

Investing for a safe and healthy North Macedonia

WHO Health Emergencies Programme
at the country level



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WHO Health Emergencies Programme at the country level

Disasters and emergencies disrupt communities and destroy livelihoods – most of all they threaten people’s health. In a typical year, Europe suffers economic losses of € 10 billion from disasters and emergencies,¹ which result in hundreds of people dying or becoming severely ill.

Europe’s 21st century emergencies include a wide range of hazards:

- Many countries have measles epidemics.
- Countries in southern, central and eastern parts of the Region have outbreaks of vector-borne diseases, such as West Nile Virus and Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever.
- All national health systems in the European Region have to respond to outbreaks of foodborne diseases, and antimicrobial resistance is growing at an unprecedented pace.
- Many countries are prone to floods, heatwaves, forest fires and other extreme events. Climate change means Europe is likely to see many more such emergencies in the coming years.
- The threat of earthquakes and other natural disasters in Europe – possibly combined with chemical or nuclear contamination – never goes away.
- Conflicts and terrorist attacks affect European countries directly and as spill-over effects from neighbouring countries and regions.

¹ Estimate quoted in EFDRR. High-Level Dialogue Communiqué from 2017. European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, Istanbul, 26–28 March 2017. Geneva: European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction; 2017. (https://www.preventionweb.net/files/52533_2017efdrhlcommuniquefinal.pdf, accessed 23 August 2019).

The European Region is part of a highly interconnected world. Diseases can spread at the speed of an aeroplane, and people fleeing emergencies often cross international frontiers. Recent striking examples of international emergencies with repercussions in Europe are the outbreaks of the Ebola and Zika viruses, and the Syrian humanitarian crisis.

North Macedonia: The case for action

North Macedonia faces both natural and man-made hazards. It is highly exposed to flooding and has medium to high exposure to earthquakes. Chemical facilities in the country present potential hazards. North Macedonia has experienced conflict and political unrest in its recent history. The Ministry of Health recognizes that the country needs to strengthen its health emergency capacities. This is why the North Macedonia is one of the WHO Health Emergencies (WHE) Programme's priority countries in the European Region.

The WHE Programme will continue to scale up support to priority countries and territories to help them to strengthen their International Health Regulations (IHR) core capacities. Each of the priority countries faces significant hazards, and each has vulnerabilities in their health emergency response capacities. This means health emergencies can have a high impact in these countries and territories. It also means they are the places in the Region where investment in IHR core capacities can produce the greatest return.

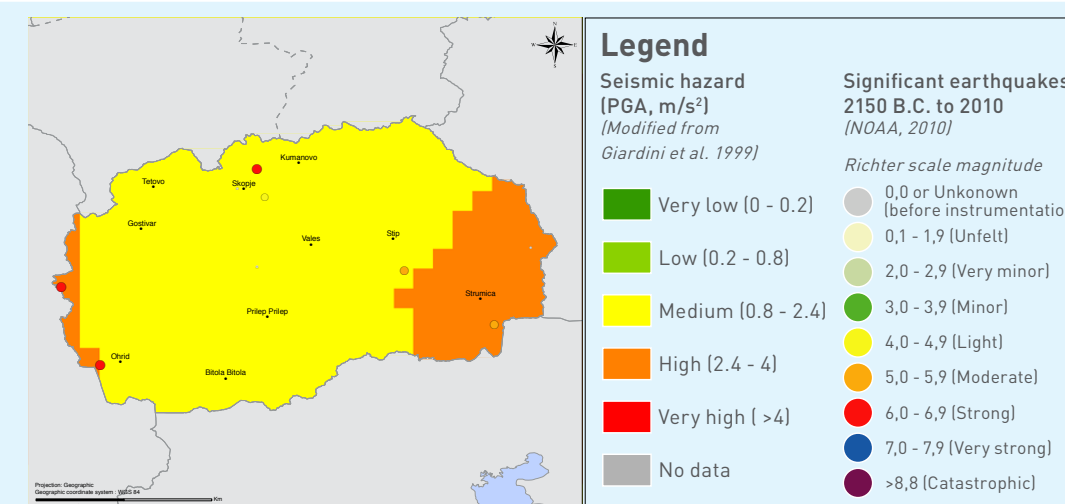
1
BOX

Key emergency threats in North Macedonia

- Earthquake and flood hazards (Maps 1 and 2)
- Drought
- Political and social fragility
- Outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases
- North Macedonia has become a destination for some people displaced by the humanitarian crisis in Syrian Arab Republic

