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Draft country programme document**

Republic of North Macedonia***

Summary

The draft country programme document (CPD) for North Macedonia is presented to the Executive Board for discussion and comment. The draft CPD includes a proposed aggregate indicative budget of \$4,250,000 from regular resources, subject to the availability of funds, and \$8,100,000 in other resources, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions, for the period 2026 to 2030.

* [E/ICEF/2025/27](#).

** In accordance with Executive Board decision 2014/1, country programme documents (CPDs) are considered and approved in one session, on a no-objection basis. This draft CPD, and a costed evaluation plan, will be presented to the Executive Board for review from 10 to 30 June 2025. The final CPD will be posted to the Executive Board web page in English six weeks in advance of the 2025 second regular session and in the other designated languages four weeks in advance.

*** References to the Republic of North Macedonia in this document uses its UNTERM short name (North Macedonia).

Programme rationale

1. North Macedonia, an upper-middle-income country in South-Eastern Europe, has made notable progress over the past 10 years towards guaranteeing child rights, particularly in dramatically reducing infant and child mortality as well as ending institutionalization of children. However, high rates of child poverty, poor learning outcomes and violence against children persist, with significant socioeconomic disparities, and are compounded by emerging threats such as environmental hazards, growing online violence and concerns over adolescent mental health.
2. Over the past decade, the country has experienced significant demographic shifts. The child population, which represents 20.3 per cent of the total of 1.8 million inhabitants, declined by 18 per cent between 2015 and 2023. This was driven by a low fertility rate of 1.5 children per woman, which is below the replacement rate, and increasing outward migration, particularly among youth. Around 63 per cent of children live in urban areas.¹ However, social services are yet to adequately adapt to these demographic shifts to meet the population's evolving needs.
3. North Macedonia is a mosaic of ethnicities, religions, languages and cultures reflecting its complex history. Among children, 48.1 per cent are Macedonian, 31.2 per cent are Albanian and smaller percentages are Turkish (4.9 per cent), Roma (3.9 per cent) or belong to other ethnic communities (3 per cent).² The ethnicity of 8.9 per cent of children remains unspecified.
4. In recent years, the country has undertaken key reforms in the context of its accession process to the European Union, focusing on areas such as democratic standards, human rights and the rule of law to align with the European Union acquis. The National Development Strategy 2024–2044 prioritizes human capital development, inclusion and social cohesion, as well as improving resilience.
5. The 2022 concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the 2024 recommendations from the universal periodic review highlight the need for strengthening child rights coordination, eliminating discrimination and promoting inclusion, ensuring the rights of Roma and children with disabilities, and implementing measures to end violence against children. These represent some of the key challenges facing children today.
6. The impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and rising food and energy prices triggered by the war in Ukraine have undermined economic growth. In 2023, the gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 2.1 per cent, which is the lowest among the Western Balkan countries.³ A significant budget deficit, a continuing increase in public debt and inefficient use of resources further limit sustainable public investment in children's development and rights.
7. Public spending in education, healthcare and social protection is consistently below European Union averages.^{4,5} In 2023, spending on healthcare represented

¹ North Macedonia, State Statistical Office and UNICEF, *Profile of Child Population in the Republic of North Macedonia: Results of the Analysis of Data on Children from the 2021 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings and Administrative Data*, 2023.

² Ibid.

³ World Bank Group, GDP growth (annual %) - North Macedonia (database), available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=MK>, accessed on 23 May 2025.

⁴ Healthcare, education and social protection data from Eurostat, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Category:Government_finance_and_excessive_deficit_procedure_\(EDP\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Category:Government_finance_and_excessive_deficit_procedure_(EDP)), accessed on 23 May 2025.

⁵ Country data from North Macedonia, Ministry of Finance, <https://finance.gov.mk/wp->

5.3 per cent of GDP compared to 7.3 per cent in the European Union; in education, it was 4 per cent versus 4.7 per cent in the European Union; and in social protection, it was 11.6 per cent versus 19.2 per cent in the European Union. However, the main challenge remains in ensuring that resources are used efficiently and benefit all children equitably.

