



Annual Report 2021



Peace Corps

Director's Message



Deborah Conner - Country Director
Peace Corps North Macedonia

For the entire year of 2021, Peace Corps North Macedonia was unable to welcome back Peace Corps Volunteers. We had planned on Volunteers returning in February 2021 and in September 2021, however, COVID-19 changed our plans both times. Even though we were unable to celebrate the return of Volunteers we were able to celebrate two Peace Corps anniversaries. The first was the 60th Anniversary of John F Kennedy starting Peace Corps in 1961 and the second was the 25th Anniversary since Peace Corps North Macedonia was established in 1996. We held various events and activities to celebrate Peace Corps 60th Anniversary. The first was held on March 25th as part of the Federal Women's Program, called 'Women of Impact Series' and featured the Acting Peace Corps Director Carol Spahn as the Key Note Speaker on '60 years of Women in Peace Corps Service'. This was a

Zoom event so people from Peace Corps Headquarters and staff in the Region were able to attend together. Other invaluable female staff were able to participate as speakers including the Director of Management & Operations and the General Services Officer. The American Ambassador to North Macedonia closed out the event. Other activities included podcasts, Facebook posts, notes and cards sent to previous Peace Corps staff and other collaborators, such as, host families, counterparts, NGO partners and government contacts.

The two main Peace Corps projects, Community Development and English and Inclusive Education, remain active. The Program and Training Team were able to continue to provide excellent online trainings and workshops to teachers, community members, municipal points of contact and youth involved in leadership. Trainings were presented in Macedonian and Albanian languages and some in English, this enabled Peace Corps to keep relationships in North Macedonia strong. Peace Corps was able to sign a new MoU with the Ministry of Education & Science, conduct a Needs Assessment for Teachers and complete a Research Study titled 'Youth & COVID-19 in North Macedonia: Needs, Challenges, and Consequences'. Both the Assessment and Research Study were used by Peace Corps to create the content of the Trainings and Workshops implemented throughout the year. Staff in the Peace Corps North Macedonia Office continued to embrace this extremely challenging environment and have consistently supported each other through thoughts and actions. The office is also laying the ground work for

Volunteer return in 2022 by reviewing and strengthening our COVID mitigation measures. Our exceptional management team has completed multiple projects to make our office and vehicles safer for those who use them. I am in awe of the talented and committed group of people that support the Peace Corps mission every day. My thoughts and prayers continue to be with the people of North Macedonia, especially those that have lost friends and family during this pandemic.

As we put 2021 behind us, we look forward to the start of 2022 with a solid plan for Volunteer return and an even stronger commitment to the Peace Corps mission in North Macedonia.

Peace Corps Overview

In 1961, United States President John F. Kennedy established the Corps to promote world peace and friendship by challenging Americans and work in developing countries. In 2021 Peace Corps celebrated its 60th anniversary, but the mission and role of the Peace Corps has withstood the test of time. The three goals of the Peace Corps remain as important today as they were at our founding:



Goal 1: To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.

Goal 2: To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.

Goal 3: To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Since 1961, more than 240,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in 142 countries, leaving a legacy of shared values, improved relations, and sustainable community-based development.

Peace Corps in North Macedonia

Peace Corps established its program in North Macedonia in 1996, following an invitation by the Government of North Macedonia. Since then, more than 800 Volunteers have worked with schools, local municipalities, civil society organizations, and public institutions to meet the diverse needs of communities throughout the country. As an acknowledgment of the importance of Peace Corps in improving the friendship between North Macedonia and America and of the commitment and dedication of Volunteers to North Macedonia society, the President of North Macedonia George Ivanov awarded Peace Corps with the Order of Merit in 2011.

Due to the COVID pandemic, in 2021 there were no Peace Corps Volunteers present in the country. However, Peace Corps North Macedonia stayed dedicated to the mission to work with the communities in the country. Peace Corps is looking forward to the moment when the Volunteers will be able to return and continue their work with their communities.

Peace Corps Volunteers serve in one of two projects English and Inclusive Education and Community Development, with a special focus on youth and special needs.



Group: MAK 1, 1996

While serving in North Macedonia, Volunteers immerse themselves in local culture, learn the local language, and take part in the social life of the community. Upon arrival in North Macedonia, Volunteers undergo extensive language, cultural, and technical training. To further their integration into the local communities, Volunteers live with host families during the eleven week training and up to 24-months of their Volunteer service. Peace Corps implements its program in North Macedonia in close collaboration with a variety of local and national stakeholders active in the fields of education, community development, youth, and special needs.

