



MONTENEGRO

BACKGROUND

Since independence in 2006, Montenegro has made steady progress improving human development, democratic governance, and European integration, which is a stated objective of the Government. In recognition of this progress, in 2012 Montenegro received EU candidate status and accession negotiations are underway. By the end of 2015¹, 22 chapters were open for negotiations, including those on the rule of law. In December 2015, Montenegro also received an official invitation to join NATO.

To strengthen rule of law, Montenegro has been implementing constitutional and legislative reforms to

enhance the independence of the judiciary through more transparent and merit-based appointment procedures. Specifically, amendments to laws regarding the role of the Ombudsman were adopted in August 2014, with the goal of providing greater independence and strengthening the institution's role in combating discrimination. However, despite national legislation concerning human rights being considered up to European standards, further improvements in implementation are required.

While positive political, economic, and social developments are notable, challenges remain in several areas. Specifically, more efforts are needed to fight corruption, reduce inequality and social exclusion,

¹ Government of Montenegro, "Montenegro opens two more chapters in EU membership negotiations", 21 December 2015. Available from <http://www.gov.me/en/News/156237/Montenegro-opens-two-more-chapters-in-EU-membership-negotiations.html>

increase civic engagement, and address cases of ill-treatment in police custody and some alleged cases of human rights violations from the 1990s conflict. Further steps also need to be taken to reduce gender inequality and violence against women, and to address discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Reforms are also needed in the area of public administration. Finally, coalitions led by the Democratic Party of Socialists having remained in power since independence, suggesting a significant test for Montenegro's democracy will arise when a transition of power is required.

ASSISTANCE AND IMPACT

With the goal of assisting Montenegro in EU accession, many of the projects undertaken by UNDP in 2015 had a focus on helping the Government meet required standards and navigate the accession process. In work to improve rule of law consistency and standards, UNDP provided technical support to the Ministry of Justice to align various frameworks with the Judicial Reform Strategy 2014-2018. This technical support, including an action plan for implementation, should ensure a more consistent and focused approach for the reform efforts going forward. UNDP also provided assistance to the Ministry of Justice in drafting the ICT Strategy for the Justice System 2016-2020, ensuring technology will play an important role in improving justice for all.

Combining efforts to improve rule of law and the protection of human rights, UNDP also facilitated initiatives to address gaps in the legal framework to increase the protection of vulnerable groups. This primarily focused on assessing and strengthening the capabilities of the Ombudsman, and improving the provision and availability of mediation and legal aid.

Reducing gender inequality and preventing gender-based violence is another high priority in Montenegro. In partnership with the Government and civil society organizations, UNDP developed an accredited education programme for judges and prosecutors on domestic violence the protection of women's rights.

"Full implementation of the law, constant training of judicial officials, respect for human rights and international standards are the guiding principles of our work. We are aware that this is the only correct way to establish the rule of law and legal certainty, and that is our contribution to the building of Montenegro as a modern democracy"

– **Ms. Vesna Medenica**, President of the Supreme Court of Montenegro

This was part of a broader effort to establish a more coordinated response to combat domestic violence, which resulted in reported cases increasing by 12.5 percent for criminal offences and 22 percent for misdemeanour cases when compared to 2014. In addition, a National SOS help line for victims of domestic violence was introduced in September. Within two months of the launch, more than 750 phone calls were received, nearly half the total number of reported cases (1,347) in the whole of 2014. UNDP has been credited by all its partners in Montenegro for its work on gender issues and was awarded the UNDP Gold Gender Equality Seal for delivering tangible improvements in gender equality.

Montenegro introduces a national, toll-free, anonymous SOS helpline for victims of domestic violence