8. The percentage of children living below the national poverty line remains persistently high, having grown since 2015 from 28.8 per cent to 32.2 per cent in 2022. Child poverty is significantly higher than adult poverty, which stands at 22.9 per cent in 2022, indicating that the country is significantly off-track to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 (no poverty) among children. Approximately 40 per cent of children experience multidimensional poverty,⁶ measured according to the European Union definition of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

9. Significant reforms have been implemented in the social protection sector since 2019, aimed at improving coverage of the poorest, enhancing adequacy of benefits and addressing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Nevertheless, only 23 per cent of households with children receive child benefits,⁷ which is a key measure to address the intergenerational transmission of poverty and strengthen the country's human capital and social cohesion. Barriers undermining adequate social protection for children stem from limited use of data in policy decisions, restrictive eligibility criteria, insufficient public expenditure on social protection and a lack of targeted approaches to address exclusion. Social stigma and discrimination faced by Roma children and children with disabilities as well as overly complex procedures to receive benefits further hinder access and utilization of social protection measures.

10. Among the most excluded are children living in poverty, Roma children and children with disabilities. Around 79 per cent of Roma children live below the national poverty line and 62 per cent live in severe material deprivation.⁸ Around 43 per cent of Roma children do not complete lower secondary education, compared with 6 per cent of children nationwide.⁹ Furthermore, despite progress in deinstitutionalization and inclusive education, children with disabilities face persistent barriers due to stigma and limited community-based support and services. Gaps in early intervention, accessibility and specialized resources remain, particularly in rural areas.

11. While the country's European Union Gender Equality Index score increased from 62 in 2019 to 64.5 in 2022, its Gender Development Index rating of 0.950 remains the lowest in South-Eastern Europe.¹⁰ Gender inequalities persist due to traditional norms and stereotypes as well as economic disparities, with women facing

[content/uploads/2024/10/%D0%97%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%80%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%91%D1%83%D1%9F%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%82-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%A0%D0%A1%D0%9C-%D0%B7%D0%B0-2023-%D0%BC%D0%BA-1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_peps01n__custom_16889193/default/table?lang=en), accessed on 23 May 2025.

⁶ European Union, Eurostat (data set), available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_peps01n__custom_16889193/default/table?lang=en, accessed on 29 May 2025.

⁷ North Macedonia, State Statistical Office and UNICEF, *Profile of Child Population in the Republic of North Macedonia: Results of the Analysis of Data on Children from the 2021 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings and Administrative Data*.

⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Roma in 10 European Countries: Main Results*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023.

⁹ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in North Macedonia*, UNICEF North Macedonia, Skopje, 2024.

¹⁰ Bashevska, Marija, *Gender Equality Index for North Macedonia 2022*, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2023.

greater unemployment, including due to limited childcare options, as well as gender-based violence, which is considerably underreported. Furthermore, 8 per cent of young women aged 20 to 24 years are married or in a union before the age of 18 years. This rate is five times higher among adolescent girls in Roma settlements, at 45 per cent, while 19 per cent of Roma adolescent girls (15–19 years) gave birth or were pregnant before the age of 18 years.¹¹

12. Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) has been limited. Learning outcomes are significantly lower than averages among nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and persistent socioeconomic disparities. Completion rates of primary and secondary education are high, with no gender disparities. However, only 34 per cent, 26 per cent and 35 per cent of students achieve foundational learning competencies in mathematics, reading and science respectively, with girls outperforming boys in the three areas.¹² Among Roma children, a mere 20 per cent demonstrate foundational reading skills and 7 per cent numeracy skills.¹³ The Human Capital Index¹⁴ suggests that children born today will attain only 0.56 of their potential productivity. Additionally, 24 per cent of youth aged 15 to 29 years are not in employment, education or training, with a higher rate among girls and young women (26.7 per cent) compared to boys and young men (21.7 per cent).¹⁵

13. Among the key bottlenecks impacting learning achievement is the low preschool coverage. Only 47.3 per cent of children aged 3 to 5 years are enrolled in preschool, half the European Union average of 93 per cent.¹⁶ While there is no significant difference in enrolment of boys and girls, there are wide disparities based on socioeconomic conditions, with 7 per cent of children from the lowest wealth quintile attending preschool compared with 67 per cent among those from the highest quintile. Roma children are particularly disadvantaged: only 12 per cent attend early childhood education.

