

## OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-MKD\_D\_1.1

**By 2025, people in North Macedonia have universal access to rights-based quality social services – healthcare, education, and necessary social and child protection – rooted in systems resilient to emergencies (UNSDCF Outcome 2)**

During the reporting year, the achievement of the outcome was on track. Significant progress was made in that the government harmonized a normative framework towards the improved prevention and effective response to violence against women (VAW) in line with international standards. Five years after the adoption of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2018–2023), in February 2023, the Parliament of North Macedonia adopted amendments to the Criminal Code harmonizing it with the standards of the Istanbul Convention. The Code now defines gender-based violence against women and victims of GBV and criminalizes stalking, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment including in the online space. The definition of rape is now based on consent, and it incriminates rape of a current or previous spouse or intimate partner. The Code also criminalizes the murder of women and girls within GBV (i.e. femicide) and includes economic and psychological violence as types of domestic violence. Additional crimes were amended to foresee stricter penalties if they are committed as a part of, or are consequence, of GBV. UN Women supported the process by participating in technical working meetings, providing expert advice, organizing discussions with civil society organizations, and by supporting an awareness-raising campaign for the public on the Istanbul Convention’s provisions and the urgent need to amend the Criminal Code. Based on the progress achieved, the theory of change is still applicable. UN Women will continue to support key national institutions and civil society actors to advance the normative work on improved prevention and effective response to VAW and enhance capacities for implementation of national and international standards on EVAW. Link: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/06/new-amendments-in-north-macedonias-criminal-code-expand-protection-for-various-forms-of-violence-against-women>

## OUTCOME XM-DAC-41146-MKD\_D\_1.2

**By 2025, people in North Macedonia benefit from improved rule of law, evidence-based, anticipatory and gender responsive policies, greater social cohesion and effective service delivery by transparent, accountable and responsive institutions (UNSDCF Outcome 4)**

Although the outcome was not fully achieved in 2023, it is on track as significant progress was made to improve the legal and institutional frame on gender equality, enhance evidence-based policy making, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and create more effective and gender-responsive service provision. Improved policy frame and institutional capacities on gender equality In 2023, public administration made remarkable progress toward institutionalization of GRB and its sustainable and effective application. The Government adopted a decision for systematization of the first Resource Center of Gender Responsive Policy Making and Budgeting as a separate organizational unit embedded within the Department for Equal Opportunities at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, with a clearly defined set of competencies and human resources structure. In parallel, the Public Finance Management reform progressed with an active stance of the MoF to design the rules of procedure for systematic application of GRB. The ministry initiated a complex process of drafting secondary legislation and developing a specific

bylaw that will regulate the enforcement of the provisions set in the first-ever gender-sensitive budget law, adopted the previous year. Central level budget users, including 13 line ministries and 8 state agencies engendered sectoral programmes through the application of GRB as an approach. Consequently, women benefitted from sector-specific measures designed to respond to challenges in the areas of public health, vocational education and training, access to property rights, media. At the local level, women and the most excluded groups benefitted from 89 gender-responsive local programs, foreseeing measures that span from childcare, specialized services in response to GBV, assistance to children with disabilities, economic empowerment, infrastructure development. In parallel, 7 Local governments developed strategic documents to advance gender equality and integrate gender into local policy and budget planning cycle. EU Integration processes more effectively consider GE priorities. Government representatives, civil society organizations, researchers and academia can now access a comprehensive gender equality overview, which, for the first time, is available in North Macedonia. The analysis portrays the gender disparities in six thematic areas: governance and participation in public life, women's economic participation, education and training of women and girls, women and health, violence against women and girls and women, peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction. All key findings were encapsulated in the unique Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) (<https://bit.ly/3HCqhiY>) produced by UN Women. The Secretariat for EU affairs, as the leading institution in the EU integration process and coordination body for alignment of the EU acquis, now prioritizes the use of gender-disaggregated data and recommendations from the Gender Equality Profile to integrate a gender perspective in the legislative alignment processes. In addition, with UN Women contribution, the work of the State Statistical Office (SSO) on gender-disaggregated data significantly improved with the newly established Gender Data Platform (<https://rodovistatistiki.stat.gov.mk/>). The Platform advanced the work on gender indicators and presentation of gender statistics, benefiting both SSO and the general public to find and use relevant data more efficiently. Strengthened Oversight and accountability towards gender equality commitments. In 2023, the State Audit Office of North Macedonia integrated gender equality priorities in its regular auditing of central and local institutions. This elevated the regular audits to also audit for gender equality. To achieve this, the State Audit Office adopted and applied specific methodological guidance for gender mainstreaming in audit practices. Furthermore, the State Audit Office led a groundbreaking regional cooperative audit on SDG 5 in cooperation with the Supreme Audit Institutions of Kosovo and Albania. This regional audit thematically focused on assessing government policies and measures for the inclusion of rural women in the labor market, tackling one of the most critical and persisting gender inequality areas in the country and the region (<https://bit.ly/46Dm4Hs>). These initiatives for auditing gender equality position North Macedonia and the countries in the Western Balkan among the pioneers conducting gender audit and represent important milestones in ensuring efficient oversight of public spending and strengthening the accountability of the institutions to advance gender equality. UN Women contributed significantly to these results by nurturing existing strategic partnerships with the Government and Oversight Institutions. Substantive technical and expert support was provided to advance the normative work and improve policy and legislative framework, enhance the application of GRB, and improve the use of gender statistics, to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Finance, Secretariat for European Affairs, State Statistical Office, and State Audit Office. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, through the Department for Equal Opportunities remained the key driver leading a number of strategic initiatives, and, through the partner agreement signed with UN Women, extended massive mentoring support to other state institutions on gender responsive budgeting. The partnership with the State Audit Office was expanded by renewing the MoU and expanding the scope of interventions, positioning the SAO as the lead institution upholding transparency and accountability towards gender equality. UN Women cooperated with other development partners, such as UNDP, NDI, as well as World Bank, to achieve better synergy of technical and expert support for the development of strategic and operational documents. Considering the progress made to date, the original strategy and theory of change for this outcome is still applicable. However, given the socio-economic and political context in the country, certain delays and setbacks could be expected in 2024, as well as delays in the implementation of activities at the central level during the parliamentary and presidential elections period. UN Women should continue expanding its interventions with a focus on strengthening technical level capacities, improving the oversight and accountability interventions, and

increased engagement with civil society and gender advocates. If, as expected, this approach is successful, then the results achieved will ensure systematic capacity development of public administration, sustainable application of gender responsive budgeting at central and local level, and effective integration of gender equality priorities in the EU accession agenda. Important lessons can be drawn, which can foster scalability of the interventions and greater Government ownership, such as investing in models for sustainable capacity development of public administration on GRB such as the establishment of a Government-led Resource Center on GRB and developing guidance tools for mainstreaming gender in the EU accession processes.