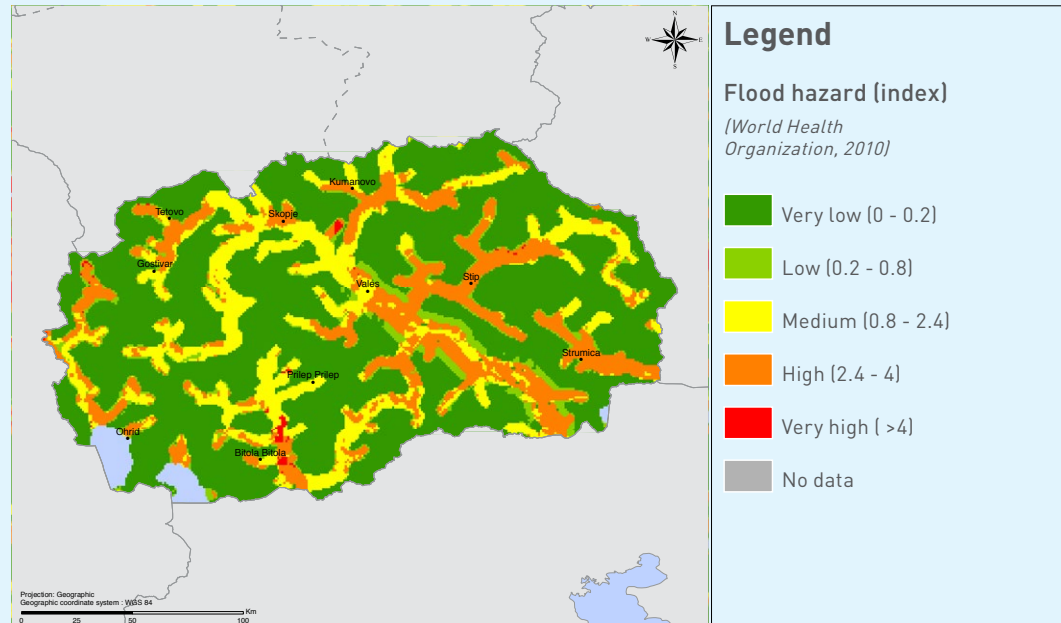
1
MAP

North Macedonia: Seismic hazard map²



2 WHO. The WHO E-Atlas of Disaster Risk for the European Region. Volume 1. Exposure to Natural Hazards. Version 2.0. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2011. (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/emergencies/disaster-preparedness-and-response/publications/2011/who-e-atlas-of-disaster-risk-for-the-european-region-the-volume-1-exposure-to-natural-hazards-version-2.0>, accessed 23 August 2019).

North Macedonia: Flood hazard map³



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North Macedonia is striving to achieve Universal health coverage (UHC), in line with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Investing in health emergency capacities supports the country’s progress towards these and other SDGs. The investment will safeguard social and economic progress, by reducing the impact of emergencies when they happen.

³ Ibid.



Damaged car in Skopje after the heavy rainfall and floods in 2016
Photo credit: UNDP/Ljubo Stefanov



“Universal health coverage and health emergencies are two sides of the same coin”



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General of World Health Organization

Universal health coverage and health emergency capacity, or emergency preparedness, are two sides of the same coin in a people-centred health system. When countries strengthen their emergency preparedness and response capacities, they also strengthen their health system’s ability to provide universal health coverage. In the same way, when countries strengthen their health systems, they strengthen their capacity to be prepared for and respond to emergencies. True universal health coverage means people can access quality, affordable, safe and culturally sensitive life-saving services when they need them most – including when they have been hit by an emergency.

2
BOX**Investing in emergency preparedness makes economic sense**

Many health emergencies are partly or fully preventable. Where they are not, harm can often be reduced through prevention, preparedness, early detection and rapid response.

Total global investment required over the coming five years to effectively prepare for, prevent, detect and respond to health emergencies is estimated at US\$ 28.9 billion. Success will be measured against the goal of better protecting at least 1 billion more people from health emergencies and providing life-saving health services to 100 million vulnerable people. It will save approximately 1.5 million lives and provide estimated economic gains of US\$ 240 billion.

Extract from A Healthier Humanity: The WHO Investment Case for 2019–2023⁴

The return on investment is US\$ 8.30 for every US\$ 1 provided – a more than eightfold return. The investment pays back in multiple ways:

- it saves people, society, economy from the next emergency
- it strengthens the health system
- it helps to meet several Sustainable Development Goals
- it contributes to global efforts to protect 1 billion more people worldwide.

⁴ WHO. A Healthier Humanity: The WHO Investment Case for 2019–2023, pp. 24–28. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. (<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/274710/WHO-DGO-CRM-18.2-eng.pdf>, accessed 23 August 2019).

3
BOX**Investing in health emergency preparedness is key to achieving the SDGs**

Investing in health emergency preparedness and response is key to achieving SDG 3 “Ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being at all ages is essential to sustainable development”. It is particularly relevant to target 3.D, which deals with strengthening health emergency capacity, and targets 3.1 (maternal mortality); 3.2 (infant mortality); 3.8 (universal health coverage) and 3.9 (deaths from chemical contamination).