14. With 89 per cent of government primary education funding allocated to staff salaries, minimal resources remain for professional development, other current expenditures and capital investments. Insufficient funding and inefficient resource allocation result in a school network that is costly to maintain and ill-adjusted to demographic shifts. Two thirds of municipalities have less than 10 children per classroom, a suboptimal number for interaction and quality learning. Coupled with inefficient human resource management, these factors undermine the quality and inclusivity of education at all levels. Challenges remain in ensuring foundational learning, digital, green and transferable skills, and in implementing child-centred inclusive pedagogies responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable, particularly Roma children and children with disabilities.

15. The prevalence of violent discipline by caregivers at home is a key indicator of progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). In North Macedonia, 77 per cent of boys and 70 per cent of girls aged

¹¹ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in North Macedonia*.

¹² Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2023.

¹³ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in North Macedonia*.

¹⁴ World Bank Group, *The Human Capital Index 2020 Update: Human Capital in the Time of COVID-19*, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2021.

¹⁵ North Macedonia, State Statistical Office and UNICEF North Macedonia, *North Macedonia and North Macedonia Roma Settlements: Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys 2018-2019 – Survey Findings Reports*, Skopje, 2020.

¹⁶ Social statistics from North Macedonia, State Statistical Office, https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2024/2.1.24.22_mk.pdf, accessed on 23 May 2025.

1 to 14 years experience physical punishment or psychological aggression by caregivers.¹⁷ This number climbs to 82 per cent among Roma children and 86 per cent among children with functional difficulties. Notably, 40 per cent of parents consider violent discipline to be an effective parenting method.¹⁸ Moreover, 54 per cent of women have experienced at least one form of violence since the age of 15 years. Violent patterns also include bullying and cyberbullying: 19 per cent of students (13–15 years) report being bullied in the past 30 days.¹⁹

16. Progress has been made over the past 10 years in child protection system strengthening. However, dispersed legislative norms and limited intersectoral coordination are continuing challenges. The social service workforce needs strengthening for effective case management and tailored support to vulnerable children and families. Limited national and municipal budgets constrain the provision of child and family social services and violence prevention programmes. Traditional attitudes and lack of awareness perpetuate violent discipline, discourage reporting and delay the seeking of support. Additionally, adequate justice for children is undermined by a lack of preventative and specialized services, lack of implementation of procedural safeguards for children, and minimal use of restorative justice practices for children in conflict with the law.

17. North Macedonia has made significant strides in improving children's health and has achieved Sustainable Development Goal 3 (good health and well-being). It reduced child and infant mortality from 13.1 and 11.9 deaths per 1,000 live births to 2.7 and 1.8 deaths, respectively, between 2016 and 2023, bringing these rates below European Union averages.²⁰ The country has ensured that 100 per cent of births are attended by skilled health professionals. Nevertheless, persistent and emerging risks threaten optimal child and adolescent development, particularly among the most vulnerable. Immunization rates fell during the COVID-19 pandemic due to vaccine hesitancy and misinformation, and are now slowly recovering. Adolescent mental health remains a significant concern, after reaching alarming rates during the COVID-19 pandemic when 1 in 3 adolescents exhibited moderate to severe symptoms of depression.²¹

18. The country has also achieved Sustainable Development Goal 2 (nutrition), reducing stunting among children under 5 years of age from 5 per cent to 4 per cent between 2011 and 2019,²² with wasting at 3 per cent in 2019. However, some challenges persist, with stunting affecting 11 per cent of children in Roma settlements. Exclusive breastfeeding rates in the first six months after birth remain particularly low at 28 per cent. Among children under 5 years of age, 11 per cent are overweight, while the rate increases to 31.6 per cent among children aged 7 to 9 years.²³

19. Since 2019, North Macedonia has been reforming its primary healthcare system to adopt a community-oriented care model. However, key maternal and child health services at the community level, such as home-visiting patronage nurses, are not optimized in line with demographic needs, have limited resources and do not focus on the most vulnerable children. Other prevention programmes, such as parenting support, developmental monitoring and early childhood interventions for children

¹⁷ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in North Macedonia*.

¹⁸ UNICEF, *Survey on Parents' and Caregivers' Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Social Norms Associated with Violence Against Children*, 2017.