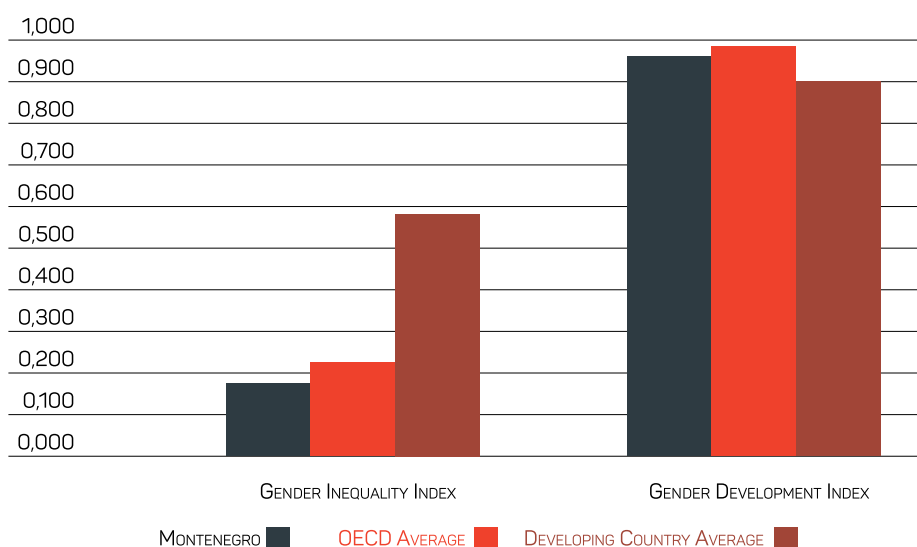
Photo by: Milos Vujovic/UNDP Montenegro



Social Welfare Reform – establishing new social services at the local level

Photo by: Milos Vujovic/UNDP Montenegro

GENDER DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER INEQUALITY INDICES - 2014



Source: UNDP²

Strengthening national and local governance systems to deliver better social services and to generate increased local development are an integral part of UNDP's efforts in Montenegro. A structural reform of the social welfare system through introduction of new legislation, the development of social inclusion plans for 21 out of 23 municipalities, the establishment of new social services, and the upgrading of facilities for the provision of social services were some of the key successes in 2015. In addition, the Government's new Social Card – Social Welfare Information System, supported by UNDP, integrates with 11 other national systems to deliver a range of benefits, including enabling better targeting and more efficient delivery of services and benefits or transfers, and providing a wealth of data for evidence-based planning.

To improve local governance, UNDP has been working with several municipalities to improve their capacity for attracting investment. This work included helping to develop business zone management plans, promotional materials, and a web portal (www.biznizsazona.me). In October, these efforts were presented to 80 investors from 23 countries gathered at the International Investment Conference organized in Podgorica and Kolasin, resulting in investment commitments of €21 million with around 300 jobs expected to be created. In addition, a Study on Identification of Business Zones of Strategic Interest and five pre-investment studies were prepared and finalized, forming the basis for further development of the business zones policy in Montenegro. This was complemented by capacity building activities for seven newly established clusters, with more than 10 cluster project proposals prepared and submitted for funding.

² UNDP, "Human Development Data (1980-2015)". Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data> (accessed 1 September 2016)

Key results



Implemented the Social Card – Social Welfare Information system, allowing better targeting and more efficient delivery of services and benefits/transfers



National SOS help line for victims of domestic violence created, receiving 750 phone calls in the first two months



UNDP awarded the Gold Gender Equality Seal, recognizing the strong performance of delivering tangible improvements in gender equality

A second initiative focused on reducing and removing barriers for business through the 'No Barriers! So Business Doesn't Wait' Campaign. As part of this project an online platform (www.bez-barijera.me) was established with the aim of identifying and eliminating cumbersome and time-consuming public administration procedures and requirements, particularly at the local level. The platform allows those launching and/or operating a business to report issues and difficulties they encounter, providing vital information to policy makers to allow them to effectively streamline these processes to encourage further investment.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD

Continued progress in the EU ascension process, as well as becoming a full member of NATO remain the main priorities going forward. In order to assist in this process, UNDP will continue to collaborate with the Government on needed reforms, as well as on initiatives that aim to strengthen the accountability of the judiciary. In addition, support will be provided to the Ministry of Justice to upgrade the existing Judicial Information System. In line with government priorities, UNDP will continue to champion technology-based solutions to improve accountability, accessibility and responsiveness of state institutions and the justice system.

Montenegro has made advances in the respect and protection of human rights, including in matters related to the Roma community, the provision of legal aid, and gender equality. However, further steps are needed to fully comply with international obligations and recommendations of human rights bodies. In particular, the current role of the Ombudsperson in dealing with anti-discrimination cases still remains a matter of concern. The establishment of a free legal aid system, which UNDP has supported in previous years, has improved access to justice, but the system still needs to be strengthened technically and financially, as well as ensuring access to justice countrywide. In other efforts to improve social inclusion, UNDP will assist with the implementation of the second phase of the Social Welfare Information System, allowing for the addition of new benefits, improved targeting and more comprehensive coverage. This will be complemented by continued work with the relevant institutions to build capacities and improve cooperation.

Finally, UNDP will continue working to improve political engagement, particularly for women. This will be done primarily through assessments of political parties, trainings on gender sensitivities, and support for the implementation of election related laws such as quotas for female candidates.