

This note presents the results of a Social Sustainability Assessment carried out by the Institute for International Urban Development (www.i2ud.org), Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development (www.co-plan.org), and the Coalition for Sustainable Development (CSD). This assessment is part of the World Bank’s Europe and Central Asia (ECA) Sustainable Cities Initiative and the WB-Austria Urban Partnership Program (UPP) for Strengthening Local Governments in South-Eastern-Europe, funded by the UPP and managed by the ECA Social Development and ECA Urban Development departments and the World Bank Institute. A summary of findings of the desk and field research, which included Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews, as well as a Participatory Workshop are presented below. Further details are available in the Skopje City Synthesis Report. For more information, please refer to the ECA Sustainable Cities Website: <http://bit.ly/XWFMCG> and www.seecities.eu. The analysis, results, and views expressed in this paper are those of the authors alone and do not represent the position of the World Bank or any of its member countries.



CITY OF SKOPJE



BASIC INDICATORS

- 506, 926 inhabitants¹
- The most prominent minority group, the Roma, are located primarily in Šuto Orizari.
- Growth rate: 3.5%²
- 30.7% unemployment³
- There are no official figures on current levels of poverty and extreme poverty for the City of Skopje (State rate: 30.4% for 2011)⁴

VULNERABLE GROUPS

1. The elderly
2. The unemployed (Including Roma)
3. Youth (15-25)
4. Employed low-income
5. Employed middle-income

*Cross-cutting group: persons with disabilities

CHALLENGES IN SERVICE DELIVERY

Administratively, Skopje consists of 10 municipalities that form part of the Skopje statistical region. The City of Skopje is a distinct unit of local self-government regulated by the *Law on the City of Skopje*. Mixed competencies and an incomplete decentralization process that has given the local government new responsibilities without matching funding are the major causes of difficulties in providing basic services to all citizens. Although most residents are in some way affected by the following service deficiencies,

¹ Source information: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia, 2012 T-03.01.7 Census 2002: Total population of the Republic of Macedonia according to declared ethnic affiliation, by municipalities, according to the administrative-territorial organization from 2004
² Source information: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia, 2012, T-03.02.15: Demographic indicators of the municipalities, 2011
³ Source information: State Statistic Office, Regions in the Republic of Macedonia, 2012
⁴ Source information: State Statistic Office, official website

marginalized groups are the most susceptible to low-quality services. Importantly, due to the decentralization process still being in a *consolidation phase*, it is difficult at times to have a clear picture of where the service delivery bottlenecks exist:

- **Registration:** The lack of current and accurate data is a major challenge for any kind of analysis or mapping. The responsible body for civil registry is the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Macedonia and the Civil Registry Office. They do not have data on the number of unrecorded Roma or members of other minority ethnic communities in Skopje.
- **Social protection:** Many of the procedures for obtaining services or rights for the members of vulnerable groups are complicated and unclear. The desk review highlighted a number of structural defects that pose obstacles to citizens trying to exercise their rights to social protection.
- **Education:** Elementary schools are under the authority of each municipality, while secondary schools are under the authority of the City of Skopje. Secondary education has been compulsory since the 2008/2009 school year. The state provides free books to all elementary and secondary school students. However, the cost of other school related supplies is unaffordable to low-income families. Some households are eligible for conditional social cash transfers to encourage the attendance of their children in secondary schools.
- **Energy:** Since 2011, electricity subsidies (currently 700 MK dinars per month) are provided to households eligible for financial assistance. It is unclear whether this assistance will become a permanent entitlement.



Focus Group Discussions, Skopje Sep-Oct 2012

INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As stipulated by the Law on the City of Skopje, matters of local importance that are functionally inseparable and equally important for the whole area of the city are the responsibility of the City. Conversely, each municipality within the City is responsible for the management of issues of local importance. Areas of competence of both the City of Skopje and its municipalities include: planning and land regulation; protection of the environment and nature; local economic development; communal activities; culture; education; sports; social welfare, civil protection; and health.

The *Law on Local Self-Government* provides for and defines methods of the direct participation of citizens in municipal decision-making. Also, pursuant to provisions of this Law, the Municipal Council is obliged to adopt regulations to ensure transparency of their work.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES TO BE CONSIDERED

- No regulations ensure the representation of marginalised groups in local councils.
- The overlapping competences of local and national governments, as well as a lack of coordination between different authorities and institutions, complicate obtaining certain services or protecting the rights of vulnerable groups.
- Some issues relevant to vulnerable groups such as social aid, health care, housing, employment, etc, are dealt with at the national level.

