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Swiss Agency for Development  
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Economic Affairs SECO



**SWISS  
COOPERATION  
PROGRAMME IN  
NORTH  
MACEDONIA  
2025-2028**

FOREIGN POLICY  
STRATEGY  
2024-2027



INTERNATIONAL  
COOPERATION  
STRATEGY  
2025-2028



SWISS  
COOPERATION  
PROGRAMME IN  
NORTH  
MACEDONIA  
2025-2028

# Background

Swiss foreign policy in the Western Balkans region promotes stability and European integration. Since 1992, Switzerland has supported North Macedonia's democratic, economic and environmental reforms and has become one of its largest development partners.

North Macedonia has experienced political shifts, ethnic tensions, and a stalemate in its EU accession which depends on constitutional changes. While elections are well-administered and competitive, reforms to enhance transparency and representation of the electoral system remain necessary. Parliament has improved its oversight function but enhanced cross-party collaboration is needed to accelerate reforms. Civil society organisations (CSOs) operate in a generally enabling environment, but they are not systematically involved in policymaking. Despite limited resources, CSOs improve the citizens' lives and promote key reforms. Citizen participation in

decision-making is gradually expanding, particularly at the local level. Addressing corruption, overcoming impunity, and reforming the public administration remain essential to strengthen trust in institutions.

The economy has shown resilience but struggles with significant challenges, including a weak rule of law, low productivity and energy efficiency, as well as labour shortages and youth emigration. The war against Ukraine, global economic and financial crises, and regional political instability have significantly affected the economy. The EU Reform Agenda and Growth Plan for the Western Balkans countries promoting regional economic integration, along with nearshoring opportunities for the European market, could foster reforms and sustainable growth.

Environmental sustainability is progressing, with important advancements in biodiversity protection and packaging waste

management. Challenges remain in depollution, solid waste management, sustainable natural resource management, and disaster risk management. Outdated infrastructure, limited resources and capacities, and a lack of awareness and preparedness for climate risks hinder progress. Alignment with EU standards and improved access to international financial mechanisms for environmental sustainability could accelerate progress.



# Results and lessons learned 2021–2024

The cooperation programme for 2021–2024 has achieved notable results, but sustainable change remains a challenge. The main obstacles to the reform process are limited capacity, high staff turnover, emigration, and a lack of transparency and accountability. More political dialogue and a shared vision are needed.

**Democratic Governance:** Parliament's independence, functioning and transparency have improved through the adoption of its own budget, revised procedures, greater civil society engagement, and better public communication. Digitalisation has enhanced transparency and trust in Parliament, municipal councils, and the State Election Commission. Public financial management has improved with 55 municipalities publishing their budgets. More than 1,000 municipal councillors received training, while dozens of young politicians have enhanced their political influence through training and support. The integrity

and influence of about 80 CSOs improved through a newly adopted code of conduct. The new Gender Resource Centre supports state institutions to implement new gender-responsive budget policy. Ten regional projects identified by citizens and authorities were implemented. Those have improved access to health services in four regions, expanded capacities of institutions for the elderly and reduced energy costs in two additional regions.

**Economic Development:** Dual vocational education has been institutionalised, with over 560 companies already involved and over 12,000 students enrolled. Partnerships with the private sector have created 7,200 jobs through supply chain development, a strengthened start-up ecosystem and skills development. Over 350 companies have accessed international markets, and sustainable tourism is now recognised as a driver for local development.

**Water and Environment:** Public utility services have improved, providing 46,000 citizens with drinking water. Energy efficiency measures and renewable energy sources for wastewater treatment in two municipalities have reduced costs and environmental impacts. Improved solid waste management has benefited 300,000 citizens, and packaging waste management has improved nationwide. Flood protection measures now cover 115,000 citizens, and preparedness measures reach 346,000 citizens. Territory under protection has expanded from 8.9% to 11.2%.

The new cooperation programme builds on these results. Going forward, the green agenda requires more expertise and an integrated approach. Strengthening national integrity and combating corruption demands greater attention, while empowering young people and women is crucial.

# Switzerland's commitment – focus areas for 2025–2028

The goal of Switzerland's cooperation programme for 2025–2028 is to support North Macedonia's reforms towards European integration and sustainable development by strengthening democratic institutions and fostering sustainable economic growth, climate resilience, and sustainable management of natural resources.

**Democratic Governance:** The Swiss interventions continue to strengthen the capacities of the administration and elected institutions/officials at the local and national levels to work in a more transparent, efficient and participatory manner. The efficient and transparent use of public resources lies at the forefront of these efforts. Swiss interventions strengthen accountability and political inclusion by supporting enhanced dialogue between citizens (with a special focus on young people and women), civil society, political parties, state and oversight institutions. A new cultural project will help to promote cultural diversity and to stimulate democratic debate. The planned interventions in local governance and decentralisation will help national and local political leaders to better understand and address the impact of climate change.