Investment in health emergency capacity also plays an important role in achieving other SDG goals such as: eliminating poverty and hunger (SDG 1, SDG 2); gender equality (SDG 5); decent work and economic growth (SDG 8); reduced inequalities (SDG 10); Climate Change (SDG 13); and Peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).



Hospital staff receive victims on stretchers arriving to the hospital during a heatwave simulation exercise. Photo credit: WHO

The International Health Regulations: a framework to protect people from health emergencies

Since 2007, the IHR have made a difference to the way the world prepares for and responds to emergencies. The IHR (2005) is a central mechanism within the WHO Health Emergencies (WHE) Programme to guide countries towards achieving common approaches and capacities to detect, assess and respond to health threats. The IHR (2005) is a legally binding treaty signed by all WHO Member States. What it commits them to is:

1. Sharing information with WHO, and each other, about all hazards – disease outbreaks and other health threats (e.g. chemical or nuclear contamination) – that could spread across international borders.
2. Developing and maintaining the core capacities needed to prepare for, detect and respond to disease outbreaks, and other health threats.
3. Reporting annually on their implementation of the IHR.

The IHR have already strengthened international cooperation and country capacities to deal with health emergencies. Nonetheless, many Member States in the European Region, and indeed around the world, have scope to further strengthen their IHR core capacities. For more information about the IHR see:

https://www.who.int/topics/international_health_regulations/en/

IHR core capacities for monitoring and evaluation

1. Legislation and financing
2. IHR coordination and national IHR focal point functions
3. Zoonotic events and the human–animal interface
4. Food safety
5. Laboratory
6. Surveillance
7. Human resources
8. National Health Emergency Framework
9. Health Service Provision
10. Risk communication
11. Points of entry
12. Chemical events
13. Radiation emergencies

North Macedonia's emergency preparedness and response capacities

6 BOX Overview of IHR monitoring and evaluation in North Macedonia

Four complementary components of monitoring and evaluation help to provide a comprehensive overview of the current status of IHR country capacities.⁵ The States Parties Annual Reporting is mandatory; the Joint External Evaluation (JEE), After Action Reviews (AARs) and Simulation exercises are voluntary.

In particular the JEE fosters a peer-to-peer discussion between international and national experts to identify strengths and weaknesses in emergency preparedness and response within the national health system. Results and recommendations from these activities are the basis for the development of a National Action Plan for Health Emergency Preparedness.

Done or in process:

- States Parties Annual Reporting: 2019
- Joint External Evaluation: 2019
- Simulation exercise: 2016, 2018 (multi-sector)
- National Action Plan for Health Emergency Preparedness: due to be updated

Recommended:

- After Action Reviews

7 BOX Highlights from North Macedonia's 2019 self-assessment report on its IHR core capacities

Analysis of North Macedonia's annual reporting data for 2019 shows the IHR core capacities with most room for improvement in North Macedonia are currently:

- Human resources
- Chemical events
- Laboratory
- National Health Emergency Framework

The government of North Macedonia is committed to further developing and maintaining strong emergency preparedness and response capacities. In 2019, North Macedonia underwent a voluntary Joint External Evaluation (JEE) of its capacities in the context of implementing the IHR (Box 4).

Following the JEE, North Macedonia prepared a National Roadmap (IHR-PVS) to strengthen collaboration and coordination between animal health & public health service in 2019.

⁵ WHO. IHR Monitoring and Evaluation: A Key Element for Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; Europe; 2018 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/375819/IHR-Brief_WEB.pdf?ua=1, accessed 23 August 2019).

Key findings from the Joint External Evaluation of North Macedonia's IHR core capacities

Areas for intervention:

- National legislation, policy and financing.
- ONE health, human–animal sector cooperation.
- Human resources.
- Laboratory capacity – biosafety and biosecurity.

Key recommendations for improvement:

- Strengthen intersectoral coordination and strategies – including on One Health and vaccinations, define clear roles and responsibilities, develop multi-hazard emergency preparedness and response plans, and create a public health emergency operations centre.
- Increase funding for human resources recruitment and capacity–building.
- Increase laboratory capacities and financement.
- Introduce digital health technologies in the health system and electronic platforms for better information exchange between emergency, health and other sectors.
- Improve skills particularly in the areas of communication, biological and chemical events, through training sessions and simulation exercises.

North Macedonia's health emergency preparedness initiatives

One Health

A National Bridging Workshop on the IHR and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Performance of Veterinary Services Pathway was organized in 2019 to strengthen coordination between the animal and human health sectors.

Hospital safety

Flood and earthquake are the highest hazards and thus are the priority threats for the country from a disaster risk reduction perspective. Twenty-eight out of 37 of the country's hospitals have been assessed using the Hospital Safety Index. And few have implemented recommendations to improve structural, non-structural and emergency preparedness measures.