EXISTING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES IMPLEMENTED BY THE CITY OF SKOPJE AND ITS MUNICIPALITIES

- ✓ All meetings of the Council are open to the public. However, if one wants to attend a meeting of the Council, it must be announced to the President of the Council who gives approval for attendance. This rule is meant to avoid participation of more people than the capacity of the hall.
 - Many of the focus group participants reported being unable to participate for a number of reasons, including lack of information.
- ✓ To provide better access to information, the City of Skopje and most of the municipalities (Centar, Karposh, Aerodrom and Kisela Voda) have e-governance and ICT tools on their official websites.
 - The remaining municipalities in Skopje have website pages, but do not provide e-services for the citizens (the website of Suto Orizari is not operational).
- ✓ The official portal of Skopje includes: e-services; e-taxes; e-public procurements; questionnaires for the quality assessment of services; software application for communication of citizens with members of the City Council and city administration (e-discussions; ask the Mayor, members of the Council, municipal administration); civic Initiative; report a problem; GIS; etc.
 - *Although there are many ICT tools on municipal/institutional websites aimed to provide information, services or communication with citizens, not all are operational/updated.*
- ✓ City of Skopje Council decisions are electronically available at the official city portal. In addition, the City of Skopje publishes an annual publication ‘How your money is spent’, which is available for download from the city website www.skopje.gov.mk.
- ✓ Many of the municipalities of Skopje publish monthly bulletins to inform citizens on their activities.
 - *Focus Group Participants reported that most of these bulletins are “luxury boxes with no content” – a waste of money that could have been used for a better purpose.*
- ✓ The City of Skopje includes the needs of marginalized groups in the creation of its projects, programs and strategies. These are aimed at improving their quality of life, and ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

- ✓ A weekly reception day, when citizens can meet the Mayor and report their problems has been established as a possibility in most of the municipalities in Skopje.
 - *Focus Group Participants reported that in reality in most of the municipalities this functions best before the elections.*
- ✓ There are legislative provisions⁵ in place clearly establishing the rights and procedures for access to information and the right to receive an official response from government authorities and institutions.
 - *Most of the municipal authorities and institutions were described as providing delayed responses to official information requests. However, there are examples where a 48-hours system is efficient and functional.*

WHY PROMOTE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN SKOPJE?

Although certain practices are already part of municipal agendas, they lack efficiency. Even though the websites of local governments and institutions utilise a number of ICT tools aimed to provide easier access to information, services or communication with citizens, not all are operational or efficient.

There is a sense that a lack of information and knowledge exists on both sides: in order to perform their tasks well, the providers (administration workers) need to be better informed, educated and trained; while the users of services (the citizens) need to be more aware of their rights and therefore have to be better informed.

There is no real cooperation between local authorities and institutions; their cooperation with the civic sector (NGOs, CBOs) is mainly related to projects in which they collaborate as partners. In addition, citizens and members of vulnerable groups feel under-represented in city decision-making.

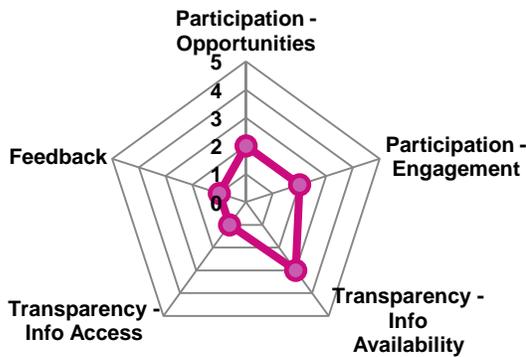
There is a general feeling of apathy and passiveness among citizens, but also an awareness that they need to be more proactive in demanding governments and institutions to become more transparent and accountable in their work.

Transparency does not mean public advertising of completed projects. What is needed is the real involvement of citizens in the strategic planning process, rather than procedural participation. Efficient feedback and performance monitoring mechanisms aimed to measure citizens' satisfaction with provided services are recognised as an opportunity for improvement.

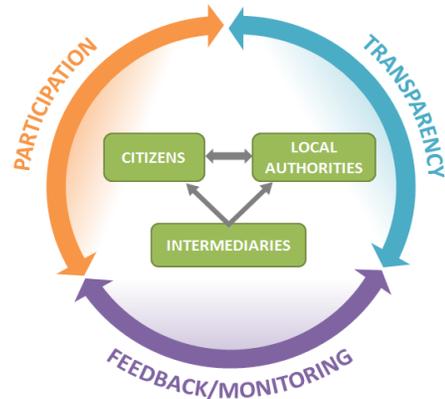
⁵ Law On Free Access To Information Of Public Interest

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX

In order to gauge existing levels of social accountability in each city in a comparable way, this Assessment developed a Social Accountability Index around 5 categories relating the framework of Participation, Transparency and Feedback/Monitoring. The index is a simplified measure of the effectiveness of existing practices and identifies areas that can benefit from improvement.



Index results for Skopje⁶



Social Accountability Framework

STAKEHOLDER OWNERSHIP

While the local authorities are responsible for implementing a number of the suggested interventions, the intermediaries and the community alike are also recognised as important parties that need to play an active role and take ownership of the interventions and actions of direct importance to the community and vulnerable groups. Details about each component and the identified responsible parties are available as part of the Skopje City Synthesis Report. Stakeholders pursuing these initiatives should establish a system of communication to inform/report on their efforts and consult in a continuing inclusive process.



Skopje: Participatory Scenario Development Workshop, 18th December, 2012

⁶ Please refer to the City Synthesis Report Annex for a full description of the index and its categories.

