



UNHCR Representation
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Country Update
1 January – 31 March 2013

I. Major Developments

Significant political and social developments:

1. The country held municipal elections on 24 March, where the ruling Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity has declared victory in the country's local elections, with 45 per cent of the vote. The opposition, led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, received about 28% of the vote and denounced the March 24 municipal elections, saying they were not free and fair. Election officials report that turnout topped 67 per cent of the 1.7 million eligible voters in 80 municipalities. Despite tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians prior to the elections, the Interior Ministry in Skopje said balloting was carried out peacefully. Monitors from the non-governmental organisations told journalists they witnessed a large number of voting irregularities (mainly family voting, cases of eligible voters not being on the Electoral lists, canvassing, etc.). Second round of voting was scheduled for 7 April 2013 in 29 municipalities around the country.
2. The Macedonian Government's debt reached EUR 2,716 billion, or 33, 3 per cent from the BDP. In the past 2 years and a half, the debt was increased by EUR 1 billion, and the Finance Minister announced new debt of EUR 100 million.
3. New round of talks on the name issue were scheduled to take place on 8 and 9 April 2013 in New York, where the UN Special Representative for the name dispute between Greece and Macedonia, Mr. Matthew Nimitz invited the negotiators of both countries to find a solution on the name dispute, which will be acceptable for both parties.

II. Strategy for Integration of Refugees and Foreigners in the Republic of Macedonia

1. Under a Sub-Agreement between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and UNHCR Skopje the construction of 20 social flats continues in the vicinity of the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers.
2. Based on technical assessments by MLSP, UNHCR provided construction materials and labour for the basic upgrade of 6 individual houses owned by refugees and/or their spouses or immediate relatives (including common law). Thus 6 families have obtained housing solution.
3. During the reporting period, the first 2 persons of concern were formally employed in a private company (following vocational training and subsidised employment projects).

III. Financial and Material Assistance

1. In December 2012 and January 2013, UNHCR and City Red Cross of Skopje (CRC) organised the first distribution of hygiene parcels including sanitary napkins and diapers (improved composition and quantities) to all PoC from Kosovo. The distribution covers the needs of PoC in hygiene and sanitary materials for the period January – April 2013.
2. Following the findings of the PA and the request of the PoC, UNHCR and CRC provided all PoC from Kosovo with firewood for the winter season whereby each family received 3 m³ of firewood for heating/cooking. The quantities of firewood are only contribution towards the estimated total needs per family per season (6 m³).

3. Promotion of primary, secondary and tertiary education amongst PoC from Kosovo continued in 2013 whereby modest scholarships are provided to enable the coverage of education related expenses.

IV. Other Developments during the reporting period

1. In February 2013, three recognised refugees who submitted application for naturalisation were granted citizenship status by MOI.

2. On 11 March 2013, UNHCR, in cooperation with its legal partner MYLA conducted a field visit to Stip to meet with the municipal and RIC representatives working on Roma issues and discuss the possible issue of Roma children with unregistered birth that were affected by the floods in Stip area. UNHCR and MYLA staff was accompanied by the RIC and municipal representatives to meet with these families. During the discussions with the families we learned that their children are in possession of birth certificate and their birth is registered in the birth registry records. However, 7 cases were registered where the fathers were interested in recognising paternity over their children. MYLA staff collected their data and will follow up their cases in cooperation with the RIC in Stip.

3. On 22 February 2013, UNHCR office facilitated a Come-and-Inform visit for the representatives of the Ministry of Communities and Return from the municipality of Kosovska Kamenica. The purpose of the visit was to meet with individuals that have applied for voluntary repatriation from the above mentioned municipality and discuss the latest update.

4. On 29 March 2013, another Come-and-Inform visit was facilitated with the MCR representatives from the municipalities of Obiliq and Gnjilane. The purpose of the visit was to meet with refugees originating from these municipalities that have applied for voluntary repatriation. During the meeting, the delegation met with these individuals and presented the results from the activities undertaken in regard to the EU Return and Reintegration Project. In addition, each respective family was consulted and advised on the legal issues related to their ownership documentation.

5. Concept note “Empowering Roma Men and Women to Combat Poverty, Discrimination and Exclusion” on behalf of UNDP, ILO, UNHCR and UNFPA in Skopje, was submitted on 28 March 2013, for review of the Human Security Unit/OCHA, following the call for proposals announced by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security.

The initiative was supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, who will be a key partner in the implementation of the envisioned programme and UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative Ms Deirdre Boyd. The main aim of the commitment is to further engage in joint activities with the UN agencies, advocating the inclusion of the PoCs and work towards improvement of their position. Within this project, it is envisaged that UNHCR Office in Skopje will support the civil registration and documentation for the legal recognition of non-registered Roma to enable them to access public services. It will also address issues of citizenship and freedom of movement within the EU. As per refugees, UNHCR will provide support to those with links to citizens in registering their marriages and assist in the process of establishing documented paternity of children. Support will be provided to persons who fulfil the criteria for naturalisation to regulate their citizenship. Guidance and capacity building will be provided to the RICs in order to successfully address the issues of the already identified persons with documentation gaps. Related to the Integration Strategy, UNHCR, along with its implementing partners, will assist the interested refugees in obtaining work permits and registration of businesses.