Celebration of 25 years of Peace Corps in North Macedonia

2021 was a big year, because this year Peace Corps celebrates 25 years in North Macedonia. The best way to celebrate this important milestone is by looking at past successes and achievements of Peace Corps. Of course, none of these successes would have been possible without the help and support from our friends: the host families – who opened their homes and hearts to our Volunteers, and the Counterparts – who opened their classrooms and offices. This enabled the Counterparts and Volunteers to work together to accomplish so much in their communities. We are very grateful for all the work of the Counterparts, Volunteers and communities.



The list of our friends does not stop here. We are grateful for the help and support that we have had from the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Local Self-Government, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Agency for Youth and Sport, Bureau for Development of Education, and many more institutions and organizations. Their support and guidance was crucial to build relationships that allows the program to effectively respond to the needs of the communities around the country.

Going back to reflect on the early years of Peace Corps in country, we organized a *Social media campaign* posting about important events that took place starting from the signing of the contract between the Macedonian Government and Peace Corps in 1996 until today. We also developed a series of *Anniversary Podcasts*. The theme for first episode was "*Appreciating first employees of PC North Macedonia*", honoring their contribution, dedication and the relationships they built with former Volunteers, as well as, staff, past and present. This was a testimony to the impact Peace Corps had on the lives of our former colleagues who started the amazing Peace Corps journey back in 1996. This episode features a conversation with our former colleagues, Fanka Stefanovska, Zhaklina Geshtakovska and Zvonko Naumoski. They talk about their most memorable moments from working with PC North Macedonia and how Peace Corps changed their perspectives.



The second episode of the Anniversary Podcasts features former Peace Corps Volunteers who have served in North Macedonia. The testimonies are from a few, but the impact and the relationships that they have built throughout the years are very special. Volunteers' contribution, commitment and the legacy they left behind are deeply appreciated and we look forward to welcoming the future groups of Volunteers in country. This episode features Allison Smith, Audrey Voorhees, Bill Bridgeford, Claire Aloe, David Nash Mendez, Justin Otten, Laura Robinson, Lisa Andonovska and Matthew Murie. They talk about the most memorable moments from working with Peace Corps North Macedonia and how Peace Corps has changed their lives. The podcasts can be found on PC website and Facebook page.

Projects of Peace Corps

Community Development Project

The Community Development Project in North Macedonia supports communities and organizations of North Macedonia to effectively manage sustainable community development. In the past, Peace Corps Volunteers worked closely with civil society organizations, local municipalities and public institutions throughout the country. Working with local partners, the Community Development Project goal is to have actively engaged citizens and community organizations in North Macedonia lead sustainable community development efforts that are inclusive and benefit all categories of citizens.



In 2021, we continued our collaboration with the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) in Skopje, in our joint effort to provide more online training opportunities for people in the country. In May we launched a series of capacity-building virtual workshops, intended for employees, members or volunteers in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and high schools from North Macedonia. The

four day workshop included the topics of *“Project Design and Management 1 & 2”*, *“RYCO Programing and Project Opportunities”* and *“Financial Management for Project Implementation”*. 34 participants, representing more than 30 different NGOs and institutions, attended the workshops and received a Certification of Completion in the end.

We continued our collaboration with RYCO in December, as we organized another online workshop series *“Youth Leadership”*, as a personal development opportunity for young people. The workshop series was divided into six days, aimed at improving skills in the areas of leadership, communication, intercultural dialogue, active youth engagement, volunteering and effective conflict resolution. 25 participants successfully completed this workshop series.

In June and July, we had two trainings *“Digital Tools for Organizations”* and *“Digital Youth Engagement”*. With the goal of introducing NGO and Municipality staff, Youth workers, and teachers to different digital tools that will help them better organize and promote their work, as well as, increase youth engagement in an online setting. A total of 138 participants attended the two online trainings.

In addition, the Community Development program launched another series of online professional development workshops for local and national organizations, municipalities and youth organizations. The workshops aimed to introduce participants to project design and management, increase youth participation during COVID-19, and support youth workers to manage the negative impacts of Covid-19. . These started in December, having two, two day sessions on *“Project Design and Management”* and will continue in January 2022 with two more sessions, *“Volunteerism in the Time of COVID”* and *“Building Youth Resilience in the Time of COVID”*.

Projects of Peace Corps

English and Inclusive Education Project

Peace Corps North Macedonia is implementing the English and Inclusive Education Project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for the Development of Education, as well as, other agencies and organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities for all students.

