a particular dramatic tension as we witness for ourselves the problems these farmers face on a daily basis—destroyed roots, sick leaves and plants, dried-up fruits.

The overriding message of this innovative documentary, however, comes through from the determination of these women to overcome the challenges they face. And that message, from the mouths of those who know the issues of climate change from the very root, is that those who survive climate change are those who are capable of adaptation. The time to adapt is now!

## REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS



As part of efforts to advance the EU agenda of the country, UNDP has supported the preparation of a comprehensive mitigation assessment on possible targets for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the context of eventual EU membership and the ongoing UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations about the future climate regime.

Following the latest decisions of relevant climate negotiations, UNDP provided support to the City of Skopje in undertaking a comprehensive assessment of appropriate mitigation actions and preparing two urban Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMA) applications, covering the energy and transport sector. These documents consist of a package of measures and cross-sectoral interventions, leading to the reduction of GHG emissions and achieving sustainable growth and healthy urban living conditions in the biggest city in the country. Implementation of these NAMAs, which are the first of their kind in the country, will contribute to fulfilling the commitment of the City of Skopje to reducing GHG emissions at the local level.



**BETTER  
MANAGEMENT**  
of ecosystems  
and natural  
resources



In 2013, the Ministry of Environment and UNDP developed a representative model for integrated ecosystem management which provides new concepts for better management of natural resources.

UNDP's work in the Prespa Lake Basin has served as a very positive example for integrated management of waters and nature. Through a series of basin-scale investments in agriculture, waste management, communal infrastructure, protected areas management, environmental monitoring and other areas, UNDP has helped reduce some of the main negative impacts on the vulnerable lake ecosystem and contributed to improving the well-being of the population that lives near Prespa.

In the area of agriculture, UNDP continued providing support to efforts aimed at extending the apple farming area under Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and agro-ecological farming practices.

Recent studies show that the significant assistance provided to Prespa farmers has already resulted in a reduction of approximately 30% in the amount of pesticides used by local farmers each season.

In addition, particular attention was paid to the reintroduction of varieties of fruits traditionally grown in this region, thus contributing to the preservation of valuable agro-biodiversity in the country.

As part of its overall efforts to increase awareness, UNDP supported the launching of the first-ever information system for farmers based on modern technology. Low costs and simplicity of implementation make this system highly suitable for replication in other municipalities across the country.

## A SMART SOLUTION - REAPING THE FRUITS OF TECHNOLOGY

“This is the one everyone knows from cartoons—the little worm in the apple” explains Eftim Petkovski, scooping the larva of a codling moth from an apple in his orchard in Resen. “But it’s no joke, I can tell you—if we farmers don’t spray for them early on, all our livelihoods are at risk. Timing is everything with these pests. You’ve got to predict their migrations—and that can be a matter of hours. Spraying too early or too late is much less effective and a lot more expensive because you need bigger amounts, often as much as three times the quantity. And you can guess what that does to the environment.”

Overuse of pesticides amongst orchard farmers in Resen has been proven to be a major cause of pollution in the beautiful but environmentally vulnerable region of the Prespa Lake Basin, threatening the habitat of over 2,000 species of birds, fish and mammals, including many endangered animals unique to Prespa and the ancient freshwater lake.

“The way we dealt with pests before was wasteful,” says Petkovski, “And a lot of that could be put down to farmers’ lack of awareness. But that’s not the whole story—the problem of knowing the best time to spray is a problem faced by all farmers. It’s about the speed of notification and that’s in many ways a technical problem needing a technical solution.”

The first major step towards a technical solution to the over-use of pesticides was taken in 2005 with the establishment of a system for monitoring pests and diseases. This system, developed by UNDP in cooperation with the Municipality of Resen, involved the installation of six solar-powered agro-meteorological monitoring stations and a number of insect pheromone traps. The monitoring stations gathered all the necessary data, but the problem remained of how to get that data directly to farmers as quickly as possible. There’s no local media in Resen, so for the past seven years they’ve had to rely on notifications in the town square—and that has been far from adequate to ensure all farmers are adequately and promptly informed.

Walking between the apple-trees in his orchard, Petkovski clicks on his mobile phone and pulls up his message menu. “Here’s the SMS we received about the codling moth on Friday,” he says, and displays the following message:

Apple trees in the area of the village of Rajca have been infected by the coddling moth. The apple trees should be treated in the next ten days. For more info, visit the Facebook page or call the Association of Farmers.



“That message went out to every farmer in the village of Rajca whose name is registered with the local Association of Farmers,” says Petkovski. “And that’s how we were able to spray before the moths had a chance to spread. Just knowing that in time has saved a lot of our fruit.”