¹⁹ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in North Macedonia*.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ World Health Organization, *WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI): A Brief Review of Results From Round 6 of COSI (2022–2024)*, Copenhagen, 2024.

with disabilities, are limited. While the Government has adopted a multisectoral national action plan on the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents, prevention and counselling services are limited across the health, education and social protection sectors. Current normative frameworks and policy priorities remain insufficient in controlling access to unhealthy food and mitigating health risks.

20. In the context of Sustainable Development Goal 13 (climate action), the country is increasingly exposed to climate and environmental risks, with air pollution, extreme weather events and natural disasters posing growing threats to public health, particularly for children. The annual mean PM_{2.5} (fine particulate matter) level is five times higher than the World Health Organization recommendations, representing the worst average among Western Balkan countries.²⁴ Moreover, the age-standardized mortality rate due to household and ambient air pollution is 96 deaths per 100,000 people, which is more than double the European Union average. In 2019, respiratory diseases caused 39.8 per cent of child morbidity, particularly impacting urban areas and children living in poor and vulnerable communities. Schools and health facilities are not equipped to address environmental health risks, and there are significant gaps in climate adaptation and mitigation, leaving marginalized groups more vulnerable.

21. The evaluation of the previous country programme (2021–2025) documented strategic contributions that UNICEF has made in advancing the country's inclusive, rights-based reforms for children and strengthening national systems. The evaluation provided lessons learned and recommendations, emphasizing the need to prioritize the inclusion of the most vulnerable, particularly Roma children and children with disabilities, by catalysing the adoption and financing of policies and measures that address remaining gaps. Recognized as a key actor in convening a range of stakeholders to address child rights challenges, UNICEF was encouraged to further deepen its partnerships, particularly with the European Union, the private sector and the Parliament, to drive systemic reforms and leverage investments for children.

22. The selected programme priorities in this country programme derive from the identification of critical gaps in the realization of child rights. Aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2026–2030 (UNSDCF) and the Sustainable Development Goals, the programme will focus on opportunities for accelerated action to achieve child-centred national priorities that are strongly connected to European Union accession targets. It aims to enable system-level change, support urgent public sector reforms and reduce equity gaps for children at scale. The programme priorities build on the organization's comparative advantages, opportunities for leveraging and complementarities with other United Nations organizations and development partners.

Programme priorities and partnerships

23. The country programme was developed through consultations with the Government, United Nations organizations, international development partners, academia, the private sector and civil society, including young people. It was informed by the 2024 Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in North Macedonia, the previous country programme evaluation, the Common Country Analysis and UNSDCF, with which it is fully aligned. It draws on the recommendations from human rights treaty bodies and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

²⁴ UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in North Macedonia*.

24. Aligned with the National Development Strategy 2024–2044, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 and the UNICEF Gender Equality Action Plan 2026–2029, the programme’s overarching vision is to drive systemic change at scale for children and adolescents, with an intentional focus on ensuring that policies, budgets, services and measures benefit the most vulnerable in the country. The organization’s strategic, evidence-based advocacy, technical assistance and partnerships, including with international financial institutions, will help to guide ongoing reforms to optimize and improve the quality of social services, ensuring that they are child-centred and leave no one behind.

25. Cutting across the two programme components will be a focus on social inclusion of the most vulnerable children, particularly children living in poverty, Roma children and children with disabilities. UNICEF will provide technical expertise and leverage evidence, financing and partnerships to influence policies and investments that prioritize equity as well as introduce targeted measures to reach vulnerable and excluded children at scale. This work builds on the significant but still fragile progress made over the past two country programme periods to enable the full inclusion of children with disabilities.

26. With climate change and environmental pollution recognized as key threats to children’s well-being and futures in the country, the programme will address these emerging areas through a cross-sectoral approach. It will build on the ongoing work of UNICEF in support of mainstreaming environmental learning and green skills across all levels of education, as well as its successful advocacy and youth engagement on air pollution.

27. The country programme has two programme components:

- (a) Protection and nurturing care;
- (b) Foundational learning and skills.