**Sustainable Economic Development:** Switzerland supports the modernisation of businesses to increase productivity and competitiveness in international markets. A special focus is put on greener practices in order to comply with the standards of the European market and to identify entry points for circular economy opportunities. More attention is given to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) outside of Skopje to create decent employment opportunities in less developed areas, particularly for young people and women. The development of especially green and digital skills is promoted through dual vocational education, upskilling, reskilling, and youth empowerment. These interventions increase the attractiveness of the domestic labour market and counteract emigration.

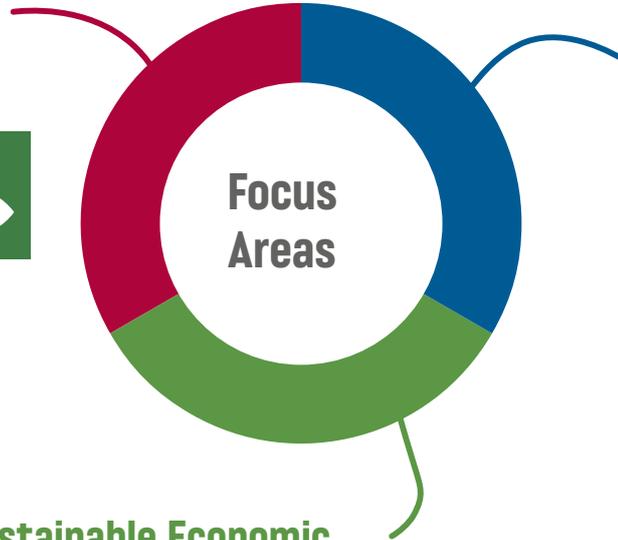
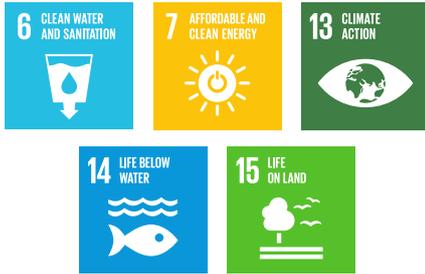
**Water and Environment:** Switzerland continues to support municipalities and public utilities in building infrastructure, enhancing technical and governance capacities, and delivering sustainable and climate-resilient water and waste management services. Particular focus is put on improving energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy in the water and sanitation sector, as well as applying circular economy principles to waste management. Integrated water resource management is a priority. Switzerland continues to support the country to protect its biodiversity and ecosystems, and to enhance the resilience of municipalities in flood-prone river basins.

**The cross-cutting theme** of good governance is promoted throughout the programme, with a focus on transparency, accountability, inclusion and the efficient use of public resources. Efforts to work with women, to address gender needs, and to empower young people are enhanced. The Swiss cooperation programme ensures a balanced distribution of interventions throughout the country, including in less developed regions and communities.

**Environmental considerations** are integrated across all projects to support the green transition and climate change resilience. Continued funding of infrastructure in the water and environmental sectors is needed to enhance corporate governance and influence policymaking processes.

It is crucial for implementing partners at both national and local levels to stay engaged and adapt to changes in order to remain relevant. Strategic alliances with other development partners are sought to enhance impact and efficiency of the programme. Additionally, strategic communication plays a key role in raising awareness, clarifying responsibilities and fostering ownership and accountability.

## Water and Environment



## Democratic Governance



## Sustainable Economic Development





# Approach and partners

Connecting technical, political and financial approaches while fostering synergies across thematic priorities is essential for sustainable change. The programme is designed and implemented in close collaboration with a broad range of partners, including state institutions, political parties, civil society, the private sector and other donors. It prioritises building local and national capacities while enhancing links with regional and international expertise. A systemic approach is adopted, to ensure that results are institutionalised. Identifying and working with national and local drivers of change is crucial to accelerate the transition progress.

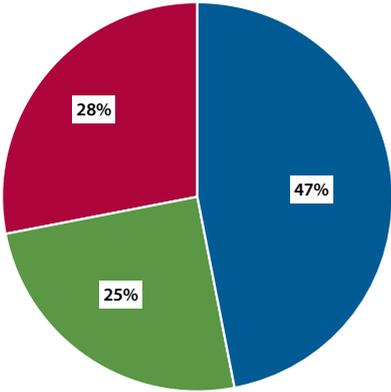
The Swiss cooperation programme aligns closely with the EU Reform Agenda and the National Development Strategy 2024–2044. It recognises the importance of political consensus, actively fostering dialogue between key stakeholders to secure broad-based support for reforms. Switzerland deepens its cooperation with other development partners to ensure complementarity, prevent overlaps and enhance aid effectiveness. Its flexible approach and ability to anticipate enable the Swiss cooperation to remain relevant, adjust to changing contexts, seize opportunities and respond to emerging needs.

## Map of North Macedonia



Map No. 3789 Rev. 5.1 UNITED NATIONS August 2008  
Office of Information and Communications Technology  
Geospatial Information Section

**Cooperation Programme 2025–2028**  
 Indicative total budget: CHF 56,090,372\*  
 Breakdown per focus area



- Democratic Governance
- Sustainable Economic Development
- Water and Environment

\* The information on the financial envelope is indicative. This information serves merely as a basis for the forward spending plans that are reviewed each year by the Federal council and the Swiss Parliament.



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