Infection prevention and control (IPC)

According to the 2018/2019 Global Monitoring of Country Progress on Antimicrobial Resistance, in North Macedonia a national IPC programme or operational plan is available. National IPC; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and environmental health standards exist but need to be fully implemented. In 2018, Macedonia conducted the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) Point Prevalence Survey of health care-associated infections and antimicrobial use in long-term care facilities.

Risk communication

The Regional Office has launched an Emergency Risk Communication (ERC) five-step package⁶ for tailored support to each enrolled country to scale up their capacity in this area, by developing, testing and adopting their ERC national plan under the IHR. North Macedonia has completed steps 1 to 3 of the ERC capacity-building package including training, capacity mapping and plan writing.

Opportunities for further progress

The most important opportunity is for the government to adopt a National Action Plan on Health Emergency Preparedness (NAP), and produce a Health Emergency Strategy based on it. Formal approval of the NAP and Health Emergency Strategy, along with a commitment by the government to provide the domestic resources to implement them, would put North Macedonia on track to build robust and sustainable IHR core capacities.

Other key areas for further investment and action identified in the JEE include:

- developing and modernizing systems for health security, including through digitalization, to improve efficiency and release human capacity;
- securing the human and animal health workforce by providing wider access to up to date training and increased professional incentives, thereby strengthening capacity and reducing turnover;

⁶ WHO. Emergency risk communication (ERC) 5-step capacity-building package [online]. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe. (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/emergencies/international-health-regulations/emergency-risk-communications/emergency-risk-communications-tools/national-health-emergency-risk-communication-training-package>, accessed 23 August 2019).

- further developing multisectoral collaboration mechanisms and ensuring that existing structures and mechanisms are operationalized, including through regular information sharing, joint training and joint simulation exercises;
- ensuring that the national coordination of IHR-relevant activities is rationalized, with a clear legislative basis and well-defined roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders.

Success stories

Organizing emergency simulation exercise (SIMEXs)

In 2018, in the city of Kumanovo (an area prone to floods), WHO ran emergency simulation exercise (SIMEXs) to test the specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of the Health Care System Preparedness and Response Plan in dealing with emergencies, crises and disaster situations in North Macedonia. The purpose of the SIMEX was to enhance the capacities of the emergency management system (EMS) teams to respond to floods by evaluating several functions in a realistic setting, including the coordination, communication and collaboration between multiple entities and stakeholders. The performance of the sexual and reproductive health services during emergencies was also evaluated. Emergency health care workers took part in the multisectoral field SIMEX which was led by the Ministry of Health, IPH under the observation of WHO and the United Nations Population Fund teams of experts.



Simulation exercise on emergency preparedness and medical services in Gostivar
Photo credit: WHO/Margarita Spasenovska

Protecting people from health emergencies together: The way W(H)E work



The WHE Programme is providing the Organization's response to increasingly demanding crises. Mainstreamed across all levels of the Organization, it is geared to better protect people from health emergencies by establishing people-centred health systems which can detect, assess, communicate and respond to crises in a matter of hours.

Since each country is unique, the Programme tailors its support to countries' specific hazards, vulnerabilities and systems. It recognizes that structures and people with the right skills need to be in place where disease outbreaks occur, where disasters and conflicts strike, and where people fall sick and die. Therefore the Programme places countries at its centre.

The health emergency management cycle defines the rhythm of the Programme. Its four phases – prevention, preparedness, response and recovery – are grounded in the requirements of the IHR and seamlessly complement each other to save lives. Here's how it works:

1. **Prevention** and control of infectious diseases – through vaccination, for example – help prevent outbreaks in the first place.
2. At the same time, countries need to develop, test and evaluate their national plans and strengthen their capacities to be **prepared** for the next emergency of any type. This includes, for example, assessing hospitals for safety and functionality, establishing a laboratory network of excellence, setting up systems for disease surveillance, and engaging communities to communicate risks.
3. During the **response**, life-saving health interventions and pre-positioned essential health packages are delivered in collaboration with health partners to ensure that affected populations have timely access to quality health services, leaving no one behind.
4. The **recovery** phase is the time to learn from experience and build back better; it is the opportunity to make health systems stronger for the future.

Bridging health emergencies and universal health coverage – two sides of the same coin – will pave the way for countries to achieve the related Sustainable Development Goals. To make this a reality, the WHE Programme has tailored the global strategy into a European Action Plan. The Plan bonds countries with comparable levels of capacity and capability to avert or respond to emergencies. This requires cooperation across sectors and across borders.

As a strong believer in partnership, WHO invites all governments, sectors, partners and people in the European Region to implement the Action Plan jointly. Together we have the expertise and know-how, and together we can support global efforts to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from all health emergencies, while contributing to protecting 1 billion more people worldwide.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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