28. The programme components will contribute to UNSDCF Outcomes 1 to 4. UNICEF will partner with United Nations organizations in advancing common goals, particularly in addressing violence and negative social norms, combating climate change, and ensuring inclusive services for the most vulnerable children and adolescents.

29. Strategies to drive systemic change include:

- (a) Providing evidence-based policy advice as well as influencing budget allocations and investments for children, particularly those who are most excluded;
- (b) Generating and harnessing evidence, strengthening data systems and monitoring child rights to inform decision-making;
- (c) Expanding strategic partnerships with key public and private stakeholders to leverage resources and mobilize support for child rights at scale;
- (d) Engaging adolescents, families and communities on climate change, environment and harmful social norms.

Protection and nurturing care

30. This programme component will support UNSDCF Outcomes 1 and 4 as well as the National Development Strategy’s goals on inclusive and efficient social protection, social cohesion, sustainable local and regional development, and on the rule of law and good governance. It focuses on reducing child poverty, strengthening the child protection system and enabling nurturing care with a focus on vulnerable children, particularly Roma and children with disabilities.

31. First, UNICEF will support efforts to improve the delivery of gender-responsive and integrated social protection benefits and services as well as targeted measures that reduce child poverty and social exclusion, particularly among Roma children and children with disabilities. This will include generating evidence and providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth and other key government entities to assess and address gaps in the coverage of child and family social protection benefits as well as universal health coverage for children, harnessing evidence-based policy advice to reach vulnerable children at scale. UNICEF will assist the Government in strengthening legislative frameworks and leveraging resources to support targeted measures, including by introducing public–private partnerships for social services.

32. To foster coordinated and strategic action for poverty reduction, UNICEF will support the Government in the development, adoption, coordination and monitoring of a multisectoral strategy to address child poverty and exclusion, grounded in evidence on the situation of children and gaps in their access to social protection coverage and services. This will leverage the European Child Guarantee approach, drawing on the experience and lessons learned from its implementation in European Union countries, regional networks and financing mechanisms, including those available for European Union enlargement countries.

33. The second priority is to strengthen the architecture of the child protection system and optimize the social service workforce to ensure integrated case management, improved services to protect children and adolescents from violence, child marriage and other risks, and increased access to justice, with due consideration to the different vulnerabilities of boys and girls. This will entail providing evidence-based policy advice to the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth on the development and implementation of a long-term strategy for social service workforce strengthening, including case management. UNICEF will also leverage resources for the development of essential protection services for the most vulnerable and excluded children, particularly Roma children and children with disabilities, including through the European Child Guarantee, European Union financial instruments and international financial institution investments.

34. Further to the 2024 adoption of a new Law on Justice for Children, which is aligned with international child and human rights standards, UNICEF will provide technical expertise to the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth to advance the operationalization and implementation of the law. This will include the development of by-laws, regulations, costing of new services and institutionalized capacity-building approaches. Within the child protection system, UNICEF will promote a holistic and coordinated approach to protecting children at risk and in conflict with the law.

35. The third priority supports optimal child development and well-being. More specifically, UNICEF will focus on further strengthening the system of home-visiting nurses by intensifying support for the most vulnerable newborns and their parents, as well as upgrading the home-visiting package to cover emerging development, health and nutrition risks. The expanded package will include counselling on mental health and well-being, breastfeeding and healthy nutrition, the protection of young children from indoor and outdoor pollution, addressing negative social norms and gender stereotypes, and promoting positive behaviour around responsive caregiving, non-violent practices and positive parenting.

36. Additionally, efforts will be directed towards the establishment of a universal system for developmental monitoring for children aged 0 to 3 years. The system will track the growth and development of children in meeting typical milestones and enable the early identification of developmental delays, allowing for timely

interventions. It will be designed to function as an integral part of the e-health system and to facilitate referral to the existing International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health assessment and complementary early childhood intervention services.

Foundational learning and skills

37. This programme component will support UNSDCF Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 and the National Development Strategy areas on: sustainable, innovative and competitive economy; social cohesion, and sustainable local and regional development; demographic revitalization; and green transformation. It will focus on strengthening the education system to deliver more inclusive and quality learning and skills development, including to foster green skills and climate action.