The innovative system of SMS notification was developed with UNDP support by the Faculty of Computer Science of the University of Cyril & Methodius in Skopje. As well as SMS notifications, the solution also makes use of Facebook. The same administrator (a pest control expert) responsible for informing farmers by SMS is also responsible for updating a dedicated Farmers’ Association page on Facebook, further expanding the amount and accessibility of timely information.

The new notification system is set to further transform farming practices in the region, securing a sustainable future for the unique ecosystem of Lake Prespa.





# INVESTING IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

The country's economy, population, and environment are highly exposed and vulnerable to natural hazards and climate change is expected to amplify the exposure and increase vulnerability. Therefore, linking disaster risk and climate risk management is an emerging area that attracts more attention, especially from local governments.

In 2013, the main focus of UNDP's assistance was directed towards supporting the integrated risk and hazard assessment process in the country, which resulted in finalization of assessments in 18 municipalities from the South East and South West Planning Regions. These analyses support future municipal strategic and programmatic planning for disaster and climate risk reduction, and should further support the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction in municipal plans and programmes.

The methodology and best practices have been replicated for other six planning regions in the country, so that in total 62 municipalities out of 84 have finalized a risk and hazard assessment with UNDPs support. This is a major achievement because few years ago, such local-level hazard and risk assessments did not exist, leading to ad hoc responses to disasters and huge losses of material goods.



## DEVELOPING THE FIRST NATIONAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN



At the request of the Government, UNDP is providing support for the development of the first National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy and Action Plan. The Strategy has been prepared through a multi-sector participatory approach led by the Crisis Management Centre.

The Strategy incorporates all aspects of disaster risk reduction in the country, important international agreements in this area, existing regional and international experiences and best practices, as well as other elements relevant for such documents (including gender mainstreaming, innovation, education and transfer of knowledge, disability inclusiveness, private sector participation). It is expected that the Strategy will be adopted by the Government in 2014.

For the first time in the country, the concept of disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction was promoted. Together with the Crisis Management Centre and the Ministry of Education, UNDP implemented measures to help reduce the risks and negative effects of disasters for more than 50 students in the only specialized school for the rehabilitation of children with visual impairment in the country. In close collaboration with teachers from this school, UNDP produced the country's first manual for children in Braille on how to stay safe in case of earthquakes, fires, floods and other natural disasters. Moreover, tactile evacuation maps and

a sound system for early warning in the case of emergency were installed in the school. Integrating the needs of people with disabilities within the processes of planning and preparing for emergencies can significantly reduce their vulnerability and can also greatly increase the effectiveness of Government response and recovery efforts.

## Disaster? THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

"I guess I'm a bit of an information freak!" says Vasko Popovski, UNDP's Project Manager for Disaster and Climate Risks, when asked how he came up with the idea for a nifty new application that's set to revolutionize public access to data on dangerous events like earthquakes, floods and fires and potential hazards like violent thunderstorms and heavy snowfalls.

With a flick of his fingers Vasko scrolls through a dozen screens listing every dangerous event currently verified and recorded in the country—from floods to power station malfunctions—with maps clearly detailing the exact location of each event.

Clicking on a highlighted location brings up specific information about the status of the event and essential advice and information on how to deal with the danger, including emergency service numbers and links for alerting others to the problem, allowing citizens to have public data on natural hazards at their fingertips.



The application was developed by a team of top students and professors from the University of Skopje's Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering (FINKI).

"One of the benefits of cooperating with FINKI was that it gave the students cutting-edge work experience," says Vasko. "And the whole project has increased their awareness and abilities in public information apps." The app is the region's first interactive mobile app in the area of disaster risk management, drawing on data and information from the National Crisis Management Centre—UNDP's partner in the Disaster and Climate Risk Reduction project for 2011-2013.

"It's one of those ideas you can't believe isn't already out there—a disaster app that tells you about dangers to the public," says Irena Vasilevska, one of the grad students who worked on the app. "I think it could make a major contribution to public safety." Locations of all dangerous events (floods, fires, heavy snowfalls) are mapped and accessible to the public.

"Before now the public were mostly getting information about dangers and hazardous events through newspapers and the television," explains Vasko. "But these aren't the most relevant and immediate channels anymore. With this app, just at this first stage you'll have 20% of mobile phone subscribers getting access to up-to-date info on dangers. All the research shows that reducing the impact of emergency situations depends on as many people as possible being informed as quickly as possible—and that's what this app is about."

The benefits of raising public awareness of risks of disasters and actual emergencies are manifold, not only in reducing casualties but in preventing such crises by early awareness of potential hazards. In the case of dangers that cause large-scale damage, such as landslides, floods and violent weather events, access to timely information can also save significant losses in property. All this, together with its ease of use and flexibility for upgrading, means the app has clear potential use in resource management and planning in many other areas and organizations from public transport to insurance services.



