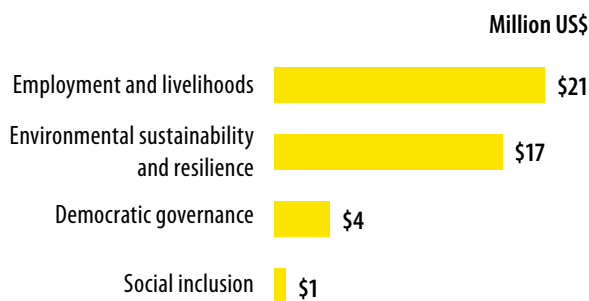


Evaluation Brief: North Macedonia

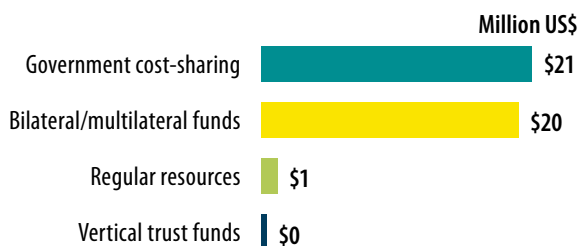


UNDP has supported the Government of North Macedonia for over two decades to pursue economic and social reforms and build capacity for sustainable management of natural resources. Over the years, its programme has been shaped by the country's development priorities and challenges. During the programme cycle under review (2016-2020), the UNDP country programme focused on supporting the Government in promoting good governance to ensure delivery of better services to all citizens; addressing issues of social inclusion by empowering the most vulnerable people in society and expanding employment opportunities; and building resilience societies and ensuring sustainable development. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an Independent Country Programme Evaluation of North Macedonia in 2019.

Expenditure by thematic area (2016-2018)



Total expenditure by fund category (2016-2018)



Key conclusions

The country programme document (CPD) reflected well the country's development priorities, in particular through interventions helping to strengthen local governance and stimulate employment.

The CPD is well aligned with national priorities and addresses the high rates of unemployment and social exclusion, weak public governance (especially poor service delivery) and high exposure to environmental risks. The political upheavals the country experienced in recent years have not challenged this framework. While UNDP interventions have helped strengthen local governance and employment policy, the results and impact achieved in the social inclusion and, to a lesser degree, in the environment outcome areas were more modest. UNDP should now focus on integrated cross-sectoral interventions promoting balanced, inclusive and sustainable development across the country.

UNDP has managed to attract an increasing amount of resources for the country programme while co-financing arrangements facilitated policy implementation at the local level.

UNDP succeeded in doubling its funding base since 2012. The significant increase in cost-sharing from the Government has compensated the reduced levels of official development assistance (ODA) to North Macedonia. Most interventions implemented at the local level also required co-funding from the municipalities. Furthermore, UNDP support was often a motivating factor for local authorities to implement specific policies, which they would have struggled to implement with their own resources and expertise.

While UNDP is recognized as a reliable partner by both donors and the Government, there is a risk that UNDP's involvement in some sectors could diminish incentives for government ministries to strengthen internal capacities. There is a high level of satisfaction among all interlocutors with UNDP's professionalism, in terms of sector expertise, management skills and commitment. Major donors look to UNDP when seeking to make rapid progress and/or guarantee a certain level of results given its impartiality and continued presence in the field, which facilitates the establishment of strong partnerships with local stakeholders. On the downside, there is a tendency for the Government to use UNDP as an implementing body to compensate for the shortcomings and weaknesses of its own administrative capacities. This raises questions about the sustainability of some interventions and the contribution of UNDP support to public administration reform despite consideration being given by UNDP to exit strategies and post-project financing arrangements. While donors welcome UNDP as a vehicle to deliver their assistance, they are also increasingly aware that this approach is not optimal for reinforcing the country's administrative capacities in the perspective of European Union (EU) accession.

The EU accession process, rather than the 2030 Agenda, is the main driver of North Macedonia's national development policies and reforms but the two processes are largely self-reinforcing. Although the CPD programming exercise successfully translated national development priorities into the common UN framework, in practice, North Macedonia's policies are being shaped by the overarching goal of achieving EU membership rather than the 2030 Agenda, with EU accession criteria driving political, economic, administrative and institutional reforms in the country. However, the EU accession process acts as a catalyst for achieving the UN objectives for sustainable development since many of the considerable efforts required from North Macedonia to adopt EU norms and standards and fulfil membership obligations, including strengthening the rule of law, improving environmental protection or dealing with unemployment and poverty, are contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1. While the current CPD outcome areas remain largely relevant, the emphasis should be on integrated cross-sectoral interventions promoting balanced, inclusive and sustainable development across the country.

RECOMMENDATION 2. The results framework and evaluation practices should be strengthened to better capture programme achievements and better assess contributions to SDG targets.

RECOMMENDATION 3. Support for effective employment policies should continue with a focus on women and young people and complementary measures in the field of social inclusion.

RECOMMENDATION 4. UNDP should scale up subnational interventions, encouraging inter-municipal cooperation and reinforcing the role of regional planning in the context of EU integration.

RECOMMENDATION 5. UNDP should continue to focus its environment portfolio on climate change and disaster risk reduction, with greater emphasis placed on helping the Government address the causes of air pollution.

RECOMMENDATION 6. UNDP should seek opportunities to build on its strategic positioning in North Macedonia to further harmonize EU accession and SDG priorities.