



Thematic
analysis/diagnosis:
**Environment, climate
change and habitats**

Executive Summary

The protection of the environment and habitats, as well as the climate crisis we are facing, are becoming louder topics in the public, in the media, in scientific debates and in the political arena. The environmental risks dominate the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report for 2022 – both in the short and in the long term. The results of the public awareness survey in the Republic of North Macedonia from 2021ⁱ show that the respondents identified the lack of clean water as the biggest social problem, followed by a high percentage of share of respondents who identified climate change, followed by corruption and crime, nature degradation and extreme weather conditions.

European Union integration is the main driver for harmonization of the strategies and the legislation with European standards and criteria, as well as the obligations that the country has undertaken with the ratification of international conventions in these areas. In recent years, exceptional efforts have been made to align strategic directions in the area of environment, climate change and natural habitats with sectoral policies, especially when it comes to climate change. New protected areas have been declared and directives on birds and habitats have been submitted. The National Strategy for **nature protection** defines the following **vision for 2027**. "**Macedonia's diverse and preserved nature is the basis for a healthy and prosperous society,**" and only the Long-Term **Climate Action** Strategy with an Action Plan provides a **vision for 2050**. "**The Republic of North Macedonia by 2050 is a prosperous low-carbon economy, which follows sustainable and climate-resistant development paths, strengthens competitiveness and promotes social cohesion through action to combat climate change and its impacts.**" Numerous laws and bylaws have been adopted or prepared and are awaiting their adoption (Law on Nature, Law on Inspection Supervision, Law on Climate Action, etc.) but much work remains to be done to be in compliance with the European directives and to prepare new strategic documents for ambient air protection (the old ones have expired). The NGO sector is extremely active in this thematic area and is well organized in usually informal networks and coalitions. Pressure from the public and from the civil society organizations is increasingly an important driver of corrective measures and activities in the protection of the environment and mitigation of climate change, thus improving the transparency and accountability of the Government. In addition, the European Commission's latest 2021 progress report on Chapter 27 notes that administrative capacity at all levels remains weak, with insufficient funding to implement existing legislation and policies. Dialogue with the civil society and public consultation processes in this sector need to be enhanced, while the transparency and access to information need to improve.

Data constitute the bases for all actions related to the environment, while the strategic documents in this area require a wide range of data. Many of them are collected by different actors (25 institutions from different profiles have been identified for the whole thematic area), and there are a number of partially developed or tested databases in different areas. The data from the census conducted in 2021 after almost twenty years, will give a new dimension to the analysis so far. There is lack of coordination between databases, and some of these databases are not functioning in sustainable manner. It is necessary to increase the financial support for the monitoring and to

establish regular coordination of all key stakeholders in order to avoid duplication of activities/projects and to ensure efficient use of the funds.

Reporting on the environment through indicators represents an ambitious endeavor, but it is successfully implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning and the State Statistical Office by providing more than 200 indicators in nearly 20 areas. This impressive list is complemented by new indicators related to climate change, gender, damages and losses related to climate change and the Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Change).

More than 900 citizens of all ages, including people with disabilities, representatives of national and local institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector, through active participation in 8 visionary workshops across the country showed that they have a strong awareness of the significance of a healthy environment for the future of the country. **The citizens view the Republic of North Macedonia as a green, healthy, clean and carbon-neutral developed modern country that is part of the EU family.** The changes that their vision needs to achieve, the challenges that need to be overcome and what each of them would do to protect the environment and deal with the consequences of climate change are summarized in the following table (details are given in Chapter 4):

Key expected positive changes until 2042 VISION	Explanation of the needs; expected benefits WHY	Key measures and activities to make the changes HOW
Improved protection of the environment and habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better education, trainings and actions We want to breath clean air 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will become the Minister of Education and I will include elements for preservation and improvement of the environment in the curriculum Practical lessons in nature to explain to the children and young people how to protect the environment More environment inspectors and more frequent inspections supervisions
The policies and investments are based on the preservation of natural habitats	Research, transfer of know-how, capacity building, networking, defining and monitoring the implementation of strategic goals by using good practices from other countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To conduct cost-benefit analyses for the protected areas, with the goal of enabling economic development for the population, in addition to protecting the nature and the biodiversity Participation in projects and exchanging experiences Educating the politicians
Climate change has been mitigated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-polluting industries Renewed vehicle fleet, public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing clean and modern technologies

	<p>transport with express trains and greater use of the railway for more sustainable road traffic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green cities (urban greenery, urban gardens and urban corridors in the city, streets converted into green paths) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will be an inspiration to others for a more responsible and better life • I will eat food whose production generates less CO₂ • I will move to a rural area • I will preserve the species that have difficulties adapting to climate change (preserving the food chain)
<p>Improved cooperation between the private sector and the municipalities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eco-smart municipalities • Local actions according to the needs of the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing trainings to bring closer the problems related to climate change and ways to solve them • Development of projects for eco-smart municipalities

An integral position that has been expressed at all the workshops is that the environment cannot and should not be considered as a separate area, but in conjunction with virtually all other areas (from energy and waste to healthcare and tourism, from rule of law and social policy to spatial planning, innovation and agriculture, etc.). These links are described in detail in Chapter 5 and they cover the socio-economic aspects, green jobs, energy poverty and equitable transition, spatial planning, youth, gender issues and more. The challenges that need to be overcome are the adoption of/amendments to the appropriate legislation in relation to the European standards and the improvement of the competencies, as well as the improved implementation of the strategic documents in this area.

The protection of the environment and the habitats, as well as the management of climate change are not the sole responsibility of the Government, municipalities or private companies. Financial and technical support from the international community and donors play key roles in this thematic area. Sustainable economic development with minimal and sustainable use of natural resources constitutes the essence of the new Development Strategy for our country, because it will enable harmonization of environmental goals with the long-term national, social and economic interests, in a broader context. Smart actions based on data and science will prevent the disturbance of the natural balance of ecosystems, protect the natural values and enable a humane life "resistant" to the climate change that await us.

VISIONS OF THE CITIZENS FROM THE VISIONARY WORKSHOPS

TETOVO A country with good infrastructure and unpolluted air, which provides all the necessary conditions for high-quality life of its citizens

SHTIP A country with robots that will absorb polluted particles from the air and purify the air

VELES High level of protected areas in the families of geoparks, which will protect nature and mitigate climate change

SKOPIJE Macedonia is the leader in generating environmental staff and the leader in the number of young people involved in environmental decision-making

BITOLA Among the European countries that rank at the top in cleanliness, security, continuous development

STRUMICA EU member, carbon-neutral (or nearly); energy independent and technologically developed