38. To improve learning outcomes, UNICEF will provide technical assistance to the ongoing education sector reforms that aim to optimize the school network through more efficient and equitable use of resources from pre-primary through secondary education. UNICEF will build on analyses undertaken to date and continue providing policy and programme advice to the Ministry of Education and Science and municipalities on reform issues, including funding formulas as well as the deployment and management of human resource. It will seek to leverage resources and partnerships for complementary investments and accompanying measures, including for climate resilience, and reprofiling of human resources to strengthen education quality and inclusiveness. UNICEF will also carry out evidence-based advocacy for the expansion of early childhood education services, focusing on the needed investments and financing options to increase coverage, including through mobilizing private sector engagement. Particular attention will be given to ensuring that early childhood education services reach children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those living in rural areas, Roma children and children with disabilities, who remain disproportionately excluded from early learning opportunities.

39. Another key priority will be the upgrading of inclusive and gender-responsive curricula and standards, along with leveraging resources to strengthen and sustain teacher professional development on delivering foundational learning, skills and inclusive pedagogical methods. UNICEF will provide technical expertise on enhancing existing and new measures to support inclusive education for children with disabilities as well as Roma children and adolescents, including a focus on the transitions between education levels, dropout prevention and school re-entry. UNICEF will further provide policy advice and good practice on fostering safe and inclusive school environments that promote gender equality, mental health and well-being, as well as combat prejudice and discrimination through a whole-education approach.

40. The third priority under this programme component will focus on expanding opportunities for adolescent girls and boys to develop green skills and engage in environmental learning and climate action, particularly in communities most vulnerable to climate change. UNICEF will work with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth, and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning in this endeavour. Interventions will include mainstreaming climate-focused social innovation and entrepreneurship programmes into general and vocational education, fostering private sector engagement. With a focus on adolescent girls' empowerment and skills-building in science and technology, programmes will be designed to equip adolescents with the skills and resources needed to contribute to and succeed in the green economy. Furthermore, UNICEF will partner with young people's organizations and youth councils to foster

youth engagement on climate and environmental issues at the national and municipal levels.

Programme effectiveness

41. Measures to enhance the effective implementation of the country programme will focus on strengthening the monitoring of child rights and communication, advocacy and partnership efforts for their realization, while ensuring programme coordination and management to achieve expected programme results.

42. The first priority will focus on strengthening partnerships with government and independent institutions to monitor and promote the realization of rights for every child, in line with the National Action Plan on Child Rights 2025–2029. This includes providing expertise to the State Statistical Office and to child rights monitoring and oversight institutions, such as the Ombudsman and the Parliament, for the generation and utilization of quality data and analysis on children and adolescents. UNICEF will support the strengthening of national evaluation capacities to inform evidence-based policy action.

43. The second priority is to mobilize partners and change agents to demand and promote systemic change for children, with a focus on the most vulnerable. This will be done through strategic communication, public advocacy, social and behaviour change approaches and private sector engagement. UNICEF will also leverage multi-stakeholder partnerships with public and private sector actors, campaigns and initiatives to address stigma, harmful beliefs and social norms, with a focus on Roma children and children with disabilities.

44. Under this programme component, UNICEF will coordinate and assure programme design and excellence, including planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. It will ensure that programmes prioritize equity and gender equality in all stages of development, implementation and monitoring. Additionally, it will oversee efforts to build resilience through strengthened risk analysis and relevant emergency preparedness and response.

Summary budget table

<i>Programme component</i>	<i>(In thousands of United States dollars)</i>		
	<i>Regular resources</i>	<i>Other resources</i>	<i>Total</i>
Protection and nurturing care	2 500	2 300	4 800
Foundational learning and skills	750	4 100	4 850
Programme effectiveness	1 000	1 700	2 700
Total	4 250	8 100	12 350

Programme and risk management

45. This country programme document summarizes the contributions of UNICEF to national results. It is the principal mechanism for accountability to the Executive Board for results alignment and resources assigned to the programme at the country level. The responsibilities and accountabilities of managers at the country, regional and headquarters levels are defined in the policies and procedures regarding the organization's programmes and operations.

46. The programme will be implemented and monitored in collaboration with the Government of North Macedonia under the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. UNICEF will report its UNSDCF contributions using the UN INFO platform.