# GETTING THE HEALTH SECTOR INTO BETTER SHAPE— IMPROVING DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Major emergencies, crises and disasters have become more frequent in recent decades. Many lives could be saved if communities affected by such disasters were better prepared. Above all, being prepared means ensuring that an organized and scalable response system is already in place before disasters occur. Such preparedness is especially important in the health sector.

Further work is required in this country to support the practical application of hospitals' plans for crisis-preparedness. Work is also needed to develop capacity and collect the data necessary to define minimum requirements for risk management and emergency health preparedness.

In 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) helped carry out two simulation exercises to test the preparedness of General Hospitals in the regions of Strumica and Gostivar, as well as the preparedness of the Emergency Medical Services. This exercise served to improve the preparedness of health facilities and staff to provide optimal services and care in emergency situations.

"The simulations helped identify the areas we needed to work on," says Mihail Kochubovski, WHO National Counterpart on Disaster Preparedness and Response in the Ministry of Health. "And that's helped improve our response capacity and coordination. At all levels—national, regional and local—we're now a bit better prepared for disaster."



## HOSPITALS ARE BETTER PREPARED TO RESPOND TO HEAT WAVES AND EMERGENCIES



“The Strumica region is very vulnerable to heat waves and frequent forest fires occur quite often, particularly in summer periods,” says Nikola Pacov, from the General Hospital in Strumica—the biggest regional hospital in the country. “In July 2012, as a result of forest fires, four people lost their lives and many were injured. It is therefore important to test the functioning of the hospital preparedness plan and the ability of the Emergency Medical Services to respond to emergencies,” he adds.

WHO/Europe and the WHO Country Office in Skopje have been working continuously over the past year with health authorities to strengthen the national health system’s preparedness to respond to crisis situations and climate change related emergencies.

A simulation exercise to test the preparedness of the General Hospital Strumica as well as of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in a scenario simulating fire caused by heat waves took place in May 2013.

A series of preparatory meetings, held prior to the exercise, gave the participants an overview of the simulation exercise and highlighted relevant information on expected casualties, trigger indicators for activating the emergency response plan, triage and patient traffic flow, and the responsibil-

ities of hospital and Emergency Medical Services staff. WHO and the Ministry of Health provided recommendations and specific guidelines on the need to update hospital preparedness plans with specific protocols for heat waves were provided.

This simulation exercise, the fourth such event organized as part of regular WHO country activities, showed strong and coordinated multi-sectoral cooperation in the public health response to emergencies. Key stakeholders participated, including the Red Cross, the Crisis Management Centre (CMC), fire-rescue units, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence.

“The exercise allowed officials to test the strengths of the current hospital crisis preparedness plan, including strong command leadership, committed and qualified staff, and effective management of incoming patients,” says Mihail Kochubovski, WHO National Counterpart on Disaster Preparedness and Response in the Ministry of Health. “It also contributed to the implementation of the national heat health action plan established in the country in 2010 as part of the WHO project, ‘Protecting health from climate change—a seven country initiative,’ through testing the hospital protocols for heat waves for which detailed desk evaluation was performed following the simulation exercise.”

Based on this exercise, a review team came up with recommendations for improvement of the plan and for better implementation of heat wave protocols during the different phases of heat waves.

WHO and Ministry of Health officials will continue to work with the national counterparts to further test and upgrade hospital crisis preparedness plans, to ensure that emergency medical services and hospitals will be ready to meet increased service demands during crisis situations.

## TACKLING THE HEALTH RISKS OF CLIMATE CHANGE - EARLY-WARNING SYSTEMS UP AND RUNNING



Climate change is expected to increase the burden of climate-sensitive diseases such as heat-related illnesses, vector-borne diseases, diarrheal diseases and respiratory diseases, as well as increasing the risk of injuries from extreme events.

WHO has recently helped undertake an evaluation of the country's climate change health adaptation strategy and heat-health action plan. The findings of this evaluation formed the basis for the development of measures to further strengthen the implementation of these plans.

An innovative contribution to adaptation has also been developed, making use of the latest technology to provide the health sector with early warnings of heat risks. The system is now functional and available at [www.toplotnibranovi.mk](http://www.toplotnibranovi.mk).

"With this system," explains Jovanka Kostovska, President of the Climate Change and Health Committee in the Ministry of Health. "The health authorities receive alerts over SMS and e-mail up to 48 hours in advance of the hazard, meaning they will be much better prepared to undertake the necessary actions."

An action plan and early warning system for reducing the health impact of cold weather has also been developed with close inter-sectoral cooperation. The plan and the system have now been adopted by the Government and are available at [www.studenibranovi.mk](http://www.studenibranovi.mk).

"These contributions have helped to strengthen the country's capacity to cope with the health risks of climate change," says Kostovska, "as well as raising awareness of the threats."



[www.un.org.mk](http://www.un.org.mk)