PROPOSAL #1: DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL DATABASE SOFTWARE TAILORED TO THE NEEDS OF CITIZENS

In order to overcome the information gap, networking of key stakeholders (and officials) has to be “in real time and space.” Analysis and strategies have to be supported by local action plans and programs that are workable. Deeper involvement of the media is one of the important factors for better information. Also, it takes encouragement and support to overcome the fear of citizens to speak openly about problems. For better vertical communication and dissemination of information, it is necessary to reinvigorate the urban communities and associations of homeowners, who are in direct contact with the citizens. Everyone has a personal stake in fixing the situation.

Overall Goal: Satisfied citizens, accountable institutions, proactive civic society sector

Specific Action

WHAT	Development of central database software tailored to the needs of the citizens. Institutions: analysis and strategy on how to improve access to information and transparency; preparation of development programs. Citizens: pro-active involvement. Greater engagement of the NGOs and the business sectors.
HOW	1. Institutions: Appoint responsible persons; connect various stakeholders. 2. Citizens: Mobilize urban (local) communities; associations of homeowners (tenants); raise social awareness 3. NGOs and the business sector (intermediaries): Strengthen civil society; motivate the business sector
WHO	Institutions, Citizens, NGO + business sector (intermediates)
WHEN	1-2 years
INDICATORS	The Central database software itself, increased exposure and visibility, Performance and quality assessment by beneficiaries; number of users; etc.
HOW MUCH	Central database software; maintenance of software (database); media support; campaign; tentative estimate: 3,500,000 USD

PROPOSAL #2: ESTABLISH A SYSTEM THAT WILL ENSURE THE INVOLVEMENT OF AND CARE FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

There are a number of causes to the problems associated with citizens' participation in general, and that of vulnerable groups in particular, in creating programs and policies that are of benefit to them, including: inaccurate or untimely information (delayed information for specific / ongoing planning activities); citizens are called to engage post-festum, and their opinions are not taken into account; non-existence of departments to communicate directly with vulnerable groups at the local level; mixing of responsibilities between the relevant institutions (local / central) for certain issues. Although the regulations provide for the involvement of citizens, in practice there are obstacles. A system is needed that delivers concrete results for citizens' involvement; relays information; and answers their questions and complaints.

Overall Goal: A system that will ensure involvement of vulnerable groups

Specific Action

WHAT	Establish a system that will ensure the involvement of and care for elderly people and other vulnerable groups by organizing patronage groups of volunteers (citizens, youth, civic sector) and service-providing departments that would facilitate participation and access to information and services.
HOW	A citizens' initiative to present the idea to the competent authorities. The inclusion of educational institutions (colleges, schools) and of young people (university and high school students) as a link for active volunteerism and to support learning-by-doing with vulnerable groups. Certain preconditions must be met, including development of social service offices within the municipalities for coordination. This should be organised as part of the system and included in the municipal annual budgets and programs (not incidentally as <i>ad-hoc</i> interventions). Also, changes in legislation to motivate the business sector to support initiatives in the social sphere (tax incentives, better scoring on tendering procedures, etc).
WHO	Local authorities; civil society (NGOs, CBOs, citizens); business sector
WHEN	Period to set up and become functional: 1-2 years
INDICATORS	Performance and quality assessment by beneficiaries, number of people involved as providers and as beneficiaries
HOW MUCH	Difficult to calculate given it is a wide-ranging, medium-term intervention. Given that this is an institutional process, the municipalities could be covering this through its own funds. Estimate per municipality: 35,000 USD.

PROPOSAL #3: AN EFFICIENT SYSTEM FOR FEEDBACK OF INFORMATION AND MONITORING

Mechanisms for feedback of information very often are not functional and effective. An efficient system for getting answers to citizens' questions and complaints needs to be established. In addition, the administration staff is not adequately trained to respond to the demands of the citizens. Hence, it is necessary to provide additional trainings for local administrative staff working in different departments, who will be in direct communication (in person at the reception desks or through the Internet) with those who need information or services. This will create an environment for efficient implementation of the "48 hours - Right now and accurate" program.

Overall Goal: "48 hours system - Right now and accurate."

Specific Action

WHAT	Efficient implementation of a "48 hours system - Right now and accurate". Accurate and on time provision of information through Internet information desk (website with complete information and inclusion of "48 hours response" on the websites of all municipalities).
HOW	Train the administration to answer citizens' questions and meet their needs; create a system of communication within and between institutions; a system of rewards and penalties to encourage timely responses; foster a strong internal communications ethos between employees in municipalities and institutions; up-to-date and functional municipalities that engage with citizens through a variety of media, including in-person, written, and electronically; as well as engage with urban communities and NGOs for dissemination of important information.
WHO	Institutions (local government, urban communities); Intermediaries: NGOs, experts
WHEN	1-2 years
INDICATORS	Number of municipalities in the city installing the system; number of users; number of complaints addressed; performance and quality assessment by beneficiaries
HOW MUCH	The cost for adjustment, maintenance and regular updating of the site; promotional costs. Estimate per municipality: 15,000 USD.