47. To ensure the quality and effectiveness of programme results and strategies, UNICEF will regularly monitor and assess programmatic and operational risks and adopt appropriate mitigation measures. Key risks include changes in international development assistance and priorities, as well as variations in global and domestic support for programmes that promote child rights and gender equality, leading to funding gaps. There is a risk that domestic financing may shift away from social sectors, with increased allocation to other areas, posing a threat to the realization of child rights. To mitigate these risks, UNICEF will continue to foster partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagement for child rights while investing in evidence-based advocacy to inform public opinion, policymaking and financing.

48. The country's exposure to climate and environmental risks, particularly air pollution, extreme weather events and natural disasters, deepens child rights deprivations, especially among the most vulnerable children. Measures to mitigate these risks are incorporated across the programme, with a focus on addressing the adverse impacts on child development and well-being as well as empowering adolescent girls and boys with green skills, including for climate action.

49. UNICEF will update annual emergency preparedness and response plans and work with key Government ministries and partners to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of systems, preparedness and emergency response capacities, with a focus on children and adolescents. Risks regarding management and accountability for cash transfers will be mitigated through the harmonized approach to cash transfers.

50. The Government will endorse the efforts of UNICEF to mobilize and leverage resources, assets and expertise from the local and regional private sector to support UNICEF programmes in North Macedonia, ensuring all donations received by UNICEF are tax exempt and donors benefit from tax deduction. Recognizing the mandate and legal status of UNICEF, the Government of North Macedonia shall ensure that UNICEF is not required to register under national legislation applicable to charities and donors to UNICEF enjoy the tax and other regulatory benefits in equal conditions as donors to registered national charitable organizations.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

51. Programme monitoring will be based on the results and resources framework, utilizing relevant indicators and targets disaggregated by sex, age, ethnic group, disability and wealth quintiles, whenever possible. Progress will be measured through data collection and sector-specific administrative data systems. This will involve tracking annual milestones, periodically reviewing theories of change, and assessing progress towards relevant systemic changes including through joint reviews with the Government and other partners.

52. UNICEF will continue to support State party reporting to human rights treaty bodies, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child, by working closely with other organizations within the United Nations system. Collaboration will continue with the State Statistical Office to strengthen data systems for children and track progress towards child-related Sustainable Development Goals and national targets, including through the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey.

53. UNICEF will act as a knowledge broker on the situation of children and collaborate with the Government to conduct strategic evaluations to inform and

improve national policies and programmes and ensure national ownership of data. The costed evaluation plan includes three evaluations on:

- (a) The reforms to optimize the primary education school network improving efficiency of public spending;
- (b) A country-led evaluation of the implementation of the National Action Plan on the Rights of the Child;
- (c) The impact of a guaranteed minimum allowance on children using randomized controlled trials.

54. UNICEF will continue to actively contribute to the United Nations monitoring and evaluation group, notably to monitor UNSDCF progress and achievements as well as provide analyses and recommendations to steer actions.

Annex

Results and resources framework

Republic of North Macedonia – UNICEF country programme of cooperation, 2026–2030

Convention on the Rights of the Child: Articles 1–42 National priorities: National Development Strategy 2024–2044 Strategic Areas 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 Sustainable Development Goals: 1–5, 7, 10, 13, 16–17
United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) outcomes involving UNICEF: 1. By 2030, all people in the Republic of North Macedonia, particularly vulnerable groups, women and girls, benefit from equitable, accessible, and high-quality health and education services, and preventative and responsive social protection and protection services. 2. By 2030, all people in the Republic of North Macedonia, particularly vulnerable groups, women and young people, benefit from a sustainable economy and decent work opportunities. 3. By 2030, all people, particularly vulnerable groups, and ecosystems in the Republic of North Macedonia benefit from climate action, humanitarian and disaster risks reduction, and a healthy, clean, and sustainable environment. 4. By 2030, all people in the Republic of North Macedonia, particularly vulnerable groups, benefit from and contribute towards effective, accountable, and inclusive governance and rule of law across all levels.
UNICEF Strategic Plan 2026–2029 Impact Results: 1–5