The English and Inclusive Education Project has two goals. The first goal is supporting students to attain communication skills in English necessary to access academic and/or professional opportunities. The second goal refers to special needs students access and participation in academic and professional opportunities.

Under the English and Inclusion Education Project, Peace Corps North Macedonia organized professional development workshops for teachers throughout the year. In May we organized the *"Develop Creativity as a Teacher"*, an online workshop intended for English Teachers and other educators, with a goal of defining and understanding creativity, as well as, its role and importance in teaching. In August we had *"Motivating Students in Online Classrooms"*, another

workshop for teachers to help them with online teaching. A total of 200 teachers attended these two workshops. Peace Corps North Macedonia continues to address needs driven by COVID-19, by organizing an online teacher workshop series to enable children to return to learning safely and recover from education disruptions. With this purpose in mind in November 2021, Peace Corps launched a virtual workshop series for professional development for teachers. These workshop series will be conducted over a period of four months, starting November 2021 through March 2022. Four important topics are covered in both Macedonian and Albanian language.



1. Student Centered Methodology,
2. Classroom Management,
3. Diversity in the Classroom
4. Managing Stress for teachers and students in the time of COVID.

Topics one and two were completed in reporting period 2021, and topics three and four are planned to take place in 2022. There were almost 1,000 teachers registered for these workshop series, 112 for Albanian language and 880 for Macedonian.

The purpose of these workshop series is to:

- Support teachers in delivering quality education to students who have faced disruptions to their education due to COVID-19;
- Support teachers in developing coping mechanisms, for themselves and their students, to help mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 has had on mental well-being;
- Promote Peace Corps and its Education program to ensure schools and teachers are vested in Volunteer return;



Guest speakers to Access Micro-Scholarship program

In April 2021 two Peace Corps staff members were guest speakers in one of the *Access Micro-Scholarship program* sessions. The program aims to develop students' English language skills and capabilities, as well as, teach students about U.S. culture and democratic values. In line with this, Peace Corps staff members talked about Volunteerism and its importance. It is estimated that 200 students from ten different towns participated. Staff shared their experiences in Volunteering and what they have gained from it, and then led the students to share their own experiences and to think about ways in which they can contribute to their communities.

E-Learning in Peace Corps

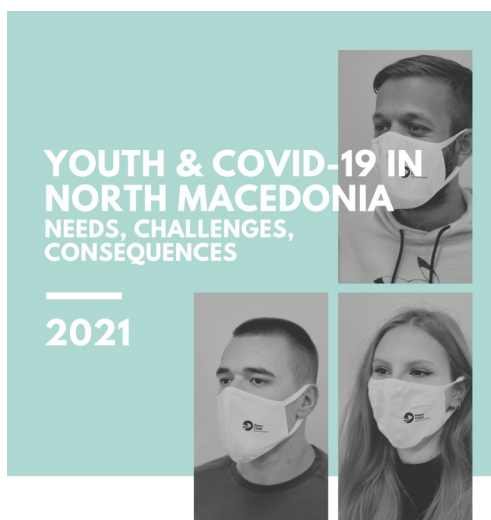
This year Peace Corps was recognized with a Five Star Award from the Federal Government Distance Learning Association in recognition for demonstrating leadership and best practices in the development and application of proven distance learning technologies in the Federal Government. Through promoting its Moodle based Learning Management System called LearningSpace in 2020-2021, Peace Corps trained over 800 staff from around the world in developing their course building skills, resulting in the creation of over 200 new courses in LearningSpace. Peace Corps North Macedonia was part of this effort by having 75% of our staff participate in this training and having two of our staff members serve as mentors to other posts.



Our Training Manager Evelina Alibegovska was invited to participate in a podcast organized by HOP Council to talk about the e-learning efforts in Peace Corps North Macedonia. HOP is the online learning platform of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programs of the European Commission. It hosts online courses implemented by SALTO resources centers, National Agencies of the European Commission programs, as well as, youth organizations from Europe. It was an honor and a great opportunity for us to share our experience and expertise in developing blended and online learning content for our Volunteers on our, now award-winning platform, LearningSpace.

You can find the podcast on the HOP platform Facebook page.

Research study “Youth & COVID-19 in North Macedonia: Needs, Challenges, and Consequences”



Youth has always been one of the main focuses of Peace Corps in North Macedonia. Our Volunteers have worked in Community Centers, Youth Councils, Schools, Universities, Civil Society Organizations, and they have been engaging young people through their work with projects, activities, trainings, clubs, camps and much more. Among many successful activities undertaken by Peace Corps Volunteers are the Young Men's Leadership Camp, Girl's Leading Our World Camp, Essay Challenge Contests, Spelling Bees, Traveling Camps, and other community initiated activities for youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had many negative effects and it keeps influencing lives in negative ways. Although young people have not been the main risk group for hospitalization and death, they have, since the beginning of the pandemic

been on the frontline when it comes to negative experiences that are social, educational, and financial in nature. Clearly their physical and mental health are at risk.