UNHCR will provide legal assistance and representation to stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness. In doing so, it will advocate for strengthening and improvement of the legal representation quality in the national legislation practice, as well as fight for prevention and reduction of statelessness in accordance with the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, as well as other international, EU and ECHR standards..

UNHCR will undertake the activities above, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, City Red Cross, Regional Enterprise Support Centre, Roma Information Centres, NGO partners in the region (cross-border) as well as UNHCR offices.

6. UNHCR Office, through a joint exercise with the other UN agencies present in the country has prepared and shared additional confidential information to amend the UNCT July 2012 contribution to the CEDAW report for the purpose of the CEDAW - 54th session held in Geneva in February 2013.

Main issues discussed included, inter alia, the following:

- The lack of funds for the implementation of national action plans and strategies for the promotion of gender equality;
- The lack of sex-disaggregated data and of gender impact assessments of laws and policies in the State party;
- The lack of visibility, accessibility, transparency and coordination of legal mechanisms for the protection of women's rights;
- The absence of clear and unified legal grounds for introducing temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality of women and men;
- The persistence of gender stereotypes in the media and in schoolbooks as well as the endorsement of patriarchal norms in national media campaigns;
- The lack of a comprehensive law prohibiting all forms of violence against women, the limited use of protection orders and the reduction in the number of shelters for women victims of violence;
- The limited number of preventive measures and victim rehabilitation in relation to trafficking in women and girls for purposes of forced labour and sexual exploitation;
- The low number of women mayors and Ambassadors and the low representation of women in other sectors of public life, with the exception of Parliament where women account for 34 per cent of MPs;
- The segregation, exclusion and high drop-out rates of Roma girls in Macedonian schools;
- The retrogression in rural women's access to education, health care services, credit and loans;
- Women's limited access to sexual and reproductive health rights and information and the use of abortion as a method of birth control;
- The high number of women in low-paid jobs or unpaid family work and the generally low activity rate of women;
- The situation of women belonging to ethnic minorities, in particular Roma women, who face intersecting forms of discrimination and are often not registered; and
- The high number of traditional and early marriages, in particular among Roma women and girls.

V. Specific Activities to Note

1. In January 2013, the Office premises were relocated to a new location.
2. During the reporting period, the Office prepared and submitted the 2012 Country Report as well as Country Plans for the biennium 2014-2015.
3. Implementing instruments for 2013 were prepared and the Office concluded IP Agreements with: the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, City Red Cross of Skopje, Regional Enterprise Support Centre Skopje. IP Agreements with the Ministry of Interior are under preparation.

4. UNHCR participated in the UN Response to floods whereby quantities of NFI previously donated to CRC (with UNHCR's visibility) were distributed to affected populace (some 500 persons targeted).
5. UNHCR contributed towards the updating of the UN Contingency Plan and joined the preparatory work of UNDP to conduct an emergency simulation exercise in the municipality of Strumica. Based on this cooperation, 2 family tents will be used for the exercise ensuring UNHCR's visibility.
6. UNHCR provided its input for the 2012 UN Report to the Government and participated in the Mid-term review of the achievements against the UN commitments as contained in the 2010-2015 UNDAF.

Missions:

1. On 07 February 2013 UNHCR Skopje in cooperation with UNHCR Pristina facilitated a Coordination and Cooperation Meeting between the Ministry of Communities and Return (MCR) of Kosovo¹ (SCR1244) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for the voluntary return of Refugees. In addition the MCR representatives met with the refugee community in Macedonia to discuss the issues related to voluntary repatriation. Also the delegation presented the latest developments regarding the EU return and reintegration project.
2. From 19 to 22 February, the Representative attended the Global Representatives' Meeting in Geneva (19 and 20 Feb), followed by the BE Representatives' meeting (21 and 22 Feb).
3. Upon the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to receive updates on UN activities in the country, the UN Communications Group has initiated a Quarterly Update to MoFA on the activities conducted per UN Agency, covering the period January – March 2013. Our Office sent an input for this Update. The next Update shall cover the period April – June 2013.

VI. Background on UNHCR presence

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The UNHCR Representation in Skopje was established in 1992. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Interior are UNHCR's main government counterparts. The close cooperation with the Government, the judiciary, the Red Cross Society, various international and national NGOs and working closely with refugee communities was crucial in the past to handle three emergency operations in response to the humanitarian exodus prompted by the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Kosovo), as well as the 2001 internal conflict.

UNHCR Skopje,
09/04/2013

¹ All references to Kosovo are in line with the SCR 1244.