UNSDCF outcomes	UNICEF outcomes	Key progress indicators, baselines (B) and targets (T)	Means of verification	Indicative country programme outputs	Major partners, partnership frameworks	Indicative resources by country programme outcome: regular resources (RR), other resources (OR) (In thousands of United States dollars)		
						RR	OR	Total
1, 4	1. By 2030, poor and vulnerable children and adolescents, particularly Roma and children with disabilities, benefit from improved social inclusion, nurturing care and protection measures and services.	Number and per cent of children receiving child or family benefits B: 70,000, 18.8% (2021) T: 100,000, 26.7%	International Labour Organization World Social Protection Report	1.1 By 2030, Government capacities are improved to deliver gender-responsive integrated social protection benefits and services as well as targeted measures that reduce child poverty and social exclusion, particularly among Roma and children with disabilities. 1.2 By 2030, the social service and child protection	Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Justice,	2 500	2 300	4 800
		Rate per 100,000 children accessing specialized social services to address child protection risks B: 3 T: 6	State Statistical Office Annual Report					

UNSDCF outcomes	UNICEF outcomes	Key progress indicators, baselines (B) and targets (T)	Means of verification	Indicative country programme outputs	Major partners, partnership frameworks	Indicative resources by country programme outcome: regular resources (RR), other resources (OR) (In thousands of United States dollars)		
						RR	OR	Total
		Number and per cent of children under 5 years of age benefiting from early stimulation, nurturing care and parenting support, including children with disabilities B: 18,000, 30%, 400 children with developmental delays T: 38,000, 80%, 4,000 children with developmental delays	National e-health system	systems are strengthened and optimized for integrated case management and improved services to protect children from violence and other risks, and ensure access to justice. 1.3 By 2030, the primary healthcare system has increased capacities to promote optimal child development and well-being, particularly to reach the most vulnerable children and their parents.	Ministry of Interior World Bank, United Nations Development Programme, World Health Organization; academia, civil society organizations, professional associations			
1, 2, 3	2. By 2030, children and adolescents, particularly Roma and children with disabilities, benefit from inclusive systems for quality learning, skills development and engagement in environmental and climate action.	Per cent of children aged 36–59 months attending an early childhood education programme B: 47.3% national, 9.1% Roma (2023) T: 60% national, 30% Roma	Education Management Information System	2.1 By 2030, the education system has strengthened capacities for efficient and equitable use of resources to provide quality education in a supportive learning environment from pre-primary through secondary education.	Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, World Bank, teacher training faculties, civil society organizations, youth organizations, private sector	750	4 100	4 850
		Per cent of children, including girls, achieving minimum learning proficiency levels B: Reading (26.4%) – boys (21.6%), girls (31.5%); Mathematics (33.8%) – boys (32.3%), girls (35.4%); Bottom quintile: 18.8% T: Reading (46%) – boys (42%), girls (48%);	National and international assessments	2.2 By 2030, adolescents have greater opportunities to develop green skills and to engage in climate action.				

UNSDCF outcomes	UNICEF outcomes	Key progress indicators, baselines (B) and targets (T)	Means of verification	Indicative country programme outputs	Major partners, partnership frameworks	Indicative resources by country programme outcome: regular resources (RR), other resources (OR) (In thousands of United States dollars)		
						RR	OR	Total
		Mathematics (61%) – boys (60%), girls (62%); Bottom quintile: 38%						
		Number and per cent of children reached with education services adapted to climate, environment and/or disaster risks B: 180,000, 65.7% children aged 3–17 years, T: 270,000, 90% children aged 3–17 years	Education Management Information System					
4	3. The country programme is effectively managed to achieve expected results and fosters partnerships, child rights monitoring and promotion.	Level of establishment and functionality of Convention of the Rights of the Child monitoring Mechanisms B: Weak (Score 1) T: Established (Score 3)	Government decision for the establishment of the mechanism Functional mechanism with human resources and budget	3.1 By 2030, state and independent institutions have enhanced capacities to monitor and promote equitable realization of child rights. 3.2 By 2030, communication, advocacy and partnerships strengthen support for child rights realization.	State Statistical Office, Parliament, Ombudsman, Commission for Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination, civil society organizations, private sector	1 000	1 700	2 700
		Overall score on the office performance scorecard B: 0.87 (2024) T: >0.8	UNICEF performance management system					
Total resources						4 250	8 100	12 350