As COVID-19 changed many aspects of reality in North Macedonia, Peace Corps wanted to learn more about the needs, challenges, and consequences the pandemic had on youth. Therefore, we decided to have a comprehensive research study carried out on this subject so that we can understand the unique needs and challenges for youth.

This research study analyzed many aspects of young people's lives including educational, social, economic, emotional health, youth participation, and inclusion of marginalized groups. In addition, the study reveals the activism and volunteering practices of youth. The institutional response to the pandemic, and the role of the civic sector is also analyzed. Therefore, this study offers a unique, cross-sectional inquiry of the youth, government institutions and civic sector that aims to understand how the youth in North Macedonia are coping with the pandemic.

“What are the needs and the challenges of the youth in North Macedonia during and after COVID-19, and what can Peace Corps North Macedonia do to support these needs?”

The results from the study are showing that there is a lot of work to be done with youth. Only 29% of the respondents (total participants: 1002) volunteered before the pandemic, and only 17% during the pandemic. 21% of the respondents do not know any youth organization where they can be involved. Therefore, many of our online training opportunities are based on the results from this study, in order to respond to the needs of youth.

If you would like to receive the complete research study, please contact us at mk-info@peacecorps.gov, and we would be happy to share the research study with you.

Environmental Conference

“Potentials for preservation, maintenance and promotion of agrobiodiversity”

The online Environmental Conference “*Potentials for preservation, maintenance and promotion of agrobiodiversity*” was an event and opportunity for opening dialog on agrobiodiversity and networking of key stakeholders (speakers and participants). The project was implemented by two local NGOs, *Ajde Makedonija* - Skopje and *Apollonia Foundation* - Gevgelija. The project was funded by the Small Grants program of Peace Corps and community contribution, with a start date in September 2020 and end date in August 2021.



The project included an Online Conference, that brought together representatives from Universities, governmental institutions, private and civic sector, and other experts in the field. They discussed legislation, national policy for protection of heirloom seeds, and opportunities for collaboration of state institutions with farmers, academia and NGOs. The importance of awareness for maintaining heirloom seeds among youth and communities was in the focus as well, together with the activities and the challenges faced by the NGO sector.

In addition to the Conference, the project created several educational outputs, including documents,

videos and brochures that have been promoted through a social media campaign and email invitations throughout the year.

The end result of the project was the creation of the *Network for agro biodiversity*. Currently, the Network includes 17 organizations and 53 individuals, representatives from different sectors including governmental institutions, universities, seed banks, civic and private sector. The Network will continue its work in the future.

Celebrating International Education Week (November 15–19, 2021)



International Education Week is a time for the Peace Corps to reflect on the benefits of global education and on building intercultural understanding. As we celebrated, we also reflected on the impact of COVID-19 on education around the world. Our team visited two partner-schools and created a video that highlights the impact on COVID-19 on education in our communities and how Peace Corps North Macedonia has helped schools in the country address this challenge.

Plans for the Future

Peace Corps North Macedonia continues to work on the preparation for Volunteer return. We expect to have the first group arrive in North Macedonia in September 2022, to continue the Peace Corps journey working alongside community members throughout the country. Peace Corps North Macedonia will continue with the online workshops and training opportunities for teachers, youth, NGO workers and anyone else who is interested to join us.

In addition, we will work with local organizations that are interested in hosting Volunteer activities and will share information on Volunteerism - this was based on the findings from the Research study that many young people do not volunteer or are not familiar with volunteering opportunities in the country.



Peace Corps North Macedonia also laid the ground work for the launch of the *Virtual Service Pilot Program*. In this program, former Peace Corps Volunteers will be donating their time to engage virtually with local partners in North Macedonia, to support activities, projects, and tasks developed in collaboration between the NGOs and schools. The first round of Virtual Service Pilot Participants will start their work in March 2022 with four selected partners: Youth and Community Center - Gostivar, PS Asdreni - Glogji, Tearce; PS Elpida Karamandi - Bitola; and Red Cross - Skopje.

We remain open for applications to host a Volunteer in the future, and we invite all the interested NGOs, schools, municipalities and public institution to send their application at mk-info@peacecorps.gov. The application form can be found here: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/north-macedonia/ask-for-a-volunteer/>